

# Heidi Klaschka

## PHOTOJOURNALIST and ADVENTURER

*Graduate Diploma in Journalism Concordia 1999*  
*Certificate in Education Edinburgh 1995*  
*BAH English/Psychology, Queen's 1992*

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*In her own words: "Type A. Curious. Enthusiastic. Extraverted."*

**H**eidi Klaschka doesn't miss a beat when asked about the philosophy that guides her life these days: "Without contraries [there] is no progression," she says immediately, quoting the poet William Blake. Change has been a constant and welcome companion on her career path so far. "Life is just so short. There's so much to do. I've always learned everything I could in a job and then moved on."

A writer, photojournalist and teacher, Heidi is most passionate about travel, and since graduating from Queen's in 1992, she has made some big life choices — about jobs, further education, and income — fit into her globetrotting agenda. Her bank account has skyrocketed in Kuwait and then bottomed out in Canada. She has traded in a comfortable house with a personal staff in Africa for an apartment in Toronto. Seemingly unflappable, she chalks up each change to experience.

Her latest travels took her towards the top of the world, when she signed on as base camp photojournalist for an Everest expedition sponsored by Affinity Holdings, a North American-based global eBusiness innovator. She scored the job after three tough interviews, but it was a perfect fit for her. "It was about

everything I am — a traveller, teacher, writer, photographer. Fortunately, I had transferable skills to offer."

Born in Kingston, Heidi was already cultivating some of those skills in high school, where she won writing awards and hungered for travel. When it came time to apply for university, the hometown campus was not her first choice, but her parents persuaded her to stay in the Limestone City. In hindsight, it was a wise choice. "I've met Queen's grads all over the world and made some great contacts for stories."

She remembers her undergraduate years as very "rah rah". Along with studying for an English degree with a medial in Psychology, she acted as a Gael, played intra-mural soccer, took dance and kayaking lessons, and wrote for *The Journal*. She also clocked at least 15 hours a week as a teller at a local branch of the CIBC.

The part-time job turned into a promotion and full-time position in Toronto after Heidi graduated in 1992. Within six months she had her licence to sell mutual funds and a wad of cash that was her ticket out of Canada. She hopped on a plane to England. "My parents warned me that I would never find such a good job again, but within a week I was working for American Express in Cambridge."

She carved out a series of temporary jobs over the next year before she decided that a teaching certificate was the next piece of paper she needed to help pay for her travel bug. The Moray House Institute of Education in Scotland fit the bill, and by 1995 she was qualified to teach high school English and Information Technology. The trick about further education, she says, is to be very specific about what you want. “I knew I wanted to study in different countries and different cultures, and I also knew I wanted to spend only a year of my time. That kind of goal setting has always been super important for me.”

Three years later she was back in school after a stint of teaching in the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait. The overseas teaching was lucrative, but she realized she preferred writing to marking essays. Within a year she had a graduate diploma in broadcast journalism from

Concordia University. Typically, she had no intention of gluing herself to a computer in a newsroom. “I recalled one journalism prof’s advice: ‘Don’t stay in a job more than two years. We want to see that you’ve *done* stuff, not that you’ve spent 20 years at a desk.’”

After a five-week French immersion course in Quebec Heidi nailed some contract work as a reporter with *The Kingston Whig-Standard*, plus various freelance writing jobs, before packing up in November, 1999 for Malawi, Africa.

Over a six-month internship with WUSC, she handled public relations for the country’s Photographers’ Association. “I was writing newsletters, doing radio and television interviews, and selling photos over the Internet. You name it and I did it. I loved it.” She could have easily stayed a few more years. Instead, she followed her nose back to Kingston and freelance writing and public relations work.

By October 2000, she was living in Toronto, where she freelanced for the CBC and — for the sake of boosting her bank account — taught high school

English. She managed to excuse herself from that post when the once-in-a-lifetime Everest job materialized.

In one sense, it came as no surprise to her that she was chosen to trek off to Nepal. “I’m good at being persuasive, organized and taking the

initiative. I’m totally adaptable. Put me in any culture and in a week I’ll know some of the language and have a job.”

Her best advice to new graduates is simple: “If you think you can do something, you can.” As for the bewildering number of career choices that faced her as a new graduate — and that still challenge her every day — she is philosophical. “Choices are always reversible. There’s a way around everything. I’ve talked my way into and around all kinds of things. I just don’t take ‘no’ for an answer.” ❖

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