



SAY

HELLO!

wave goodbye

## Former 'rock-chick' photo journalist Jude Calvert-Toulmin mingles with the glitterati of British climbing at Ben Moon's leaving party in Sheffield.

I thought OTE should have a review of a climbing event from a woman's point of view, because climbing articles can be a bit blokey sometimes...

Now, I am not a climber; John Allen and Paul Mitchell once shouted instructions and encouragement as I managed to struggle to the top of something called Three Pebble Slab in a pair of non-stretchy jeans, and Andy Barker once took a photo of me swearing my way up Great Slab at Froggatt, but frankly I'd rather sit and look at the view and read *New Scientist* or *Vanity Fair*. However, because I'm married to the handsome Martin Veale I've met a lot of climbers, so here goes...

By the time this hits the newsstands Ben Moon will already be in Salt Lake City where he's moved in order to expand his clothing company S7, but he celebrated his departure with a select little do at The Waterfront Bar, nestling amidst the newly refurbished Victoria Quays in downtown Sheffield. I'd never been there before but it's gorgeous – reminds me of Canary Wharf in London (where I spent the '80s as a rock-chick photojournalist).

We emerge from the shadows and there's the bar all aglow. We go in at riverside cobblestone level. Oh my God! There's a huge open staircase to descend without falling over and everyone is at the bottom in the bar peering up to see who's just walked in. Daunting or what? But fun when you're down there, you get to peer up at everybody walking in fazed by the staircase and crowd below. And at the bottom of that staircase the glitterati of the climbing world throng and shine. This is the sort of do into which I would sashay all the time in London and I sometimes feel a bit churlish that a lot of my social life now comprises two minute conversations with the other harassed mums outside school. This, as anything Ben does, is classy.

Anybody who is anybody in the climbing world is there. Allegedly Sheffield has the highest concentration of climbers in the world. And they're all here tonight. Apart from Ben and his staggeringly beautiful and stylish girlfriend Jo, who last time we saw her was short-haired but now sports fab dreads reminiscent of

Ben's old ones, the buzz of the night is that Seb Grieve is off to Gretna Green to get married to the lovely Brigitte and they've only known each other five weeks! Good on you son. Brigitte giggles to me: "They keep calling us Ken and Barbie," and she's right, they are Ken and Barbie! Some of the dynamic women here are actually fab climbers, like Airlie Anderson, Anne Arran and Ruth Jenkins. I'm sitting on a stool feeling not very fab myself because there is such a predominance of firm flesh on view. The glamorous and sophisticated Helen Fisher-Brown (Joe Brown's daughter) who is my great pal and whose society-queen-of-the-climbing-world expertise is admired by all us gals, introduces me to Crispin Waddy, one of the Welsh climbing posse. I don't know any of the Llanberis crowd apart from the adorable Adam Wainwright. So I don't know Crispin from Adam, so to speak. And I certainly am not aware that he is in fact a famous climber and climbing wall designer. I lean over and trill: "Ooh, are you the artist Crispin?" and he says bashfully and modestly "Well... yes." "The watercolour artist who does those fantastic paintings of Stanage?" I coo adoringly. (Being an artist myself other artists whose work I admire command immediate respect.) Crispin looks at me as if I am completely barking and says, "No, that's not me." "Oh." Embarrassing moment and end of conversation. To explain – Cristan Baggeley, (not even a Crispin at all, duh brain) is an up-and-coming local artist who paints gorgeous watercolours of Stanage and other crags. He is very talented, buy, buy, buy, before he's too famous.

Helen Fisher-Brown's friend Rachel and I have a chat. Rachel is the manageress of a very cool and successful coffee bar in Sheffield called Coffee Revolution, (established by Matt Smith and Del Goodey.) Last time I saw Rachel she was with her mate Charlie Dale who is one of my favourite actors (played the mad chef in *The Lakes*) and now plays Dennis Stringer, the motorbike mechanic in *Corrie* (I announced on meeting him – with a straight face mind you - "There's Ewan McGregor, Colin Firth, and you!" Puhlease!)

