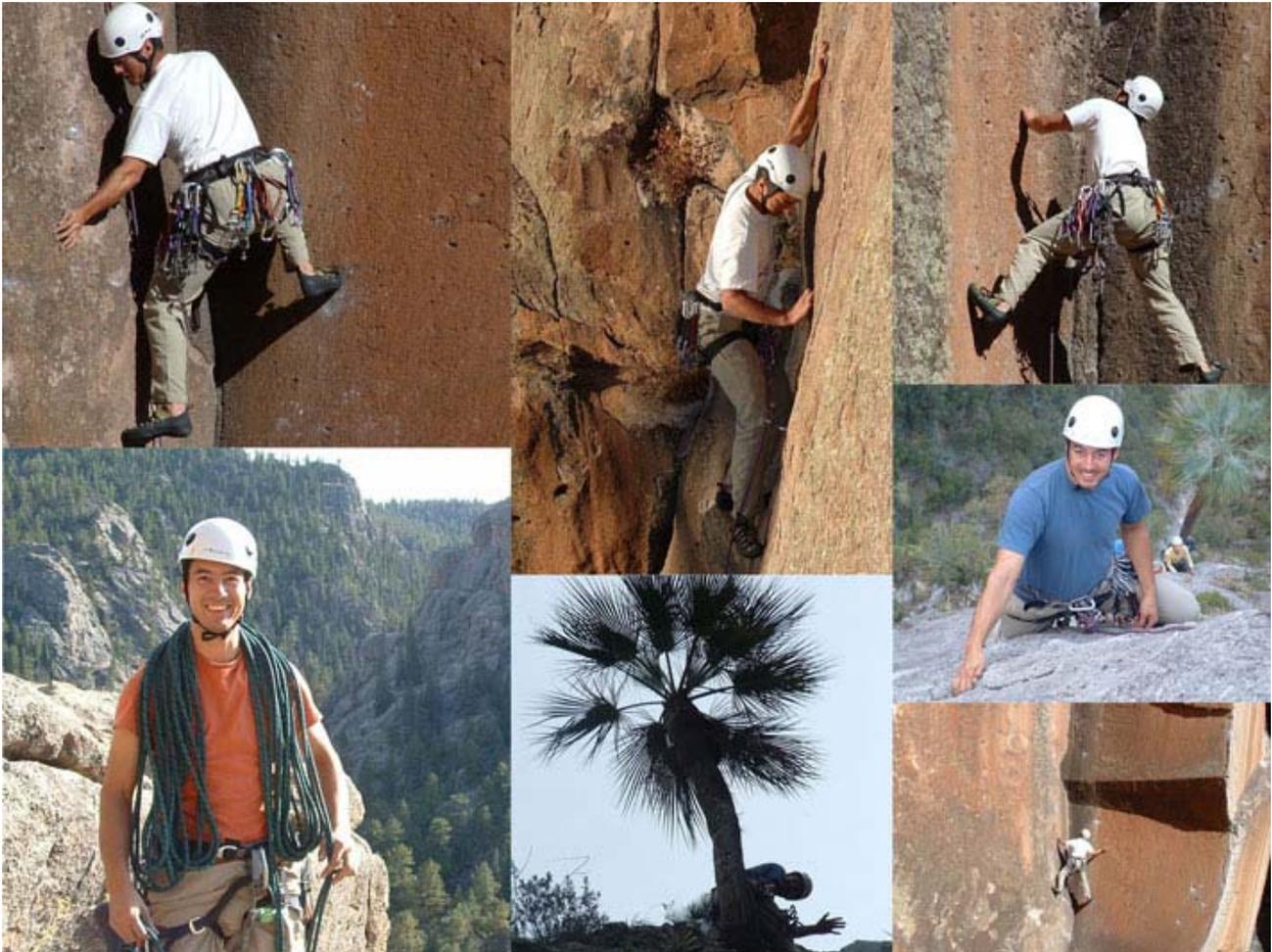


## **A Fallen Friend: Edward Romero**

by Matthias J. Graf & Lisa Biehl, July 20, 2007

We are sad to inform you that we have lost a friend. Edward G. Romero (age 36) died early Wednesday morning, July 18, of a heart attack. He leaves behind his wife Socorro, his two children Diego (5) and Alexandria (2), and family and friends.



