

on skiing

Legacy

BY EDIE THYS MORGAN

"ALL SNOW IS GOOD SNOW," MY father, Buck, would say. The subtext of Dad's catchphrase was that your worst day of skiing is better than your best day of doing pretty much anything else. The nuanced message within that depended on its use.

First of all, his very declaration that "All snow is good snow" implied that there was something better than the current offering. For Dad that gold standard was powder. Specifically the "unbroken," and more specifically champagne powder at the top of the Inbacks in Jackson Hole, in late January or early February.

"All snow is good snow" was often deployed to preempt mutiny in challenging conditions. It said, "There will be no whining from you...or you or you or you!" As weekend warriors, we did not have the luxury of picking our days on the slopes. I can only imagine the agita from mobilizing four kids to be on snow every weekend morning. Whining would not have helped.

"All snow is good snow" was a "Love the one you're with" philosophy, urging my siblings and me to appreciate the attributes of every kind of snow: Sierra cement for taming steeps; sheer ice for learning control; and treacherous crud for improving balance. This mantra extended beyond snow to things like weather and even company walking into our Squaw Valley home. Mom and Dad welcomed every wayward skier who showed up on their doorstep at "Hotel California," where ski talk covered the rent for visitors.

Perhaps most powerfully, "All snow is good snow" was an affirmation that we were made of strong stuff. It was a verbal wink in a tense moment that said, "I know



you can do this, because you're a true skier. You're in the tribe."

About a year ago Buck, at 85, took his last run, down KT at Squaw onto the locker-room deck, where he collapsed in cardiac arrest. It was a fitting exit for a man whose greatest pleasures were skiing, watching skiing, and talking about skiing. That does help me come to terms with the loss, but it doesn't stop me from wishing he'd had one more season, especially this season, which has strangely (cosmically?) conspired to be an epic one.

This bittersweet interplay of wistfulness and gratitude started at Buck's memorial last spring, when friends gathered to take a "Run for Buck" from the top of Squaw. The run morphed into a massive people-slalom, where friends and relatives wove together, grins wide, in a constant procession of joy down the hill. I could imagine Buck smiling while clipping my tails to take the fastest line.

Shortly thereafter came word that Squaw would host a World Cup (!) this season. For a man who banked serious hours following every level of ski racing on television, Live-Timing, and Sprongo, having a World Cup finish in view of his locker would have been momentous. He could have discussed it all with one of the finest coaches in the land, who's bunking at Hotel California this season.

On top of all that, an East Coast grandchild may finally race at Squaw this season, and his snowboarding grandchild has come back to two planks. Officially now, when it comes to skiing, all of Buck's kids and grandkids fall somewhere along the continuum from merely enthusiastic to pathologically obsessed.

Just before the season started, the revised Squaw Valley Master Plan assured preservation of the locker room. Dad would have celebrated this news mightily because that was his sacred space. The best part of the best days began and ended among his locker-room neighbors.

Damn! This year of planetary alignment seems a cruel irony, but maybe that's the way it rolls: When we've lived a good life, we always want one more year, or one more run. The experiences of this season make me miss Buck even more, but the privilege of enjoying them also makes me smile. That privilege—membership in the skiing tribe—was his gift to our family. Someday, when my kids tell their kids that "All snow is good snow" they won't just be making a statement. They'll be passing on a legacy. *

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