

Becoming ANYTHING He Wants to Be

Imagine cold so cold that bare skin freezes almost instantly. Imagine wind so strong that it could blow you over and deep icy cracks you might fall into at any moment. Now picture a group of mountain climbers making their way through this environment to the highest spot in the world. One of the climbers is Erik Weihenmayer.

On May 25, 2001, Erik did make it to the top of Mount Everest, the tallest mountain on Earth. But Erik could not see the view from the top. He could not even see the snow and ice all around him. He could only feel them because he is blind. Erik is the only blind person ever to reach the top of the world.



On May 25, 2001, Erik became the first blind person to climb to the top of Mount Everest.

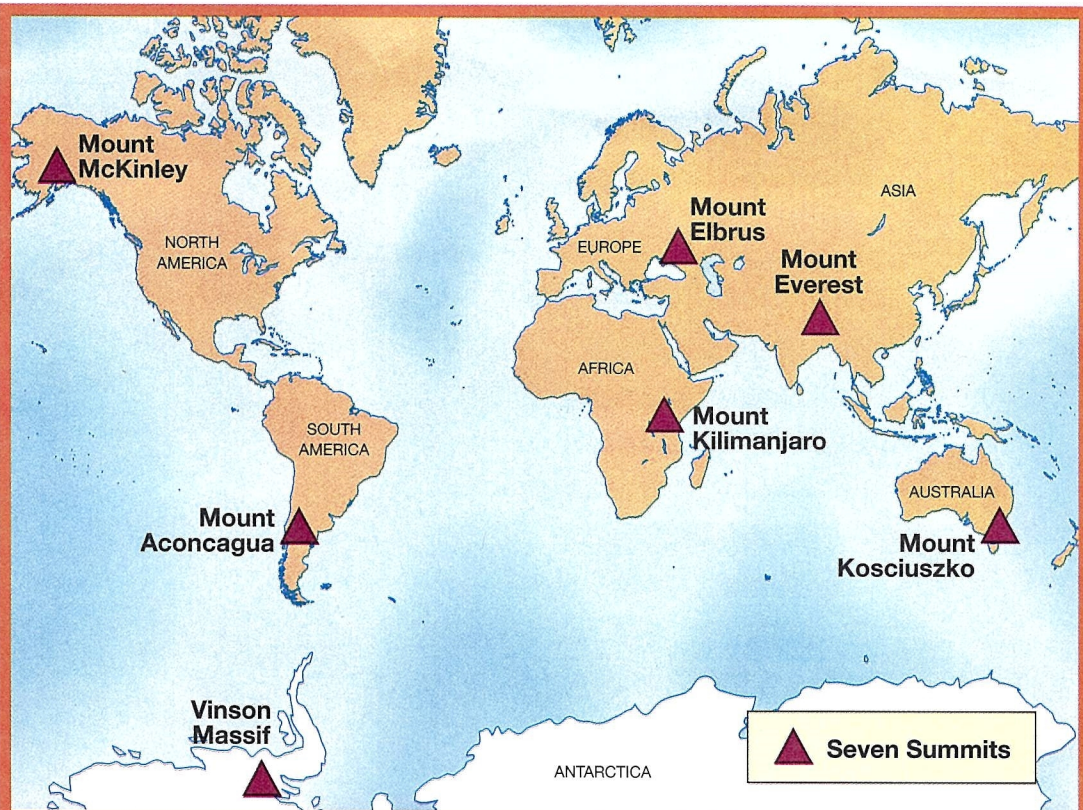
A Hard Beginning

Erik was born with a rare eye disease. He could never see very well. By the time he was 13, the disease had made him blind.

People often think of all the things a blind person can't do because he or she can't see. Erik's father encouraged Erik to think about the things he *could* do. Erik learned that lesson well.

It wasn't always easy. At first, Erik was angry when he lost his sight. He refused to learn Braille, a writing and reading system for blind people. He failed math his first year in high school because he could not read the Braille textbook.

Then Erik started wrestling. It was a sport where his blindness did not slow him. He learned Braille, and his grades improved. He became the captain of the wrestling team. One year he won second place in the state wrestling championship.



The Seven Summits are the highest mountains on the seven continents. Every mountain climber dreams of climbing them all. Very few achieve this dream.

The Thrill of the Climb

When he was sixteen, Erik went rock climbing for the first time. The experience changed his life. He loved the feel of the wind and the rock under his hands. Different rocks had different textures. This thrilled him and made him want to climb more and more.

Yet Erik did not want only to follow other climbers. Blind people had climbed that way for a long time. Erik wanted to lead. He wanted to find the toeholds and places for his hands by touch. One night, he proved he *could* lead.