**"I found Edward to be an inspirational climber."** Scott Bardenhagen - collage & comment.

Edward took the LAM Climbing School in 1998 and climbed with the club on Tuesdays and Thursdays until he moved to Albuquerque in 2005. He remained an active climber and continued to climb with LAM members and others. He also enjoyed, bicycling, and snowboarding. Edward was a member of the Sierra Club, KUNM, and the Chama River Brewing Club.

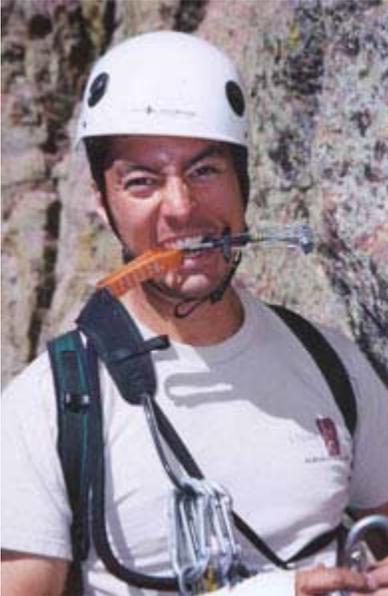
---

**Donations to the college funds of both of his children  
are preferred over flowers or other gifts.**

Memorial contributions may be made to FBO Diego and Alexandria Romero,  
c/o Smith Barney, 6565 America's Parkway NE, Albuquerque, 87110.

**Climbing and Friendship: Homage to the Life of Edward G. Romero, 1971-2007**

by Matthias J. Graf.



Edward was not a famous climber, nor did he ever want to be one. He was a charming weekend warrior who enjoyed this outdoor sport like so many of us, pursuing it with a full-hearted enthusiasm and dedication to the lifelong learning process on the rock. Learning to move gracefully on the rock, like a ballet dancer, became the goal while at the same time managing the fear of falling.

We met during the LAM climbing school of 1998. I had just moved to Los Alamos. Already back then Ed took climbing very serious and was far ahead of me. His heart was set on trad climbing, the kind of rock climbing where one uses gear to protect a potential fall. He equally loved sport climbing, where bolts are already placed in the rock for protection. This is typically done on steep face climbs or thin friction slabs, where no crack or weakness in the rock allows the placement of gear. As a local boy he loved to visit the local sport crags just as much as longer trips to Colorado, Arizona, California, Wyoming or Mexico. Early on he was looking for climbing partners for his weekend trips, either going with an endearing old-timer to show him a few tricks on the rock, or with fellow novice climbers like myself, who were willing to go out on an adventure with him. We got to

know each other through many Tuesday and Thursday top rope sessions of the club, where we worked on and improved our climbing skills under the tutelage of a Jan Studebaker, Mark Zander or Norbert Ensslin. To the surprise of many uninitiated climbers the slogan "You'll never gonna make it!" became part of our climbing credo when we tried to encourage each other on a difficult section of a top rope setting, but never when on lead.

For as far back as I can remember, he has been this happy and likable kind-a-guy, who showed courtesy and respect to everyone and expected nothing more from others. So as a newcomer to New Mexico I always felt at home and welcome with this native son of Santa Fe.

Ed was an inspiring climbing partner, who would not be deterred from trying again and again after being thrown off by the rock again and again. I don't know where he got that energy and resilience from. There were times when I was wondering what would give first, the rope or his stubbornness. After climbing for roughly seven years with Ed, I can't remember a single time where we didn't finish a multi-pitch climb with a smile on our faces and a handshake at the top of the mountain congratulating each other for the excellent time and experience spent on the rock, no matter if it was raining, the sun was burning down on us, or the rock had been chossy and crappy.

Over the years it became clear that we were not just climbing partners, who would climb with anyone to simply maximize the amount of time on the rock, but that we enjoyed the company and friendship of who we climbed with just as much as the great pleasure of pushing ourselves on challenging rock. We didn't mind climbing as a team of two or three on shorter multi-pitch routes. A good climbing trip to places like Jacks Canyon, Enchanted Towers, Tres Piedras, Diablo Canyon, the Sandias or Cochise meant for both of us that testing our skills on fun and steep routes was just as important as the good times at the camp fires or in the car while on the road. Ultimately, a good trip was a trip where we came back home all well, still talking with excitement about challenges and fears we had faced on the rock and thinking already about where to go on our next trip or when to return.

