I CAN'T recall how the idea took root, but the notion that I would climb Kilimanjaro with my teenage daughter seemed as reckless as it was thrilling. We had done some training. Janet, 15, had never climbed anything substantial and her only exercise is a daily stroll to the school bus stop at the end of our road. Yet when I tested her resolve, warning her that climbing Africa's highest mountain would be the hardest thing she'd ever done, her response was emphatic: "That. I told my friends I was climbing a mountain and they said 'Yeah, right, I suppose it's Kilimanjaro' and when I said it was, they passed themselves, so now I'm determined to do it.'"

Kilimanjaro is awesome. On the day we arrived, its snow-capped peak towered above a shelf of cloud like a planet in space. I felt a surge of excitement and four hours almost six kilometres above sea level, it is the world's tallest free-standing mountain and it is high, wild and forbiddingly handsome. The first day of our six-day trek involved cutting an 11km path through the equatorial rainforest. We started at a brisk pace, taking time to marvel at some exotic Colobus monkeys, but were soon passing other climbers, only for our Tanzanian guides, Godfrey Moresi, 31, to pull us up. "Too fast! The trail (is) pole pole (slowly slowly)."

"How many times have you done this?" Jesse wanted to know. Godfrey boasted, "This is my 11th time." He told us that of the thousands who attempt the mountain annually, half (about 10,000) do not make the summit because of acclimatisation sickness. Despite the fact that Kilimanjaro can be scaled with our temporary equipment.

After six hours, we reached the first base camp — situated above the rainforest at 3,000 metres — and flopped down on our beds where we picked in to a surprisingly well-prepared hot dinner of coconut rice and fish cooked by our team of porters. Before we left, Jesse had protested: "I'm not having porters carrying my bags. Dad — it's like having slaves." I demurred but told her she was welcome to haul her own. But, once on the mountain, Jesse forged a touching bond with two porters and — full of gratitude for their efforts, carrying our tents, food and backpacks — never mentioned the subject again.

The second day of climbing, a steep ridge for six hours, to 4,000 metres, was gruelling. "I feel weak and dizzy," Jesse muttered within the first hour. I took her hand, encouraged her to drink regularly and fed her bits of energy bar.

We climbed like two old elephants, "pole-pole" and in silence. We stopped and rested regularly, making our way past the giant heather and on to the twisted volcanic rock of the alpine desert. Clouds wrapped around us, obscuring and then suddenly revealing spectacular views.

It was around then that I began to wonder whether I had made an awful mistake. Following the advice of our tour operators, I had chosen to tackle the mountain via the more demanding Machame route, shortened the Whistler route for its potential, intoxicating views. Although it is harder than the gradual Coca-Cola route, the extra day acclimatising can make the difference.

When David Cohen decided to climb Kilimanjaro with his 15-year-old daughter, even the porters believe she wouldn't make it.
Once we were at the summit, the view was breathtaking. We could see the entire world below us. It was a moment of pure joy. We took a moment to enjoy the view before packing up our tents and starting the journey back down.

The descent was much slower than the ascent, but still challenging. We had to be careful not to slip on the icy terrain. We took our time, enjoying the scenery as we went.

Finally, we made it back to base camp. We were exhausted, but happy. We had achieved our goal. We had climbed Kilimanjaro.

It was a moment of pure joy. We were all in tears as we celebrated our achievement. It was a moment we would never forget.