

First season snow reporter

Adrift in dreams of grandeur

By Sheryl Bussard

What delirium inspired me to become a snow reporter at Schweitzer Mountain Resort last winter? To *voluntarily* set my alarm every Friday and Saturday for 2:30 a.m. throughout the ski season, braving the lonely cold so *you* would know the conditions?

It wasn't the big fat paycheck, I can tell you that. Nor was it the employee discount in the Schweitzer Village shops. In fact, I spent more than I earned on Spyder and Helly Hansen apparel in order to soothe the raging shopping goddess within and take full advantage of my employee "savings." It wasn't even the free employee season pass, though there *is* the status that comes with flaunting your employee ID badge when swiping the time clock.

Admittedly, I had my doubts. Like being the first to drive the nine miles of unplowed switchbacks up to the resort. Having moved here from Laguna Beach, I wasn't exactly accustomed to winter driving challenges.

"Oh, it's not so bad," said my soon-to-be boss Patrick Sande during our interview. "Your insurance is paid up, right? And you have four-wheel drive? An emergency roadside kit? Then you'll be fine. Just allow an extra hour, take some blankets, and be sure to charge up your cell phone."

And what about my *real* job? I figured I would wrap up by 9:30 a.m. and be back at my laptop before my clients ever caught on that I was seeking greater fame and fortune up on the mountain.

That's why I did it, of course. For the glory. The chance to be a celebrity. Yes, being a snow reporter would be the start of My Next Big Thing. A small jump, I imagined, from snow reporting at Schweitzer Mountain to leading a primetime news team. Better watch your back, Katie Couric. I envisioned

a devoted radio audience, a loyal Web following, and the usual celebrity stuff: public appearances, TV interviews, movie offers, snow groupies.

Never mind that it would be only my second season of skiing and that I'd just begun to brave blue square runs without throwing up. Undaunted, I vowed to become the consummate snow reporter. I'd learn the lingo. I'd entertain. I'd inform. But I would never, ever, use the term "bullet proof" when describing surface conditions. No sirree, that directive was underlined and bolded in the snow reporter manual.

In preparation for my new career, I researched snow terms and weather phrases. As it turned out, I needn't have worried about such technical issues. "Would you say it's mostly sunny or mostly cloudy?" I'd poll the other members of the marketing team once they strolled in at 7 a.m. "Are these snow *flurries* or *flakes*?"

At 4:30 a.m. it *is* lonely at the top, beautifully so. I carved my own first tracks through the village, sometimes in fresh powder up to my thighs, as I made the morning trek to our highly specialized scientific snow measuring equipment, aka The Snow Stick.

Alas, being a snow reporter wasn't quite as glamorous as I had imagined. There were copy machines to unjam, phone messages to record, Web sites to update, and e-mails to write. *With no assistant to bring me a caffe latte.*

Looking back, I'm pretty sure I enthralled my three loyal Web devotees with such bon mots as *Snowly moly! ... We'll cross that cat-track when we come to it! ...* and my favorite, *Let's not make a mountain out of a mogul!*

Other days I fancied quotes that were blatantly self-referential:

To be great is to be misunderstood.



The author basking in the glory of her first (and possibly last) season as a snow reporter

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—Ralph Waldo Emerson

And some were pretty much for no reason at all:

The snow doesn't give a soft white damn whom it touches.

—E.E. Cummings

Traditionally, the snow reporter winds up his or her shift with one last bit of pomp and circumstance: the ringing of the opening bell. This is a pretty big deal, especially to hardcore skiers who keep a tally on the number of days skied each season and pride themselves on being *first chair*. Standing under the clocktower, radio in hand, I'd cock my head and listen attentively to the pre-opening check-offs and behind-the-scenes banter. Finally, I'd hear my cue: "Dispatch to Bell Ringer, do you copy?" *If* the update from Dispatch met with my educated approval, I'd give the bell a few powerful pulls. Or allow some kid the honor of doing it for me.

Bitter as I may have been that the *CBS Evening News* didn't discover me, I do run into fans from time to time who inadvertently gush (while I'm signing autographs) about how addicted they were to my snow reports. So there you have it — fame or no fame, there's no business like snow business. And in my case, the legendary Mac West couldn't have said it better: *I used to be Snow White, but I drifted.* ❄️