

VINTAGE

THE AMERICAN FILM INSTITUTE MAKES SURE THAT THE MOVIES YOU LOVE ARE FOREVER PRESERVED FOR POSTERITY

Marilyn Monroe and Tom Ewell in *The Seven Year Itch*



› FEBRUARY 15, 2013

AMERICAN WAY

AMERICAN AIRLINES + AMERICAN EAGLE



Turn your wall decorations into fiscally sound

INVESTMENTS

New Mexico's winter wonderlands are no longer a skier's secret

LAND OF

ENCHANTMENT

TWICE MONTHLY

Good Advice, Part Two

ONE YEAR AGO to the day, I published a column called “Good Advice,” where I conveyed the sage instruction of my local ski-shop owner/psychiatrist, Rick Holliday. I’d often visit him at Ski Frisco Sports in suburban Dallas and seek his Yoda-like guidance on how to get my family to espouse my passion for skiing come wintertime, when all my wife and daughters really want to do is go plant themselves in the sand somewhere. He’d take notes from behind the counter while I lay prone on the shop’s floor, staring at the ceiling and discussing my feelings of failure and utter embarrassment because all my previous attempts to convince everyone to dress warm and strap sticks to their feet proved futile. Rick cured my wife and kids’ recreational ills by instructing me to take them to Vail — immediately.

It worked. I successfully indoctrinated my spouse and brood into the world of alpine skiing while living the high life at the playground of the rich and famous. And because they were already successfully indoctrinated last year, I wanted to plan this year’s ski odyssey on a stricter budget. At the same time, I didn’t want to sacrifice quality. When assessing where to go, I took last year’s notes from Rick and applied them to all the ski resorts in the U.S.

For starters, the resort needed a world-renowned ski school. I didn’t need Rick to point out that if the ski instructors created a bad experience, all of that hard Vail work would come undone, and my family would never ski again.

Where to begin? I knew whom I wanted to ask, but because an integral part of completing my ski therapy was to come out from under the oh-so-feathery wing of my local ski-shop owner/psychiatrist, I needed to make this decision on my own. Luckily, I had to go no further than a draft of our cover story about New Mexico skiing by New Mexico author Steve Larese (page 40).

I’d visited New Mexico before, including during the winter, and I considered it to be an Arizona-esque, handsome-

escape-from-the-cold retreat. But I had absolutely no idea that skiing was as much a part of the culture as kachina dolls. As with most every story in *American Way*, however, I learned something. And as with all travel stories in *AW*, when I was done reading, I had a laser-focused desire to go. I studied all of the resorts in the Land of Enchantment and chose the toughest mountain of them all: Taos.

In skiing circles, Taos is widely considered to be one of the most challenging mountains in the U.S. Yet, in an ironic twist of fate, it also has one of the best ski schools for all levels, including super beginners like my 4-year-old and my 6-year-old, and super, super beginners, like my wife (sorry, honey).

Just as in Vail, I enrolled Kimberly and my daughters in ski school — the girls in group lessons, which they loved because they were with similarly overstimulated children, and Kimberly in private lessons because no one likes to be klutzy in front of strangers (I’m really, really sorry, honey). She was paired with Tom Jackman, or as I like to call him, Professor Tom, from the Ernie Blake Snowsports School.

Professor Tom is one of us: a Midwesterner who cut his teeth skiing a landfill in Michigan, not dissimilar from my own skiing background on a landfill in Ohio. He was talented, knowledgeable and, above all, patient (honey, let this serve as



a standing apology). He had the chops to be an instructor anywhere in the country — probably anywhere in the world — but he chose a corner of northern New Mexico as his home. But why?

“Taos is a special place,” he says. “The ancient culture of the Native Americans and Hispanic community place it outside the mainstream. Likewise, the artistic and alternative aspects were a draw. And as a ski instructor, I sought out the best ski school in North America.”

As for Kimberly’s progress?

“Day One was a long one,” he says (now it’s Tom’s turn to apologize, honey). “Day Two we focused on technique, with Kimberly questioning the movements and thinking hard about what to do. By Day Three, everything was clicking. We had established a good degree of trust and confidence. Repetition and mileage on familiar terrain allowed her to have fun while her skiing improved by leaps and bounds.”

While this was happening, I was one happy powder hound, getting a tour of the mountain and an impromptu lesson along the way by local legend Chris Stagg. But the most memorable part of the trip was Hotel St. Bernard and the friendships we fostered there. The hotel is of modest presentation, more akin to a 1960s Bavarian mountain hamlet than a 21st-century American power lodge. All the accommodations were rustic, all the meals communal, and all the guests like-minded and family-oriented. I’m sure we made lifelong friends over the three days with Santa Fe locals Andrew and Monique Jacobson and their boys: Drew, 7; Reid, 5; and Brody, 10 months.

One year ago, my wife and kids cut their skiing teeth in Vail. Their second time was in Taos. One resort was the plutocratic yin to the other’s yeoman yang. But both ensured that the Pitluk family will be skiing again; both can ensure that your family will be skiing together for years to come. Please take my advice.

Adam Pitluk
ADAM PITLUK
Editor

-  **Want to talk to Adam?**
Reach him at editor@americanwaymag.com
-  **Want to sign up for email**
notification of Adam’s column or to read his past columns? Visit www.americanwaymag.com/whatsnew