

Shelby Stanger: When I think of wild ideas, Mount Everest is one of the ultimate ideas I think of in the adventure world. Standing at 29,029 vertical feet, it looks majestic. Every year, hundreds of people attempt to climb it but it's challenging and incredibly risky. It's located between Nepal and China and just getting there can be hard. Then, once you are there, there's altitude sickness, wild weather, avalanche risk and it's expensive. There's also people who die there every year. So with all this, I've always wondered by people still climb this mountain, what drives them and how they did it. This year the weather window for summiting was small, a dozen people died while climbing, but over 880 summited in total, making it one of the busiest years ever. One of those climbers who actually went from a way less busy side, and we'll get into that on the show, was today's guest, Caroline Gleich. She's a repeat guest and an incredible adventurer and activist who shares about why she climbed even with an injury and so much more.

Shelby Stanger: I'm Shelby Stanger and this is Wild Ideas Worth Living. Caroline Gleich has an adventurous, tenacious spirit and she's a world class athlete and activist, which I think is a great combo. She's been on the show before and we talked about her activism and another goal she ticked off which was completing all 90 lines of the Chuting Gallery in the Wasatch Mountain range. As a professional ski mountaineer and adventurer, Caroline spends a lot of time climbing peaks and also skiing down them. She's had a deep love of the mountains since she was a kid and her goal's always been to get people outside and to protect the places we all love to play.

Shelby Stanger: I'm so excited to talk to you about everything going on in your life. Before we get into Everest and your climb and all the wonderful things you're doing, for those people who didn't listen to our first interview, I thought we could talk about your first love. That is your love for the mountains and when you started skiing and maybe you have a story as a kid that set the path for why you chose to climb mountains and be so involved in winter mountain climbing?

Caroline Gleich: Yeah, well I think it goes back to my upbringing in Minnesota because I didn't really have the mountains when I was growing up. And then I would take a trip to Utah or out west twice or three times a year with my family, we would go skiing in the winter and then we'd do these epic backpacking trips in the summer from when I was 10 to 15. And we visited some of the most iconic alpine places in the west, like the Sawtooths and the San Juans and the Wind River Range and I have three brothers in my immediate family and then I have three older half siblings. So I was always trying to keep up with my brothers and trying to outperform them and it was always a friendly competition. But I really just fell in love with being outside and especially with those huge, iconic alpine areas of the west and I just always wanted to see how the world looked from the top of the peaks.

Shelby Stanger: So when you did get out west completely, how did you start getting introduced to mountain climbing and competitive skiing and then setting records?

Caroline Gleich: Well, I didn't actually grow up skiing competitively and I've done only a few competitions in my ski career. But when I was 15, I moved to Utah with my family so that was between my sophomore and junior years of high school and it was shortly after my half brother was killed in an avalanche and so with that loss in our family, it was hard for my parents to be really supportive of my big mountain dreams. So I had to learn how to do it on my own as an adult. I mean, as I got more progressed in my career, they became more and more supportive. But, it was hard for them to encourage me to go back country skiing because it had caused this huge loss and sadness in our family. So, let's see, so I graduated from high school and then I was like, "I'm going to become a professional skier." I got a job at REI as a cashier and I started saving up-

Shelby Stanger: You did?

Caroline Gleich: Yeah. That was my first job in the outdoor industry when I was 18.

Shelby Stanger: Wait. Which REI store?

Caroline Gleich: The Salt Lake REI. And then after that I moved into the action sports sales department. So I was an action sports specialist. So I got to sell skis and bikes and kayaks and roof racks. And saved up to buy my own avalanche equipment and back country ski equipment. So once I bought that, I started saving up, taking ava courses and just really building this slow progression.

Shelby Stanger: How much older was your half brother than you?

Caroline Gleich: So he was 37 and I was 15 when he died. So he was quite a bit older.

Shelby Stanger: And what was his name?

Caroline Gleich: Martin.

Shelby Stanger: Martin. Wow, losing a sibling's got to be really challenging.

Caroline Gleich: Yeah. I mean, it's really hard. It was really hard. And I was the oldest child at home at the time and one of the biggest challenges was just seeing the effect on my parents and seeing their pain, it's something that I think about all the time now. It was actually really hard to tell my parents I was going to Everest and to the Himalayas because I just felt so guilty for causing them so much worry.

Shelby Stanger: I want to ask you about that. How did you tell them? You've always been kind of a go getter it sounds like. So, I imagine your parents weren't that surprised but how did you tell them, "Hey, mom. I'm going to go climb Everest"?

Caroline Gleich: Well, I was so scared to tell them about my first Himalayan trip when we went to climb and ski Cho Oyu, which is the sixth highest peak in the world which we

did in September of 2018. And I was so scared to tell my mom and dad, I was staying up at night and I felt this huge burden of guilt. I think even when you're grown up, you still want to make your parents proud. And I was so worried that they weren't going to be proud of my choices or supportive and it was really emotional for me to tell them but once I told my mom and then also I think it helped that we had more logistics set up and we went with a guided group and with a guided company and we were deciding to climb with oxygen, we took some steps to make it a little less risky. So, I think that that helped them accept the decision.

Caroline Gleich: And ultimately I think that you just have to accept with whatever you do in life that death is an inevitable possibility whether you're driving your car or whether you're living a super sedentary lifestyle, that has risks as well. So, I think whatever we do, we just have to accept that death is inevitable and I think that my parents have come to accept my choices and to be proud of me for them.

Shelby Stanger: It sounds like your parents are pretty supportive and awesome as well. But, I don't know, that wouldn't be easy. Why did you want to climb mountains? Especially after having your half brother pass away. That's so hard. What drew you to them?

