

BONDED TOGETHER

BOND CAMP WAS A WORLD TRAVELER, A SURFER, A SKIER, AN ENTREPRENEUR. WHEN A SKI ACCIDENT IN THE BACKCOUNTRY RESULTED IN A PARALYZING INJURY, HIS LIFE CHANGED, BUT IT CERTAINLY DIDN'T STOP.

WORDS BY MEGAN MICHELSON



WORTHY MCCORMICK WAS ON HIS WAY TO THE GYM ON JANUARY 2, 2015, WHEN HE STOPPED HIMSELF. It was a beautiful winter day in the mountains of Colorado, with brilliant sunshine, cobalt skies and fresh snow. Why was he going inside to work out? He called his best friend and former college roommate, Bond Camp, now his business partner at the Bivouac, the boutique hostel they opened in 2013 in Breckenridge, Colo.

“Want to go hike up to Crystal Lake and ski that face we’ve always talked about?” McCormick asked Camp.

Camp, now 30, rarely says no to invites like that. So the two friends spent the next couple hours skinning uphill through soft, Rocky Mountain powder until they arrived at the summit at 13,500 feet in elevation, above a vast, south-facing slope high above treeline. This was a backcountry zone neither had skied before, but they’d spent many days in the area during the summer fishing for cutthroat trout.

McCormick dropped in first, slicing through untracked snow down what he still calls some of the best turns he’s ever had. There was no way he could have known what would happen next.

Camp pushed over the precipice and made six or seven fluid arcs before suddenly catching an edge on a patch of variable snow and getting jerked backward. He flung onto his back, landing with an audible thud on what they later realized was a hidden rock outcropping. He then tumbled multiple times, his body contorting in a limp and helpless way.

“Are you OK!?” McCormick shouted from where he was waiting at the bottom of the slope.

At first, Camp thought he was shaken, but fine. He’d taken plenty of bad falls before. But when he tried to stand up, he realized his legs were awkwardly off to one side and he couldn’t move them. He thought maybe he’d broken his legs, but he couldn’t feel any pain. He yelled to McCormick to call for help.

The rescue operation took hours—Camp went hypothermic during the process—and required a helicopter and a team of medical professionals, who stabilized Camp, loaded him on a sled and into the chopper, and airlifted him to the trauma center at Saint Anthony’s Hospital in Denver.

At some point, McCormick called Camp’s longtime girlfriend, Erica Segerberg, now 28, who was home in Breckenridge. “Bond is alive,” he told her. “But he’s seriously injured.” Frantically, she got a friend to drive her to Denver and when they reached the

hospital, she pushed through the doors of the emergency room and cried out to the nurses, “Where is Bond’s room?”

Finally at his side, the reality of the situation began to sink in for Segerberg. Camp was rigged up to countless machines, he was heavily sedated, and due to the punctured lung he’d suffered, he started gurgling blood. A doctor explained the situation: In addition to broken ribs and a broken scapula, Camp had fractured his T2 and T3 vertebrae—his spinal cord wasn’t completely severed, and there was a chance he could regain at least some movement, but for now, he had no motor function below his chest. He was paralyzed.

This is not a story about a guy who once loved adventure—who surfed and skied and traveled the world—who then loses his ability to walk. It is not a story about loss at all, in fact. It is a story about a man faced with the hardest challenge life could throw at him and how instead of crumpling under the weight of his injury, he rose to meet the challenges head on.

But he couldn’t do it alone. It took a team of people and loved ones willing to put their own lives on hold to help bring Camp back to the life he once knew.

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Camp grew up in Georgia, an exploratory and athletic kid from the start. He was drawn westward and ended up studying finance at the University of Colorado Boulder. But he was never one to sit still, always planning surf trips to places like Costa Rica and sleeping in his car in the frigid mountains in preparation for the next big powder day.

He met McCormick, a native Vermonter who also loved to wander, during college while skiing road-assisted backcountry laps on Colorado’s Loveland Pass. The two founded their friendship in discovery, traveling to Cuba to rock climb the cliffs of Viñales, they hiked into the Himalayas from the Dalai Lama’s hometown of Dharamsala, and they circumnavigated Sri Lanka on motorcycles in search of abandoned waves.

Eventually, Camp started inviting Segerberg, who’s from coastal Georgia and also went to CU Boulder, along for the adventures. She had a passion for travel, too, and a deep-seated love for the ocean and the mountains. “It’s when you meet someone and you just see each other’s worlds,” Camp says about finding Segerberg.

After graduating college, Camp got a job in commercial real estate in Denver, a smart career move, but it didn’t make him happy. So in true Camp style, he packed his things and flew to

Maui, figuring he'd spend a few months working odd restaurant or boat jobs to pay for his surfing habit. Segerberg came for a visit and the two ended up living on the island on and off for the next five years.

The couple never stayed in one place for long, always stricken by the appetite to explore. They based out of Bali and Thailand for a couple of months, then knocked around Cuba and El Salvador.

On a surf trip to Ecuador with some other college friends, Camp and McCormick spotted a hotel for sale. They hatched this idea of turning it into a place that would welcome travelers in a communal setting with sleek, contemporary design, similar to the modern-day hostels they'd seen all over Asia and Central America. That property didn't work out, but the seed was planted.

