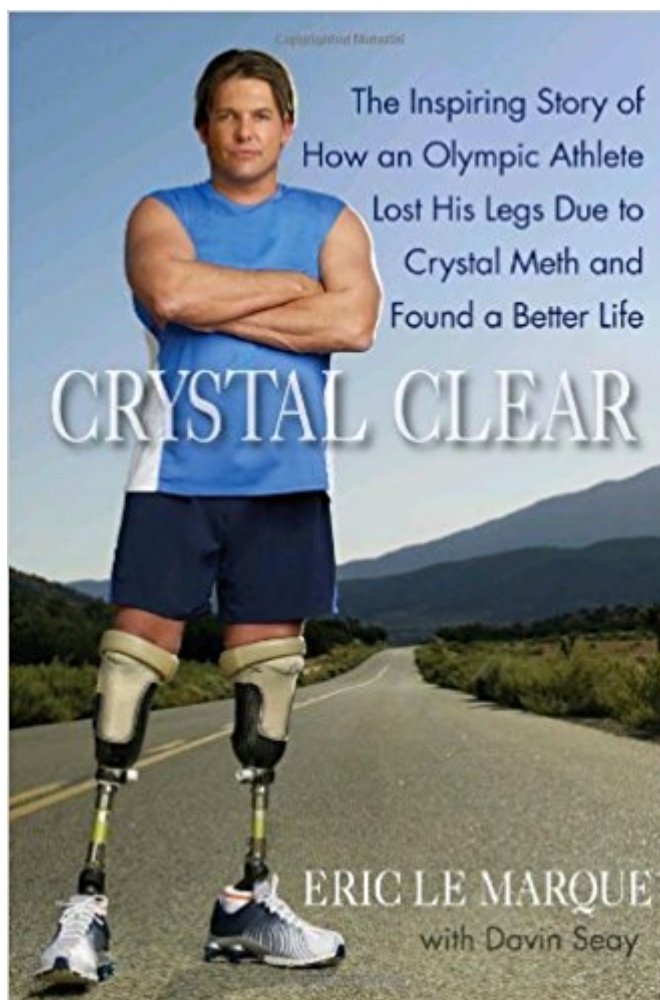


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Crystal Clear: The Inspiring Story Of How An Olympic Athlete Lost His Legs Due To Crystal Meth And Found A Better Life



Synopsis

In this gripping first-person account, former Olympian Eric LeMarque recounts a harrowing tale of survival—of eight days in the frozen wilderness, of losing his legs to frostbite, and coming face-to-face with death. But Eric's ordeal on the mountain was only part of his struggle for survival—as he reveals, with startling candor, an even more harrowing and inspiring tale of fame and addiction, healing and triumph. On February 6, 2004, Eric, a former professional hockey player and expert snowboarder, set off for the top of 12,000-foot Mammoth Mountain in California's vast Sierra Nevada mountain range. Wearing only a long-sleeve shirt, a thin wool hat, ski pants, and a lightweight jacket—and with only four pieces of gum for food—he soon found himself chest-high in snow, veering off the snowboard trail, and plunging into the wilderness. By nightfall he knew he was in a fight for his life. Surviving eight days in subfreezing temperatures, he would earn the name “The Miracle Man” by stunning National Guard Black Hawk Chopper rescuers. But Eric's against-all-odds survival was no surprise to those who knew him. A gifted hockey player in his teens, he was later drafted by the Boston Bruins and a 1994 Olympian. But when his playing days were over, Eric felt adrift. Everything changed when he first tasted the rush of hard drugs—the highly addictive crystal meth—which filled a void left by hockey and fame. By the time Eric reached the peak of Mammoth Mountain in 2004, he was already dueling demons that had seized his soul. A riveting adventure, a brutal confessional, here Eric tells his remarkable story—his climb to success, his long and painful fall, and his ordeal in the wilderness. In the end, a man whose life had been based on athleticism would lose both his legs, relearn to walk—even snowboard—with prosthetics, and finally confront the ultimate test of survival: what it takes to find your way out of darkness, and—after so many lies—to tell truth—and begin to live again.

