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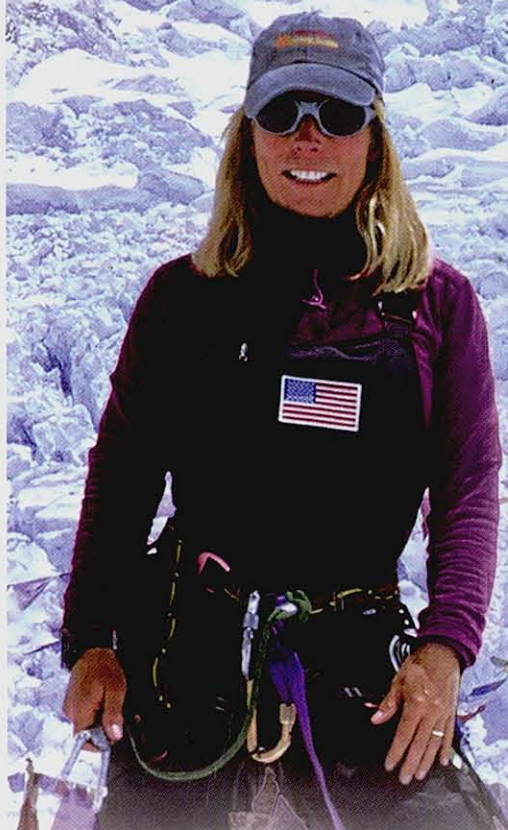
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SUE ERSHLER

On Top of the World

BY CHERRYH BUTLER

Although she never had climbed a mountain or even hiked before turning 36, Susan Ershler was the fourth American woman to conquer the Seven Summits—the seven highest mountains on each of the seven continents.

“It’s really a mental game,” said the former vice president of sales for a multinational telecommunications corporation. “When it was really difficult, I would just tell myself to ‘push through the pain. It won’t last. It’s gonna get better.’” And it did.

“I had never felt such a sense of accomplishment as when I stood on that first summit,” Ershler said about her first climb, a 14,400 vertical scale up Mount Rainier in Seattle. “I had never achieved something that great.”

Ershler had always exercised throughout her life but, she never pushed herself to her full potential until she met her husband, Phil, when she was 35. The professional mountain guide introduced his future wife to the sport, and they eventually became the first couple to climb all seven summits together in 1992. The couple co-authored the book *Together on Top of the World* about their experience. “When I stood on that summit all the pain went away,” she said. “Oh my gosh, to stand there on top of the world, it’s so worth it. And you are never going to have [those experiences] if you don’t have some pain. Most people quit when it gets hard, but it’s true what they say, ‘pain is temporary. Pride is forever.’”

Although she is known as the 12th American woman to conquer Mount Everest, Ershler was also a great success in the business world. During her 23-year corporate career, she held a series of executive positions in the sales divisions of Fortune 500 companies. In fact, she was managing a 100-person sales team and striving to reach a \$300 million sales goal during the year leading up to the

Mount Everest climb. Each day during her lunch hour, Ershler strapped on a 40-pound backpack filled with weights and kitty litter and climbed the 35 stories in her office building. “It was the only way I could train and work,” said Ershler, who still manages to get in 100 hikes a year. “You just have to squeeze it all in.”

Ershler, now 54, has since left behind her corporate career and travels the world giving motivational speeches and conducting workshops, including a popular sales workshop, “Conquering the Seven Summits of Sales.”

“I loved my career, but I was ready to take on new challenge,” she said. “So I started speaking, and I’m really passionate about helping others reach their dreams.” She hopes she can help people embrace their age instead of letting it hold them back. “Try not to concentrate on age,” she said. “You can be stronger and healthier at this age. It’s never too late. I feel more confident and stronger than ever.”

Ershler also has a few more goals of her own, including winning the Emerald Cup, a women’s figure competition, next year. She won it two years ago and is looking to defend her title.

“I did my first competition when I was 53 because I was looking for a new challenge,” she said. “You lose a lot of muscle as you get older, and I wanted to get back into strength training. It keeps you young.” Ershler knew signing up to take the stage in a bikini would keep her motivated. “I’ve found the best way to accomplish something is to just sign up. It holds you accountable and inspires you to start.”

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