

BLIZZARD BONDING

Mountainside Memories

By Peggy Newland

When you have a 'tween daughter, sometimes you just have to get away. Together. Conversations from home—of math homework, making beds, clearing the table, setting the alarm—need to be replaced occasionally with escape. With an 11 year old quickly growing up, I wanted to savor some time alone, just she and I in the mountains, not far from the Seacoast of New Hampshire. Laughter and hot chocolate and long strolls along snow covered sidewalks, perhaps a cross-country ski over fields seemed to be the perfect bonding experience ...

Courtesy of the Christmas Farm Inn

But how do you keep a busy girl occupied and still keep your sanity as a mother? You take your daughter on a "Blizzard Bonding" vacation to the shopping mecca of North Conway and find lodging in the tranquility of Jackson, New Hampshire.

"But it'll be minus 10 degrees this weekend," my daughter, Haley, says.

"You can skip school in the afternoon," I suggest, wanting to be off the roads by dusk.

"Cool."

Yes, it will be.

The Christmas Farm Inn in Jackson is everything a winter lodge needs to be. There are fireplaces, nooks and crannies, and fine dining in a comfortable space full of families. Upon our arrival, we

are welcomed with hot tea and fresh chocolate chip cookies and the fireplace is warm and, well, welcoming. Outside, the wind howls and ice is forming in crystal columns past the windowsills, but inside there is laughter. One guest has been coming ever year for 23 years and he gets an honorary Fire Marshall medal each time he arrives.

"There's an old abandoned ski resort just behind the inn," Dana, the manager, tells us. He is a mountain man in his down vest and long mustache and my daughter asks him question after question.

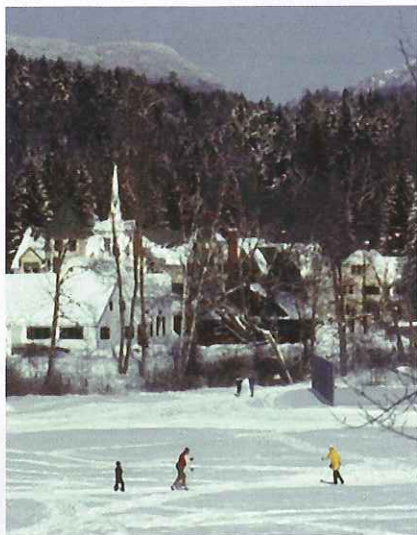
"Can we ski to it?" she asks me.

"Sure," I tell her. It looks like we'll be bonding tomorrow in a snowstorm. Skiing up Tyrol Ski Area.

The next morning, we stuff ourselves with a gourmet breakfast very unlike our usual fare of cereal and toast. After excessive amounts of coffee for me, we're ready to discover deserted wilderness of Tyrol Ski Area. I'm expecting grown over trails, scrappy trees, and rusted equipment, but what we find is a dreamland of white fluff and a vaulted ceiling of pine. The Graustein Loop climbs from just behind downtown Jackson Village to the abandoned ski area. In its prime,

Tyrol had a vertical drop of 1,000 feet and a variety of terrain which included four novice trails, six intermediate trails, and four expert trails. I can hardly keep up with my 11-year-old daughter. It drops through series of downhill back to Village Trail with an elevation differential of 190 feet and it's the perfect adventure. Almost like discovering a hidden gem or a lost tomb.

"Why don't they keep the old trails going?" Haley asks. She researches all the abandoned ski resorts in New Hampshire, making lists and compiling ones she'd like