Caroline Gleich: Well, I mean, he taught me so much about leave no trace ethics and when we'd go on these backpacking trips, he would bring along a rope and set up a top rope for me so I could climb on real alpine granite. And those were my favorite childhood memories. Even if I wasn't having fun while they were happening, I was probably complaining and suffering but it doesn't have to be fun to be fun. And it's those moments where you're having so much difficulty and overcoming all these personal challenges, I find those to be the most memorable trips where things don't go right and where you have to dig deep. He introduced me to the love of nature and to the love of being in wild places. And I think it was like he's lit a spark for me and it was impossible to put that spark out. It's just one of those things that's contagious and once you're turned on to it, it's hard to imagine life without that. So, I really felt like it was a way to honor and celebrate his memory and his legacy and all the lessons that he taught me.

Caroline Gleich: And there was no denying that that was what I was meant to do. When I'm waking up really early to climb a mountain, I just have this feeling, the sense, that this is what I'm meant to do.

Shelby Stanger: So do you have a fond memory of climbing as a kid that really impacted you? You said earlier that you have fun when it's not fun. Which is a pretty good statement to say.

Caroline Gleich: Well it's not that I have fun in the moment. I'm probably complaining a ton, but it's memorable is the difference. It's something that you want to go back to and so I'm trying to think in particular. I remember when we went into the Wind River Range, I was like 10 and 11 years old, we went in two summers in a row.

We would take horses in because it's a long ways in to get to the nice camping spots. But, then we would hike out and that was when I did my first alpine start. So we'd start in the middle of the night waking up at 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning and we'd hike all day out. And I remember I really wanted to carry my weight and carry the rope because we had used it to climb. And I was like really stubborn and headstrong and insisted on carrying the rope for quite a few miles and then eventually the parents decided to take it away from me because it was pretty heavy and I was getting beat down. But I just remember just being really fiercely determined and I just remember trying to keep going and putting one foot in front of the other for this long hike out of the Wind River Range.

Shelby Stanger: Do you have any other fun memories as a kid that you think really set the path of your life?

Caroline Gleich: Well, my dad... I think that we talked about this in The Follow Through, the REI documentary that came out in 2017. But, when we'd go on ski vacations, my dad would always have this competition for who was the best skier and he would award them the animal status. So, we'd always be competing and to be the fiercest, most aggressive skier and to get the animal status. And it was just a really fun thing and it really taught me how to be aggressive and how to be powerful. And it just taught me all these other things that I really use in every day life now. And so I think sports and skiing are a great metaphor for ways we can help support young people and especially young women to keep finding their voices and to be a different version of what we think femininity is.

Shelby Stanger: I love that. Break down animal status to me because, one, I love that your dad didn't give you guys a trophy or say, "You get an ice cream for the best skier." It was status.

Caroline Gleich: It was status. Yeah, it was who's the animal. So, I mean, it was just committing to the fault line and skiing with aggression and confidence. And also not complaining and not whining and just having a good day and having a good attitude, too.

Shelby Stanger: That sounds like a really good parental tactic for those of you parents listening. Have your kids compete for best animal on the slopes all day which means no complaining. And you don't award them with a cookie. They get status which is priceless. Your parents are climbers as well?

Caroline Gleich: No. My parents are not climbers. My parents are doctors. My mom is a dermatologist and my dad is an immunologist. And they are very recreational in their hiking and skiing.

Shelby Stanger: That's like no joke to go in on horses and then carry ropes. That's not the average experience for the average American.

- Caroline Gleich: It was really special and it took a lot of planning really from my dad, my half brother, a lot of adults worked together to make it happen for us. It was amazing.
- Shelby Stanger: What a good experience as a young woman growing up. That must have instilled so much confidence in you.
- Caroline Gleich: Yeah, and going on ski trips, too, it was just I think because my parents did work so much that it was a way where I really felt close to my family. And I think in our modern day society, it's hard to have that intimacy and to have that sense of belonging with people. And when you go on these trips, you're so dependent on one another and it creates this intense bond and even if you're not always getting along, you're tied to each other and you're connected in a way you can't really access in other areas of life.
- Shelby Stanger: I also imagine just the fact that you're able to climb a mountain or get from point A to B carrying your own weight, carrying your own pack at a really young age, I mean 10 to 15 is a pretty impressionable age for a young woman, we're going through a lot of changes, that's puberty pretty much. I know what I was like between 10 and 15. I wasn't always the most fun to be around. But, I found surfing then and that really impacted my life because I got so much courage being able to say I rode a wave, that it filtered into another aspects of my life as well. For you, did you find that with mountain climbing?
- Caroline Gleich: Yeah, I completely agree. I struggled so much as a young woman, as a preteen and then through my teenage years. And so many things about body image and societal norms and I felt like I really lost my voice during those years of my life and it took me a long time to find it back. And so, the mountains were a place where I felt like I could be just the best version of myself. I could just be who I was.
- Shelby Stanger: In 2018, I read a statistic about how many mountains you had climbed. I don't have it in front of me. Can you let us all know how many mountains you'd climb? When we last interviewed you had just completed the Chuting Gallery which is a series of lines in the Wasatch range.
- Caroline Gleich: So, last year I climbed 77 peaks.
- Shelby Stanger: 77 peaks. No joke.
- Caroline Gleich: Some of them were repeats, some of them aren't super hard but some of them are much more difficult than others.
- Shelby Stanger: I just love how nonchalant you are about that. I mean, at least the audience knows who I'm talking to right now, Caroline Gleich is this little, gorgeous young woman but you pack a lot of power in your physique. It's amazing.

Caroline Gleich: Well, thank you.

Shelby Stanger: I love it.

Caroline Gleich: I still have a chip on my shoulder about my size.

Shelby Stanger: Why? When I met you, I was like you're like my size. But you kick butt and I think that's the cool thing is when you think of a mountain climber, sometimes we think of these big burly men. And we talked about that last time.

