



KRISTEN ULMER

Among men and women, Ulmer was a pioneer of extreme in the 1990s, one of the best big-mountain skiers ever. Just don't call her "fearless."



No other member of the Hall of Fame has such clear bookends to a career as Kristen Ulmer, the original female freeskiing icon who created a profession and persona that upended the all-male world order and inspired thousands of women to follow.

"I became famous in one day," she recalls, recounting the story of persuading ski filmmaker Eric Perlman to allow her into one of his films; the frigid, overnight drive from her home in Salt Lake City to Squaw Valley in a heater-less car; the sleepless nap in the pre-dawn base area parking lot; and, finally, huddling above the famous Palisades cliff bands with a handful of testosterone-charged superstars ready to go big. She attempted and landed three huge backscratches that January day in 1989, leading the other athletes to gush that they'd never seen a female skier do anything like it.

"By that evening, everyone at Squaw knew my name," Ulmer says. "Within a week, everyone in the ski industry knew my name. Within a month, I was fully sponsored, and all four major American ski magazines had called to request an interview."

Ulmer quickly realized she had the opportunity of a lifetime, with just the right personality, just the right look, and just the right "twisted relationship" with fear to pull it off. She also had a couple of secrets. Even though she would make the U.S. Freestyle Ski Team in moguls, she claims she wasn't a very good skier yet, just extremely comfortable in the air. And she was unimpressed, actually kind of ticked off, with earning that label as the "best woman you've ever seen."

"Mostly I wanted to kick the men's butts," she now laughs. "I wanted to be



the best skier period, not the best woman."

Thus began a legendary career that still has her at the pinnacle in the annals of the big mountain "extreme" freeskiing women who would follow (the Wendy Fishers, Ingrid Backstroms and Angel Collinsons), and the first to be inducted into the Hall of Fame. Primarily through her show-stopping appearances in two dozen ski movies, Ulmer shook up the ski world by often going bigger than the guys, and by backing it up with her outspokenness, her thoughtful writing for ski publications, and her vision of what it means to be a professional skier. Able to shift seamlessly from being thoughtful and gentle to assertive and audacious on the mountain, Ulmer established herself in those nascent freeskiing years (along with Scot Schmidt) as the most successful extreme film athlete of the time. "I considered her on par with the best male skiers of that era," Schmidt says. "There isn't a female big mountain skier today who isn't standing on her shoulders."

Ulmer was the embodiment of a whole new way of skiing, and was regularly featured in print ads for Salomon and The North Face. She appeared in roughly 25 films, from the North Face Extreme Skiing series to the RAP Entertainment Snow Zone Series, Warren Miller, and TGR. Starting in the early 1990s, she spent a decade of springs pioneering big mountain skiing in Alaska's Chugach Range, long before it would see established heli-operations (the experience was a highlight of her career, and she still goes back every year). In 1997, after honing her climbing skills,

she became the first woman to ski the Grand Teton, albeit at two turns per minute, with every turn triggering an avalanche or major slough.

The ski publications celebrated her with numerous covers and with headlines ranging from "Best and Boldest" to "Queen of Extreme." *Powder* called her the "biggest ski icon the ski industry never expected" and "the protoplasm at the center of a vast network that is the universe of extreme skiing." Her feats went beyond the slopes to include rock and ice climbing, paragliding, kite boarding, flying trapeze and elaborate bike tours in remote countries like India and Indonesia.

And in 2003, suddenly and with little warning, Ulmer decided, "I'm done." The years of handling all those self-promotional tasks that lie at the underbelly of being a professional skier had finally caught up. The decision came after she attended "Burning Man," where she concluded that it was time to move on. Immediately, she quit



it all: sponsors, films, public appearances, and four regular columns with ski publications. An article in *Ski Journal* called it "The Great Disappearing Act."

Ulmer didn't disappear, and instead channeled her energy into the next stage of her life, helping others. She created and executed more than 100 mindset camps, called *Ski to Live*, an experience that would eventually morph into an acclaimed career as a fear specialist. Her 2017 book, *The Art of Fear* (Harper Collins), became an Amazon best-seller and had her making the A-List media rounds. Ulmer's message is that fear is something to acknowledge, not conquer, and that in doing so you turn it into an asset and ally, and one of the greatest experiences of your life. In her own "fearless" big-mountain career, Ulmer

readily admits she didn't have a healthy relationship with fear. But the experience helped her confront this misunderstood emotion for the benefit of others, and launched her second career.

Career Accomplishments



1989-2001: Holds the unofficial but accurate title as best female extreme skier for 12 years in a row.

1990: Named to U.S. Freestyle Ski Team in moguls, but opts for the big mountains.

1992: Begins 10-year effort to pioneer Alaska Chugach Range.

1997: First female ski descent of the Grand Teton

1997: Named most extreme female athlete in North America, documented by *Women's Sports and Fitness* magazine, beating women in all sports disciplines.

2003: Created and leads mind-set ski camps called *Ski to Live*.

2017: HarperCollins published her best-selling book, *The Art of Fear*.

2018: Created theme-based ski camps, *The Art of Fear* ski camps.

Born: Sept. 8, Henniker, N.H.



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