

I'm Elodie, and I was asked to share something today that would celebrate Ikse's dirtbagery. For the uninitiated, the word dirtbag in this context refers to a dedicated rock climber who pursues a lifestyle that revolves around being outside and climbing rocks as much as possible, sacrificing material comforts, stable employment, and regular showers in pursuit of their passion. Ikse spent much of their twenties proudly dirtbagging and there are countless stories that I could share from those adventures.

One of Ikse's favorite dirtbagging regions was Southern California. It was there that the two of us grew our climbing relationship, spending any spare time in pursuit of big rocks with an amazing group of similarly minded friends. At some point during this time, around 2019, a new climbing lingo emerged among our group. As many of you know, climbing is a sport that has no shortage of lingo, but as far as I can tell this one is unique to us.

There are two expressions: wee-woo, and woo-wee. I will translate. Generally, these are said when you're on the business end of the rope and the stakes are high. "Wee-woo" translates roughly to "oh god, this is so scary, if I mess this up it's going to hurt so I have to keep going, but oh god I'm scared." It kind of sounds like a siren and has the same general meaning. Wee-woo. "Woo-wee", on the other hand, is said with relief. It means "that was crazy, I can't believe I did that, I was so scared, hell yeah." Woo-wee.

As many of you know, Ikse had a penchant for silly little words and sounds. As such, they were a big fan of this shorthand and used it often. It's a simple way to express and acknowledge your own fear. I think people often believe that rock climbers are fearless. Ikse would be the first to point out that fearlessness and rock climbing don't necessarily go hand in hand. Some of the best climbers I know are scared often. For me, and for Ikse I think, the feeling of climbing through the fear and conquering the climb is a huge part of what kept us coming back to the sport. That and the beefy muscles, of course.

It was this drive, combined with being laid off due to the pandemic, that led six of us to Idyllwild, California in June of 2020. Idyllwild is a little town not far from Big Bear where we all were living at the time. Looming over this town is a really big rock called Tahquitz, or Lily Rock. It is roughly 1,000 feet at its tallest and is comprised of beautiful, quality granite. It is a popular climbing destination.

We had split off into pairs to tackle this behemoth and were going to climb more or less near each other for the day. It was a beautiful sunny day. My partner was climbing above and I was anchored in belaying him, we were two pitches in at this point which translates to roughly 200 feet off the ground. I was looking around at the scenery when I heard the smallest little "wee-woo". I looked around and had to lean out to peer around the rock to spot Ikse, who was about 40 feet to my left, navigating a particularly tricky section of rock, wee-wooing to themselves. I snapped this photo in that moment.



I love this photo for many reasons, but I think the main one is that this is how I remember Ikse best. A small figure against a huge background. And that's not because of their physical stature but because they loved being in big places. As a climber against a 1,000 ft cliff. Cowboy camping in the middle of a giant desert basin. A canoeist in a massive lake. (The eighth biggest lake in Minnesota, I've heard.) They were so at home in these landscapes that they almost seemed like a fixture of them at times, and I think this photo captures one of those moments.

What it doesn't capture, though, is the difficulty of that section and the rather perilous position Ikse was in. We were 200 feet off the ground, there was very little in the way of hand or foot holds, and Ikse's rope isn't directly above them, but is connected quite a bit to the side. All of that combined with the angle of the rock, a slip would make for a very unpleasant swing across the surface, often referred to as a "cheese grater." Wee-woo, indeed. They kept at it, though, and soon I lost sight of them around the bend of the rock and it was my turn to climb. We arrived at the same point for the beginning of the third pitch around the same time. I asked them how they were and they said with a HUGE grin "that was so terrifying!" Woo-wee.

The rest of that day was a bit of a trial, and we shared laughs and tears and curses. Just before dusk the six of us reached the summit of Tahquitz.

One of the last things I told Ikse was that I promise to spread as much Ikse-flavored good in the world as I can. And so, in the spirit of that, I wanted to pass on this nugget of Ikse wisdom. They taught me that it's ok to admit when things are scary and hard, so next time you find yourself in a challenging situation, remember Ikse and give a little wee-woo. You might be surprised how much it helps you push through.