Caroline Gleich: Yeah, I mean, I think that it's become... it's cool to see that the outdoor industry and just the world in general is becoming more accepting of seeing people who challenge our preconceived notions. I think it's getting to be a better place for people who don't fit the norm.

Shelby Stanger: When I started this podcast, I always thought of climbing Mount Everest as the ultimate wild idea. I still think it's one of the most extreme things you can do. Caroline's the first guest I've interviewed who's actually done it. So I wanted to know why and how. What happens in that moment that an idea like this goes from, "Yeah, it would be really cool," to, "Let's do this."

Shelby Stanger: Talk to me about why you wanted to climb Everest and then let's talk about what it was like.

Caroline Gleich: Yeah, well I guess as I started to get more and more into ski mountaineering and alpinism, I actually didn't always have the dream of climbing Everest because I heard all these different stories about what the experiences and what it's not and I had my own preconceived notions that, I mean, there's the cost and there's the crowds and there's just so much baggage that comes with Everest. And so I had always had a dream of going to the Himalayas to ski mountaineer but Everest wasn't always my dream until I saw it with my own eyes. And so at the end of August 2018, we were driving to the base camp on Cho Oyu and across the Tibetan Plateau. And Cho Oyu is 26,907 feet and it's good training for Everest and it's also a great ski peak in the Himalayas because you can ski most of the way down. So we decided to go do that last year and to see how we felt on an expedition and to see how we handled those altitudes. And I say we, it was my fiance, Rob and I, going to do that. It can be hard to find partners to do this stuff.

Caroline Gleich: So when we're on the drive there, we're driving through these dusty hills, through the Tibetan desert and plateau and then this snow covered peak starts to come into view behind these brown hills and I see it and I was like, "I want to ski that." And it turns out it was Everest. And it's so beautiful from the Tibet side and the northeast ridge is the route that we climbed. And it's just a fantastic knife edge ridge and an amazing position and the mountain really spoke to me in a powerful way. So as I've gone through my career, with the Chuting Gallery, yeah, I had a list of lines I wanted to ski. But I also try to be intuitively listening

to the mountains and making goals that speak to me and not having too much a set list of peaks that I want to summit. Instead I want to make sure that I'm continually inspired.

Shelby Stanger: Yeah, you must be really connected to the mountains when you say the mountains spoke to me, for someone who's not a mountain person, can you explain what that looks like?

Caroline Gleich: I mean, it's probably like if you're a surfer, you might see a picture of a wave and you're like, "Oh, I really have to ride that wave." Or I guess it's just that gut feeling you have that something is calling to you and it's inviting you and that you're meant to be there. I don't know. It's hard to describe but I think a lot of it comes for me from seeing things and seeing photos and imagining myself in those positions. Everest is a huge undertaking, it's a huge financial undertaking and it's really risky and so it's not something I wanted to do just to say I did it. I wanted to make sure that I was genuinely inspired by the climbing and the mountain and everything about it that goes with it because if you're not 100% committed and wanting to be there, it's just not a place to... it's not something to take lightly.

Shelby Stanger: It sounds similar to big wave surfing. Which I have no desire to do but I have so much respect for people who surf giant waves. It's just so cool to have watched you climb Everest and see your journey. I, through your Instagram stories, learned a lot about what climbing Everest is like and I had no idea there was so much waiting involved. Before we get into the logistics, could you tell us a little bit about what you did to prepare and you had some serious obstacles including your knee that you faced.

Caroline Gleich: Yeah. Well, part of the big preparation was, I mean, like when people are like, "How did you train for Everest?" I'm like, "Well-

Shelby Stanger: Your whole life.

Caroline Gleich: "It's hard to describe the last 10 years of my life and building my progression from climbing 4,000 meter peaks and then 5 and 6,000 meter peaks and then putting it together." Like in 2015 I put together an expedition to go climb and ski in the Cordillera Blanca of Peru and we skied three 18 and 19,000 foot peaks and just learning all these different things through all these different steps of my career, it wasn't just something I trained for in one year. So, one of the biggest stepping stones that helped me a lot was going to climb and ski Cho Oyu which is the sixth highest peak, I referenced it a couple minutes ago. And just seeing how my body reacted at that altitude and learning the differences between just normal pain and then what is when you're too sick and you need to go down. It's really a fine line with altitude sickness. So going to climb and ski Cho Oyu, that was a hugely important step. And so we did that summited in September and then I proposed to my fiance on the summit. Which was really special.

Shelby Stanger: I cannot wait to talk to you about that and I'm going to save that for a little later.

Caroline Gleich: Okay cool. I'm jumping the gun.

Shelby Stanger: It's so badass. I love that moment. So, I'm still just not a mountain girl and I'm sorry, you got to dumb this down for me and probably some of the listeners here are also surfers and have not climbed mountains but altitude sickness, I lived in Breckenridge, that's my mountain experience, that was it. What is it like to... how do you know you're getting altitude sickness versus you're just tired?

Caroline Gleich: Yeah. And it's a fine line and it's really monitoring your symptoms and being super self aware. It's like having some wilderness medicine training and then we take our blood oxygen saturation and we take all these different measurements to see how well we're acclimatizing. And then you just have to take into consideration all the symptoms and we had an amazing high altitude doctor who was available by sat [hone and text who would help us also with some of these decisions. So, it's really hard to describe just how incredibly exhausted you feel at 17,000 feet, 21,000 feet. We slept all the way up to 27,000 feet and at that altitude, it's just really hard to do anything. It's even hard to talk, your voice, you just run out of air to speak to one another so communication, just like basic things like even getting up to go to the bathroom, that takes all your energy. You feel like you need to rest for an hour after you take a pee. It's just all of your cells, everything, is just fighting so hard to survive.

