



by Tyler Fish

Birth is an expedition. It starts somewhere and it ends someplace entirely different. My family now includes Sarah and me, our German Shepherd and Ethan Torbjorn Fish, newest addition. He's here to stay. My life is altered.

When you're an expecting father, you get a lot of advice, both solicited and unasked for, and one of the most common phrases offered to me was, "it'll change your life." For me those words were the beginning and the end of it. Nothing more was said; "it'll change your life" wasn't expanded upon very much. I didn't know what that meant, and no one seemed inclined to fill me in. It was like everyone was saying, "get ready," but they wouldn't explain how. Now I think I begin to grasp it.

The appearance of Ethan changed my life from the moment I stared at him. Traditionally newborn infants haven't been very interesting to me. Needy, hard to communicate with, kind of clumsy and loud. Not very predictable--all in all they share the characteristics of bad expedition partners. So when I just stood there and stared at him for fifteen minutes in the nursery at the hospital, and thought he was incredible, I knew something had changed. I actually thought, "so this is what they meant." Smiling, I laughed inside and knew that this was just the beginning.

The second most common advice was that I should get my sleep while I could. A veteran father

would say, “get ready for sleepless nights.” This I shrugged off and dreaded at the same time. I dismissed it because I wanted to. I feared it because I like my regular sleep. Digging a little deeper, in a conversation with one of my friends, he said that you just get used to operating on less sleep. “How,” I asked? “You just do,” was his reply. This is a huge change for me, and I'm making it because I have no choice. My wife and I are a team, helping each other get what we need while attending to the larger goal of a happy, healthy family.

Expeditions change your life, and the North Pole trip will undoubtedly do the same for John and I. Similar to birth, no one can really tell us what it'll feel like, how that will occur. There will certainly be times of less sleep! John and I will tolerate this because we have to in order to achieve our goal. We take all the advice we can get. When we're out on the ice we will smile and laugh inside and out when the words find their true meaning for us. At some point we're guaranteed to say, “this is what they meant.”

Erling Kagge, from Norway, was the first person to reach the North Pole, the South Pole and Everest. Here's what he had to say about polar expeditions, birth and the changing life:

“Polar explorations are somewhat similar to childbirth. During the journey and immediately afterwards I couldn't imagine doing it again. During the thick of it, I think of the cold, the pain, the filth and the hunger (I'm talking about polar exploration here) - yet, in the fullness of time, a new dream begins to take shape. Its easy to forget, but let's remember that the universe wasn't created to guarantee human happiness, and the nightingale doesn't sing for our amusement. From this I conclude that I must organize the conditions of my own happiness. Living free will never be pain-free. That was never the idea of it” --Erling Kagge

Life changes. Sarah and I chose to guide this process by having a son. For me and John, we choose to throw in a journey to the North Pole. The journey will change us. When we finish the expedition, John and I will not be the same people we were when we started.