

## HIGHER LEARNING

Fifteen-year-old Evan Jacobsen in the process of scaling all 18,549 feet of Russia's Mount Elbrus this past July.

**S**an Clemente's Evan Jacobsen is anything but a normal 15-year-old. He enjoys hard work, his summer interests include more than "killer waves and an awesome tan," he actually likes to spend time with his dad, and he cares as much for philanthropy as he does for football. He's also found a way to combine all of his passions in a single, if long-term, goal: to be the youngest person ever to climb the tallest mountains on each of the earth's seven continents (a.k.a. The Seven Summits) with his father Donald by his side, all in an effort to raise \$1 million for charity. (Since the current Seven Summits recordholder was 20, Evan will have an extra year to make up summits that eluded him for reasons ranging from bad weather to illness.)

It's an admittedly big task, one that will take him at least three years, ending with the summit of the world's rooftop, Mount



Evan Jacobsen (left) with villagers near Mount Kilimanjaro.

Everest. But he's already off to a blazing start after summiting both Africa's Mount Kilimanjaro (19,340 feet) and Russia's Mount Elbrus (18,549 feet) this past July.

It was in Russia, during another climbing expedition, that Evan's million-dollar campaign was inspired. In the villages at Mount Elbrus's base, Evan saw abject poverty firsthand. It was about as far from the splashy OC as he could get. "All I could think about was how lucky I was to be pursuing my dream when, in parts of Russia, families were struggling to keep a roof over their heads," he says.

The images haunted him even when he returned to his life of beaches and football. So he went to his father with a plan, and his father embraced it. With Evan's passion, and Donald's checkbook, they set up Summit7, a non-profit organization that will give 100% of collected donations to Habitat for Humanity, The Fuller Center for Housing and other international home building charities. The Jacobsens will cover the charity's administrative costs as well as the costs of all climbs – potentially hundreds of thousands of dollars. (The guide fee for Everest alone is \$65,000.)

While navigating the world of philanthropy is new to Evan, navigating mountains is not. He began climbing with his father, a former swimmer and lifeguard and avid climber, at age 10. "Dad would tell me all these stories about mountain climbing, and I just wanted to relive the adventures with him," says Evan. So they started climbing together and Evan liked it more and more, learning under his dad's tutelage.

But Evan's dad laid down the law when

Evan set his sights higher, namely Mount Everest – a place buffeted by the jet stream and dubbed the "death zone" because of the scarcity of oxygen in the air. "I told him, if he was serious, he had to start where I started," says Donald. So Evan enrolled in an Alpine Ascents International Mountaineering School. "At one point the instructor told Evan, 'I'm impressed. That would have kicked my butt when I was 16.' Evan said, 'Actually, I'm 13,'" says his mom Edie, who is surprisingly calm for the mother of a teenager destined for the death zone. Now, Evan's been to Russia twice, Africa, Australia, and summited 10k-plus peaks in California and Washington.

It's not all fun and pretty views, however. In fact, it's almost no fun and pretty views; Evan's just as likely to run past his friends at the beach than join them for a few waves, and profuse sweating is a daily routine as common as teeth brushing. A typical week involves runs of up to six miles, impromptu local mountain climbs, a healthy diet (try to convince your 15-year-old of that one), weight training, 90-minute StairMaster hikes and hour-long treadmill expeditions – with a 20-pound pack strapped to his back. "It's tough, and I miss some things, but I also know I have to be prepared. It's a form of respect for the mountains, and nature," says Evan, who credits his dedicated football and wrestling training for setting a good foundation.

Evan's dedication has resulted in more than just bigger thigh muscles and cool summer vacation photos, though. He's also proud of the relationship he's built with his father. They're about as close as father and son can get, something that makes Donald equally proud. "Not many teens would voluntarily spend a week or more in a tent with their father," says Donald. "It makes me feel like I'm doing something right." And if all goes well, they'll test that bond at the top of the world in May of 2009, when, at age 18, Evan would be the youngest person to scale the Seven Summits. (No pressure, Evan).

Then, only one challenge will remain: What next?

For more information on Summit7 and to donate, visit [www.summit7.org](http://www.summit7.org).

—TERENCE LOOSE