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Essay #1 Final

My Own Wind

The ski lift passive-aggressively dropped my cold, tiny fourth-grader body off at the top of a brisk Pomerelle Mountain. Against a dark, jagged wall of pine trees that probably smelled amazing if my nose wasn't frozen shut, snowboarders fastened their boots to their bindings in the snow while skiers waited on them and chatted. People left in groups, and the steel, black lift brought two more to replace them quickly and quietly, beside the regular clunking sounds it made. To the right was a wide, tame run. 'MILK' is the name the wooden sign greeted me with. It was an apt name, I thought. The snow looked kind of milky, or at least frozen-yogurt-y, with a matte finish that hid whatever texture it had. To the right of the name was a green circle. That apparently meant it was an easy run. The mild slope, wide path, and vigorously groomed snow seemed to nod in agreement. A group of five or six skiers and boarders traversed into Milk ahead of me. This was a good place to start.

The sky was even milkier than the snow, and from a distance there wasn't enough contrast to differentiate the two. The dark, sharply pointed pine trees, though, opposed the bright whiteness to vaguely outline my path to the bottom. Up close they were a deep, dark shade of green and dusted with snow, but at a distance, against white and white, they might as well have been black. Amassed and surrounding, they nullified the light breeze, leaving a serene stillness over the quiet, frozen mountain face. Specks of ice floated between the black walls of pine and my eyes in the crisp air; it was too light, too cold and dry to fall. Reminding me that colors existed, a few skiers and snowboarders in pants and coats of various neon hues were scattered

throughout, weaving back and forth past each other and drifting further down the run until they were just colored dots in the monochrome landscape.

I had just spent the last million (two) freezing hours learning the basics of skiing – pizza's and french-fries. The old ski-instructors (they are always old) taught the beginners group that angling the skis in a wedge or pizza-like shape, narrow in the front, slows a beginner skier down. Positioning the skis parallel to each other, like french-fries I suppose, allows a skier to pick up speed. I followed, imitated, and listened to what they said was right and wrong, and what the consequences were. Now I was finished, and free to explore the mountain. And I decided to forget about pizzas.

Firmly gripping my cold aluminum poles by their black, scuffed plastic handles with my numb hands, I thrust them into the ice with raging enthusiasm. Pushing off them produced a forward slide across the slope, smooth and frictionless. Anxious to exercise my newfound volition, I invested in momentum and pushed two or three more times. *Shhhhhhhhhhhh* is the sound of skis on fresh corduroy. I knew I was getting somewhere when I heard it, and by awkwardly shifting my weight I muscled myself into Milk, leaving an even number of small holes and two vaguely parallel lines trailing in the snow behind me.

Still moving at a relaxed, controlled pace, I glanced down to make sure that my pale-grey rubber-tipped rental skis were oriented in a french-fry-like fashion. They weren't. The muscle memory wasn't there yet. Now that I had forced myself into french-fry mode, with a stance more than a foot wide, the inside steal edges of my skis no longer resisted the packed snow underneath me. I conspired with gravity, and gradually accelerated. The seemingly flat groomer was showing its flaws as I picked up speed, and the perfectly smooth glide between the base of the skis and the snow became progressively erratic. By moving more snow under me, steering was

getting more sensitive as well. That was fine, good in fact. I ducked down until my knees almost touched my chest, and tucked my poles in my armpits, because it made me fast and cool. At least that was the consensus among the other fourth grade skiers.

Now I was covering meters every second. My strained, skinny legs felt and absorbed every bump and imperfection in the corduroy through my increasingly jittery skis. My feet bounced and shifted around in my poorly fitted rental boots – grey, plastic, and probably heavier than I was. The group ahead of me was quickly getting closer. The *shhhhhhhhhhh* sound began to be overwhelmed by the excited sounds of my flapping, thin-and-baggy navy-blue snow pants and the cold whistling in my numb ears. Wait, I really *was* moving. There wasn't any wind. I made my own.

I laughed out loud, maybe even letting out a 'woo-hoo!'. Ice in the cold air pelted and pushed past my uncovered face, into my squinting eyes and gaping mouth, through the yarn in my Kermit-green home-knit beanie, around my cheap gloves and into the sleeves, neck, and waist of my poorly fitted olive-green winter coat. Features on the run disappeared behind me almost as soon as I saw them. I caught up to the group, dodging a red-coated man carving up the corduroy on his snowboard. I spotted my 3rd grade teacher on skis, also on the trip, overtaking her as well. I passed person after person, more or less shooting straight down the slope and laughing at nothing – exactly how the instructors told us beginners not to ski. They'd have to catch me. I was a blur of second-hand winter-wear.

Through the canyon of trees ahead of me, a silhouette of the lift stretched across the run and up into the mountain, slowly carrying chairs full of skiers and snow boarders to the top. I was approaching the bottom, surely crowded with other skiers and boarders. I couldn't be *that* irresponsible. I pizza'd my skis, suddenly scraping up and throwing out ice and snow behind me,

and reluctantly throwing away the momentum I had built up. Then the lodge came into view, smoke rising out of the chimney and light leaking out of the windows, with racks full of skis and boards positioned around the perimeter. Cold people shuffled in to get warm. Warmed people left to get cold.

I wasn't cold yet.