Courtesy of the Christmas Farm Inn

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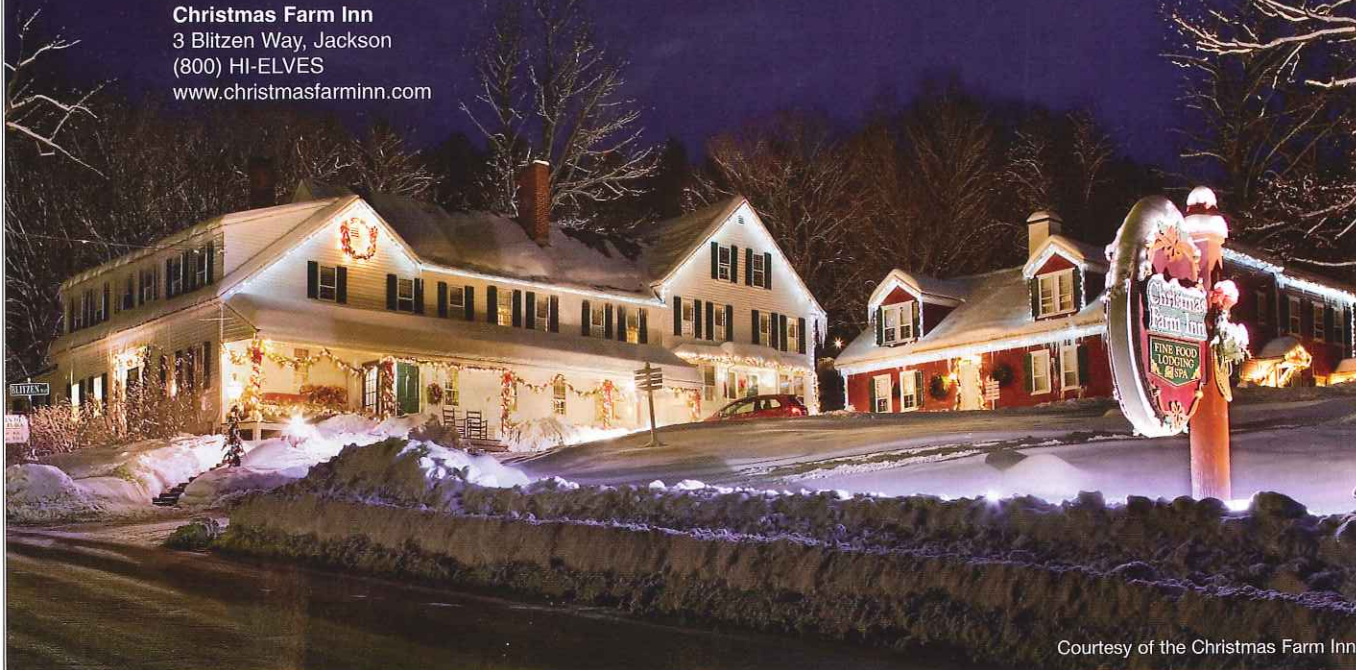
This package includes dinner each night at Plum Pudding Restaurant, as well as two country breakfast buffets each morning. At the Carriage House Spa, there are mother/daughter one-hour Swedish massages and two Salt Glow treatments and to finalize the bonding, handmade chocolates. Pricing includes two nights lodging in Carriage House Suites (if available).

Christmas Farm Inn

3 Blitz Way, Jackson

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Courtesy of the Christmas Farm Inn

to visit: Mittersill, Temple Mountain, Mount Whittier, Joy Farm and Cate's Hill, and she's chronicled them all. We find out that Tyrol Ski Area failed in the 1980s because it lacked a needed water supply for snowmaking and most skiers traveled to larger ski resorts, such as Wildcat, Black, and Cranmore mountains.

"That's sad," Haley says.

We stop and hear the natural silence, wind through limbs, the call of a brook.

As we ski past the frozen Jackson Falls, the view of Wildcat Valley and Carter Notch are "awesome," as Haley says. We try to ski as many trails as we can in three hours. Luckily, we've packed power bars and granola, a couple of water bottles, and this gives us sporadic energy. There's something so nice about sitting in snow

banks with a pre-teen daughter, who is laughing. We ski through the Covered Bridge Trail which is aptly called the Kissing Bridge due to all the honeymooners coming to Jackson for romance.

Over the covered bridge and under Highway 16, we loop along Ellis River Trail to the Ellis River Cabin, a warming hut that, on weekends, serves hot chocolate to the masses. The easy, rolling terrain is perfect for the end of the day, and with the daylight dimming, I feel the Christmas Farm beckoning.

"I bet I know where you're going after this," Haley says.

"I bet I know, too."

We both say hot tub and continue on our way. The wind seems forbidden at this elevation, the trees protective, Haley in front of me. Her tracks are parallel going uphill, but going down, she leaps from the tracks to the open trail and glides.

