

Robert W. Craig, Pioneer in Alpine Climbing and Consensus-Building, Dies at 90

Robert W. Craig, visionary, scholar, and mountaineering legend, died on January 16, 2015 in Denver, Colorado. He was 90.

Born on September 16, 1924 in Long Beach, Calif, Craig was raised by his mother, a homemaker, and his father, a U.S. Naval officer who relocated the family to Panama City before settling in Seattle in the mid-30's, where Mt. Rainier and the Cascades first ignited in Craig the passion for mountaineering that would thread through his entire life.

In 1936 he began climbing with the Boy Scouts. In 1939, Craig was a sophomore at Seattle's Garfield High School, where he formed his lifelong friendships with legendary Washington Post TV columnist Jack Carmody and renowned climber Fred Beckey. Another schoolmate, Conrad Carter, recalls having lunch with Craig one day that year and reading in the Saturday Evening Post that no one had ever successfully climbed K2 in the great Himalayas. The two vowed they'd save their money, says Carter, and someday develop their own expedition.

University and World War II delayed the boys' plans, but fourteen years later, having sharpened his mountaineering skills as a guide on Mount Rainier in Washington, leading ascents of Kate's Needle, Devil's Thumb, and Mount McKinley in Alaska, and completing a number of climbs in the Rockies, Craig finally fulfilled the promise. In 1953, he joined seven other Americans to form the Third American Karakoram Expedition for first American attempt to summit K2, an effort which left four climbers injured and one dead. Craig, along with teammate Charlie Houston, detailed the account in their 1954 book, *K2, The Savage Mountain*.

Craig's second book, *Storm and Sorrow in the High Pamirs*, recounts a second tragic expedition to the Soviet Pamirs in 1974 in which weather and avalanches led to the death of another American teammate, along with an additional thirteen Soviet and Siberian climbers. Craig himself was buried twice in avalanches during this expedition but was recovered by teammates. Where many might have turned away from climbing after such experiences, Craig continued to look forward, and in 1983, he agreed to lead a final international climb: the American-Tibetan Everest West Ridge Expedition. He made it to 24,000 feet elevation and fellow team members to 28,000 feet, all without oxygen. He was 59 years old.

Craig's professional life was characterized by the same fearlessness. During World War II, he served as a Naval officer in the western Pacific on an attack cargo ship (AKA 80), was on the first Naval ship to arrive in Nagasaki, Japan after the atomic bomb was dropped, and soon thereafter visited the devastated center of Hiroshima, an experience he described as "overwhelming."

Craving knowledge, he returned to school and earned a Bachelor's Degree in Philosophy and a B.S. in Biology at the University of Washington in 1949. He then became a teaching fellow at Columbia University, where he received an M.A. in Philosophy in 1951 and completed requirements for a Ph.D., ABD.

During the Korean War, Craig accepted a civilian position in Colorado training troops at the Army's Mountain and Cold Weather Training Command at Camp Carson and moved to Aspen, where he met Aspen Institute founder Walter Paepcke. In 1953, Paepcke appointed Craig as the first executive director of the Aspen Institute, where he oversaw the Institute's Executive Program and eventually co-founded the Aspen Center for Physics.

After a decade, Craig left the Institute and became a principal in two planning and industrial design consulting firms. During this period he and his first wife, Carol Galun, also owned and operated a family ranch outside Aspen, Colorado, specializing in commercial cattle production. There they raised their three children, Kathleen, Jennifer, and Michael until their divorce in the late 1960's.

In 1975, Craig relocated to Keystone, Colorado at the behest of then-president of Keystone Resort Bob Maynard, who encouraged Craig to consider another Aspen Institute-like enterprise that would set Keystone apart as a center for intellectual pursuits. This time, however, Craig wanted to focus not just on discussing problems, but doing something to address them, and in 1975 founded The Keystone Center, a collaborative problem-solving organization that initially focused on environmental regulatory issues. The Center, which Craig led as president and CEO until 1996, remains headquartered in Keystone and has expanded its work to address other critical state and national policy issues. It was in Keystone that he met his wife and partner of more than 30 years, Terry McGrath.

In retirement, Craig hardly slowed down. He skied until his 88th year and was legendary among Summit County locals for logging more days on the slopes than most 20 year old ski bums. He remained active off the slopes as well and was spotted regularly walking near his Keystone home in his iconic tan corduroys and white sneakers.

A past president of the American Alpine Club, Craig was inducted into the American Mountaineering Museum's Hall of Mountaineering Excellence in 2010 and recognized with a variety of awards for mountaineering and public service. Though Craig famously and humbly attributes much of his success – in climbing and in life – to “just luck, I guess,” his family, friends, and admirers give him more credit. U.S. Supreme Court Justice Byron White once remarked that Bob was a true Renaissance man, possessing the brains, a strong interest in science-related policy, the creativity to build new and innovative organizations, and physical endurance that set him apart from most others he had ever met.

Dr. Tom Hornbein, member of the first American team to ascend Everest in 1963, said “Bob was a consummate mountaineer. He was a caring catalyst with a patient ear and an uncanny ability to guide you without your ever knowing you were being steered.”

Craig is survived by his wife, Terry, of Keystone, CO and his children: Kathleen and Jim Jacobs of Great Barrington, MA; Jennifer Craig of Aspen, CO, and Michael Craig of Carbondale, CO.

Letters of condolence may be mailed to The Keystone Center, 1628 Sts. John Road, Keystone CO 80435. In lieu of flowers, the family requests that contributions be made to The Keystone Center's Robert W. Craig Memorial Fund (www.keystone.org), the American Alpine Club (www.americanalpineclub.org), or other charity of choice.