Finally, my climbing skills improved and I almost caught up with him. While I was improving physically and technically on the rock with more graceful moves than ever, he had already decided for himself that in



order to become a better climber it was necessary to unite body and mind and follow the rock warrior's way described in the book by Arno Ilgner. First, I thought he was going flaky having lived for too long in the vortex of Santa Fe. It turned out that it wasn't enough for him being physically fit and strong, but to be mentally prepared (see excerpt) for the unknown challenge of a climb. It's fair to say that he had some success with it, though he openly admitted that it wasn't quite as easy to implement. Ed considered it a work in progress, that means, that from time to time he would still do a Chuck Berry (shaking with one leg) or Elvis Presley (shaking with both legs and moving his hips) improvisation while placing desperately needed gear or attempting to clip the bolt that's barely out of reach. He had reached a point where climbing was an integral part of his life, but not the

only one. Looking back I would say that he had already become a warrior on the rock, whereas I was still stuck in the chicken warrior mode. That means chickening out when getting too scared on a difficult climb.

Climbing was his passion. And sure, he struggled to find the right balance of pursuing this passion and spending quality time with his two children and wife. After he had moved to Albuquerque he began bicycling 15 miles to and from work several times a week to stay fit. Once he asked me if that could be considered selfish, because it took time away from playing with his kids after work or helping Socorro in the house. On occasion, driving back from a climbing trip, he would dream about being an old dad climbing with his adult kids. His son Diego or daughter Alexandria would go climbing with him and lead the crux pitch of a route he never had dared to climb before. Diego was already getting comfortable wearing a climbing harness and bouncing up and down on low-angle slabs at El Rito or Tres Piedras. It seemed all going the right direction until his sudden and unexpected death brought his dreams to a dramatic end.



**Ed on Absinth of Mallet, Cochise West Stronghold, Tucson**



**Edward at 11 Mile Canyon, Colorado**

Photos above courtesy of Matthias J. Graf.

## Edward Romero's Winning Trait: Immediate Respect

by Jan Studebaker.

Edward had a very fine trait that instantly endured himself to nearly everyone he meet; he gave people full respect immediately upon meeting them, rather than expecting them to win or gain his respect as many of us do. He was not naive, rather accepting and loving, and would quickly mediate his respect if he was not treated accordingly. This trait allowed him to make friends easily, who would feel truly connected with him after only a few meetings. I discovered when Cosima and I attended his wedding, that his entire family had the same trait. We will never forget how quickly we were accepted, integrated into the group, and befriended.



Although I had only a few adventures with Edward, I can say unequivocally that I felt he was a very good friend, and that I could count on him in time on need. My last and most memorable experience with Edward was our ascent of Royal Arches in Yosemite, a "50 Classics" climb.

Edward was one of a large number of Los Alamos climbers that were on my final climbing trip to Yosemite. He had recently graduated from the LAM climbing school, and was a competent climber, but lacked experience. I had announced at the beginning of the trip that I hoped to climb the Royal Arches as my final climb of the trip, and probably the last big climb of my life (I had decided to give up climbing due to personal reasons). I told the group that I would be watching them carefully for a partner on the climb, and that I would select the person that I felt most comfortable with for my second. I chose Edward over several more experienced climbers to be my partner for the ascent because I felt he was completely trustworthy, would follow my instructions to the letter, was incredibly positive about everything, was a joy to be with, and was truly ready.....Edward didn't disappoint!

Edward said in his trip report "The day after we got home, we were greeted by the disturbing news of a rockslide that claimed a climber's life only hours after we'd left. This served as a reminder of the unpredictability of life. Of how fleeting our tenure on this planet is. Climbing is a dangerous sport and part of the thrill is realizing the possible, dire consequences. But, as Orville Wright once said, **If you want to lead a safe life, you would do well to sit on a fence and watch the birds soar above you.**"

Photo above depicts Jan, Cosima, and Edward in Yosemite, the day before our climb of Royal Arches.

