



He was the first Irish person to reach the summit of K2 in Pakistan which is referred to as the savage mountain.

An accomplished and highly skilled climber from Limerick who scaled Everest and pucked a goat from the peak, Gerard also climbed Mount McKinley in Alaska, North America's highest mountain.

Gerard first attempted K2 in 2006 but had to turn back 600 metres from the top after he was injured. His three teammates on that expedition were killed by an avalanche soon after completing the climb. Gerard's return to K2 the next year for a second attempt demonstrated his length of will and determination. Only 200 or so climbers have ever managed to scale K2.

At the summit, Gerard and two of his teammates attempted to rescue a group of climbers who were in difficulty. They struggled for several hours to save the troubled climbers. Gerard was killed by an avalanche that swept down K2.

Gerard's achievements were celebrated not only in his hometown, but across the country and

around the world. The light of Gerard's travails and triumphs was as bright and expansive as he was. He inspired people. I didn't know Gerard personally, but Ireland being Ireland, I knew of him and his amazing adventures through others.

Staggering successes aside, the impression I got of Gerard McDonnell was that he was simply a really great guy. A friendly, self-deprecating, positive and helpful individual who was much loved by all who knew him.

I gathered the sense of someone with an iron will and a gentle soul. In pursuing the extreme sport of mountain climbing to the level that he did, he lived very close to death which in turn seemed to make him live life that much larger.

The term hero is often overused, Gerard McDonnell is a hero in the true sense of the word. He died trying to save others. Perhaps in these more cynical times we have disregarded the notion of heroes and in turn human beings base need for someone or something to inspire them. Everyone is born equal. This is true. But it is not elitist to say that some people in their own way show us all how super humans can be.

Gerard McDonnell.

Wise words I heard from a friend recently, "Don't down your own ideas, there are plenty of people out there who will do that for you." That gave me pause, we often roadblock our own route to living a why-not? life.

Gerard McDonnell was a person who pushed things further. He challenged himself because testing yourself is the biggest test there is. He didn't take no for answer or listen to all the reasons why something he wanted was not possible. He just did it. Not because he wanted adulation, but because he thought why not?

The Gerard McDonnell Memorial Fund was established to assist the children of those Pakistani and Nepalese climbers who also lost their lives on K2 in 2008: Jehan Baig, Karim Meherban, Jumik Bhote and Pasang Bhote. The Fund will sponsor these children throughout their childhood years, helping with their education and medical care. The Mountain Fund staff is 100% volunteer, and there are no deductions for overhead. Your donation goes directly to the children.

The Gerard McDonnell Memorial Fund also partners with a local climbing school in Pakistan and helps train high altitude porters in safe climbing technique and first aid. Your contribution is a fitting tribute to Gerard's spirit. The fund makes it possible for him to continue helping others. For all of us, it is a meaningful way to honor his courage and compassion.

Make a donation by logging onto <http://www.mountainfund.org>.