

THE NEXT ACT | LIFE STORIES

THE ALPINIST

Yuichiro Miura, 84

A glorious
view from
the top

THE JAPANESE FIRST CLIMBED – AND SKIED DOWN – MOUNT EVEREST AT 70. NOW, HE IS PLOTTING A FOURTH ATTEMPT OF THE WORLD'S HIGHEST PEAK AT THE AGE OF 90

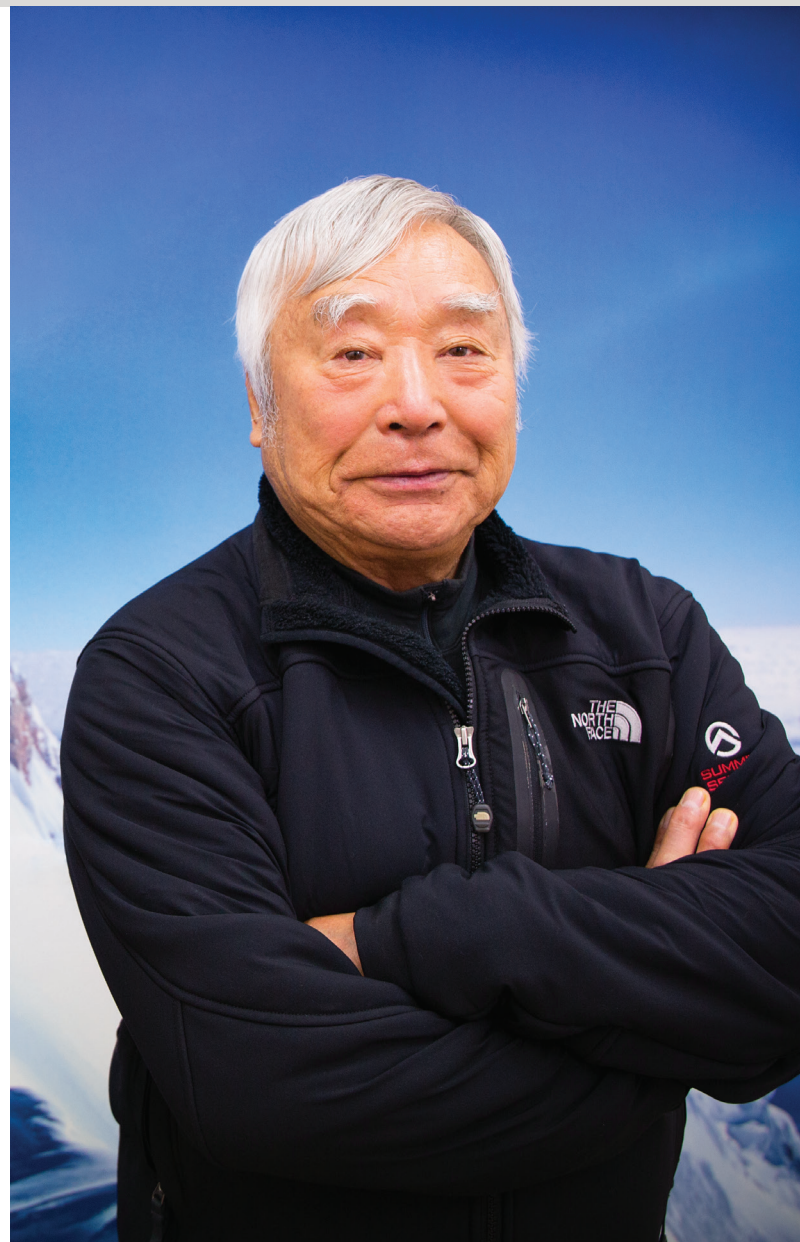
Testing the frontiers of the impossible – that's been my life in a nutshell. And Mount Everest has been the stage.

I was the first man to ski on the world's highest mountain in 1970. At age 70, I became the oldest man to climb Everest. I reached the summit again at 75, and once more four years ago at 80 – regaining my record.

Now, I have my eyes set on another ascent at 90. Whenever somebody has tried to do the thing that “couldn't be done” it has been called crazy. So, to attempt it – and succeed – becomes a source of pride.

My achievements actually followed a period of bad health. In my 60s, I saw myself as a fat old man. I was suffering from what you might call a mid-life crisis, after a failed attempt to enter politics. I lost motivation in life, and began eating and drinking too much. I grappled with diabetes.

The way I climbed out of that hole was seeing my father, Keizo Miura, ski Mont Blanc in his 90s. I wanted to surprise everybody by transforming



myself. That led to my ambition to climb Everest.

After my first ascent, I suffered some setbacks. I developed an irregular heartbeat and had to undergo two heart operations. I shattered my pelvis while skiing in 2009 and doctors told me I might not walk properly again. But I kept going, recovering to reach Everest's summit for a third time in 2013.

I have overcome adversity by continuing to dream. I'm always thinking of the next goal to achieve, the next dream to chase. The key to living life to the fullest – whether you are young or old – is to have a big challenge. One where you can say: if I can achieve this, I can leave the earth happy.

It is when you stop worrying about death that life wells up most strongly in your heart. The bigger your goals

and dreams are, the more you will be filled with what in Japan we call *ikigai*, or purpose in life.

I cherish life and treat myself well. That means a traditional healthy Japanese diet. Simple food from olden times in particular, seaweed, fermented soy-bean and nutritious miso soup.

But it's also important not to be too stoic. Treat yourself now and then. I'm famous for indulging in an enormous steak once a week.

The same goes for exercise. My regime can seem rather hard-going, even for youngsters. I have invented a training method called “heavy walking” in which I strap 5kg weights to my ankles and 10kg to

my back – and set off on long walks around Tokyo. That's the everyday regimen.

In April, I set off for some serious training in the Himalayas to prepare for my next big goal: skiing down Cho Oyu, the sixth highest mountain in the world, next year when I will be 85.

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This may sound like a lot of toil but I enjoy it. I relish testing myself to the limits. And enjoyment is one secret to a successful life. Having fun. A sense of play. I have always pursued the things that I enjoy. And more than anything in the world, I enjoy descending a mountain on a pair of skis.

In the end, however, the most important thing is family. Family gives life its positive meaning. It's the source of my energy and my spirit of adventure. I was blessed to have a father who kept skiing until he was 101. My son Gota, an Olympic freestyle skier, is also an inspiration. All my family have supported me in my endeavours, and we support each other.

This gives me the vigour – and the courage – to continue pursuing impossible dreams.

This is the latest in a series of profiles of individuals who are redefining later life that will appear in FT Weekend Magazine and at www.nextact.ft.com.

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