

The Extremophile Choice is not just about tools, architecture, and infrastructure. It's **also about attitude**. It's about what makes our minds different from other animal minds that are confined by ecological imperatives that can't adjust to change on a technological timescale. A species takes many thousands of years to change. We on the other hand evolve day to day. And when I say evolve, I now mean not just our minds, but our *forms*. This is what makes us different physically, and it's *why* we're always pushing the envelope mentally.

Humans are **adaptive extremophiles**. My brother Terry is shown here, but his extremophile nature can't be fully captured in this picture frame. If the camera were to zoom back out, and take in the full height of the cliff, his image would be nothing but a little smudge against the ice. And of course, if he fell, he would literally be a smudge on the lake ice at the base of the cliff. (See his story below to learn more about how his attitude, and his relationship to the technology he and Valerie Ng develop and manufacture at *Esprit Ropes*, "evolved" during this climb.)



Photograph by All Bryant

Terry's Story:

They say the Inuit have twenty six words for ice and snow. The ice in the picture you're looking at is actually tubular (hollow). It was my second season of ice climbing and because I was living in an area where there wasn't a climbing community, there was no possibility of getting what's known as a belay (a catch if I fall). Because the only style I was into at the time was, 'from the ground up', I was rope soloing with a rescue sender (a camming device), anchoring the dull end of the rope to a large tree at the base of the climb. I had 30 meters of 8.5mm climbing rope stacked in a rope bag and attached to my lower left leg. The rope came out of the bag, up through the camming device, and on down to the tree below, and as long as I put in protection (various passive and non-passive devices into the rock or ice), and I was clipped into it with a carabiner, I would be caught by the system if I fell.

In the picture you can actually see my last pro, a small TCU (triple camming unit) well below me to the right of the large icicle. At this point in the ascent I was trying to get an ice screw in, but it wasn't to be. The ice had too much air passage in it, and in the event of a fall the screw would rip out. Every good climber knows how to reverse the moves and down-climb to safety, but in this case the icicle below me was too shaky, and the base was still 30 meters above the frozen lake.

Even today, years later, I remember the fear welling up in me as I contemplated my situation. For the past two seasons I had thought about soloing without rope many times, but now it was the only option. It had been a sunny afternoon in late March, and water was dripping everywhere, but suddenly the temperature started dropping as the sun disappeared over the forest. By the time I reached the summit the rescue sender was freezing to the rope and not allowing it to pass. To this day I remember how it felt to release my protection and watch as it plummeted to the lake below. Only a few more moves to safety and... I had survived.

That was in fact the last time I rope soloed. From then on I climbed pure, with no distractions. Now whenever I'm with young aspiring climbers I tell them some things appear to be very dangerous and are actually not. Just as some things can appear to be really safe and aren't. Eventually we learn. Cheers.

Postscript: I named the route 'Air Head'