### Royal Arches, Yosemite National Park Trip Report

June 11, 1999

**Author:** Edward Romero

**Climbers:** Edward Romero and Jan Studebaker

This climb capped off a splendid week in Yosemite National Park. Blessed with continuous good weather, great climbing and entertaining companions, my first trip to Yosemite was made even more magnificent by knocking off one of the "Fifty Classics". On this trip, we were honored to have with us a pioneer of the sport, and co-author of "Fifty classic climbs in North America", Allen Steck. I tried as often as I could to have meals with Mr. Steck and somehow gain insight into how the sport of rock climbing had started. He had many interesting stories about climbs and climbers that have come and gone over the years. A truly remarkable man.

Jan convinced me that if we were to be successful in completing this climb, we would have to start early and climb fast. This was an adventure climb after all, which meant that we just might make it back alive. To start early, we would have to eschew showers and a hot breakfast. What's up with that? With bagels

and cheese with a fruit drink chaser, we head off to Awhanee to park. Locating the base of the climb was no problem. Just look for the heinous chimney to the right of Devil's bathtub.

Part of the agreement Jan and I had when I finally convinced him to do this climb with me was that I would lead the first pitch. After much grunting, sweating, swearing and flailing, I hauled myself up to a welcome tree and brought the pack up. Jan followed with much more grace than I had exhibited, to my chagrin. From there, it was a matter of scrambling up some mixed 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> class up a ledge system to its end. At this point, the real climb starts at a crack on face (5.7) well marked with piton scars.

Considering that Royal Arches was first climbed in 1936, you would expect numerous piton scars. Jan led this with no apparent difficulty and belayed me up from near a large tree. I grabbed the gear and continued up a nice jam crack (5.5) and belayed in the shade of some welcome shrubbery. By now, we were getting nice views up and down the valley. This was real climbing! My next lead took me to what would best be described as a "bear hug double crack". With left and right appendages enjoying their own private crack, I was all grins when I found a nice, wide ledge just below the famous tension traverse.

Someone had strung a length of rope with conveniently placed loops that made the climber resemble Tarzan of the jungle, one hand on rope, the other reaching for a ledge upon which to mantle up. After walking across a 4<sup>th</sup> class ledge to a shady tree, we decided to luncheon, enjoying spectacular views of Glacier point apron, the Cathedral rocks and up to Half Dome. It was at this point we were overtaken by two teams of simul-climbers. The first, a team from Madrid, Spain stopped to chat for a moment. With my broken Spanish, I found out what Belay was in Spanish: reunion. With an "Ay voy por arriba (I'm going up now)" they were off. The second team was in training to do Half Dome in one day. Good luck boys!

After lunch, I continued up a fun layback flake (5.7) that ended up in a tree with very interesting, gnarled wood. A fun pitch, one of the best on this route. Jan realized with some horror, he would have to crawl around an exposed corner to unknown territory. But with some contorted moves, he was on the face on the other side. Communication was difficult at this point, because sound doesn't travel very well around corners and through trees, so I would recommend a short pitch to get around this corner for a safer belay up the face. As I followed the hand/foot jam crack (5.6), I found that Jan had prudently placed pro every ten feet at first, then towards the top, none at all. When I got to the reunion (belay), I asked Jan about this and he confessed that his feet were tired of being stood on while being jammed in a painful position, so he decided to just get out of there. I agreed that this was the toughest pitch of 5.6 I'd ever done!

Discontinuous cracks led us to the start of the dreaded 5.4 friction traverse. This pitch lies at the top of a blank sheet of granite leading straight down the pool at the Awhanee. Very exposed, it certainly got the heart racing. We located a pair of hangers that marked the start of the rappel route and prepared to descend. There were hangers with slings and rappel rings every half rope length or so. It would be possible to take only one rope for this climb, but with two, we only had to do 10 rappels. Most had at least a small ledge to stand on, but a few were just hanging rappels, simply clipped into hangers on a blank wall extending up and down for thousands of feet. At one rappel station, I noticed a fleet of very small spiders on the rock, bright red in color, quite striking and beautiful.

Following the rappels down, we were pleased to be deposited on the ground right next to the dreaded chimney that was the first pitch. After congratulating ourselves on a fine day of climbing, we headed back to Curry village for a hot shower and a cold beer. The next day was leaving day and as El Capitan vanished from behind us, I reminisced on the wonderful week I'd had in Yosemite valley and vowed to return.

