



# Family



In the 1980s the World Wide Web didn't exist so computer users formed clubs to share knowledge. There wasn't a computer club in my area so I started one. It was called the Carshalton Independent Atari Computer Club. Every Wednesday after school I would pack my Atari 400 and a tape recorder into the back of my Mum's car, and go to the village hall to meet other Atari owners.

I can't recall anything we said on those evenings whilst we waited for computer programs to load from cassette tapes to 16K memory chips. But I do remember that at the age of 12 it felt normal to be running an organisation that adults wanted to join. My parents never told me that I was too young or inexperienced. They just got stuck in with photocopying newsletters and driving me around.

When I was 17 I proposed an expedition to clean-up 35 years of mountaineering rubbish that had accumulated at Everest Base Camp. Mum and Dad didn't tell me to forget the idea and concentrate on passing my A-levels. They didn't say that if I failed my exams, "my life would be over" or some of the other guff that you hear parents telling their children when they start panicking (the parent, not the child). And they didn't point out that I had no expedition experience. Instead, they quietly helped me with what became a juggernaut of an expedition.

After the clean-up I led a hand-to-mouth existence, earning money from a job in an outdoor store to finance my next expedition. I would disappear for months at a time to Alaska, South America and the Himalayas. Back then there was no cellular or satellite telephone coverage. Day after day, week after week, my parents had to get on with their lives, not knowing when the phone would ring and whether the news would be good or bad.

One evening, after returning from a harrowing expedition, I was watching a television programme with my Mum. Suddenly she said, "I know if you die you'll have seen and done more in your short life than most people twice your age." Then we went back to watching the TV.

I've never been one for long goodbyes at airports. But at the start of my third attempt to reach the summit of Everest my parents wanted to see me off at Heathrow so I said OK. As they walked away from the security gate they reached out to hold each other's hand. I'd never noticed them hold hands before.

My Mum and Dad don't know this but on all my expeditions my priority has been to return home safely so they don't have to go to my funeral. It's been my way of thanking them for the gift they have given me. The gift to choose my own path in life. I think it is one of the greatest gifts that a parent can give a child. And one of the hardest.

Writer, speaker, and mountaineer. Since co-leading an expedition at 18 to clean-up Everest's base, Paul Deegan has visited some of the world's most esoteric mountain regions.

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