He was climbing with a partner, and they finished after dark. The partner had forgotten his helmet light. He could not see to climb down. But Erik could “see” with his hands. He led the climb back down to safety.

Erik says he loves the beauty of mountain climbing, the movement and the teamwork.



Climbing the Seven Summits

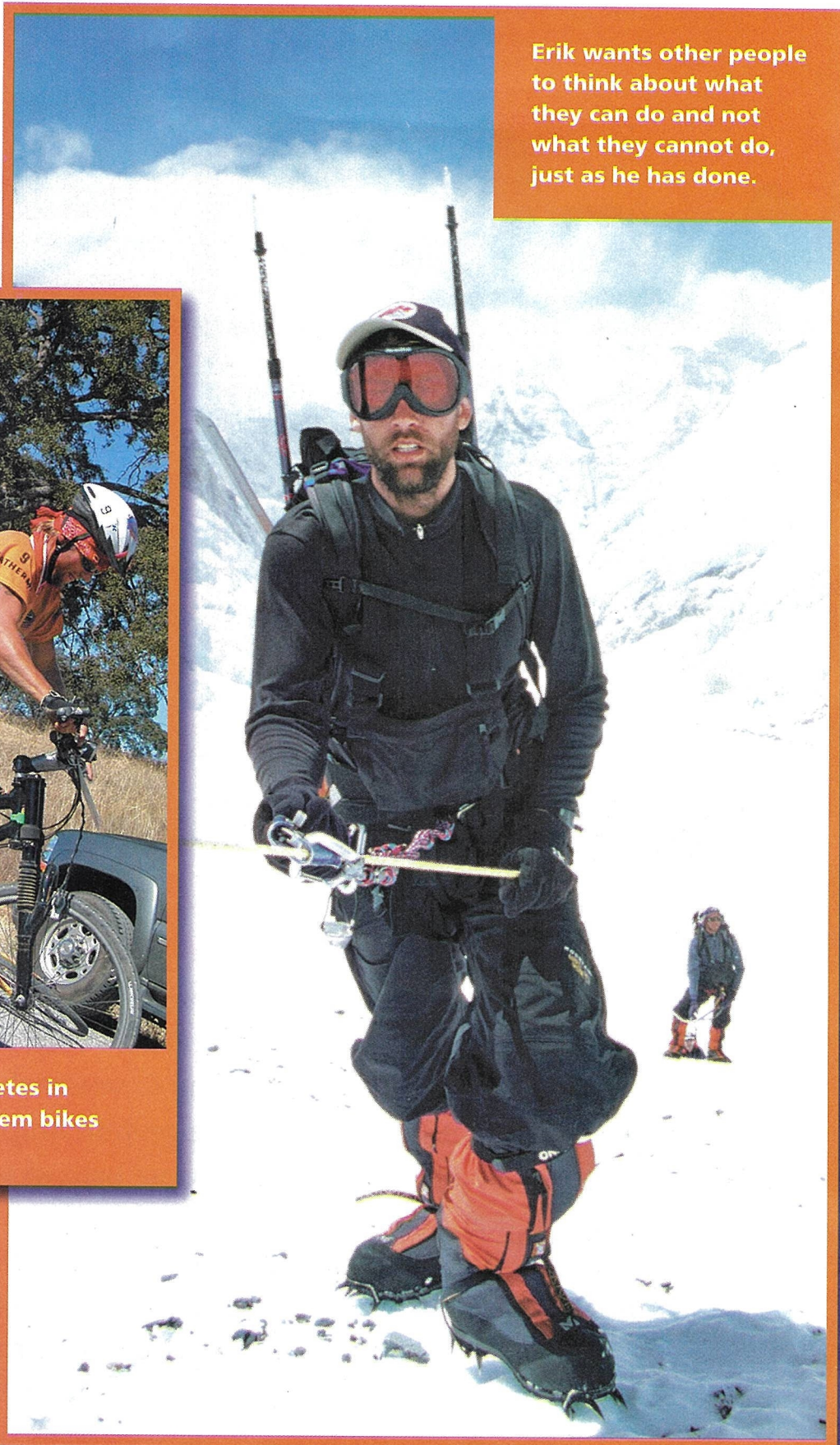
Soon Erik began climbing mountains! He discovered he could use long poles to lean on and help him feel the ground. He could also use his hearing to sense when a cliff was in front of him, or when the ground dropped off. Sometimes climbers in front of him wore bells or tapped their ice axes against rocks to help direct him.

In 1995, Erik climbed to the top of Denali Peak (Mount McKinley) in Alaska. The TV news reported it: a blind man had climbed the tallest mountain in North America! It was the first of the “Seven Summits” that Erik went on to climb. These mountains are the highest on each of the seven continents. Over the next seven years, Erik climbed them all.