The day after we got home, we were greeted by the disturbing news of a rockslide that claimed a climber's life only hours after we'd left. This served as a reminder of the unpredictability of life. Of how fleeting our tenure on this planet is. Climbing is a dangerous sport and part of the thrill is realizing the possible, dire consequences. But as Orville Wright once said "If you want to lead a safe life, you would do well to sit on a fence and watch the birds soar above you".

## **My Memories of Edward: What an Attitude** by Steve Doorn

More than anything else about Edward, I will remember his constant positive attitude. He was always a positive influence and an inspiration--and not just in the mountains. But it will always be the mountains where I place him. It seemed the natural place to find the perfect outlet for his tremendous energy and enthusiasm for life.



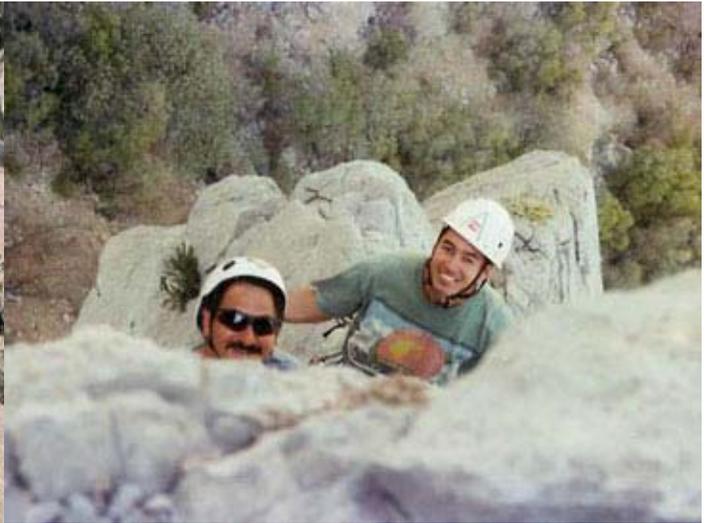
I feel lucky to have had the chance to share some amazing places with Edward: the Winds, Crestones, Sandias, San Juans, Tres Piedras, and just top roping or backpacking in our backyard. He was one of the rare people to share my love of climbing in the Brazos.

No matter what we had just finished, he was always ready for the next trip. "When are we doing Resignation Ridge?" "We've got to do the Needle this summer!" "Check out those cracks going up that face." Whether it was sharing a long route in the mountains or talking about life back in camp, I can't imagine a better companion to go on an adventure with. His passing brings into focus what he told me about that magic mushroom tattoo of his; that it was a reminder to himself to live a more spontaneous life and to grab onto opportunities when they present themselves. I'll be missing the many climbs we should have done together.

Photo above shows Edward with his children Diego (5) and Alexandria (2). Photo courtesy of Steve Doorn.



Ed on Absinth of Mallet, Cochise West Stronghold, Tucson

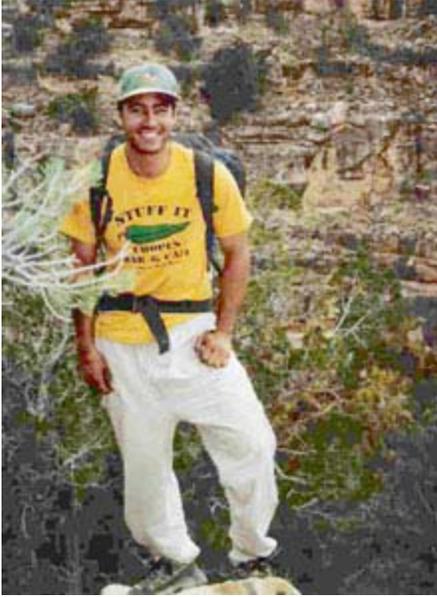


Ed and Joe at El Potrero Chico, near Monterey, Mexico

Photos directly above courtesy of Matthias J. Graf.

