

## The Ski Ninja

by Marciana Castillo

Up here, I felt like the queen of the world, but instead of a crown, I wore a helmet, along with goggles, complete with my waterproof winter coat and snow pants. Up here, high above the ground, I was invincible. Up here, I could see the miles and miles of glossy snow, tainted by footprints and tracks that were left behind by speedy skiers and snowboarders.

I was sitting alongside my sister and god-sister on the chairlift, and my dad, aunt, and god-brother were on the one behind us, as we steadily approached the top of the mountain. We raised the safety bar on the lift, and braced ourselves to glide off the seat and onto the slush. It was a smooth transition off of the lift and onto the ground.

As the skiers waited for the snowboarders to strap in, I found myself peering down at the steep incline — the path that I would soon be taking. I marveled at the sight, as people were fearlessly racing straight down the mountain, past the all powdered, evergreen trees. Once the snowboarders were ready, they signaled us, and everyone began to move toward the edge of the slope, eager for the trip down.

I was the last one of the group to begin to go down, but I right as I was about to go, I stopped, noticing that my ski boot buckle was undone. It felt uncomfortable, making my foot sting, so I attempted to fix it. I wanted to make sure that I had it on correctly so that I could avoid any complications on my way down. After a few minutes of toying with it, the buckle finally clicked in, and I was finally prepared to begin my safe journey down the slope.

I could feel my adrenaline rush as I excitedly zoomed down the mountain. The wind viciously blew against my face as I surged down, and despite wearing a whopping total of three layers, my fast-paced movements instantly chilled my body. The slope was icier than usual,

likely because of the rain from the night before. Tightly holding onto my poles, I found myself making large “S” curves to carve into the ice with my skis to control my speed. I allowed my momentum to push me forward to coast down, steering out of the way of obstacles such as other people and ditches. I did not want this phenomenal feeling to come to an end, but I could feel the bottom of the mountain slowly approaching.

So in awe of the wondrous trip down the slope, I almost did not notice a snowboarder up ahead, lying on the ground. As I moved closer, I recognized my aunt standing with the snowboarder, and the rest of the group waiting a few feet further from them. I curved my skis into a “pizza” shape to halt, and realized that my dad was the snowboarder on the ground. As I inched nearer, I noticed a sea of red tinting the pure, white snow.

“I’m fine, I can snowboard down the rest,” I heard my dad say.

My aunt’s doctor senses kicked in, and almost instantly yelled, “You are not riding your board down the mountain. We need to get some help.”

My aunt formed her ski poles into an “X” on the ground, signaling that there was an emergency. A man passed by us, alarmed, and asked if he was okay. Frantically, my aunt replied, “No! He is NOT okay!”

Eyes wide from seeing the large gash on the side of my dad’s leg, he nervously expressed that he would go down toward the lift and alert someone for assistance.

Now it was a waiting game. After several minutes had passed, the ski patrol services arrived. My dad was lifted onto the gurney, and the snowmobile was off, carrying my dad behind them. Frightened, I skied down to reunite myself with the group, while my aunt followed the ski patrol with my dad.

I asked all of them if they had seen what had happened, but no one was entirely sure.

Everyone was shocked by the major turn of events. One second I was having the time of my life, and the next moment my dad was struggling to stand. Amongst the crazy frenzy, my aunt demanded that we go back to the ski lodge to ensure that we remained safe while she contacted my mom to accompany them to the hospital.

Once we arrived back at the lodge, we were all in shock from what had just occurred. After hours of waiting, the door of the lodge opened, and in came my dad on crutches, alongside my mom and aunt. We excitedly ran toward him, eager to find out what had happened and to see how he was doing.

We all found out that my dad was waiting for the group, kneeling up toward the mountain with his snowboard attached to his feet. A little girl somehow lost her control, causing her skis to collide directly with my dad, cutting through his layers of snow gear, and severely damaging his leg. The girl quickly skied away, and was gone before he knew what had happened, eerily similar to a ninja. To this day, we still do not know who injured him.

After a traumatic forty-minute drive to the closest nearby hospital, he was treated and stitched up. Every day, we are all so thankful that he managed to safely emerge from the incident. If the laceration had been a few inches deeper, or closer to his upper body, the situation could have been much worse.

Who knew that a peaceful day on the slopes could turn into such a dangerous and traumatizing experience? But from the experience, we all learned to never wait facing upward toward the slope, and most importantly, to do all things possible to avoid an encounter with a ski ninja.

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