Later, McCormick called from Tokyo. Camp and Segerberg were living in a van in New Zealand. "What do you think about opening a hostel in Colorado?" McCormick, now 30, said.

Again, Camp rarely says no to invites like that. Besides, it made sense: The two obviously had roots in the state and the types of travelers who frequent Colorado's mountain towns were perfect for the hotel they envisioned. They settled on Breckenridge and found a dated bed and breakfast that was ripe for transformation.

Together, Bond and McCormick gutted and renovated the place almost entirely themselves, installing new carpets, painting the walls, and toting in thousands of pounds of bunkbeds for the communal rooms. "Installing 20 light sconces sounds easier in theory," says McCormick.

They named it the Bivouac, or the Bivi for short, after the impromptu tent setup climbers and hikers use, and they had a soft opening in November 2013. Camp and McCormick hired a few folks to help at the front desk and with housekeeping, but they did much of the work themselves, hosting laundry parties for their friends to help fold sheets and towels. They lived in the hotel's basement and several months later, Segerberg, who'd since launched her own swimwear line, moved back from Maui and joined them.

"I wanted us to both have our own separate things going on,"

Segerberg says. "But at some point, I couldn't be without Bond anymore."

After his accident, Camp had multiple surgeries and he spent 12 harrowing days in the intensive care unit, filled with nurses coming in day and night to keep him alive.

He was then transferred to Colorado's Craig Hospital, which specializes in spinal cord injuries, for two months of rehabilitation, where he spent his days regaining his strength and learning to operate in a wheelchair. Camp had a steady stream of visitors, from his brother, sister and parents to other friends and family. And of course Segerberg, who slept in a chair by his bedside during his entire hospital stay.



Photo by Bond Camp

"I was so thankful he was alive," Segerberg says now. "And I immediately knew that life was going to be OK. But I had no idea what the weeks and months ahead would be like."

Camp was discharged from the hospital in March 2015 and he and Segerberg got an apartment in Denver to try to return to some sense of normalcy. "When we left the hospital, it was like, 'What do we do with our lives now?'" Segerberg says. "That's when we made a vow. A pact. We said, 'We have to continue on. Things will be different, but we have to start traveling again. We have to live our lives.'"

Segerberg's birthday was coming up and Camp asked his doctor if they could travel to Sayulita, Mexico, to celebrate. His doctor advised staying in the country, and everyone told them they were crazy for trying to plan a trip. But Camp was

determined. He booked a flight to Maui and the two were off, fulfilling the pact they'd made just after he was released from the hospital.

"I remember calling my mom when Bond was in the hospital. She said, 'Never look back. You have to look forward. That's the only way you're going to get through life and the only way you're going to get through this,'" Segerberg says. "I could look back and dwell, but it's not worth it. Because the life we've created after this injury is probably more beautiful than the life we had before."

The two now had a plan: Spend time getting Camp healthy, then focus on getting him back in the ocean, back in the mountains. Camp got a grant from the High Fives Foundation, a nonprofit that helps those who've suffered life-altering injuries, and through High Fives, he joined a surf trip to Ventura, California, to learn how to get back on a surfboard. Sitting on a board that was part surfboard, part kayak, and with a little push from others, for the first time since his injury, Camp caught a wave.



Through the staff at High Fives and the other people they met who'd had spinal cord injuries, Camp and Segerberg learned that life after a spinal cord injury can be every bit as adventurous. "It's the power of positivity," Segerberg says. "This whole experience has been kind of weirdly beautiful in that you gain these friends and have these experiences that you can't imagine your life without."

In January 2016, exactly one year after Camp's injury, Camp and Segerberg spent a month in Costa Rica. They met McCormick at a surf lodge in the town of Santa Teresa and using adaptive surf equipment, McCormick helped push Camp into small, one-foot waves. Within a couple of weeks, Camp was paddling into bigger waves on his own.

"At one point, I didn't think it would be possible for me to ever surf again," Camp says. "I just thought, life is never going to be

the same. But a year later, I got in the water and got to drop in. It's super challenging, but I get to be out there with my friends in the lineup. You basically have to do whatever you can to keep giving it a go."

Says McCormick, "Watching him progress was a very special experience for me. Up until that time, I had lost my adventure buddy. Bond has shown an immense amount of positivity and he knows there is still so much that he can do."

In February 2016, Camp and Segerberg decided to pack up their home in Colorado and move back to Maui, where a tight-knit community of friends and the healing waters of the Pacific awaited them.

"We always planned on moving back to Maui eventually, but the injury sped things up," Camp says. "Now, with this injury, I find Maui to be the place I want to call home. Every time I get in the ocean, I feel so much better."



They found a single-story place in the town of Haiku that they could outfit for Camp's wheelchair and at last, they began to set up roots.

"Erica and I have always tried to passionately go out and live. We thought we were doing a good job until my accident. But that just fueled a deeper fire within us to follow our dreams and live harder," Camp says. "Ever since we were introduced to First Descents, we never wanted to miss an FD Ball and we loved joining events. We are greatly touched by every fighter, survivor and individual involved. When listening to the stories of the fighters and survivors, it brings many waves of emotions. We find ourselves nodding our heads, with tears and chills and saying 'thank you.' It is of great importance to have the FD community around for the continuous inspiration, adventure and highly likable personalities that remind us anything is possible."