Back to the party, and more and

more v. famous climbers are trotting down the open staircase: fun-loving, wise-cracking Jerry with a bevy of beautiful women following him; Stevie Coates with a big grin ("where have you beeeeen Stevie?"); Sean Myles; Al Williams; all the fun lads are here – except Johnny! The dynamo Dennis Hopper of the climbing world is notable for his absence, possibly due to being in LA again – he's left the same sort of powerful vacuum as a black hole (not that I've been down any lately). Having recently hugged and made up with him after three years of not speaking due to a bit of a scrap it's sad not to see him here. Also notable for her absence is the gorgeous six-foot blond goddess Chrissie Dorn, Jerry's ex, who's sadly moved back to her native Germany. Also couldn't make it was Deborah Sweeney, the stunning artist mum of Al Rouse's lovely daughter Holly. And no climbing party is complete without Deborah – the zingiest, zaniest brainiest dingbat I've ever met.

I start having a nice chat with the beautifully poised Anne Arran but Quentin Fisher pounces on me with his stock opening gambit: "Got any gossip?" I've worn out "Only about you Quent" (which isn't even true). At my friend Linda's little soiree last night I did stun him into silence – in reply to the usual "gorrany-gossjude?" I said: "Actually Quentin I'm writing a review of Ben Moon's party for OTE." He went white.

One showstopping girl, a red plait coming out of the top of each cap sleeve, bemoans the fact that some towny who has ligged her way into the party has just sniped "didn't you know plaits are out now?" I tell her she looks absolutely gorgeous and not to listen to a word of the nasty girl's jibes. She smiles warmly at me and says: "I wish more women were like you," and I tell her it's because I'm middle-aged with three kids and I'm not in the running darling and if a woman looks nice, you should always tell her so.

The dullness of the bar-wait is relieved by my noticing my old pal John Allen five people across from me, examining himself from all angles in the mirror behind the bar. "John!" I hiss "Caught you!" and he grins in his usual charming, self-deprecating

manner. Richy Heap sidles over for a chat and tells me about the multi-tasking experience of making his recent film *Walking on Jellyfish*. Richy and I get stuck into a good old technical (film) conversation before he realises that film making's what I did my degree in. Richy is the most energetic and unaffected film maker I've ever met.

I eventually manage to have a decent conversation with the delectable and fascinating Crispin. It starts off badly, where I say: "Are you a climber then?" and he goes "kind of," and I am off trilling again "Ooh, you might know my husband Martin then, he did Big Air," and Martin is looking at me with that long suffering look of having accidentally married the densest belay bunny of them all – but Crispin is completely non-judgmental. We then discover that we both use mirror glass to make mosaics, an odd thing to have in common with someone and when he says he's a physicist I start waffling on about the proximity of art and science, and how many really good climbers seem to be artists or scientists and how they would all blend in round the Mad Hatter's Tea Table.

When everyone spills out of the bar onto the cobbles above, the young and trendy prance off gaily to whichever club the buzz has decided everyone's going to. It brings back lovely clubbing days' memories but I'm glad I'll be getting up at 7am tomorrow to walk the dogs instead of losing a whole day of my life. Martin and I get a taxi with Ian and Karen Jones. Ian's a Liverpudlian I tell him how I used to hang out with the Bunnymen and Teardrop Explodes and tell him some funny stories I can't repeat here. Ian's like "Wow really, I was at that gig. Is that what happened after? REALLY? WOW!" It's interesting that climbers are impressed by great musicians, rock stars nearly always fail at being great actors and film stars are impressed by great climbers (Nicole Kidman's waxed lyrical about climbing in interviews before). Oh, and everybody's impressed by Leo. But he wasn't there girls... however Pete Robins was...

Anyway, good luck Ben and Jo and thanks for the ace party! ◆