

MOUNTAIN CLIMBER

by Kathy Furgang



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MOUNT KILIMANJARO
CONGRATULATIONS
YOU ARE NOW AT

UHURU PEAK, TANZANIA. 5895M/19341Ft AMSL

- AFRICA'S HIGHEST POINT
- WORLD'S HIGHEST FREE STANDING MOUNTAIN

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WORLD'S LARGEST VOLCANOE
AND WONDER OF AFRICA

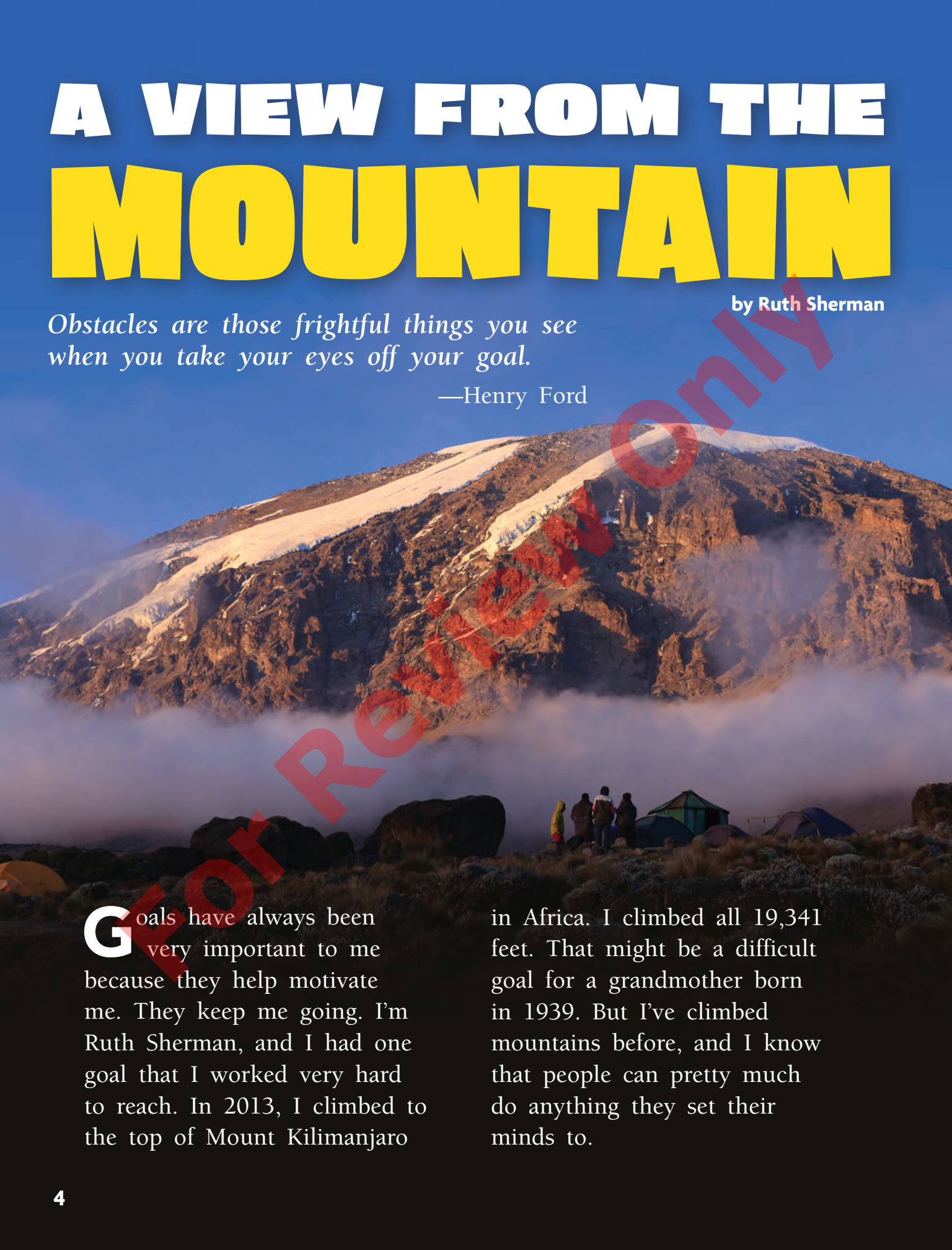
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A VIEW FROM THE MOUNTAIN

by Ruth Sherman

Obstacles are those frightful things you see when you take your eyes off your goal.

—Henry Ford



Goals have always been very important to me because they help motivate me. They keep me going. I'm Ruth Sherman, and I had one goal that I worked very hard to reach. In 2013, I climbed to the top of Mount Kilimanjaro

in Africa. I climbed all 19,341 feet. That might be a difficult goal for a grandmother born in 1939. But I've climbed mountains before, and I know that people can pretty much do anything they set their minds to.

