

# InsideOUT

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Denver Center  
Theatre  
Company

## Grace, *or The* Art of Climbing

GRACE, OR THE ART OF CLIMBING  
BY LAUREN FELDMAN

DENVERCENTER.ORG  
Box Office 303.893.4100

2012/13  
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# InsideOUT

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## Synopsis

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**SAM:** *Our chief want in life is somebody who shall make us do what we can.*  
—*Grace or The Art of Climbing*

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In this play, a young woman must deal with several significant losses in her life. To battle doubt, depression and her own inner demons, Emma (Emm) strengthens her mind, body and spirit by taking up rock climbing. ■

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# THE PLAYWRIGHT, LAUREN FELDMAN

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**L** Lauren Feldman's plays include *Amanuensis*; *The Egg-Layers*; *A People*; *Fill Our Mouths*; *Grace, or The Art of Climbing*; several ensemble-devised works (including *Lady M*; *The Food Play*; and *The Life and Works of JC as Told by the Heretics*); a dozen short plays; and a solo piece. Lauren has been nominated for the Wendy Wasserstein Prize, Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, ATCA/Steinberg New Play Award, Barrymore Award for Best New Play, and the Doric Wilson Independent Playwright Award. She was selected as an American playwright delegate for the Royal Court Theatre's "Crossing the Borders" project and for Australia's World Interplay Festival, and she has been an artist-in-residence at Terra Firma, SPACE at Ryder Farm, the School of Making Thinking, Tofte Lake Center, Montana Artists Refuge, Montana Repertory Theatre, Sewanee University of the South, Cornell University, and Theater Emory/Brave New Works Festival. Her plays have been seen throughout the U.S. and in the U.K., Canada and Australia. She is a New Georges Affiliated Artist, a former Dramatists Guild Fellow, a former terraNOVA Groundbreakers Playwright and an alumna of the Yale School of Drama. At present Lauren is writing and rewriting, teaching playwriting at Bryn Mawr College and training at the New England Center for Circus Arts. ■

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<http://www.laurenfeldman.com>

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# CLIMBING TERMS USED IN THE PLAY

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**Harness**—a sewn nylon-webbing device worn around the waist and thighs that is designed to allow a person to safely hang suspended in the air.

**Belay**—variety of techniques used in climbing to exert friction on a climbing rope so that the climber doesn't fall.

**Belay device**—use of a rope to protect a climber from falling; brake on the rope such as Figure 8's, ATC's and GriGris.

**Carabiner**—an oval or D-shaped link of steel or aluminum that serves as the climber's all-purpose connector.

**Chalk bag**—a hand-sized holder for the chalk used by a climber to absorb sweat.

**Top rope**—style of climbing in which a rope runs from a belayer at the foot of a route through one or more carabiners connected to an anchor system at the top of the route and back down to the climber.

**Boulder**—climbing only at the height the climber feels comfortable so he/she can jump to the ground.

**Mantel**—a climbing move that looks like a small child climbing up the kitchen counter. Hands are on a ledge, one foot comes up, as one rocks over one hand with the elbows locked.

**Layback**—a climbing technique that involves pulling on the hands while pushing on the feet.

**Dyno**—a dynamic jump or leap to grab a hold.

**Crimp**—a very small hold that uses only the fingertips.

**Lead climbing**—a form of climbing in which the climber places anchors and attacks the belay rope as they climb.

**Silent feet**—one should not hear the feet squeak audibly.

**Peel**—to fall.

**Elvis leg**—wobbly knees from tired legs.

**Oxytocin**—love hormone; evokes feelings of contentment, reduced anxiety, feelings of calmness and security. Human bonding, increase in trust and decrease in fear. ■

[http://www.rockandpaddle.com/ Dictionary.htm](http://www.rockandpaddle.com/Dictionary.htm)

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# EMM'S QUEST

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EMM: *I am Frodo and Bastian and Icarus and Harry Potter—I'm a young boy quester; it's my moment of truth.*

