

'I cannot believe my boyfriend is such a self-centred bastard.'

— FROM *EMBRACING THE DRAGON*

... Finally Nathan clears his throat. He has a plan. He will climb the cliff. "As for you, you'll find a different route over and while you're at it you'll carry my video camera and water bottles ... One of the reasons you have come is to act as my support crew." Excuse me? For a second I'm tempted to laugh, but Nathan isn't joking. This is surely the most ridiculous place in the world to wage a fight. But abuse flies between us hard and fast. I cannot believe I have come all this way to carry water bottles. I cannot believe my boyfriend is such a self-centred bastard. Nathan angrily corrects me. I'm the selfish one. If I really cared, I'd be doing everything in my power to make his journey a success.

Now, two years after *Embracing the Dragon* was released, sold 2500 copies and was a finalist for the 2005 Travcom Travel Book of the Year, Nathan Gray has published his account of the journey, called *First Pass Under Heaven*.

In Gray's take of the cliff episode he is not Greeks' "self-centred bastard" but a stern coach motivating his weak team-mate. He starts by writing about how Greeks lacked the motivation for the climb ahead:

I know she doesn't really want to be out here. It has shown from the very beginning in the way she made no effort to help out with the preparations. "Right, Polly, I don't think it's gonna be safe for you to make this climb. But I'd like it if you could film as I try. Afterwards you can carry both bags around the side, and I'll meet you down the other side to bring them up."

*"F*** off."*

"Look I invited you here, and part of your responsibility is to act as a support crew to make my journey successful."

"Your journey?"

"You said you wanted to come here to film. Now here's your chance. Do as you're told."

Later, when she succeeds in the climb, he praises her; *"Feels good, eh? Facing your fears."*

IN SYDNEY, where he is promoting his book en route to China, Gray points out that his book isn't about retaliation and his three months with Greeks was only a fraction of his two-year journey walking the wall. Gray had originally set off from the Gobi Desert in China's east with an expedition team — including an Argentinian photojournalist, an overweight Buddhist monk, a professional golfer whose Mormon wife and child had just left him and a pseudo-mystic Italian — who at times come across like the *Keystone Kops* lopping across the back of China. Also included are the torturous months that he walked alone.

If Gray was hurt or angry at the way his former girlfriend portrayed him, he's not about to admit it. But together the travel memoirs show two people's radically different interpretation of a shared adventure. They also reveal a couple who suffered from what Gray eloquently calls "same bed, different dreams".

Greeks was 27, well-travelled and had been working for Wellington's now defunct newspaper *The Evening Post* for a year when she was sent out to interview Gray. He was back home recuperating after walking 3000 of the wall's

