

## Daegan Learning to Ski

February 24, 2013

Hi Samantha,

The story of your Mt Washington ski trip got me thinking about your mother's first downhill experience. You might enjoy hearing about it – especially since Daegan turned out to be such a good skier.

When Daegan and JP were growing up they had plenty of opportunity to cross-country ski. However, when Daegan was about 16 years old and JP about 13 (1985) we decided it was time to succumb to their desire for downhill skiing. Fran dreamed up a week-long retreat and invited our friend Deena and her kids for a week at Smuggler's Notch during Christmas season. Both our kids were excited about the opportunity since they had a taste of downhill skiing and JP in particular, had expressed a strong preference for it over cross-country.

When we were settled into the resort we signed up both Daegan and JP for skiing lessons. It made sense that they should get an official introduction to the sport, rather than rely on our 'hay-wire' approach.

We got them on the ski hill the next morning – bright and early – because we wanted to have a couple of runs with them before the lessons so they could get a feel for the equipment and the hill. Fran and Daegan headed out to the chair lift for their first run.

To get to the beginner hill meant riding on the chairlift to the halfway point and disembarking on a specially constructed snow hill while the chair continued its journey to the top of the mountain. From the halfway point it was a pleasant and gentle glide down the open slope back to the lift.

As they were riding up the hill, Fran outlined the process of getting off the chair to Daegan (Daegan may have a different opinion about how thorough this was). "All you need to do is to stand up on your skis when we get to the slope for disembarking – then slide slowly down out of the way of the chair." she said. It seemed quite simple.



What Fran forgot to mention was that both people on the chair had to stand up at the same time otherwise the chair would swing sideways as a result of the shifting weight.

As they approached the jumping-off point, Fran raised the safety bar and got ready to stand up. In her eagerness to demonstrate, Fran was the first one up off the chair. Daegan hesitated to check out what Fran was doing – and the chair swung left as Fran's weight came off, placing Daegan directly behind Fran who was slowly gliding down the slope. As Fran cautiously skied down the slope she heard Daegan screaming behind her: "Get out of the way! Get out of the way!"

It was too late, however. The chair was already too high for Daegan to stand on the snow. All she could do was to scream at Fran below her – drowning out Fran's instructions to pull down the safety bar and wait for her at the top of the hill.

Deena and Eyal, who were following on the chair behind, got front row seats to the drama playing out before them. As they passed the halfway point, Fran called out – asking for their help to get Daegan settled at the top of the hill ‘til she could catch up. By the time my chair had passed, Fran was halfway down the beginner slope, but she still had time to get my attention and ask me to manage whatever I would find at the top of the hill.

My heart sank, since I knew that this could easily be the thing that turns Daegan off skiing. I could imagine all sorts of ways that a 16-year-old teen might swear off skis, lifts, boots, and snow in the face of such an event. It was even easier to do so when thinking of our headstrong daughter.

By the time I arrived at the top, Daegan and Deena were nowhere to be found. It made sense to me that they would have taken the easiest run so I headed off in search of them.

About a quarter of the way down the hill I could see Deena below standing at the side of the run – patiently waiting as Daegan got up from a fall. As I approached, I watched Daegan struggle to rearrange her skis, push herself up on her poles, brush the snow off her hat, coat, and pants, clean the snow off her glasses with her wet glove, and – with tears in her eyes – get ready for another attempt across the hill. I glided up to Deena and listened to her tale how Daegan insisted on going down without me, headed off down the blue-level slope, and fell her way down the mountain. She told me that this was about the 10th time Daegan had traversed the run, fallen, picked herself up, brushed herself off and headed back for the next fall – each time cursing at the equipment, the snow, the skiing, and refusing any advice that Deena may have offered in the process. I could see that Deena had just about reached the end of her patience (and tolerance of the cold) so I invited her to continue on down and I would take over the task of accompanying Daegan down the hill.

As Deena reported, the process was one of me giving advice, Daegan insisting she already knew about it – then gliding across the ski run, panicking as she approached the other side, falling in a flurry of snow, struggling to get up, clean herself off, get the snow off her glasses, find her ski poles, and position herself for the next traverse.

We followed this routine for about a half an hour before we finally got to the midway point and the beginner hill. At this point – in a fit of frustration—Daegan pointed her ski tips straight toward the bottom of the hill and let herself go!

Fran, who was waiting at the bottom of the run, reported to us later how she saw this snow-covered skier heading straight down the hill looking totally out of control. She was also filled with anxiety about the whole process, not because she felt that Daegan would injure herself, but in fear that Daegan would have nothing to do with skiing for the week we were away, or for that matter any time after. Fran was anticipating the miserable time that Daegan would have while the rest of us were skiing, and of course the misery she would give us for making her go through such a terrible experience.

By the time Daegan had slowed down at the base of the hill and slid to a stop, Fran was anticipating the worst. In trepidation she asked Daegan “How did it go?” To Fran’s complete amazement Daegan replied “That was fun, can we do it again?”

I guess skiing is like so many other challenging activities in life – like solving a frustrating puzzle, learning to play a guitar, or giving birth – if it all ends on a satisfying note, then the struggle, mistakes, and tears are quickly forgotten. We can all be thankful for that!

Love,

Bill