—*Grace, or The Art of Climbing*

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**E**mm believes she's on a quest to change her life by becoming a rock climbing champion. According to Nancy Howard, professor of English at West Virginia University, a literary quest is defined as "a journey, a road of trials in which a hero hears a call and leaves home—alone or in the company of others—to search out a treasure. Along the way, he/she undergoes trials, receives aid, fights enemies and may even die. But, if the person succeeds in attaining the treasure sought, it may change who and what he is."<sup>1</sup> In stories of quests, the hero is on the brink of a great change. In Emm's case she is unhappy, depressed and experiences her world as sterile and confining, a kind of wasteland. Therefore, she must get out and change.

**A**ll questers need helpers or guides. Many quest stories have an other, a double or alter ego. This person or creature is sometimes a stranger or sometimes a bond exists between himself and the protagonist.

Anyone can undertake a quest, but those who do accept a call. They must possess courage, endurance and insight to see the limitations of their lives. There are times in our life when our survival "depends on our ability to grow, to answer the inner challenge that urges us to change our lives."<sup>2</sup> To stay where we are out of fear or habit is to succumb to a kind of living death.

**O**n the journey of the quest the hero/heroine may face a variety of ordeals such as dragons, giants, deep rivers, mysterious elements—and fear. The purpose of the journey is to learn the essential truths and hard facts about ourselves—a sort of rite of passage.

If one is successful on the journey, the treasures at the end of the quest have certain common characteristics. They are always difficult to obtain, but the thing one is looking for will change one's life. The prize is always a promise of a fresh start.

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In modern literature there are many quest tales. For example, Frodo Baggins's quest is to destroy the One Ring in *Lord of the Rings*. Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tin Man and the Cowardly Lion go on a quest for a way back to Kansas, brains, a heart and courage in *The Wizard of Oz*. Harry Potter's quest is to overcome the Dark Wizard, Valdemort, whose aim is to conquer the wizarding world. ■

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1. [commons:wvu.edu/nhoward/](https://commons.wvu.edu/nhoward/)

2. Ibid.

[commons:wvu.edu/nhoward/215/course%20Document/Myth%200F%/QuestFpdf](https://commons.wvu.edu/nhoward/215/course%20Document/Myth%200F%/QuestFpdf)

The Brothers Grimm. *The Complete Grimm's Fairy Tales*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1944.

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# CLIMBING WALLS

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A climbing wall is an artificially constructed wall with grips for hands and feet, usually used for indoor climbing, but sometimes located outdoors as well. Some are brick or wooden constructions, but on most modern walls, the material most often used is a thick multiplex board with holes drilled into it. Recently, manufactured steel and aluminum have also been used. The wall may have places to attach belay ropes, but may also be used to practice lead climbing or bouldering.

Each hole contains a specially formed t-nut to allow modular climbing holds to be screwed on to the wall. With manufactured steel or aluminum walls, an engineered industrial fastener is used to secure climbing holds. The face of the multiplex board climbing surface is covered with textured products including concrete, paint or polyurethane loaded with sand. In addition to the textured surface and hand holds, the wall may contain surface structures such as indentions (incuts) and protrusions (bulges) or take the form of an overhang, underhang or crack.

The concept of the artificial climbing wall began in Great Britain; it was created in 1964 by Don Robinson, a lecturer in Physical Education, who inserted pieces of rock into a corridor wall. The first commercial wall was built in Sheffield, traditionally England's center for climbing due to its proximity to the Peak District.