## **A Tribute To My Friend, Edward "Lalo" Romero** by Joe "Chango" Rael

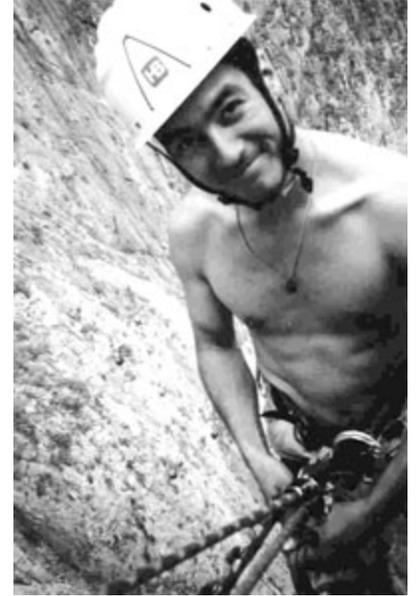
I met Edward in the spring of 2001, I was a rookie in the climbing school when I dared myself to climb with the "veterans" on a Tuesday evening. I was looking for a route to set an anchor when I came across Edward. We introduced ourselves and after explaining who I was and what I was doing, he immediately offered to climb with me. Thus began the adventure!



It wasn't many outings later when he started calling me "Chango", in apparent reference to my climbing technique (or complete lack thereof). The next several years were filled with climbing trips all over New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, and our greatest adventure, a week in El Potrero Chico in Mexico with our best friend, Matthias Graf.

Lalo and I also shared a love for snowboarding (steep and deep!), music (Ozomatli!), good beer, and life itself. Often he told me he was the luckiest man in the world, a beautiful, understanding

wife, two wonderful children and a great family. Indeed, he was truly blessed! He was a man with many talents, gifts and abilities. As great a rock climber as he was, he was an even greater person. His smile and winning attitude enabled him to easily make friends, and his quiet confidence was apparent in everything he did.



Though our lives intertwined for only a few short years, they produced literally thousands and thousands of memories. I am a better person for having known Edward and he will always be in my heart and soul.

Photos courtesy of Joe "Chango" Rael.

## Too Brief, yet an Unforgettable Friendship

by Tony Stout

Edward and I met just a short time ago. In fact, it was even less than one year ago, November 2006. His name was on an Albuquerque climbing list and I was organizing a trip to Paradise Forks, home of beautiful basalt cracks. I was contacted soon after I sent that email signed by someone named "Lalo".

I picked up the telephone and called him at work, "is this LAYlo?" (I had no idea how that might be pronounced). A warm chuckle, "this is Lalo". We set a plan, and met at my place that Friday. I liked him as soon as I shook his hand.



Of course, the climbing over that weekend was great. We only climbed a few routes together but he always gave it his all, wanting to push himself to see just what he was really capable of. After a few warm-ups Edward decided he wanted to try Goldfinger, a classic 5.11, on top rope. After much, much grunting, he finally pulled himself over the top of the rim. That climb obviously did not go so well for him but by the end of the weekend he was ready to get on lead for a stellar 5.10, East of Eden. He onsited it!

One evening Edward concocted some crazy Gumbo dish that myself, Edward, and Tanya enjoyed over campfire conversations and brews. Many of the details of these conversations elude me but I do remember our talks about his family and how much he enjoyed his two children Diego and Alexandria, and his wife Socorro. He gave it his best to try to convince me of how great kinds were in an attempt to convince me that Brie-Anne and I needed our own (I told him that I needed to climb 5.13 before I could be distracted by little creatures). Other topics included politics, and past climbing trips to Yosemite, Cochise, and the Wind Rivers.

Following that trip we shared a great weekend playing in the snow. Of course, there was that continuous debate over the best style to descend steep white powder (we had an immaculate day at Wolf Creek!). His vote was dragging his knuckles on a snowboard. As he watched us struggle with two poles and two skis as we walked from the car to the resort, he commented that he liked having just one piece of equipment. He was truly graceful as he weaved between trees through the powder. I on the other hand, preferred two planks and staying upright (he referred to snowboarders as "knuckle draggers" and skiers as "two plankers").

Edward, myself, and four other friends were planning on going to Yosemite the first week of September. It's a hard blow knowing that he will not be joining us. When I learned of his passing the thoughts of disbelief wrecked me. It just did not add up. He had spent full days skiing, climbing rocks, ascending peaks, often pushing himself to the brink. How does this happen? I realize that these questions are futile because even if there were good answers, it would not bring our friend back.