Shelby Stanger: So you'd been really training, indirectly, for ten years of your life climbing mountains, doing the Chuting Gallery but then Cho Oyu, it sounds like really helped prepare you. But you had a big obstacle right before climbed Everest with your ACL.

Caroline Gleich: So in February, we had to make the final deposit for our trip and we had to make our first deposit in January. And it was just so stressful financially because I didn't have all the money together we got an extension for the payment and I was going, working really hard with sponsors and with other people to try to fundraise to help me get to Everest. And then the day came where we had to wire transfer the final deposit. And so we did that. And the next day was the third day of video shoot and it was like sunset, it was getting dark, we had just filmed some interview so I had been standing around for a while. And I dropped in to make this turn, a turn that I've made a lot of times before. And I hit some bad snow and I caught an edge and then I started tumbling, summer salting down this steep pitch and then I felt a pop in my knee.

Caroline Gleich: And I just started swearing because, I mean, just instantly my mind just went to the worst case scenario that I wouldn't be able to climb Everest, I wouldn't be able to get my money back and that I'd have to pay my sponsors back and I'd go bankrupt. It wasn't a comfortable position financially for me to be able to go. I'm not independently wealthy. So it was a real stretch for me to be able to put



that money down and I didn't get trip insurance at the time I made the deposits because it's another 5 to 10 grand to get trip insurance for a trip like Everest. So I just couldn't swing it.

Caroline Gleich: So, anyway, that first night after that happened, I went to the ER just to get an x-ray. And they didn't really know exactly but I knew that it was probably my ACL. And I was just devastated because I've heard that's a season ending injury. And it's always been my worst nightmare to have a knee injury. This was my first knee injury. And it was my worst nightmare come true. So the first night I was devastated and I've always struggled with depression and with mental and anxiety and I have to say that there was part of me that thought about suicide at that moment because it was so stressful. I'm tearing up as I'm talking to you because just reliving that it was like so traumatic. But then the next day, Rob really, really rallied. He's from Park City and so there's an excellent community of sports medical doctors and orthopedic surgeons here.

Caroline Gleich: So he rallied all his connections and got me set up to see a sports med doc and to get an MRI the next day. And to have that happen right away really helped me emotionally and mentally because I was like, "I need answers. I need to figure this out, what I'm doing here." So the next day we saw a doctor and he said, "You know, it might be possible in six or seven weeks to go to Everest with a hinge brace." And the minute he said that, I went from being depressed and semi suicidal to all of a sudden, my demeanor, everything changed. And I was like, "I'm going to do this. I'm going to rehab my knee. And I'm going to go climb Everest and I'm going to have surgery when I get home." And luckily it was a straight ACL. The MRI that afternoon confirmed that and I got in to see an orthopedic surgeon the next day and he said that it was totally possible for me to rehab and to go still.

Caroline Gleich: And then we talked to our expedition leader and to our high altitude doctor and they were both supportive of the idea. So all of a sudden I went from being... it was instant, I was like, "I'm going to get the swelling down in my knee. I'm going to learn how to use my knee again without an ACL. I'm going to get my balance and proprioception back and I'm going to work up to longer and longer hikes and do what I can so I can be successful on Everest."

Shelby Stanger: Caroline, thank you for sharing that story with me. One, because I just had a moment recently where I had an injury, it was just a stingray but it went through my toe. It really sidelined me, dumb. But I went so dark because I thought I wasn't going to be able to run and surf and just my mental health is... I'm sure I'm also on the spectrum with anxiety and depression and I've dealt with it a lot my whole life and for me my medicine has always been through sports. And when I don't have that or I can't do my goal or I can't do what's ahead of me, I spin. But there's something really powerful when at least you know what it is and you have a plan to get out of there and to heal. Having a plan for healing is so important. I'm curious having an injury like that as an athlete, you've probably had a lot of injuries, what other tactics besides just

knowing what to do and then having a plan on how to heal, what's helped you get through those moments because I know people listening have been through this.

Caroline Gleich: Yeah. I think having a sense of community or having some sort of support network was really important. And with this injury it was really nice to have a team of doctors who could give me information and then once I started writing about it publicly, after the first two weeks I was ready to talk about it on Instagram. I wasn't ready right away because I was really worried about my livelihood. I was like sponsors are going to drop me and I'm going to get fired from my teams because there's not a lot of protections for athletes with injuries. I always feel a little bit precarious with my position as a sponsored athlete. And so after the first two... I called my sponsors and told them all and luckily I work with great companies and they were all like, "Okay. We're with you."

Caroline Gleich: And then when I started talking about it on Instagram and I asked people to share their positive knee stories with me, just hearing from everyone else on the internet who had gone through the same thing and who had come out on the other side and just hearing from everybody and opening myself up to that, that really helped me feel better just to know I wasn't alone.

Shelby Stanger: Yeah. I think there's a lot of power in knowing you're not alone. I appreciate you sharing this and I think this is going to help a lot of people, like reaching out to your community, which you did, is really big in just knowing you're not alone. That's huge. So, you continued to train for Everest doing the best you can and then you actually got to climb it. So you went a different route. I'm sure every year is a controversial year on Everest right now but this year was especially controversial because there was some images that went around the internet of these lines of people waiting to summit but you didn't even go that way.

Caroline Gleich: No, so we climbed on a different day from a different side of the mountain and so it was really stressful to be up there with this short weather window. An experience like Everest, it attracts a lot of people because it is a phenomenal experience. And yes there are definitely problems with Everest. There's problems with waste disposal and there's problems with crowding. However, I still think that it's just such a phenomenal experience that it attracts a lot of people. But it was really stressful this year because when you're waiting for weather on Everest, you're literally waiting for the actual jet stream to move off the summit. And this year the jet stream was wobbly so it wasn't clearly moving off the summit and allowing for wind speeds that would allow a person to stand up there. So, when we finally got the weather, it was a little bit later in the season than usual and then there's this two day weather window when everyone's acclimatized and ready and everyone went on the same days.