After dinner of pan-seared salmon and chicken piccata, we bundle up and stare up at the stars. With our breath billowing out, forming smoke signals, it makes sense to huddle closely together. Our heads touch as she names constellations her grandmother has taught her: Orion, Big Dipper, Little Dipper. We talk of plans,



Peggy Newland Photo

Conversation Starters with Your Kids

What's the wildest dream you've ever had?

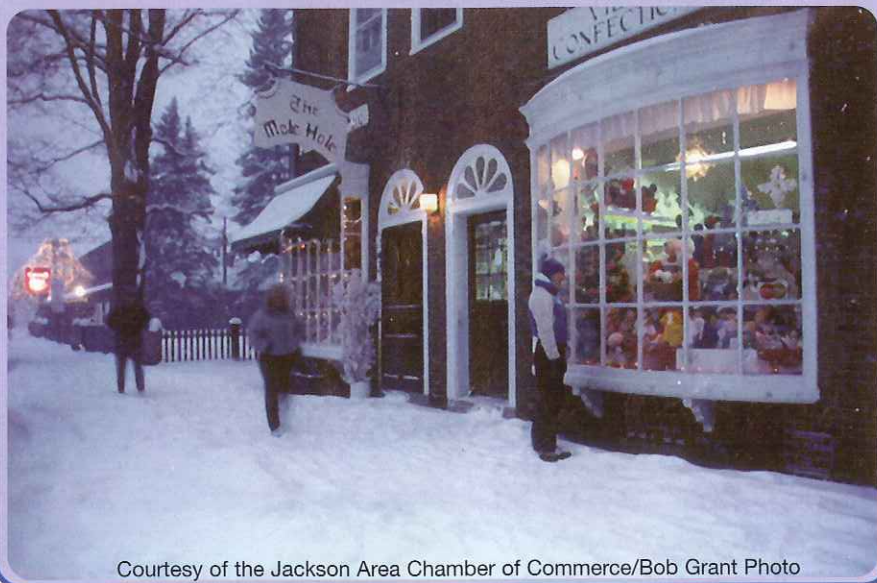
What's the hardest thing about growing up? What's the best thing?

Do you want to know the most embarrassing thing that happened to me when I was your age?

(No child can resist this question!)

What do you wish I knew about you?

You want to know three secrets about me? (Another question no kid can resist.)



Courtesy of the Jackson Area Chamber of Commerce/Bob Grant Photo

of dreams, of school, and anything she wants to discuss.

"I'm just going to become a ski bum," she tells me.

"I think that's a wonderful goal to have," I agree.

That night, we turn our gas fireplace on and watch snow smack against the windows. We sleep together in a huge, king-size bed, and have three pillows each.

"This is perfect," Haley sighs.

After our success with finding abandoned ski resorts, the next day has to be a day honoring the shopping in North Conway. We save the outlets until later, and walk through the village. Ringed by snow-capped mountains on all sides, the downtown has brick sidewalks, neighborhood five and dimes, and plenty of places to eat and drink. We decide on Flatbreads in the Eastern Slope Inn and aren't disappointed. Rustic, with wood-fired pizza ovens and local artwork, this place says sit awhile and relax. We order a large cheese pizza and of course, the gingerbread cake with homemade ice cream.

I tell Haley about coming to North Conway in college and skiing with boyfriends.

"Where did they take you?" she asks.

So I show her Horsefeathers, a pub/restaurant on Main Street, which in the 1980s used to be the hangout for the après ski college crowd. Now, it's upgraded and bright, rather than crowded and full of dancing skiers. The menu is varied and the leather couches look comfortable. But we have places to go. Such as the outlets.

L.L. Bean competes with Eastern Mountain Sports and both outlets have major deals in January. We find black leather boots 80 percent off in one and bike shorts in another for bargain basement prices.

"Bike shorts in January?" Haley laughs.

"Bonding in a blizzard?" I say.

And we continue on our way, knowing that homemade treats await us at the Christmas Farm Inn and that hot tub for two can be bubbling for the both of us. I think of our next bonding vacation and I'm calling it "Bicycle Bonding."

As a psychotherapist, I think everyone needs a blizzard bonding vacation in minus 10 temps.

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