The simplest type of climbing wall is of plywood construction, known colloquially in the climbing community as a "woody", with a combination of either bolt-on holds or screw-on holds. Bolt-on holds are fixed to a wall with iron bolts, which are inserted through the hold to specific bolt points and then fixed into pre-allocated screw-threaded holes in the wall. Screw-on holds are, by contrast, usually much smaller, owing to the nature of their fixing. These holds are connected to the walls by screws which may be fastened anywhere on the wall's surface. ■

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[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Climbing\\_wall](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Climbing_wall)

[http://www.streetdirectory.com/travel\\_guide/42270/extreme\\_sports/types\\_of\\_climbing\\_walls.ht](http://www.streetdirectory.com/travel_guide/42270/extreme_sports/types_of_climbing_walls.ht)

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# THE NATIONAL CLIMBING TEAM

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**U**SA Climbing is the national governing body of competition in the United States. They promote three competition disciplines: bouldering, sport and speed climbing. The bouldering discipline is represented by the American Bouldering Series (ABS) while the sport and speed climbing disciplines are represented by the Sports Climbing Series (SCS). USA Climbing receives sanctioning and is recognized by: The International Federation for Sport Climbing (IFSC), the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the United States Olympic Committee. ■

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[http://usacclimbing.net/about\\_main.cfm](http://usacclimbing.net/about_main.cfm)

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# ROCK CLIMBING FOR KIDS

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Children can climb on climbing walls or on mountains; these climbing walls can be found at many schools, climbing gyms and even state fairs. Some climbing enthusiasts even build these walls inside their homes. The walls use polyurethane climbing holds for children to grab. Some walls are flat, whereas others can be more challenging with textures and overhangs to simulate mountain surfaces. Kids can improve their climbing skills on these basic walls before attempting to ascend more advanced structures.

The most obvious benefits of rock climbing for kids are physical, in that the sport is an intense physical activity requiring coordination, strength and flexibility. At more advanced levels, building strength can be essential to completing certain courses. For beginners the challenges are usually kept to a manageable level so that the children can achieve. Mental benefits of rock climbing for kids are equally as important. The sport requires strategies and focus in order to make it to the top. Children who have difficulty concentrating can often sharpen developmental focus through rock climbing. A feeling of accomplishment might also be seen as a mental benefit; this feeling often encourages increased physical activity in order to meet the next challenge.

One of the benefits rock climbing has over other children's sports is that it is generally non-competitive. Team and competitive sports are not always a good fit for certain children, particularly those who are shy or uninterested in competing against others. Activities like rock climbing do involve social skills, but they do not involve the same type of cooperation as a team sport. From a parental perspective, this should not be seen as a negative thing, as different people enjoy different kinds of social interaction.

Safety needs to be a top priority in rock climbing; mistakes or accidents can lead to hazardous falls. It is recommended that kids climbing sessions be supervised by adults, for adults can help children better understand climbing techniques and warn them of unsafe climbing habits. Mats are generally used as a safety precaution at the bottom of basic climbing walls. However, for more advanced wall climbing and mountain climbing kids will need the appropriate safety gear.

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**S**ince rock climbing is not performed with a group of peers, parents often find that rock climbing has the benefit of being a family activity. Parents can climb with children and learn together. This activity is a great bonding experience for climbers of all ages. This can be excellent for all involved. ■

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<http://www.livestrong.com/article/112254-rock-climbing-kids/>

<http://www.wisegeek.com/what-are-the-benefits-of-rock-climbing-for-kids.htm>

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# DEPRESSION

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**A**t the beginning of the play, Emm shows symptoms of depression. She is irritable and frustrated; shows no interest or pleasure in normal activities; sleeps excessively; has no appetite and complains of fatigue. <sup>1</sup>

Emm picks mountain climbing as an exercise to rid herself of the blues. The effects of exercise on depression are many and positive. When one exercises, the body releases chemicals called endorphins; these interact with the receptors in the brain that improve natural immunity and reduce the perception of pain. Endorphins also trigger a positive feeling in the body that can be described as “euphoric,” giving a positive and energizing outlook on life. All this regular physical activity boosts self-esteem.

Regular exercise has been proven to reduce stress, ward off anxiety, improve sleep, strengthen your heart, increase energy levels, lower blood pressure, improve muscle tone, strengthen and build bones and reduce body fat.

