

Midwinter Madness

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It exists today only online, but in my childhood it was a popular destination for amateur skiers: the Underhill Ski Bowl, nestled at the foot of Mt. Mansfield, Vermont's highest mountain. The Bowl was open evenings, illuminated by primitive floodlights and the moon. And it was an affordable option in a time when skiing was beyond the budgets of most Vermonters.

My clearest memory of the Ski Bowl is the time my stepfather, Ned, made an epic descent of its main slope. This was in the early 1950s, probably on a Friday night, as Ned was wearing his office clothes. Ned had been, in his youth, a formidable all-round athlete. He'd played baseball and hockey in school, farm league baseball as an adult. He still negotiated a hockey rink pretty well, and he probably reckoned that skiing wasn't likely to pose much more of a challenge. He knew nothing, in other words, about traversing a slope to insure balance and safety.

Ned's adventure doubtless began with the tow-rope, the only lift in the Ski Bowl back then. Our mother was probably chatting with friends out in the crisp night air, my baby slope. Suddenly I was drawn from my pursuits by an audible gasp among those at the bottom of the hill. Seeing all heads turned toward the main run, I looked that way.

And there was Ned, trouser-legs flapping, hurtling down the hill. I mean straight down. Comments on all sides: "Darn fool." "Oinagoo." But on he came, undaunted. We all made way, assuming he knew no more about stopping than about turning. Somehow he reached the bottom without incident, but how he ended his ride I don't recall. Snowplow? Friction? In any case, we all released our held breath in unison.

Ned was chided amiably. "You could've killed yourself, fella." And there was no repeat performance. Presumably chastened, he went back to hockey. We girls learned to skate. And skiing fell—deservedly, I think—into benign neglect in our family.

The Shore in Winter

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Waters!
draw me to your edge..
liquid beacon
with glints of sunlight
lift from the horizon,
golden pathway leads
from sun to shoreline.
Soaking, soggy sand
lures me nearer
to the shore.
There is an exhalation
heard from soul
to soul each daybreak
On every beach
On this globe.
Bring us here...
Lull us by the lapping
water against our
feet, up our ankles,
shins, and calves
to creep inside
our senses.
Returning us again
to our watery births.
Once a year
in winter, I come to the shore
to breathe, to listen
And to heal.
Muse and Mother Waters
Reclaim your earth-bound soul.

sisters and I plying saucers on the

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with photo

Worst and Best Christmas

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1966 was a momentous year. I married my sweetheart in January, completed my senior year of college in June, found my first job in July, and learned I was pregnant in August.

It was the height of the Viet Nam war and my husband Daniel, recently drafted, went off to war shortly after the doctor told me we were pregnant. While my spouse guided fighter jets onto the flight deck of the USS Ticonderoga, I lived my life on the opposite side of the world in Mahtomedi, 'Minnesota, at my parent's home, sleeping in the same bed I'd known since 1947.

When we first learned we were pregnant we were both thrilled and scared at the same time. Were we capable of being parents when both of us still felt like newlyweds? Then my husband sailed away just as I was beginning 'to show.' Tearfully, we vowed to write daily and send recorded messages weekly on a small portable tape recorder.

The morning of December 21st dawned frosty cold as I began feeling twinges. I felt my first contraction at my weekly doctor appointment. A smile passed across his face as he said, 'Looks like today will be birth day. See you in the delivery room this afternoon.' Our baby was born at 8:23 PM that evening.

My father, the elementary school principal in my small hometown, knew the publicity director at the hospital. This gentle man visited me and saw my tape recorder and photo propped on my hospital bedside table. He asked my permission to put our 'great holiday story' in the local newspaper for December 25th. We all must have been a big hit because Christmas evening, the paper called asking permission to use the story on the national UPI feed. After that, our story ran nationally and Dan got over a hundred copies of our picture from all over the country. And to this day, my husband and I agree that the Christmas of 1966 was the worst and the best ever.