

Oregonauthor.com

Jon Remmerde

Published in *The Christian Science Monitor*

820 words

Learning to Cross Country Ski

We took care of Ash and Ingrid's ski shop in Sumpter part of that winter, and Ash gave us a good deal on used skis, boots, and poles.

My sister, Cheryl, skied down the hill as I carried my gear out to attempt to ski. She asked, "Do you need a skiing lesson?"

I said, "Yes, I do." On the snow-covered driveway, Cheryl showed me the push, glide, push, glide that gives the skier forward motion.

I tried it and found it simple and effective. Each glide forward was not much more effort than taking a step, but it carried me yards rather than feet.

I skied to the highway, up the shoulder of the highway, and up the first street. Cheryl called after me, "Don't you think you might need to know something else?" I thought I did, but I became so absorbed in the smooth, gliding movement, I thought all else would have to wait a while.

Sumpter's steep gravel streets hadn't been plowed. I crossed the slope and skied back down toward the highway on another street.

I sped over packed snow in golden winter sunshine. As I picked up speed, I thought had I lingered, Cheryl probably would have taught me how to turn and even how to stop.

Buildings blocked my view. If I kept rocketing down the hill, I would ski onto the highway without being able to check for traffic, so I dropped onto my back and kicked my skis up to keep them from tangling under me, hard to distinguish from, but more intentional than falling, and I stopped.

I skied back and found Cheryl again. We continued my skiing lesson.

Laura and I and our daughters lived in Whitney Valley, 13 miles over the mountain from Sumpter, a perfect place for skiing, with the meadow's gentle slopes for easy gliding, with a steep drop from bench ground onto low ground by the river, and with open ridges rising from the meadow for those who would achieve downhill speed. I skied parts of many days on

the meadow.

Amanda and Juniper and Laura finished school for the day when I left my skis on the porch and walked inside. I helped fix lunch, and we ate. Amanda said, "I'd like to ski. Can we all go skiing?"

"Sure." We walked north of the barn. Juniper and Amanda skied down the gentle hill several times.

They got tired of skiing. I made a small effort to push it. "If you practice more, you'll get better at it, and you'll enjoy it more."

Halfway down the hill, Amanda stepped off her skis. "I don't see the advantage of skis. Look. I can walk on the crust, and it's easier to walk than ski." Juniper left her skis and rolled down the hill in the snow. She stood up and stayed on top of the crust.

"I said, "You two are lighter than I am. I break through the crust. But one advantage of skis is, they're faster."

Amanda said, "Are you sure about that?"

"You go on foot, and I'll ski. I'll race you to the river, and we'll see." She started before I was ready, but I had planned to give her a head start anyway, so I wouldn't win by too wide a margin. However, as I started down the hill, her lead continued to grow. I reached the bottom of the hill and skied hard, but I didn't gain much on her.

She stopped on the bank above the river and turned to greet me. She glowed with victory. "What took you so long? I thought you said skis were faster than running."

"I thought they were. I had no idea you could run so fast. You must have eaten so many carrots for lunch they turned you into a rabbit."

Juniper and Amanda slid down a high bank onto the river ice again and again. Sunshine warmed us. We left outer clothing hanging in willow bushes. We walked together on the hard surface of the river above our summer swimming holes and above shallow crossings. We scattered out and sought four different visions of winter in Whitney Valley.

We gathered together again as the sun dropped toward the mountains. Winter cold cut through the warmth of late sunshine. We walked on the river upstream. We picked up and put on jackets, gloves and scarves as we went. Behind us, we left ski tracks, footprints, and the marks of someone rolling in the snow. We walked up the hill and around the barn and into

the house.

We cooked dinner on the wood-fired cookstove as the sun set. The moon rose, huge and winter-white above eastern mountains. The winter day had nourished us as much as the hot food we ate.

Moonlight and moonlight reflecting from snow shone in the windows and supplemented the soft golden glow of light from kerosene lamps.