

# A man about Towne

## Central grad reflects on high school years and lessons learned

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What's your response to fear? Is it "fight", "flight", or "freeze"? It's hard to tell what your response will be until you are experiencing it at the moment.

In the case of Central graduate Andrew Towne, he used his fear to accomplish something that very few in the world people have done. He climbed "The Seven Summits".

The Seven Summits are the highest mountain peaks of each of the seven continents and less than 500 people have achieved this very difficult feat. Reaching the top is recognized as a mountaineering challenge that was first achieved on April 30th, 1985 by Richard Bass. Towne completed this task on May 25, 2017, when he summited the highest peak on Earth, Mount Everest in Nepal.

Many people aren't aware that there are two versions of this challenge all depending on what some people claim to be their highest mountain on each continent. Towne completed both challenges along with reaching many other of the world's highest peaks.

Towne was a graduate of the class of



2000. He now works as a Project Leader in the Minneapolis office of the Boston Consulting Group, providing strategic advice to governments, foundations, and multinational corporations.

When asked about his memories of Central High School, he replied with interesting and inspiring answers.

"Mike Berg (former Central teacher and coach) was one of my inspirations, one of my role models," said Towne. "When I was a freshman in high school,



Coach Berg was of great help to me." Towne explained that in his freshman year, he was 5'3" and weighed 220 pounds. After receiving a "B" as a grade for the first time in Berg's physical education class, Towne was motivated by Berg to put more effort into his class. This, however, caused

some teasing from classmates, which made him try even harder.

"You don't have to be good at sports, but you do have to try." This is something that Towne remembers Coach Berg telling him clearly.

When I asked Towne if he has any regrets about high school looking back, he said, "I would have stood up to teasing and I would have tried to find ways to build groups up, instead of bringing them down."

Towne said that he changed quite a bit over his years at Central. He became involved in many things and became a leader. He participated in debate, speech, student congress, band, and choir. Towne at some point remembers going through a "heavy metal stage". He even sported a Mohawk at one time. He also shed much of his freshman year weight by becoming more physically fit.



Freshman year at GFC



While attending GFC, one of the things that Towne for sure remembers was the school spirit. During his freshman year 1997, the food occurred. He remembers helping make sandbags. Some school days, buses took students from school to "sandbag central" in the western part of the city.

Towne first thought of climbing shortly after graduation even though he was afraid of heights at the time. After high school, Towne attended the Ivy League college of Yale in Connecticut where he was part of a national championship rowing team.

Among his many notable achievements, Towne also learned how to speak Swahili, German, Italian and Spanish and worked for the Central Intelligence Agency (serving in Iraq under Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation New Dawn) before attending Penn Law School and Wharton business school.

While climbing the two versions of the seven summits, Towne experienced many harrowing moments. One of the most frightening moments came in 2015 when he first attempted to climb Mount Everest. A deadly earthquake and ice avalanche prevented him from making it to the summit. An avalanche that struck Everest Base Camp killed 22 climbers. Around 170 climbers were evacuated from the south side of the peak due to fears of further avalanches, while Chinese authorities closed the Tibetan side for security reasons. Nobody reached the peak in 2015, so Towne's quest to reach the seven summits took a very unexpected turn, one that might have scared some people into not attempting to reach the world's highest peak. But Towne returned in 2017 and completed his quest.

Towne currently resides in Minneapolis, and his very busy travel schedule prevents him from making it back to Grand Forks very often, but Central administrators and Towne are working to find a date in 2018 when Towne can return to Central to talk to students about his experiences. Until then, he had a few "takeaways" that he



hopes that pass along to current Central students: "Do the right thing and believe in yourself," encouraged Towne, "stand up to bullying, be nice, and help each other out."

Andrew Towne is living proof that if you're interested in something, believe in yourself and just go for it. And maybe one day you can accomplish the "impossible."

(For more information about Towne's life and adventures, you can search articles previously written about him by Brad Schlossman of the Grand Forks Herald or journal entries by Towne on the "Youth for Understanding" International Exchange Program.)



Photos by Andrew Towne