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Customer Reviews

Eric LeMarque is an inspirational speaker, business owner and entrepreneur, avid sports enthusiast, and volunteer. He lives with his wife Hope, along with their two children, Nicholas and Zach, plus their Teacup Maltese, Cherry-Snowball, in Los Angeles. Davin Seay is the author and co-author of numerous books, including, most recently, Hello Charlie, In Justice, and Mission: Black List #1.

Chapter One
Fresh Tracks
I got up late that morning. It was close to ten when I opened my eyes, to the sound of some wild animal fishing in the garbage cans. As soon as I realized what time it was, I could only think about one thing: the mountain was already open and I wasn't out there capping it. My feeling of frustration grew when I glanced out the window and saw that, after five days of a heavy blizzard and thick fog, the sky was now a bright and cloudless blue. The storm that had brought me up to Mammoth Mountain a week earlier had passed. The weather report had called for five to seven feet. Instead, almost fifteen feet of fresh champagne powder had been dumped. Conditions were going to be epic. This is what I lived for. Of course, so did a lot of other guys. As I jumped out of bed and quickly began getting myself ready for a day of nonstop snowboarding, it was almost as if I could hear the exuberant shouts of everyone else already up there, dropping cliffs, catching air, and getting perfect rides all up and down the mountain. I prided myself on being the first one up the lift in the morning and the last one off the slopes before nightfall. Now I'd be forced to stand in line, take my turn, and, worst of all, ride through snow that someone else had gotten to before me. I was anxious, obsessed in fact, with getting where I needed to be. I wasn't thinking about the necessities I should be taking with me. That was my first mistake. Or maybe not. Maybe my first mistake was the attitude I brought along to the mountain in the first place. Back then, there was an arrogance I carried around with me like a chip on my shoulder, a selfish self-regard that always put me and my agenda first. After a year of consistent drug use—a carefully calibrated combination of crystal meth, potent marijuana, and alcohol—I had pretty much lost touch with the rest of the human race. I was a loner, the master of a world that I manipulated at will and shaped to my specifications. To say that I was a control freak doesn't begin to explain how I led my life in strict accordance with my own priorities. Whatever didn't meet my exacting standards, I

simply discarded. And since people were far from predictable, they were the first to go. It might have been different if there had been somebody else with me that day, a friend, a snowboarding buddy, someone to tell me to slow down and take it easy, that the mountain would still be there when I showed up. But I'd long since passed up the opportunity for companionship. I did what I did by myself and for myself and I liked it that way. I lived inside my own head, alone with my thoughts and my schemes and the satisfaction I got from pursuing perfection. A favorite coach of mine used to say, "Experience is something you won't get until after you need it." Since I didn't have it, I didn't know I needed it. That day on the slope was going to be perfect, and I was already missing out. It was an intolerable situation. I moved quickly through the borrowed condo where I was staying, distracted by the sunlight filtering in through the high windows, haphazardly grabbing a few odds and ends without really thinking about what I was doing. Why bother? I'd been up those slopes hundreds of times before. I knew Mammoth like the back of my hand. I'd spent as much time as I possibly could amid that stunning Sierra Nevada scenery, coming in from my home in Southern California dozens of times a season. I yearned to be up above the tree line at eleven thousand five hundred feet, where you could see the curvature of the earth. I had an intricate map of the snowboarding trails imprinted in my mind, the best tables, drops, and hits, the secret places where the cornices curled like frozen waves across the spine of the ridgebacks, the places few others ever went, where the powder was fresh and unmarked and waiting for me. I was totally familiar with this environment, completely acclimated and supremely self-confident in my ability to master the most difficult terrain. I owned that mountain. At least I thought I did. Now that the storm had cleared, conditions were optimal and I wasn't about to weigh myself down with a lot of unnecessary clothing and equipment. I had several different options that I'd brought with me in anticipation of the ever-changing weather conditions on the mountain, including a heavy-duty waterproof Gortex outfit. But I knew that would be bulky and unwieldy and that its thermal protection might be too much for such a pristine day. Instead I chose a Ripzone jacket and a pair of ski pants with zip-out linings that I immediately removed. I put on the stripped-down shell over my cotton boxer shorts and slipped on some regular gym socks and a long-sleeve T-shirt. I grabbed a thin beanie, spring gloves, and a small pair of goggles. My main concern was to stay as lightweight as possible. I was dressing for what the weather forecast said it would be: about twenty-seven degrees. I wasn't protected enough to keep me from getting cold as I rode up on the lifts, but I knew I would warm up on the rides, when my body was in motion. I looked around for my boots, a pair of Burtons I had bought secondhand. When I first got them, I could still smell the stink from the previous owner's feet. The dude in the shop told me that they had been used by a pro rider. A pro rider was what I wanted to be. I'd