MAKING THE DECISION

I've always been an athletic person. I worked as a gym teacher in a public school and taught exercise for forty-seven years. Even today I teach exercise classes to senior citizens. I also run 5.3 miles every day, rain or shine.



Ruth Sherman

Once I read a book by a famous baseball pitcher. In 2012, he climbed Mount Kilimanjaro. His hard work really inspired me. That's when I decided that I wanted to climb the mountain, too. I knew it would be much harder than the mountains I had climbed in South America, Asia, or New Zealand. As it turns out, it was harder than anything I had ever done in my life.

- ▼ Mount Kilimanjaro is in Tanzania, an African country that borders Kenya.



GETTING READY

Hiking to such a high altitude can make it hard to breathe. A person can become very sick. I knew I had to be in very good shape before I started the climb. So I worked hard to train and get ready. For three months before the climb, I walked up and down a steep hill five times every day. I did it with a backpack filled with full water bottles. In addition to my daily running, this got me in great shape for the trip. I also got a clean bill of health from my doctor. I was ready for the climb of my life.

I signed up to join a group that included guides who would help the climbers. They told us to pack only necessary items—a raincoat, a hat, mittens, emergency drinks, medications, and a passport. I also packed a journal so I could record my experiences. Our packs were not allowed to weigh more than thirty pounds. Everything we brought with us had to be carried on our backs. We were going in February, which was the warmest time of year on Kilimanjaro. But it would still be bitter cold at night.

Notes from Ruth's Journal

Everyone should be able to go away with such good wishes. I am very nervous. Plane will leave in just a few hours at 5:30 p.m.

I'm just going to take a deep breath—Be positive and go slow and steady.

I will remember to eat and drink water—A lot of “to-dos,” but with this support I feel confident.



ON MY WAY

I left my home in Connecticut with so much support from my family. I was nervous, but as the ancient Chinese philosopher¹ Lao-tzu once said, “The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.” I took a plane to Amsterdam, then to the Kilimanjaro International Airport in Tanzania.

1. philosopher - a person who studies ideas about truth, knowledge, and life.

It's hard to believe that I took this trip without knowing anyone else in the group of climbers. The nine climbers in our group all arrived at the Bristol Cottages in Moshi. There were six men and two other women besides me. The youngest was forty and the oldest was seventy-three—that's me! The cottages are at the foot of the mountain. The night I spent there would be the last time for nine days that I would sleep in a bed.



▲ Ruth had a night of rest in the Bristol Cottages in Moshi, Tanzania, before beginning the climb of her life.

TO THE TOP!

For our trip we had forty-three porters, people who carried supplies and helped us along the way. They carried tents, tables, chairs, pots, pans, dishes, and toilets—on their heads! One porter insisted on carrying my backpack the entire time because of my age. I don't know why he felt that way—I didn't feel old at all. The porters even carried tanks of oxygen for people who would need it when we climbed so high. The higher someone climbs up a mountain, the less oxygen there is in the air. Humans need oxygen to breathe, so this can make them feel sick.

The porters were people from the local area of Tanzania. They lived near the mountain and climbed it many times. They warned us to adjust to the changes in oxygen by going slowly. Otherwise we could get altitude sickness, which can cause headaches, stomachaches, and shortness of breath—symptoms that make it difficult to climb. They would always remind us by saying, “Pole, pole.” That's Swahili for “go slowly.” It's pronounced “polee polee.” I certainly did my best to *pole pole*!

The uphill climb is so steep that our goal was to go only about five miles each day. It took us all day to reach our goals.



Our journey began with strong bodies and positive attitudes.



▲ Many of the porters carry the gear in large sacks that they balance on their heads.



▲ Our tents were made to withstand harsh weather and rocky grounds.



The meal tent was a place for our group to gather socially and refuel.

EACH DAY IS A JOURNEY

Each morning, the porters gave me a high five. They would say, “*Jambo, Mama.*” *Jambo* means “hello” in Swahili. Every day was an exhausting journey. My most important supplies besides my boots were the ski poles I used as walking sticks, and the buff I used for my face. A buff is a cloth that goes over your face to help keep dust out of your nose.

There were no mirrors for us to check how we looked, and we didn’t care. The men grew beards. I changed clothes in my tent

when I needed to, but I basically wore the same clothes the whole trip, and none of us could take a shower for nine days.

The porters set up our tents each night and took them down each morning. One small tent was used as a bathroom. There was also a tent for meals. Our tour group had a cook who prepared foods such as French toast and eggs for breakfast. We had sandwiches for lunch and hot dinners in the evenings.