Caroline Gleich: And so we decided to go the day after but it was a less certain weather day. So it was really stressful to be climbing on our summit day knowing that the weather

and the wind speeds could increase to the point that we would literally get knocked off. It was really stressful this year and again there's a lot of problems. But I think it's a complicated issue on Everest. Just like a lot of places that people love like people are going into the wilderness in bigger and bigger numbers and we need to be more conscious of how to mitigate our impact on these wild places.

Shelby Stanger: Okay. So from the day you got to Everest and can you tell me about when you arrived at Everest and when you summited? What was that timeframe like? It was a long time I remember.

Caroline Gleich: So we left on April 20th. And then we summited on May 24th. So I think we arrived at base camp on... I think it took us a full week to get there. Maybe the 25th or 27th of April. And then we summited almost a full month after that and this is considered a rapid ascent. Most teams take 60 to 70 days to acclimatize and so we pre-acclimatized at home using a Hypoxico altitude training tent.

Shelby Stanger: Tell us what that is.

Caroline Gleich: So it's this tent that goes over your bed and it simulates higher and higher altitudes so our home in Park City is about 6600 feet and then we'd start sleeping at incrementally higher altitudes over the course of two and a half months. The manufacturer only recommends that you go to about 9,000 feet and by the end we were sleeping at 17,000 feet. Which it was painful and hard, it's hard to sleep at 17,000 feet even in the comfort of your own home. So with that kind of training, it's really nice to be able to spend less time on the mountain and then you're much less likely to get sick in the Himalayas once you go there but it wasn't a walk in the park, let's just say that.

Shelby Stanger: I mean, even just eating on Everest, was that a big part of it as well?

Caroline Gleich: This trip, the first two weeks, I had a really hard time with my appetite. I caught a bug on the plane ride over. It took us 42 hours and five flights to get there and then we had a three day drive. And somewhere along that journey I caught some little bug and it was like a flu and I felt horrible. And I couldn't eat anything the first two weeks basically. I could eat very little. I just had no appetite. I usually am a good eater on trips and at altitude. But this trip I really struggled and all I wanted was cup of noodle soup, just something really bland and familiar. So I ate a lot of ramen and then after the first two weeks I started to feel better and then I was able to eat more of a balanced diet but then when you're going up higher on the mountain for the days that you spend above advanced base camp... so base camp you can drive to. Then advanced base camp is at 21,000 feet and yaks can carry stuff up. So you have more fresh food and you have a nice kitchen cook tent where people cook for you. It's amazing. And the above that at camps one, camp two and camp three, you're cooking your own meals, mostly dehydrated backpacking food and you're eating Cliff

bars and it's hard to carry enough calories so you're usually pretty calorie deprived.

Shelby Stanger: So you just lose a ton of weight on Everest?

Caroline Gleich: I lost 10 pounds and Rob lost 20 pounds.

Shelby Stanger: Wow, that's a lot for a month.

Caroline Gleich: Yeah.

Shelby Stanger: When we come back, Caroline talks about the message behind her climb, what it was like at the top, plus her husband Rob Lea's ultimate triathlon and how she proposed to him. That's right, she proposed to him.

Shelby Stanger: As more women are getting out there, doing badass things in the outdoors, it's important to find gear that's actually made for us. That's why I love that Keen from Portland, Oregon just came out with a new version of its women's Terradora athletic hiking shoes. Every detail's designed for a woman's foot with a more contoured arch, a narrower heel, cushioning in different areas and more support in others. Keen really took design specifically for women in mind when they made this shoe. The new Terradora two keeps all things we love about the original Terradora but with added performance, comfort cushioning under foot and more traction. So as women, we can go even further and stay out there longer. I also appreciate Keen's consciously constructed approach to making shoes with more sustainable materials all the way down to eco anti-odor which naturally breaks down foot funk without pesticides and water repellency that's PFC free. We can feel great treading lighter on the planet while we're out exploring it. For an all around hiker that checks all the boxes, check out the woman's specific fit of the Keen Terradora two, available at REI.

Shelby Stanger: When Caroline decided to climb Mount Everest, she knew she wanted to make it about something more than reaching the summit, so she and Rob decided to climb for a cause, gender equality.

Shelby Stanger: So I think what's really amazing about this climb you did is you didn't just climb for yourself, you climbed for a cause, Climb for Equality. Can you tell us about this and why this cause?

Caroline Gleich: Well, I mean, for one thing, we knew with going to Everest that we would get a lot of eyeballs and curiosity on our trip. And so a lot of people were like, "Just go climb. Don't do it for something." But I wanted to use this opportunity where we'd have a lot of people's attention to talk about something else besides just climbing. And so gender equality, it's normally something that's so difficult and uncomfortable to talk about, it's not my favorite topic. However, having worked in the snow sports and the outdoor industry for the past 15 years, I feel like I'm at the point where I can't not talk about it because I really feel like we need

more people to be strong advocates for women and we need people to think about the ways in their everyday lives they can advocate for women and especially to help get women into leadership positions because when you look, there's more and more women getting into sports and into the workplace and everything. But if you look at who's at the top, whether it's Everest summits or Fortune 500 CEOs or Hollywood directors, you still see that it's only about 10% women.

Shelby Stanger: Yeah, I read this quote you told GearJunkie and you said, "Close to 10% of all people who summited Everest are women. Leadership positions across the board, whether it's 8,000 meter peaks or Fortune 500 CEOs, do not have an equal representation of women." I was blown away by that quote.