sprayed them heavily with Lysol, which didn't help much, but I liked the boots primarily for their speed lacing system, which used a dial to cinch up the laces and made getting in and out of them much quicker and easier. As I said, I was in a hurry to get to the mountain that morning. My snowboard was also a Burton, a 164.5-centimeter "Code" model. A guy my size, 5'9.5", should have been using a smaller board, but I preferred the longer length for its increased stability and strength for my big mountain, custom free-style riding, which I took full advantage of. Its shape was a little like a figure eight or a modified dog bone, curving in at the middle and wider at the front and back. It was made from laminated graphite, a tough, hard material that was state of the art for snowboarding thanks to its light weight and durability. The board was equipped with ratchet bindings that could be adjusted for just the right foot stance. When I bought it, the board had been stamped as a second because of some small flaw. It was cheaper than a top grade model, which sealed the deal for me, but before I took it, I asked, "Hey, brother, can you grind off the marking?" I didn't want it known that I was riding anything other than the best. It was just another part of the image I had constructed for myself, a mix of ego and drug delusion. But in point of fact, I was one of the best, at least when I was on my board. Coming down the slopes on a great run, I could see others stopping just to watch me or point me out to their friends, saying, "Dude, watch this guy. He's awesome! He'll hit every jump." The way I saw it, I had a reputation to uphold. Some of it, of course, was drug-fueled ego, but there was also some truth to my high self-regard. I had a natural flair for snowboarding. Still imagining I could hear the amazed shouts of the snowboarders on the slopes, I took a quick look around the condo for whatever else I might need. I slipped a twenty-dollar bill out of my wallet, thinking I'd use it for a quick lunch at one of the lodges that dot the slope. Off the kitchen counter, I scooped four pieces of Bazooka bubble gum to chew while I was riding for a quick hit of sugar. I grabbed my cell phone and my MP3 player, programmed with the music I would use as a soundtrack for the day. I had actually planned out which playlist I would select for which run I would be on at any given time, matching my moves to a particular song, which during that time included a lot of hip-hop and rap, especially Eminem. The funny thing was, when I was actually out on the slope and about to take a jump, I'd never hear the music I'd so carefully sequenced. As I'd approach a ramp, building up speed, I'd remind myself to listen to the song I'd prepared for that very moment. But as soon as I got airborne, exhilaration would overtake me and my mind would empty. It was one of the few times that would actually happen—when the incessant chatter between my ears would fade to nothing and I'd be part of the majestic emptiness around me. Then, as soon as I returned to earth, the thudding beat in my ears would return and I'd be back where I was before. That morning I forgot to take a lot of things I normally carry with me any time I ride. One of

