



At the PEAK

Climbing mountains to raise awareness of those with breathing difficulties has become a way of life for one English Cypriot

By Sarah Mewes

C LIMBING the highest peaks in the world to focus attention on children with respiratory and breathing difficulties, such as asthma, would not be everyone's choice of how to spend their spare time. However, it is activities of this kind to which John Michael Mouskos has dedicated his life to raise money and awareness for those who are deprived of what most of us take for granted: breathing freely and without pain.

Mouskos, founder of The Breathing Life Trust, has made it his aim to collect £200,000 to set up a medical centre (The Breathing Life Lung Centre for Children) in Nicosia to treat children suffering from respiratory diseases.

Mouskos developed his passion for mountains from very early on, having been brought up in a little village in the Troodos mountains, which served as his inspiration. "Being able to have an insight into the kind of walks my great grandparents had to undertake in order to survive life in the mountain village was important to me. Inevitably, I understood the connection between walking and breathing."

"Ten per cent of children in Cyprus suffer from asthma and there is no institution that has the necessary equipment to treat such diseases effectively. I have family and close friends in Cyprus so I would say that my soul is in Cyprus."

But his love for Cyprus has not stopped him going further afield, tackling mountains as high and as exotic as Mount Aconcagua in Argentina, which Mouskos refers to as "the real deal" when comparing it to mountains such as Mont Blanc.

"Mount Aconcagua is 7,000m high, making it one of the highest mountains in the whole world. Being the first Greek-Cypriot to climb a mountain of such altitude made the experience very special to me. Our team consisted of two Cypriots and three Greeks: Costas Tsivelakas, Stratos Michailogiou, Panayiota Christopanou, Kyriacos Onistforou and myself. Our leader, Costas, held the team together and ensured that we got to the top safely. Food wasn't of great importance, what mattered was liquid, so we carried a lot of that in our backpacks. We prepared for the tour by climbing less difficult mountains."

So how does a non-athlete make it to the top of the highest peak in the Southern hemisphere?

"Basically, stamina and personal fitness is not what will get you to the top. When you climb mountains you put your life at risk. So I link three things to a successful tour: courage, determination and faith that you will make it back."

Making it back from Aconcagua seemed almost like a blessing to Mouskos' group: just after they arrived they were informed that six other mountaineers had died on their quest to make it to the top.

Back home in London, where Mouskos' charity is based, he has plans to climb even steeper mountains.

"Mount Everest is, of course, the ultimate and final challenge. Needless to say though, many have failed when attempting to climb it. A lot of experience and preparation will be necessary to take that risk. I do hope to live a long life."

For donations or more information visit: www.breathinglife.co.uk

SEVEN QUESTIONS

- What car do you drive?
A blue Porsche C4S
- Describe your perfect weekend.
Visiting art galleries in all principal museums of Europe
- Assuming you believe in reincarnation who or what would you come back as?
A wild deer
- What is your greatest fear?
Height
- What is your earliest memory?
Climbing in my father's village of Lemithou
- What did you have for breakfast?
Cereal with fruit juice
- What was the last item of clothing you bought?
Armani jeans

It's my life: John Michael Mouskos

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