Any form of exercise can help depression. Examples include biking, dancing, jogging, aerobics, tennis, swimming, walking and yoga. ■

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1. [www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com)

[www.mayoclinic.com/health/depression/DS00175/  
DSECTION=symptoms-  
Depression](http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/depression/DS00175/DSECTION=symptoms-Depression)

<http://www.webmd.com/depression/guide/exercise-depression>

[http://www.health.harvard.edu/newsweek/Exercise-and-  
Depression-report-excerpt.htm](http://www.health.harvard.edu/newsweek/Exercise-and-Depression-report-excerpt.htm)

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# HEALTH BENEFITS OF ROCK CLIMBING

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**R**ock climbing is both a thrilling and exciting experience that is also beneficial to the health of your body and mind. First, it improves mental health. Rock climbing requires problem solving skills and a great deal of concentration. As one climbs, one must analyze the footholds and handholds and then decide on each move. Because of the concentration required, sport climbing can become very meditative. This state can improve one's mental health as you train your brain to concentrate on problem solving as well as improving your mood through the release of serotonin.

Climbing causes one to stretch muscles for long periods of time. As one reaches for the next handhold or foothold, one is stretching and bending, which over time can improve flexibility.

**R**ock climbing is beneficial for the heart. Besides being one of the best all around workouts one can get, the sport is a great way to strengthen and tone heart muscles. Sport climbing can burn up to 550 calories an hour; that indicates the heart is truly pumping. This exercise improves cardiovascular health, which can lead to a longer life, more energy and stronger lungs.

With the amount of calories burned, rock climbing is an excellent way to maintain a healthy weight. Reaching the mountain usually requires hiking, which burns additional calories. In addition, the gear one packs will keep you on track to trim off more pounds.

**S**uffice it to say, rock climbing is one of the best exercises available to build and improve muscle strength and tone. While climbing, the entire body pulls itself from one handhold to the next, making sport climbing a robust whole body workout. No matter your age, rock climbing has many health benefits that can improve the overall quality of life. ■

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<http://www.hivehealthmedia.com/health-benefits-rock-climbing/>

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# BANANAS

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**A**be eats many bananas touting their health benefits. The banana is a natural remedy because the fruit contains three natural sugars (sucrose, fructose and glucose) combined with fiber. These sugars give an instant, sustained and substantial boost of energy for athletes. In addition, bananas can also help to overcome or prevent a substantial number of health concerns making it a must in our diets.

For example, “according to a recent survey among people suffering from depression, many felt better after eating a banana.”<sup>1</sup>

This is because bananas contain tryptophan, a type of protein that the body converts into serotonin, known to make one relax and improve mood. For someone suffering from PMS, the B6 vitamin in a banana regulates blood glucose levels that can affect mood. High in iron, bananas can stimulate the production of hemoglobin in the blood, thereby helping in cases of anemia.

**T**his tropical fruit is extremely high in potassium, yet low in salt, making it an ingredient to beat high blood pressure. So much so that the US Food and Drug Administration has just allowed the banana industry to make official claims for the fruit’s ability to reduce the risk of high blood pressure and stroke. In a bid to boost brainpower, 200 students were helped through their exams this year by eating bananas at breakfast, break and lunch.

Research by the Franklin Institute and the Linus Pauling Institute has shown that:

- The magnesium and potassium-packed fruit can assist learning by making pupils more alert.
- The banana is used as a dietary food against ulcers and other intestinal disorders because of its soft texture and smoothness; it neutralizes over-acidity and reduces irritation by coating the stomach lining.
- Bananas are high in B vitamins that help calm the nervous system.
- When compared to an apple, a banana has four times the protein, twice the carbohydrates, three times the phosphorus, five times the vitamin A and iron, and twice the other vitamins and minerals. It is also rich in potassium; hence, one of the best value foods around.
- Rubbing mosquito bites with a banana skin may reduce swelling and irritation.

