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## Getting a Good Grip (and Passing It On)

Rock climbers and youth coaches Stacey and Vikki Weldon

AS A CHILD, Stacey Weldon liked tagging along with her mom to pick up her big brother, Chris, from the climbing gym. Soon, Stacey was climbing the walls, and before long her younger sister, Vikki, was busting moves on plastic gym holds, too.

As the siblings began competing in local, regional, national and eventually international events as members of Canada's Junior Team, their younger brother, Michael, joined in. With four kids to accompany to events as far away as Scotland and Ecuador, parents Andy and Laurie Weldon laced up the climbing shoes and started learning the ropes as well—not just in the gym, but also of judging and organizing sanctioned competitions.

Now 23 and 19, respectively, Stacey (pictured, left) and Vikki (right) no longer compete on the Junior Team, but they share their experience by coaching younger climbers who have hopes of representing Canada at events such as the Youth World Championships (happening this month in Sydney, Australia, where Michael will compete in the Boys 16 – 17 category).

Last year, the International Olympic Committee decided to grant provisional recognition to the International Federation of Sport Climbing—of which Competition Climbing Canada (CEC) is a member—as the sole governing body for climbing on artificial surfaces, meaning competition climbing is one hold closer to being included in future Olympic Games, possibly as early as 2020.

up! spoke with Stacey and Vikki about the sport that's helped them—and their family—ascend through adolescence.

Your dad is director of the CEC, and your mom is an international judge for climbing competitions, a judging instructor and the rules coordinator for CEC. How does it feel to have your parents so heavily involved in your passion?

**Vikki:** I've always been really proud that my entire family climbs. And when my parents could understand what we were doing, it was so much better for them and for us. Climbing is like any sport, it's like tennis—it's not as much fun if you have no idea what's going on. When you understand, then you can say, 'Oh, you did really well,' and understand why.

**Stacey:** They work hard. They put in long hours. And my mom bakes a mean cookie—ask anyone who has ever been to a comp.

What has competition climbing brought to your lives?

**Stacey:** I think I got the travel bug! It's definitely amazing to have those kinds of experiences as a kid. It opens you up to a whole new world. You're meeting people and making friends, and I still have friends from all over the world. My favourite thing about competing is that I don't know of any other sport where the person you're competing against is cheering for you. You develop a healthy sense of what competition is.

**Vikki:** It was definitely unique in that not many people go to Bulgaria or Ecuador or Beijing. I got to meet lots of people from all over the world, I made a lot of best friends on the Canadian team, the coaches were awesome and those were the best experiences of my life.

Do you think climbing is a character-building activity?

**Vikki:** I definitely think so. It's taught me a lot about people in general, and about having fun, working hard and not giving up if you want something really bad.

**Stacey:** Absolutely. Climbing has made me who I am today. Among many things, it teaches you trust, compassion, a healthy competitive spirit and a lot about yourself. Completing a route you have been working on—and working on—is a hugely rewarding experience that I have a hard time comparing anything to. I feel I have a huge drive to succeed, but also the patience to do it right—no shortcuts. I believe this comes from climbing, from that feeling of working so hard to get to the top and finally doing it.

"I don't know of any other sport where the person you're competing against is cheering for you"  
—Stacey Weldon

Does climbing provide equal opportunities for girls who compete?

**Vikki:** As a sport, I think it's amazing—nobody is trying to separate boys and girls; everyone just climbs together. I think the message to girls is you can be strong, too. Just think about climbing and have fun. Physically, the reality is that women are behind men in grades [ratings that determine the difficulty of specific routes up a wall], but some women are just as strong in comps. And then there are women like Josune Bereziartu [the first woman to climb a 5.14b, an elite grading]. There definitely is a strength difference, but climbing is about movement, too, and girls can learn how to move really well.

**Stacey:** The only time I've ever seen unfairness was at a Canadian Bouldering Championships, where there were different amounts of prize money for male and female [winners]. Their justification was that they do it that way in other sports, so why not climbing? But that's not right—girls train just as hard as the guys do.

What do you think about climbing potentially becoming recognized as an Olympic sport?

**Stacey:** I'm kind of torn a bit. It would be more in the limelight with more politics involved, and that might take some of the fun out of it. I think it would be neat to see. I don't know how much it might change the climbing community, but it would be a good way to find out.

**Vikki:** It would be good for the Olympics to open up and have different sports, to be more open minded. Everything is evolving; the world is evolving. Climbing is an up-and-coming sport. If they accept it, it would be great for the community and great for the whole world. I think it's really exciting and climbing deserves to be there. It could be really fun to watch, too, if it's done right. If they make the moves exciting and the format good it could be really cool. I'm looking forward to seeing what happens.



## Where the Weldons Climb in Alberta

### Acepahle (Heart Mountain)

"It's got a burly hike to warm you up, and the rock is always in the shade, so you have nice cool temps for sending your projects." —Vikki

### Heart Creek (Heart Mountain)

"It's so easy and quick to get to, you can go after work and climb when it's light out, and there's such a great range of routes of all kinds of difficulties." —Vikki

### Back of the lake (Lake Louise)

"It's a beautiful area, with beautiful climbing on great rock."  
—Stacey