Caroline Gleich: Yeah. And so we created a social media toolkit and we encouraged people and our followers and just everyday people who felt like they wanted to support this to use the hashtag and to learn a little bit more about disrupting implicit bias. And it's just one of those things that when I started to learn about implicit bias, all of a sudden I had this language to describe these things that I felt my whole career, this blink reaction people have when they see me that they think I'm not capable or that I'm not strong or that I'll die or I'm not meant to be in the mountains. So learning about that, it helped give me language to talk about things I had felt and these invisible forces that I felt like had shaped my career. And so I just felt really passionate about that. And then with my partner, Rob, I also wanted to bring men into the conversation because it's really easy for a lot of that hard work of advocating for women to fall on women's shoulders and I think it really takes bringing men into the conversation as well and people of all genders. So, Rob also was on board with this and also he's doing his ultimate world triathlon where he's trying to climb Everest, swim the English channel and ride his bike across America in a year, he's doing that as a try for equality. And that whole inspiration came from this UN movement called He for She. And it's a hashtag and it's a whole social influence campaign, social awareness campaign just about the role that men can play in advocating for gender equality.

Shelby Stanger: So you're basically marrying a badass. I love him. I fell so in love with Rob while you've been posting about him for his second leg of this ultimate triathlon. So Rob climbs Everest with you and at the top of Everest he holds a sign that says, "I get to marry her." Which we're going to get into this engagement story because it's so good.

Caroline Gleich: It was so cute.

Shelby Stanger: So do you feel you were able to make a difference for equal pay. That's such a daunting, giant task but what do you think you guys did and what more needs to be done?

Caroline Gleich: Yeah. So when we were talking about this idea for the trip, we talked to our expedition leader and we were like, "Hey. If you could hire a female guide, that

would be so cool." And so our company ended up hiring a female guide to get us to the top of Everest. So I got to summit with Carla Perez and Chad Peele was our other guide.

Shelby Stanger: What was her name?

Caroline Gleich: Carla Perez. And she's Ecuadorian, she was the first South American woman to summit Everest without supplemental oxygen. And right now she's trying to summit K2 without supplemental oxygen. And to me, having the opportunity to work with a female guide and to have her leadership on our expedition, it really just changed the whole tone of everything and it made me so excited and so happy and then our expedition was, our western part of our expedition was over 50% women. And so that wasn't from our campaign but I just think that a hashtag isn't going to change the world but it's just a small step and it's something we can do to hopefully get people to start thinking differently about a fun way that they can advocate for gender equality and to start having these difficult conversations in a lighter hearted way.

Shelby Stanger: Well I also think just seeing you climb gives light to so many other younger people, older people, any female can now say, "You know what? Caroline climbed. She sort of looks like me. Maybe I can do it."

Caroline Gleich: Well, I'm not the first woman to do this and I didn't do anything that groundbreaking on the trip. There's a lot of women who have done way harder things on Everest from... there's this woman Allison Hargreaves who climbed Everest, she was a mother without any oxygen or outside support, without Sherpa support. She did that in the, I think '90s or the early 2000s. And then Melissa Arnot Reid was the first American woman to climb Everest without supplemental oxygen. So there's other women who have really paved the way and people who have looked me but they've also been a huge part of my inspiration and I just hope that by telling my story and putting myself out there that I can hopefully inspire other women to see themselves at the top whether it's on Everest or it's in a leadership position somewhere else.

Shelby Stanger: What was it like at the top with Rob, like at the top of Everest? When you're actually there is it just a photo moment?

Caroline Gleich: I was real stressed out because you want to get the photos and it's crowded and cold and uncomfortable and sheer drop offs in every direction. And you feel real shaky and sort of faint, light headed and out of breath very easily. And there's a lot of things to trip over so I was really scared at the top to be honest. My anxiety was really in full swing. And I was really worried about all the miles of descending we had in front of us because on a summit day for Everest, it's like less than half way. You have so much distance to cover to get to comfort and to get to more of a safe position. So I was really just stressed out on the summit. It wasn't the joyful moment that you would think. Also I knew the weather was

maybe coming in. So I just was worried and anxious and not chill. I was happy but cautiously optimistic, let's just say that.

Shelby Stanger: I appreciate that honesty. And I imagine that would be terrifying at the top. You just need to get the picture and get down and-

Caroline Gleich: Yeah, I just didn't really feel relaxed even until we got back to the U.S. because traveling through China, there's just so many unknowns. So once we got to LAX I was like, "Woo hoo. We're back on U.S. soil."

Shelby Stanger: Yeah that's what I was going to ask you. What was it like when you finally got to whatever your safety was which was LAX?

Caroline Gleich: I mean, it was just a huge sigh of relief and I think I'm still decompressing from it because it's just a lot to process and a lot to take in.

Shelby Stanger: Yeah, I imagine you're going to decompress, even this whole year you might need a year off this year.

Caroline Gleich: Yeah, I'm trying to find restful moments where I can and to take that time to reflect. There's just a lot of different things I still need to process from it for sure.

Shelby Stanger: Well congratulations. I was inspired watching it. I think so many other people were. And it was really interesting to learn through... you're really good at social media and sharing with other people through social media, your story, the hard and the fun. And so I really appreciate that.

Shelby Stanger: So I want to talk about Rob. Rob, your partner, just seems like such a great advocate. And he was involved, too, which was so great. I just watched him embark on the second leg of his ultimate world triathlon swimming the English channel. And you posted this video of him swimming and all of a sudden he takes a jellyfish to the face. It's so funny to listen to you commentate.

Caroline Gleich: He said he got stung by over 50 jellyfish. And I mean, it was kind of sad and kind of funny to watch. It's like a very slow, soft car crash. So, it was amazing to watch him do that and, I mean, when we first started dating, I'd had a lot of breakups and relationships that hadn't worked out before, so I was really hesitant to put him too much on my Instagram or make him too much a part of my social media because I'm like, "I don't want this to be my story." I didn't want to "brand" us too much because I was nervous that it wouldn't work out. And over the years, he just continued to support me and to keep showing up and just love that he lets me shine. And he's not afraid to let me go first, to lead, to be who I am. And he's very confident in himself and his masculinity that he's not... he doesn't feel threatened by my strong assertiveness or by any of my personality characteristics.

