

Energy Express: What slippery sports can teach us about living a balanced life

by Marilyn Preston

It didn't appear to be the wisest time to be taking a five-day ski vacation to Snowmass, Colo., even with a free and gorgeous place to stay. So much work to do. Bills to pay. Economic collapse to obsess over. And yet, it was the only time I had, so I grabbed it. Maybe I'll write a column about the importance of work-play balance, I told myself on the breathtaking ride through the Rockies. Write a little, ski a little, write a little, ski a little ...

"Is this what survivor's guilt feels like?" I found myself wondering the next morning, as I buckled up the sleek, black concrete blocks that pass for my ski boots. The world has gone Madoff, the banks are crumbling, everyone who has a job could lose it tomorrow, and I'm signing up for the one of the best ski school programs on the planet?

Ah — but this is why we ski, I wanted to shout to my small group instructor Kathryn, riding the gondola to the top of the mountain. We ski to face our fears, to work through our challenges, to be a better, stronger, less hysterical person off the slope as well as on it. Yes!

The question is not, dear reader, to ski or not to ski; the question is what precious healthy lifestyle lessons can we take home from the mountain?

Lesson 1: Fun Is Good For Your Brain. All work and worry, and no fun and frolic make for a very dull and uninspiring life. When you're sliding down a steep mountain on two skis, your mind becomes one-pointed, pretty much, and there's no time or space to remember what your Apple stock used to be worth, or how you're going to cover next year's tuition. From your mind's point of view, this time focused only on this present moment is a good thing, a healing thing. It stills the chatter and helps bring you back to clarity and balance. If you're not a skier, find your own path into The Fun Zone, and go there at least three or four times a week.

Lesson 2: It's OK To Go Slow. Going fast in sports is highly overrated. Why celebrate speed over grace, velocity over artistry? On day three at Snowmass, I woke up having invented a new sport. You've heard of the Slow Food movement? I am the founder of the Slow Skiing movement. It feels divine on any terrain, from bunny hills to the bumps. Sure, I can go fast, but why would I want to? Coach Kathryn — a gifted teacher from the Ski and Snowboard Schools of Aspen, who could tell me to stand up straighter in six different languages — understood completely. She knew of at least one high-performance speed racing ski team that trains in the off season by doing all their runs as slowly as they possibly can. So that's another little lesson that sticks with me after my time on the mountain: Be patient. Move more slowly. Rejoice in your surroundings.

Lesson 3: The Importance of Front-End Alignment. There were three of us improving our skills with Coach Kathryn, and Lisa was one. Mid-50s, mother of four, been skiing about 30 years, but always a nervous skier. Why? Because, as Lisa explained, she'd be going straight, and all of a sudden her skis would cross, and

she'd fall down. She had no idea what caused the problem, and no ski instructor had ever suggested a fix. And that's when this miracle on the mountain happened.

"I see what's wrong," said Kathryn, "you're pronating!" Most women do. Our wider hips tend to make our knees move inward as our legs bend, destabilizing our upper body and collapsing our feet. Coach K introduced Lisa to her ski guru Eric Ward, who custom-fitted her in a \$100 shim. Lisa's skiing was transformed overnight. "I feel grounded!" she screamed, on our very next run. So of course I got shimmed, too, and it made a big difference. For more information on Eric's innovative Sport Balance System (SBS) â€” a front alignment for balancing your feet, good for all sports and both sexes â€” visit www.footfoundation.com.

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"Eric's shim is the closest thing I have to a magic wand when it comes to improving someone's skiing." â€” Kathryn Rooney, the genius who got me down my first black run. Yahoo!

Marilynn Preston â€” fitness expert, personal trainer and speaker on healthy lifestyle issues â€” is the creator of Energy Express, the longest-running syndicated fitness column in the country. She welcomes reader questions, which can be sent to MyEnergyExpress@aol.com.

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