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The Ski for Light Equation: (Skills + Sharing) * Enthusiasm = FUN by Christine Faltz

Eija Jacobsen is originally from Finland and, while not quite born wearing skis, she was introduced to cross-country skiing at the age of four. Yet, after applying to be and accepted as an instructor/guide for an international weeklong cross-country skiing event, she was "terrified."

Eija is an excellent skier and certainly knows how to demonstrate and teach the fundamentals of the sport. So why the fears and insecurities? She knew her pupil for the week would be blind.

Her pupil turned out to be Tom Torvie, a visually impaired resident of Anchorage, Alaska. Eija and Tom joined 110 other guide/skier pairs as participants at the 2003 Ski for Light (SFL) event.

Ski for Light is an all-volunteer, nonprofit organization founded in 1975. Its mission is to make available physical fitness opportunities to blind, visually or mobility impaired adults in an environment where "we can't" is replaced with "we can." Sighted guides are paired with disabled skiers for the week and together they decide how long, how often and on what type of terrain they will ski. First time guides are paired with experienced skiers while first time skiers are paired with more experienced guides.

"I knew all about SFL and I finally decided it was time to stop procrastinating and do something different, do something for someone else and share the fun of skiing." Eija says. This determination did not prevent Eija from feeling extremely nervous.

Turk Ellis, another first time instructor/guide, recalls "I knew that I loved to ski and I've always enjoyed passing on this passion to anyone willing to give it a try. But this was so very different. I didn't know if I was capable of guiding a blind skier."

Those fears were put to rest for Eija and Turk by the end of their first meeting with the guide trainers, pairs of seasoned skiers and guides who train the new guides. Both also had the opportunity to talk with other "rookies" who shared the same fears. By the end of their daylong training session Eija and Turk had mastered the necessary communication skills and guiding techniques and were ready to hit the trails with their skiers the next day.

"Tom was very understanding and forgave me my lack of experience." Eija laughs. "In the beginning, I would tell him 'Tom, we're coming to a hill,' and he would tease 'Yes, Eija, it would help to know if that's uphill or downhill?'"

"Eija was always cheerful, even when the weather and snow conditions did not merit such behavior," Tom grins. "At times Eija was the voice of reason as she would suggest breaks at good times or allow skiers of greater ability to ski ahead of us on difficult terrain. Although," he reflects, "I never imagined my voice of reason would have a Finnish accent!"

wasn't always clear who was the guide." smiles Eija. "Ski for Light is about sharing the experience of skiing, having fun, growing and learning. It was not so much my being Tom's eyes; it was Tom guiding me with such ease that I was finding new

"I have never felt so alive and so important and yet so small," echoes Turk. "I went to SFL to ski, to do something for someone other than myself. I came away with so much more. It was truly a life-changing experience."

If you are a strong, confident, classic cross-country skier, or if you are a blind, visually or mobility impaired individual who is interested in skiing, please consider attending the 29th Ski for Light week from February 8 - 15, 2004, in Green Bay, Wisconsin. Attendees will stay at the Radisson Hotel & Conference Center and ski at the Brown County Reforestation Camp. For applications and additional information please contact Brenda Seeger at 507-274-5502 or brenda@sfl.org or visit www.sfl.org.

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Experience Ski for Light Close to Home: Attend a Regional Program!

If you're interested in seeing what Ski for Light, Inc.® is all about but you can't make it to the annual week-long event (or you just can't get enough of a good thing!), give your nearest Regional a try. Regionals are similar in structure to SFL but are shorter, generally held over a weekend. Regionals are being held on various dates January through March (many Regional programs are also active year-round) and include:

Black Hills Regional Ski for Light

25th Anniversary
January 25 - 29, 2004
Deer Mountain Ski Resort, Deadwood, South Dakota
Cost: \$190 (Scholarships are available)
Web site: <http://www.bhskiforlight.org>
Telephone: 605-341-3626
Contact: Don Theye
Email: artpimp1@rap.midco.net

Colorado Regional Ski for Light

January 23 - 25, 2004
Snow Mountain Ranch, Granby, Colorado
Contact: Dave Thomas
Email: yourdama@ecentral.com

Michigan Regional Ski for Light

January 23 - 25, 2004
Web site: <http://www.msfl.org>
Contact: Jim Ellickson
810 West Park Street
St. Johns, Michigan 48879
Telephone: 989-224-8288
Email: ellickson@voyager.net

Montana Regional Ski for Light

March 24 - 28, 2004
West Yellowstone, Montana
Cost: \$248 pp./do.; \$360 pp./so.; \$90 pp./single day
Contact: Ed Durbin
Telephone: 406-538-7151
Email: tedurbin@midrivers.com

New England Regional Ski for Light

Cross-Country Skiing/Snowshoeing
January 9 - 12, 2004
Craftsbury Outdoor Center, Craftsbury Common, Vermont
February 27 - 29, 2004
Royalty Inn/Great Glen Trails, Gorham, New Hampshire
Web site: <http://www.nersfl.org>
Contact: NERSFL
P.O. Box 2170
Brattleboro, Vermont 05303



Ski for Light, Page 3

Telephone: 781-667-9270

Email: info@nersfl.org

Northeast Pennsylvania Regional Ski for Light

January 25 - February 1, 2004

Land of the Vikings, Sherman, Pennsylvania

Contact: Bjorg M. Dunlop

Telephone: 518-731-8741

Email: bjorgmd@aol.com

Puget Sound Regional Ski for Light

January 10 & 24, February 7 & 21, March 6 & 20, 2004

Total cost for the season is \$60

Trollhaugen Sons of Norway Lodge, Erling Stordahl Snow Park

Stampede Pass, Washington

Contact: Maida Pojtinger

Telephone: 253-631-7904

Email: rmpoj@aol.com

Sierra Regional Ski for Light

March 13 - 15, 2004

Tahoe/Donner Cross Country, Truckee, California

Web site: <http://www.srsfl.org>

Contact: Betsy Rowell

Telephone: 916-362-5557

Email: montbets@pacbell.net

Wisconsin Regional Ski for Light

January 23 - 25, 2004

Wisconsin Lion's Camp, Rosholt, Wisconsin

Contact: Bev Helland

10168 Amber Trail

Edgerton, Wisconsin 53534

Telephone: 608-884-4955

Email: bhelland@madison.k12.wi.us

Ski for Light Canada

February 9 - 15, 2004

Kamloops, British Columbia

Web site: <http://members.shaw.ca/sflcanada>

Contact: Annar Jacobsen, President

Telephone: 604-826-4559

Email: annar@telus.net

As with SFL, no prior experience with visually or mobility impaired people is necessary. If you're confident on skis, you can share your love of the outdoors by being a Guide.

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