

## Fire and Ice

by Danielle Mott

People of all ages fill the room. A young boy on rollerskates, parents searching for their children, coaches resolving last minute problems, excited athletes, exhausted athletes, all of us trying to prepare ourselves for the last rollerski of “Fire and Ice,” a week long, summer cross-country ski camp. My friend Taya and I lay on the floor attempting to summon up an ounce of energy. I ran through the last minute details in my head. Do I have water, food, extra clothes, skis, ski boots, poles? Yes, all there. Now, it was simply a matter of getting out there and doing it. Twenty-eight hot, hilly, hard kilometers lay ahead of us.

Then, the voice of Dan, the camp leader, splits through the cacophony of the crowd, “Let’s go everyone. Into to the vans.” The crowd surges toward the small door. I’m swept along in the mess of people and stumble out the door. We all hop into unmarked, white vans and drive towards the starting point.

As we trundle along the backroads of central Oregon, I wonder “What have I gotten myself into?” After a week of hard exercise, no sleep, and socializing I’m in no condition to be rollerskiing for hours. The van stops in the middle of a dry, thin forest of pine trees, and I stagger out. I reluctantly clip on my retro-colored skis, put on my poles, and began slogging.

The first few kilometers aren’t bad. The movement works the stiffness and tiredness out of my limbs. Taya and I make small talk about the weather, the adventures of the past week, and food. On a side note, Nordic skiers love food and the very thought of eating will keep us going for many miles. Anyway, we glide along and slowly fall into silence. All we hear is the click clack of our poles against the warm pavement and the chirp of the summer birds in the tall trees. We’re pleasantly surprised by the rolling-ness of the road and the gentle breeze. I say to Taya “This won’t be so bad.” Spoke too soon.

We turn another corner and catch a glimpse of the next section. The gradual terrain transforms into a curvy, hilly mess. “Oh no,” we groan. To make matters worse, I look over my shoulder and see the youngest kids in the camp followed by the support van right behind us. This means out of the 70 kids skiing up to Mt. Bachelor, Taya and I are the last ones. Several small children zoom right by us, leaving us dead last. From then on everything falls completely apart.

Our prostration is heightened by the stifling heat, our severe dehydration, and our growling stomachs. My tangy fruit bar is long gone and I find myself wishing for anything to eat. I ration my water and only allow myself to take little sips every 10 minutes. Taya and I’s cheeriness has completely disappeared. We sink into a black mood and I find myself needing to keep my mouth firmly shut to prevent all my negative thoughts from rushing out. We talk about quitting. We agree that as soon as we reach an intersection, we will stop. The intersection connecting to the desolate highway comes and goes, and we continue climbing. Neither of us could quite force ourselves to give up.

After about two hours, I begin to notice the rapidly changing weather. The cloudless blue sky has transformed into one rumbling black cloud. The pleasant breeze has switched to a cold wind hurling snowflakes at us. Stopping is no longer an option. If we were to halt, we’d have to wait potentially an hour for the van. I’m only wearing a sports bra and shorts. I’d freeze if we stopped. I gather a few ounces of energy I never knew I had and continued on. Up ahead,

we see a few girls. I'm reassured that we're not the only ones still on this cursed mountain. We sprint to catch up to them and we're greeted by smiles and encouraging words. It's amazing how much a couple happy people can change my mood. From then on I realized I can do this. By then the road has reverted back to its rolliness and the miles seem to zip by. I glance up to see a green sign proclaiming "1 mile to Mt. Bachelor Ski Lodge." All of us scream in excitement. We zoom ahead and after a couple minutes I see a quaint little log cabin.

I rip off my skis as quick as I can and sprint inside. Everyone else is inside enjoying the warmth. Someone is strumming along on a guitar as a couple kids sing along. Most kids are wearing a clean, dry clothes. People mill around and chat easily. I even see a couple guys heading outside with portable hammocks. They must have decided to spend cold, windy night outside in the trees. Everyone, except us, appears rejuvenated after their rollerski.

It turns out most skiers only skied for an hour or two and then rode the rest of the way up in the van. A little bit of pride fills my body. We were part of a small minority that skied all the way. I collapse onto my fluffy sleeping bag, after changing my soaking clothes, and smile to myself. We're here, finally.

The next morning we drive back down to Bend. I'm ready to have a three course meal and a two hour nap, yet I'm filled with a deep satisfaction. We did it. We persevered when it was hard, and laughed when it was fun. I unlocked another part of myself. I realized I can push myself mentally and physically much farther than I ever thought.