the most essential was a two-way radio that had a range of about seven miles and that I'd made a habit of carrying along no matter how unencumbered I wanted to be. The same was true of a torch lighter that I had originally bought to smoke my kush in between runs. Because of the high altitude, most regular lighters didn't work, and I had made a point of finding one that could produce a flame even in the thinnest air. I would also normally pack a couple of apples with me, one to eat and the other to carve and punch out for a makeshift pipe, ducking down into the tree line for an occasional toke through the hollowed-out core. This time, instead of the fruit, I knocked back a couple of bottles of water and slipped one into my pocket to drink later. I was ready to go. Except for one last item. Before I closed the door behind me, I patted the pocket of my jacket to make sure it was still there—•a small plastic baggie with a half gram of high-quality crystal meth. That was one thing I made sure never to go anywhere without. I had been doing meth on a daily basis for the better part of a year, and by the time I arrived in Mammoth, on February 1, 2004, it was starting to catch up with me. I still harbored the illusion that I was in control of the drug and not the other way around, even though the gaunt face that greeted me in the mirror every morning said otherwise. My gums were receding, my skin...

I love how it ended the most in finding someone he needed to bring him down to reality, beyond his ego cocky attitude, which did come in very handy as he was fighting for his life for several days in freezing weather buried in waist high snow, not sure if he would end up as a meal to wolfs around him. I bought the book for a friend who recently lost both of his legs, but passed away before I was able to deliver it too him. I found the book to be a inspirational story of courage, determination, to never give up when everything seems hopeless. I would definitely recommend it as a positive read for anyone, especially someone who has lost their legs, as an encouragement to never lose hope. My name is Salvatore Aprea, I live with my wife Ida in Sun City West, Arizona

Eric's story was a gripping account of a man coming to terms with his addiction to meth and the role it played in putting him in harm's way, eventually leading to his losing both legs. The imagery Eric uses to tell his tale literally puts you in his shoes as he takes you with him on a desperate fight for survival against the snowy elements. A person in lesser physical condition would not have made it out alive. What is equally compelling is what happened after his ordeal, in coming to faith in Christ and rebuilding his life both physically and spiritually. This is a book you'll have trouble putting down until you've finished it. I hope a movie is made of this terrific account.

What an inspirational story of survival and overcoming addiction.! I enjoyed reading about how he survived on the mountain. Wished there was a little more about his recovery from the frostbite and addiction.

very easy to read

I had a chance to hear Eric speak here at our university but his book gave me far more details of his ordeal. The book is well written..., an inspiration of stupidity turned into courage, determination and success. I recommend it to anyone trying to avoid big pot holes in life..., and if you do get into trouble how to get back on track.

Excellent price

True and remarkable. 100% recommend. Adrenaline will only get you so far. Wolves, rivers, elements..... God's hand was upon him and gave him a second chance.

I had considered Eric LeMarque a friend, as we worked together in the Media Department of In His Presence Church for over a year before one day he handed me a promo card about his book. I stood in shock as I looked at the photo of Eric with steel replacements for his legs. I had NO IDEA up to this point all that he had gone through. I also did not know he was an Olympic champion. To me, he was just Eric, a really nice guy, alongside whom I volunteered in doing some work at the church. I had observed him as a great dad, very devoted to encouraging his 9-year-old son, and proud, too, of his little guy with the curly hair that caused him often to be mistaken for a girl. When I bought Eric's book and read his story, I became more and more in awe of his fortitude in the midst of circumstances that would cause lots of people to just give up, and because of giving up, to die. This story grips you from the very start, and it is hard to take a break from reading it to do anything else. It is shocking. One thing after another happens that just seems impossible. Just as you think he's finally getting a break, things take a bad turn again, and you wonder how he could keep on going. I admire Eric's candid admission of the failings in his life. He doesn't try to give himself any excuses for his less than admirable, even illegal, activities that had brought him to the point of making decisions that got him into this life-threatening set of circumstances. You will be totally amazed at all he went through from the moment he realized he was in trouble up to the point where he finally was safe again -- but would never be the same again, and would always live with

reminders of his ordeal. I really do believe everyone should read this book, and I look forward to seeing Eric talk about his experiences on many television shows. I will not be surprised to see this turned into a movie. In fact, I told Eric I'd like to play his mother when that happens.

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