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**H**earthburn sufferers should be aware that bananas have a natural antacid effect on the body. ■

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1. [www.squidoo.com](http://www.squidoo.com)

<http://www.nutritionuncovered.com/are-bananas-good-for-you/>

<http://www.squidoo.com/bananafruit>

[www.livestrong.com/article/444034-what-does-a-banana-do-for-your-brain](http://www.livestrong.com/article/444034-what-does-a-banana-do-for-your-brain)

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# PARTICIPATE

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Free events designed to spark dialogue between actors, experts and audiences.

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**Perspectives** - Denver Center theatre Company's own "Creative Team" and community experts host interactive, topical discussions with attendees that provide a unique perspective on the production. This provides an in-depth connection that makes the stage experience even more rewarding.

1/18, 6pm, Jones Theatre

**Talkbacks** - Perhaps the best way to fully appreciate a production is by engaging in a stimulating dialogue with your fellow audience members and the actors who bring it to life.

1/27, Post-show

**DCTC@The TC: The Art of Making Art** - Get the inside scoop on the 2013 Colorado New Play Summit Feb 8 – 10. Denver Center Theatre Company artists will discuss the upcoming reading of Karen Zacharias' commissioned adaptation of Helen Thorpe's *Just Like Us*. Plus learn how *Ed*, *Downloaded*, *Grace*, or *The Art of Climbing* and *Sense & Sensibility The Musical* emerged from last season's festival for full productions this season.

1/29, noon, second floor of the Tattered Cover LoDo (1628 16th St.)

**Theatre & Theology** - In our continued partnership with Pastor Dan Bollman with the Rocky Mountain Evangelical Lutheran Synod and cast members, this discussion examines the relevant connections to the productions through a theological lens.

2/05, Post-show

**Higher Education Advisory Discussions** - Audience members gain scholarly insight into the productions through discussions, facilitated by faculty members from regional colleges and universities.

2/10, Post-show

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# QUESTIONS

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## **PRE-PERFORMANCE QUESTIONS**

1. Why do you think the playwright uses rock climbing as a metaphor for life? What other sports (team or individual) are used as a metaphor for life? Why do we tend to compare these activities to life?
2. How do grief, loss and depression affect people and the people around them? What steps are necessary to help people through these times?

## **POST-PERFORMANCE QUESTIONS**

1. How does the set complement the world of the play? How do the actors interact with the set to give a sense of place?
2. How would you describe the relationship between Emm and Abe? What are the subtle clues that indicate what is real and what is imagined? What happens to their relationship?
3. How does Emm treat the other people in her life? How would you describe her relationship with Dell? With Mick? With Ky?
4. How does Emm use climbing to heal her mental and physical state of being? Explain if you think she was successful or not.
5. How are Emm and Sims alike? What characteristics do they share? How would you characterize their relationship?
6. Why does Sims help Emm with her journey? Why does he decide to help her?
7. Why is Emm scared of falling? What does she compare falling to?
8. Why does each character have a different definition for the three rules of climbing? What are your three rules of climbing?

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# THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

at the Denver Center Theatre Company  
also offers the following programs:

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**Denver Center Theatre Academy On-Site Classes:** affordable, high-quality theatre classes for children, teens and adults taught by industry professionals. Classes are offered on-site four times a year. Classes are available for all interest and skill levels for ages 3-103. Scholarships are available. Call 303/446-4892 for information.

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**Dramatic Learning:** Teaching Artists from the Academy bring the creative process into classrooms to support and enhance core curriculum. Workshops and residencies in any discipline are tailored for each classroom. Dramatic Learning benefits more than 90 schools and 5,000 students annually. Call 303/446-4897 for more information.

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**Family Fun Forum:** This event is FREE. Families juggle, sing opera, and hula-hoop on the tightrope. These are just a sampling of the zany and fun things families learn in this two-hour skills hunt presented by Denver Theatre Academy teaching artists. Families will rotate from classroom to classroom, learning news skills and winning tokens for the entire family. Families spend their “earnings” on face painting, balloon animals, fun food and much more. Call 303/446-4892 for more information.

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For more information also check out our website at

[www.denvercenter.org](http://www.denvercenter.org)