A great athlete, Erik competes in tandem bicycle races. Tandem bikes are for two riders.

Erik wants other people to think about what they can do and not what they cannot do, just as he has done.



Not Just a World-Class Climber

Erik didn't stop at mountain climbing. At one time he was a teacher and a wrestling coach. He is also a sky diver. He runs marathon races. He skis. He scuba-dives. He does long-distance bike rides. You could never tell Erik that blindness is a handicap.

Now Erik speaks and teaches all around the world. He has written two books. The message in each is that hardships can make us stronger and better people. One of his books is called *Touch the Top of the World*. The story was made into a movie.

Erik also made a movie called *Farther Than the Eye Can See*. It is an adventure film about climbing Mount Everest. Erik used the movie to raise more than half a million dollars for charity. He used his success to help form a group called No Barriers. The group finds ways to help people with disabilities overcome the barriers in their lives.

Today, Erik is trying to help blind people learn to read and write. He wants everyone who cannot see to learn Braille. He speaks all over the world to help make this happen.

Erik was once asked if he believes everything is possible. He answered that there are limits. For example, he cannot drive a car. But, he added, "There are good questions and bad questions in life. The bad questions are what-if questions. 'What if I were smarter, or stronger? What if I could see?' Those are dead-end questions. A good question is, 'How do I do as much as I can with what I have?'"

My Blue Belt Day!

A karate student shows a roundhouse kick.

Just What Is Karate?

Karate is an ancient Asian form of self-defense. It uses no weapons. In fact, *karate* in Japanese means "empty hand." In karate, a person uses kicks, punches, blocks, and hand chops to stop an attacker.

Belt colors show how much karate students have learned. Beginners wear white belts. A student must pass a test to achieve each next belt. The kicks and other moves get harder and more complicated with each level of belt. The highest level is the black belt, the sign of the master.





May 3

Why was I so scared this morning? My stomach was doing flips. You'd think I was facing a cougar instead of a karate test!

I didn't feel scared six months ago. That's when I took my test to earn my green belt. I knew the green belt forms and performed all the kicks and blocks and punches just right.

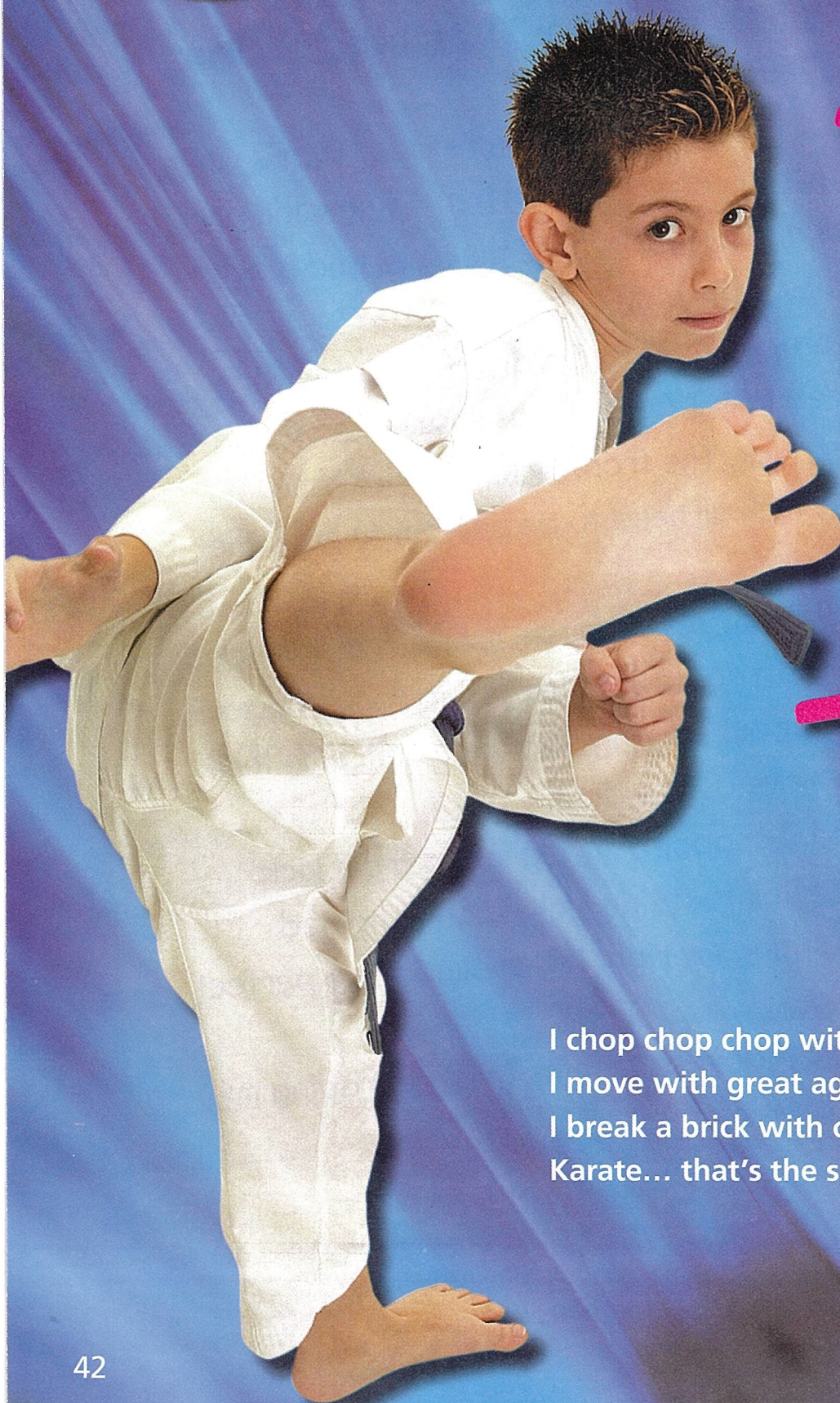
This morning, though, I didn't feel ready for the blue-belt test. I guess I was unsure about my roundhouse kick. The front kick, side kick, and roundhouse kick all need to be perfect to earn the blue belt.

