



Dave Graham

V16 boulderer, 5.15b route climber, former East Coast prodigy. FAs of ~700 boulders V11 and up, including a dozen V15s. Age 39, lives in Spain, Switzerland, and Colorado.

WE WERE LUCKY ENOUGH to be in the right place at the right time at Rumney [New Hampshire, in the late 1990s when a young Graham, Joe Kinder, and Luke Parady freed many of the area's 5.14s]. The old guard had just bolted a ton of really nice routes. As we climbed the existing routes, they told us to try the open projects. Rumney has a powerful, modern style; it gave me my rock-climbing base for life.

WHAT I'VE LEARNED FROM DEVELOPING BOULDERS is the timeless nature of climbing. It feels like a long time ago that I put up *The Story of Two Worlds* and *From*

Dirt Grows the Flowers [both V15s in Switzerland], in 2004 and 2005, and that a lot should have changed in 15 years. *Off the Wagon Sit*, *Ephyra*, *Poison the Well*—those are famous new V16s that were all projects of mine back then, too. And I never would have thought to grade them V16. I learned that our vision of what's possible can be very advanced.... The concept of "futuristic" is malleable, and really belongs in the eye of the beholder.

I'VE LOST SO MUCH ENERGY OVER someone downgrading my boulder because I *knew* it was personal. I would get so worked up. *They're trying to get me!* I'd think. But in reality, it's like, big deal: people try to get you sometimes. You can't let yourself hurt your own feelings: you can do a lot of damage. My art is my art. And my perception of grades is my perception. Other people can have theirs, but I'm pretty sure mine makes some kind of sense.

I TRIED LA RAMBLA [5.15a; SIURANA, SPAIN] back in the day. I belayed Chris Sharma when he sent it. I failed miserably. I felt like a disgraced samurai.... I created a lot of things in my head around that. Then I realized, *What am I trying to prove? And to whom?* Some 14-year-old kid will do it next week. Your motivation needs to be for you.

[ON CLIMBING HIS SEVEN-YEAR PROJECT *Hypnotized Minds* (V16; Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado) in 2019] I had one chance a year to try it [because of limited time in Colorado and changing conditions], and it felt like surfing a really hard wave, because of the way it breaks. It felt so elusive: I swore I could do it if I had reasonable, functional conditions. I wanted to give up and say, *Oh, I know I can do this thing.* But I knew that inside I *didn't* know if I actually could.

[AFTER SENDING HIS FIRST 5.15b/9b—*ALI HULK SIT EXTENSION, RODELLAR, SPAIN—LAST YEAR*] Now I want to try 9b+ and 9c!... These days I say, 'You don't know until you go.' After spending ten years working on my weaknesses, I'm rethinking what I can do. Maybe I can do better than I think. Your perspective of where you're at is just that—a perspective.

A FEW YEARS AGO, my father asked, 'How do you find the motivation and psych, after twenty years, to do the same thing every day?'

My answer was making music, The Island [a website and media company Graham founded], making films—things that aren't climbing. Recently, I discovered crystal hunting. There's an essential balance for the soul, for the spirit. To do one thing repeatedly *a muerte* will diminish your motivation. So strive for something [else] to put the same amount of energy into. That's hard for a lot of people. My problem now is that I'm really passionate about crystals, and sometimes I just want to look for crystals instead of climb!... I like to participate in this moment on Earth with these things that Earth created. It's the same as rock climbing, the same as music, but a different kind of eternal.