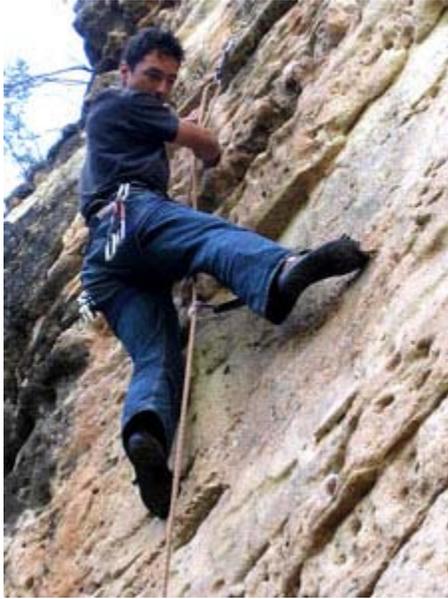
Edward's life touched me in just the short period of time that I knew him. He was one of those guys that truly embodied the "live life like today is your last day" mantra. It is admirable. His positive attitude was contagious and the way he spoke of his family was awesome. His life was a blessing to all who knew him, and I am thankful that our paths met, however brief. He will truly be missed.



## Pulled into Orbit – Remembering Edward Romero

by Alexander Nees

I didn't know Edward for very long. We met a few months before his death, introduced to each other by Tony Stout, a mutual climbing friend. A group of us New Mexican climbers were planning a trip to Tuolumne Meadows in Yosemite National Park, and Edward and I were both looking for partners. We got together a few times in the following months, quickly getting to know each other as climbers and friends.

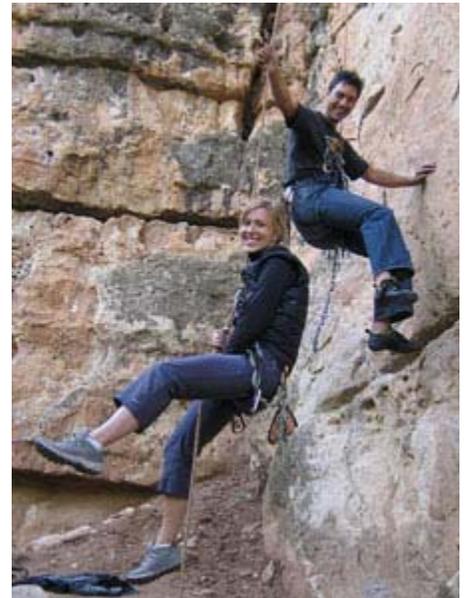


We began by climbing in the gym, then moved outside one day in June to climb some moderate trad lines in the Sandias. Pulling on plastic had been fun, but out on the rock we immediately had that intuitive connection common to all good rope teams. Edward was excellent on the rock: smooth, confident, and precise. I had strength born of too much time spent in the gym, but Edward had a wealth of experience and a poise that I could only watch and admire. Climbing can so easily become caught up in ego and expectations, with each partner struggling to live up to some sort of lofty standard. Edward wasn't about that at all. He just loved to climb, and reminded me of the core reasons why I loved climbing too. It was easily one of the most purely enjoyable days of climbing I've ever had.

On the drive down from the Sandia Crest back to Albuquerque that afternoon, we filled the car with stories, speaking excitedly of climbs we had done and climbs that we might do together in the future. As I

left Edward's house that night, having finally torn myself away from the warmth and hospitality of his family, we were still talking about the possibilities for our new partnership.

Summer is the busiest time of year for me in my work, but I had had such a good time with Edward in the Sandias that I managed to carve out another day to come into the city and climb with him. We were already setting our sights higher: this time we were eyeing the Southwest Ridge of the Needle, a moderate climb but probably the longest route in the Sandias. We chose the 24th of July to climb, and a week or so beforehand Edward called me up to tell me that he had already scouted the approach! He spoke with glee about the 2 hours of hard bushwhacking that lay between us and our objective. A few days before our climb, I was shocked to learn that on July 24th I would be coming into Albuquerque not to climb the Needle with Edward, but to attend his funeral.



I didn't know Edward for long, but his sudden death has been deeply upsetting to me. I knew him just long enough and well enough to understand how much we have all lost. I am so sad to have lost a friend, but very grateful that I was given even a few days to spend with Edward. Upon meeting Edward and his family, I felt an immediate connection of a kind that I've only rarely experienced before. But reading others' stories and talking to his friends, I realize that many people have had similar experiences with Edward, that many of us have been pulled into orbit around the basic kindness and decency that defined and suffused him. If nothing else, I can only hope that this tragedy helps us to find each other. Ed would have liked that, I think.

Photos courtesy of Alexander Nees.