Shelby Stanger: Yeah. And he seems pretty strong himself. He's a big dude and, I mean, just the fact that he climbed Everest and went ahead and like a month later swam the English channel?

Caroline Gleich: Yeah. So he's the first person to ever do those two things in a single year. There's 10 people who have done them both. It's called Peak to Pond challenge. And he's the first one to do it in a single year and it's just incredibly difficult because of the weight loss and the muscular atrophy and all these different things from spending 40 days on Everest to be able to turn that around in just a month and to gain the weight back because the English Channel rules don't allow you to wear a wet suit. And the water is very cold, it's about 55 to 60 degrees. So he had to gain back this layer of brown fat to keep him warm like a baby seal. And then he just crushed it. It was so cool to watch.

Shelby Stanger: So he climbs Everest, loses 20 pounds doing it, puts as much as he can back on, swims... how far is the English Channel and how long did it take him?

Caroline Gleich: It's 21 miles as the crow flies but with the tides and the currents it was 28 miles of swimming.

Shelby Stanger: 28 miles.

Caroline Gleich: 28 miles. And it took him 11 hours and 47 minutes during which he's not allowed to touch the boat, he's not allowed to get on the boat or to wear a wet suit. When we feed him, we have to throw him a bottle and a little bucket on a string and then feeds out of that and he just treads water.

Shelby Stanger: Yeah. I've learned a little bit about long distance swimming because we interviewed Kim Chambers who swam a bunch of those and then Diana Nyad. And they're both... swimming is so crazy. But so he does this and you're supporting him. He climbed Everest with you and I'm sure having him support with you was amazing, but what was it like to be on the other side and then support him?

Caroline Gleich: Okay. So when he first came up with his idea a couple years ago, I was still working on the Chuting Gallery project and I had all my own goals and big mountain dreams and I'm like, "I'm the professional athlete." I felt really threatened by it at first and my ego and my jealousy and just these ugly sides of me reared their heads because I have a lot of insecurity, I guess, is what it comes down to. And so first I was very insecure and I felt very threatened by him plan and his idea. And to be honest, when he first told me he wanted to climb Everest I was not supportive and I told him I'd break with him if he did that. So, I had a big shift over the years of wanting to do that myself and go with him on that. And being his supporter and stuff - it was a turning point where I realized that you can get as much of a sense of satisfaction from supporting someone else as you can from doing the goal yourself.



Caroline Gleich: And so it was a beautiful turning point from me on my own journey, finding a sense of wholeness and to be less insecure about myself, it was really gratifying and it was really beautiful to be on the boat and to help him achieve that goal. And sometimes that jealousy is a good reminder to get clear on your own goals and to make sure that you're doing things for yourself that you want to do and you're not living someone else's life. So, it's a fine line between listening to that and then also coming from a place of self love and feeling like, instead of that sense of scarcity, that sense of there's enough to go around.

Shelby Stanger: And then Rob has one more piece of his triathlon left. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

Caroline Gleich: Yeah. So in September he's going to ride his bike across America. So he's going to start in Seattle and end in Nantucket. And when we started talking about it, we originally thought I would drive an RV and support him and crew him but then for a while I thought maybe I would ride with him but then when I tore my ACL, my surgeon and my PT think it might be a little excessive for me to ride over 100 miles every day just so close out of knee surgery that you just don't want to over do it with your knee graft. So I might ride the first couple days with him but then he's going to do mostly self supported. So he's going to have some bags on his bike and he'll have a credit card and he'll do a combination of staying with people, staying in motels and camping and just take this route and take the time. I'm really excited for him and to be honest I'm really jealous because it would be so indulgent to take 30 days and ride across America. So I'm a little heartbroken I can't go with him and I hope it doesn't derail our fresh marriage. But I'm trying to keep myself busy with other things like I'm planning to go to Washington DC with Protect our Winters to do some lobbying about climate change and other legislation and I have other things going on so I feel like I'll be able to keep myself engaged in other projects that are meaningful to me.

Shelby Stanger: I'm curious how you two met.

Caroline Gleich: We met on Instagram.

Shelby Stanger: And you proposed how long ago?

Caroline Gleich: In September of 2018.

Shelby Stanger: In September. So tell me about this engagement.

Caroline Gleich: So we had been talking... I grew up in Minnesota, very traditional Midwest. I grew up Catholic as well and so there's always this thought I had that marriage is a huge goal and it's something I always wanted. Finally we felt like we were ready. So, we were talking about it and I had always wanted to propose to him. I thought it would be really cool. But one of my friends was like, "No, you can't take that moment away from him." So I asked him, "Would I be taking that

moment away from you?" And he was like, "No, that would be awesome." So I asked his mom for permission and then she gave me her blessing and his dad, too. And then when we were on the trip, it was in my back pocket. And then when we got to the summit, I proposed.

Shelby Stanger: You got down on one knee and you said, "Will you marry me?"

Caroline Gleich: I said, "Robert James Lea, will you marry me?" And he said yes.

Shelby Stanger: Right on. Not many women do that.

Caroline Gleich: Yeah, I mean, again I'm just really happy to be with a guy who wasn't threatened by that and I think that having to wait for a guy to ask is sort of outdated. I think it's something that two adults should decide on. It's nice to have an element of surprise and what not but I think if you want to ask, you should, if you're a woman. I think it's outdated to have to wait for something you want.

Shelby Stanger: I love that. And did you get him a ring? Did you have that all picked out?