Just before my test, though, my instructor helped me. *Sensei* Scott said I just needed to focus. He said, "Don't think about earning your blue belt. Just think about each move as you do it."

It worked. I snapped my leg into a front kick. I whipped it out into a side kick. Then I shouted "Yiah!" and swung my right leg around for a perfect roundhouse kick.

Now I think that in six months I will be trading my blue belt for purple!

There are different schools of karate.
Most follow this order of belts.



I chop chop chop

by Jack Prelutsky

I chop chop chop without a stop,
I move with great agility.
I break a brick with one quick kick—
Karate... that's the sport for me!

Long Jump

by Kristine O'Connell George

Brittany and Jaleesa cheering,
I run as hard as I can,
 focusing
far beyond the sandpit.
I leap, hold air,
pull with my fingertips,
land solid,
weight forward,
and know
 I can do anything.
All I need
 is a running start.



Interview *an* **ACHIEVER!**

Everyone has done something to be proud of. Maybe it was scoring a winning goal in a game. Maybe it was overcoming a fear. Maybe it was helping someone, or it was learning something new. Whatever it was, it's time to share it.

Interview a classmate about an achievement he or she is proud of. Use the list below to guide your interview. Jot your partner's answers down on a sheet of paper. Using your notes, share your partner's achievement with the rest of your class or group. Be sure to speak clearly and to use correct grammar.

- 1 Achiever's name
- 2 What achievement makes you the most proud?
- 3 When did it happen?
- 4 Where did it happen?
- 5 How do you feel about what you did?



Build a Word

Many English words have word parts called roots from other languages. If you know the meaning of the root, it will help you understand the meaning of the whole word. Here are the meanings of four roots.

auto = self **graph = write** **phon = sound** **tele = distance**

Example: A **phonograph** is an early record player. It plays **sound** that was **written** down, or recorded, on a disc.

Combine the roots above to make words that answer the riddles below.

1. I'm your name that you **write** yourself.
What am I?
2. I help you hear **sound** from a **distance**.
What am I?
3. You use me to **write** a message and
send it a **distance**. What am I?

Now make up two words of your own. Use the roots above. Combine them with other words. Your new words do not have to be real. Write a sentence that defines each new word you made.

Example: A **telebird** is a bird that flies a long distance.



Answer Key: 1. autograph; 2. telephone; 3. telegraph

Congra

You read about a man who climbed the highest mountain in the world and a girl who earned her blue belt in karate. You may also have a friend, relative, or classmate who accomplished something great. Or maybe you read a story about a character who does something wonderful.

Choose a real person or a story character who achieved a goal. Write a card, congratulating that person on the achievement.

- Decorate the front of the card.
- Inside, write a message. Tell what you think about the person's achievement, as Carrie has done here. Which sentence tells you her purpose for writing this card?
- Include the date on which you are writing.



congratulations!



Dear Ava,

May 1

I am writing this card to congratulate you on winning the school music award. I know you practiced piano every day, and it showed! Your concert was great. You deserve your award.

Your friend,
Carrie

