

After the

FALL

By Christina Quick

“**A**ll you,” Craig DeMartino called down to climbing partner Steve Gorham.

It was DeMartino’s signal he was ready to move. Soon it would be Gorham’s turn to make the ascent.

“OK,” was the reply.

It was July 22, 2002. What started as a stormy day in Colorado’s Rocky Mountains had turned into a mild summer afternoon, perfect for exploring a new climbing route.

DeMartino, 38, had been climbing with Gorham for a number of years, and the two were doggedly passionate about the sport. That morning, when lightning and hail forced them off their high perch, they decided to hunker down and wait. Their persistence yielded another opportunity to climb.

A hundred feet up, DeMartino let go of the rock and leaned back confidently, expecting Gorham to lower him to the ground by feeding the rope through a belay device.

Suddenly, DeMartino was falling.

At first he assumed there was a little slack in the rope. He had fallen a few feet before. Once, while ice climbing in Vail with his wife, Cyndy, he had asked her to pull the rope taut.

Over the roar of a waterfall Cyndy misunderstood and gave her husband additional slack. DeMartino plunged over the icy lip of the falls before Cyndy saw the problem and stopped him in midair.



Craig DeMartino

DeMartinoPhoto collection

Falling is a part of the sport, and seasoned climbers know how to handle it calmly, even gracefully. But as DeMartino kicked away from the rock and waited for Gorham to respond, he quickly realized this fall was different. He was actually going to hit the ground!

Freefalling at approximately 50 mph with his back and head toward the earth, DeMartino glanced off a tree and turned upright before slamming into the cliff’s rocky base feet first.

DeMartino’s climbing shoes literally exploded on impact, sending bits of rubber and leather in all directions. The force of the blow instantaneously shattered the bones in his feet and snapped his neck and back.

Gorham raced to his friend’s crumpled body. He’d thought DeMartino planned to stay at

Craig DeMartino scales The Bastille Crack near Eldorado Springs, Colo.

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the top and belay Gorham as he climbed. Just before DeMartino fell, Gorham walked away from the rope to get his shoes. It was a tragic misunderstanding.

Though DeMartino was conscious, his chances of survival didn't look good. Jagged bones were jutting through both heels, and his right leg was bleeding badly where an artery had been severed.

Emergency response

Peeling off his shirt, Gorham used it as a tourniquet to slow DeMartino's bleeding.

"I have to go for help," he told DeMartino.

Gorham knew he would have to sprint four miles across difficult terrain before he could reach his truck and drive into Estes Park. Starting down the steep trail, Gorham suddenly remembered the cell phone in his backpack.

In 18 years of climbing, Gorham had never carried a phone in the backcountry. There was little use for one, since it was nearly impossible to get reception so far out. But that morning he had inexplicably stashed a phone with his gear.

After running back to his pack, Gorham grabbed the device and dialed 9-1-1. To his surprise, the call went through. The dispatcher connected him with EMT Eric Gabriel, head of Rocky Mountain Rescue.

An avid climber, Gabriel was well acquainted with the location. He had helped evacuate an injured climber there a year before. Unfortunately, the victim did not survive. Knowing there was little time to lose, Gabriel grabbed his gear and headed to the site.

Gabriel arrived in less than an hour, a tremendous feat in the rugged wilderness. Twenty minutes later, an entire medical team was on the scene — another small miracle.

Firefighters had been battling wildfires a few miles away. The medical personnel were standing by as a precaution. Any other time, it might have taken them several hours to reach the remote location.

With DeMartino strapped to a backboard, the team began the downhill journey to a clearing where a helicopter would land. DeMartino remained alert throughout the ordeal. Every bump sent an agonizing jolt of pain through his body.

He believed he would live, but DeMartino also knew he was spiritually ready if he lost his struggle for survival.

Faith journey

Much of DeMartino's adult life had revolved around climbing. He'd even met Cyndy at an indoor climbing gym.

DeMartino's pursuit of the sport had brought him to Colorado. A photographer by trade, he was living in Philadelphia when he drew a circle on a map around Fort Collins, Colo., and set out to find a job in the region. The search led him to Group Publishing, a Christian business based in picturesque Loveland.

Though he was not a Christian, DeMartino landed a job in Group's photography department and was soon living his dream. Two of his co-workers were also climbers, and they invited him along on weekend adventures. Through these relationships, DeMartino became

Craig DeMartino, who uses a prosthetic leg designed for climbing, takes on the rocks in Wild Iris, Wyo., (below) and sets a speed record on El Capitan in California's Yosemite National Park (bottom).



DeMartinoPhoto collection

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DeMartino enjoys a variety of outdoor sports, including mountain biking and skiing. His wife, Cyndy, and children Mayah, 9, and Will, 7, often get in on the adventures (bottom).

DeMartinoPhoto collection



open to the ideas of Christianity.

Shortly after their marriage in 1996, he and Cyndy dedicated their lives to Christ. They became active in a local church and started learning about the Bible. During that time, the couple also became parents.

In many ways, DeMartino had the life he had always wanted. Now he was fighting to hold onto it.

Survivor

Five hours after his fall, DeMartino finally arrived at a hospital. In addition to multiple broken bones, he had suffered a collapsed lung and lost a massive amount of blood.

One of DeMartino's vertebrae was completely splintered, and surgeons had to remove the fragments from his spinal column piece by piece. His back was then fused together with two rods and bone from his hip.

At one point, doctors told Cyndy her husband had only an hour to live. But God had other plans. DeMartino not only survived, but continued to defy medical predictions concerning his long-term recovery. Remarkably, he suffered no paralysis in spite of the spine and neck injuries.

The gradual healing process was difficult for DeMartino, who was used to climbing several times a week. Initially, he couldn't even roll over without assistance.

Lying in the hospital, DeMartino asked God to reveal His will for the rest of his life. He told the Lord, "I'm not sure why this happened, but I'd really like to know what You want to do with this."

Soon after, as writers and

reporters started contacting him about his amazing tale of survival, DeMartino realized his experience could be a platform for sharing Christ.

Today, DeMartino travels the country conveying his story through an organization he started called After the Fall Ministry. Between speaking engagements and his work at Group, he continues to stay physically active.

Several months after the accident, DeMartino's shattered right leg was amputated below the knee. Yet he still climbs with the use of a prosthetic leg.

Five years since his fall DeMartino says his climbing performance is better than at any other time in his life.

In the summer of 2006 he went to Yosemite National Park in California with famed climber Hans Florine and became the first amputee to scale El Capitan in a day. He has also won gold medals for climbing at the Extremity Games, a competitive athletic event for amputees.

When he isn't climbing, DeMartino enjoys skiing and mountain biking with Cyndy and their two children.

"It's been so cool to see what God has done with this," he says. "When people hear me say God is real, it's almost impossible to argue with me. I'm the proof. I'm a living miracle."

CHRISTINA QUICK is staff writer for *Today's Pentecostal Evangel*.

tpeextra

Visit tpe.ag.org for a podcast with author Christina Quick about her own climbing experiences.

ABCs OF SALVATION

To know God and be ready for heaven, follow these steps:

A. Admit you are a sinner.

"There is no one righteous, not even one ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:10,23 (See Romans 5:8; 6:23.)

Ask God's forgiveness and repent of your sins.

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Romans 10:13 (See Acts 3:19.)

B. Believe in Jesus (put your trust in Him) as your only hope of salvation.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16 (See John 14:6.)

Become a child of God by receiving Christ.

"To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." John 1:12 (See Revelation 3:20.)

C. Confess that Jesus is your Lord.

"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9 (See verse 10.)

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