

How a middle-aged beginning skier learned to take on black diamond runs

At 40, I thought my daredevil days were behind me — what could top the insanity of growing up in Miami in the '80s? Then I discovered skiing, a sport I had sworn off when a boyfriend abandoned me on a black diamond run (I was solid bunny-slope material) in the '90s.

Eighteen years later, in Park City, Utah, an instructor helped me kick my terror to the tree line and tap into the bliss of coasting down groomers with my mind entirely focused on the matter at hand — mastering the next turn and reducing the frequency of faceplants. No worrying about work or my kids. The to-do list loop was miraculously switched off. I was hooked.

A few years in, thanks to dozens of lessons (critical) and investments in boots as well as custom insoles (also critical), I've mastered balance and carving and begun to enact what could be described as a middle-aged spin on “shredding the gnar.”

While friends are phasing out serious skiing (“It's so dangerous — let's go to the Caribbean”), I'm test-driving more challenging terrain, despite the fact that I am a so-so skier. The satisfaction of tackling an unfamiliar piste and then enjoying a well-earned chalice of wine in a cozy cabin somehow outweighs my fear of crushing a body part.

Here are some of my adventures:

Jackson Hole, Wyo.

Engage my core? What core? I had unwittingly just traversed a “quickie” black diamond run en route to the intermediate area, and trepidation oozed from my too-loose limbs. My instructor was going on about activating the deep abdominals to improve stability, but the words ricocheted right off my helmet. After the birth of my second child, I had ceased thinking about my abdomen. The notion that a power quadrant lurked beneath my mom pooch seemed absurd.

We did some drills to “zip up my abs,” simultaneously squeezing my butt and sucking my bellybutton toward my spine. That micro-maneuver was like a shock absorber. I now had stamina in powder and bumps, a good thing since Jackson Hole's craggy, aggressive topography is notoriously hardcore. Later that day, moguls formed from fresh snowfall. I sucked in, recited, “Stomach in — turn!” and whipped over the bumps without pause. Taking on those moguls was a major milestone.

Where to eat

The Kitchen

155 N. Glenwood St., Jackson, Wyo.

307-734-1633

thekitchenjacksonhole.com/

Chef Ash Tucker turns out sophisticated Asian-influenced plates like ramen flavored with shimeji mushrooms and narutomaki, a pink swirly fish cake. Entrees from \$16.