Caroline Gleich: So I made these rings out of P cord, just some thin climbing rope, some really small rope. And I just melted the ends together and I brought those with us. We're not like huge on material... like spending a lot of money on jewelry, it's just not something that I would want to do. So when we got home, my mom gave me my grandmother's engagement ring that she had set aside for me. And then for my wedding band, I have my other grandma's wedding band. And so, to me, having those heirloom, vintage pieces, it's more ethical and more sustainable and it's more true to who I am. And then Rob has a silicone ring that he'll probably never wear. But that's fine with me.

Shelby Stanger: I love that. And I think your approach to rings is really cool. One, I was like, "I'm going to lose the ring surfing." And so, my ring is sea glass. It's just sea glass.

Caroline Gleich: Oh cool. That's so awesome.

Shelby Stanger: It's just little sea glass. It's less than 100 bucks, I've already lost one. So you have so many things going on this year and you have a wedding coming up.

Caroline Gleich: Yeah, in less than three weeks we're getting married, which is crazy.

Shelby Stanger: Wow, so you're busy. By the time this podcast comes out, you will have been married-

Caroline Gleich: Hopefully.

- Shelby Stanger: And have had this great wedding. What are you looking forward to most with your wedding?
- Caroline Gleich: For one, we're getting married at the top of Snowbird, at the top of the tram at 11,000 feet on Hidden Peak. And it's a place that's really special to us. So for one we're just really excited to share the heart of the Wasatch with our friend and family. And then I'm just looking forward to having a big dance party and just to bring in all these weird groups of people together and having a big celebration and I just want to have a good time and I hope my guests also have a great time.
- Shelby Stanger: I love that you also have weird groups of friends. I'm always like, "What's going to happen when I put all my weird groups of friends into one room together?" And it's always epic and I bet your wedding is going to be so beautiful.
- Caroline Gleich: I'm worried. I'm trying not to freak out - I couldn't sleep at all last night. I was so anxious. There's a lot of last minute details that need to be worked about but it's just one of those things where you do as much as you can and you do the best you can and then realize that not everything is going to be as you want it and just to be rolling with what happens.
- Shelby Stanger: That's great advice. So after the wedding, do you get any time to chill?
- Caroline Gleich: No. I have a pretty busy schedule for the end of August and September. And then maybe in October we'll go for a honeymoon. I'm no 100% sure yet. We'll see.
- Shelby Stanger: So you talked a little bit about self doubt and anxiety. It's something I struggle with still, failure, perfectionism. It's probably going to be a lifelong battle but I'm hoping I can nip it in the bud sooner than later. Do you have any tactics that you've used, books you've read, things you do to calm that chatter in your mind to gain that confidence, to go after these big goals?
- Caroline Gleich: I guess one of the things that really has helped me is to do meditation. And I'm not sponsored by this app or anything, I pay for it, but I used Headspace for a while and I found that to be really helpful. Another thing that has really helped me, I had done talking to life coaches and other therapists but to me so many of my sises are deeper than what I can access through just talking. They're in my tissue and my muscles. So another thing that's really helped me is getting message and regular body work and having someone who can help me... sometimes that kink in your neck, that muscle knot is some deep stored trauma or some limiting doubt or self belief that you have that needs to be resolved and so having a massage therapist has been super helpful to make me feel more whole.
- Caroline Gleich: And the other thing is just realizing that you don't have to listen to all the thoughts. Like you'll have these little thoughts, these things that come up and

just learning that you don't have to listen to all the thoughts that you have. Some thoughts just aren't worth listening to. So, learning to let those go.

Shelby Stanger: Wow, Caroline, you're such a go getter. And you put yourself at the highest level, when you go after something, you go after the best. I mean, you're going to DC to help legislate for climate protection, you've climbed Everest, the tallest of mountains. Any advice to people who, maybe they have some obstacles in their life or they just want to go after a wild idea?

Caroline Gleich: I mean, one of the things I think about with myself is that I waited so many years to feel like I was ready for these things. And sometimes I wish maybe I had gone for these big dreams sooner and not waited quite so long to feel like I was so over-prepared. I mean, it's good to be prepared but on the other hand, I think especially for women sometimes we wait until... we don't think that we're ready until we have so much experience and sometimes I think we could go for it sooner. The other thing I would say is that it took me a long time to really believe in myself that I was capable and worthy of achieving these big things. A lot of with Everest was just wrapping my head around fundraising and telling myself I was worth it because I think I had this inner dialogue that I wasn't capable or worthy of raising that amount of money and being up there. And so I had to really do some self coaching around that. And so I think just believing in myself and trying to take on these big, ambitious things sooner, I wish I would have done it... started dreaming bigger, sooner.

Shelby Stanger: Don't wait to dream big. You don't have to change who you are to be worthy of your goals. We all have our own Mount Everest to climb even if you don't want to climb Mount Everest. I'm sure there's a big adventure you want to do. My biggest advice is just start. Any adventure you partake in will be memorable. Thank you to Caroline Gleich for sharing the details of your adventure. I appreciate your why for doing so and your determination. Also thank you for your work in the world on climate change and for equality and for your desire to continue to evolve, to grow, just to push yourself as a human. Caroline's wedding pictures and some clips are up on Instagram. It looked like it was an amazing party. So check it out. You can follow Caroline, @carolinegleich. That's C-A-R-O-L-I-N-E G-L-E-I-C-H. And you follow her husband @roblea as he does the ultimate triathlon.

Shelby Stanger: If you liked this episode with Caroline, you can also search for our previous episode number 39, climbing mountains, conquering fears, and speaking up to protect where we play. This podcast is produced by REI with help from Annie Fassler and Chelsea Davis. Tune in week after next as we talk to the founder and some participants of an all women's off road adventure series, the Rebelle Rally. As always, I appreciate when you subscribe, rate and review it wherever you're listening to this podcast. I love your funny reviews and your heartfelt reviews. They mean a lot and I read them all. Remember wherever you are, some of the best adventures often happen when you follow your wildest ideas.

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