

SKI LIFTS

By Andrew A., Altadena, CA

I walked through the snow and sat down on one of the two seats of the old, red ski lift and thought, "If only someone could break open that door and pick the lock to start the engine again, I would be able to get to the top." It was Christmas day, and I was revisiting Mt. Waterman, a closed down ski resort near my house, with my dad. I felt nostalgic as I sat on the cold, unmoving chair. Earlier that day, I had attempted to hike to the top, but I had given up after about 300 yards of trudging up the steep, icy slope.

Nine years ago, I had sat on one of these simple, two-person chairs when I first learned how to ski. Except that time, they actually moved. That time, the skiers there were as big as giants were, and the slope that lay before me looked a lot scarier than it did now. About seven years ago, Mt. Waterman closed and the lifts became as still and silent as if they were dead. My dad said that there probably wasn't enough snowfall at Mt. Waterman to attract enough skiers, and that the owners would be losing money by continuing to operate the lifts.

This was the first lift that I had ever been on, and while I was away from it, I had ridden a myriad of other lifts in more than 30 different ski resorts. On ski lifts, I have encountered and talked to many people from all over the world and have learned through quick two-to-five-minute conversations about many people's families, occupations, home-towns, moods, ideas, special traditions and holidays. I have crossed paths with many different characters on my lift rides: I have sat with some people who would jabber on and on enthusiastically when I ask them a question, and I have met others who would simply grunt or mumble a terse reply.

Sitting on ski lifts, I have seen the most beautiful forests at Lake Louise, jagged cliffs at Squaw Valley, best skiers at Mammoth, highest peaks in Switzerland, icy rivers at The Canyons, picturesque panoramas at Heavenly, and undergarments hanging from trees at Vail. I remember the experience of swaying on a ski lift in a horrible blizzard at Whistler, discovering hidden trails at Cypress Mountain, and feeling the coldest temperatures at Marmot Basin in Canada.

High above the ground, on ski lifts, I have spent many memorable times with my parents and friends. We can talk and laugh now about funny moments like the time I didn't unload at the top of the lift and almost rode the chair back down, or the dramatic incident in which my dad and I were thrown off the chair a few feet after we loaded.

In the last nine years of riding ski lifts at, and away from Mt. Waterman, ski lifts have taken me to see the beauty of forests, snow, mountains, and all the people with whom I share a common interest with: Skiing (or snowboarding). The lifts treat everyone equally; their only job is to take skiers and snowboarders up mountains without a care for who their passengers are, what they say, or how they treat each other. Every summer, better new ski lifts are made, creating more room for further travel through a different world.

And there I was, sitting on a chair at Mt. Waterman. I saw no beautiful forests, nor any jagged cliffs, no peaks, no rivers, no skiers, nor any hanging undergarments around.

Just the lift, where it all began. Reluctantly, I climbed down from my perch on the chair, and made my last, hopeful effort to hike up to the top.