

## Quinn Simons: *Climbing for Inspiration*

Trapped at 25,000 feet for a week on the frozen slopes of Gurla Mandhata in 1997, Quinn Simons knew he would die if he didn't get off the Tibetan peak soon. Staring at the dead white skin covering his hands and the angry red flesh exposed when his fingernails slid off, he knew there was only one way down – to put one frozen foot in front of the other and will himself to safety. Remarkably, Quinn and his fellow climbers emerged alive from the ordeal. But Quinn's life was irrevocably changed.

Now, 11 years later, Quinn is preparing to return to Gurla Mandhata with his father and renowned expedition leader Jake Norton – and summit the very mountain that claimed his fingers, both feet and almost took his life. He will face the dangerous ascent not just for himself, but for challenged athletes everywhere. Particularly, Quinn seeks to positively impact the lives of people with disabilities in Nepal's Humla region, many of whom have suffered grievous injuries due to fighting between Maoist guerillas and the Nepalese army.

Quinn's personal journey since returning from the 1997 trip has not been an easy one. After having both feet amputated at the ankle, and losing his fingers (doctors were able to create functional "mittens" for him out of what was left of his hands) his life was plagued by pain, physical setbacks and psychological frustrations. He immersed himself in work (building houses and training racehorses) going harder and faster than most. Along the way, he lost sight of some of the things that were most important to him.



"At some point, I forgot I was an athlete," says Quinn. "I was a runner and a climber and a skier and a biker for most of my life and then 'bang!' – that was all gone. It wasn't gone because I physically couldn't do those things any more ... I just couldn't imagine myself as a disabled athlete and therefore didn't let myself become one."

The turning point came when Quinn saw CAF spokesperson Maj. David Rozelle cross the finish line at the Ford Ironman World Championship in Kona. "I couldn't walk without crippling pain and here was a guy who rode a bike for 112 miles and then ran a marathon, all on a prosthetic foot," says Quinn.

Quinn was inspired and decided to become a triathlete. He started short, doing minis and sprints. His stumps hurt, but he finished and never walked. Soon, he got a better set of prosthetics, and he got faster and it didn't hurt as bad. The more he trained and raced, the better he felt about himself as an athlete – and as a person.

Quinn has always thought about returning to Tibet, but it wasn't until he started competing in triathlons that he realized why he wanted to return. "Someone doing something extraordinary shook my self-inflicted limitations loose and inspired me to be better, try harder," says Quinn. "When this happened I realized that I wanted to return to Tibet to offer that same opportunity to someone else. I want to help someone flip that same switch and realize that the only reason that they are still not an athlete is because they decided that they weren't, not because they were physically incapable."

Quinn, his father and Jake Norton plan to go back to Tibet this September. When they return, they will go not just to climb, but to make a difference in the lives of physically challenged people in the region – and inspire others around the world. CAF is proud to be a partner in Quinn's efforts as he seeks to show others how they can conquer their personal mountains.

To learn more about Quinn and the expedition, go to [www.quinnclimbs.org](http://www.quinnclimbs.org)