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In spite of my dreams, Christmas could hardly be described as white this year. Barely more than a dusting, we had to wait for another special holiday for snow. My dad's birthday is two days after Christmas. While any day is a good day for a birthday, let's face it some are better than others. And December 27th does not qualify as one of



those better days. Still Dad did get a generous gift from the gods this year, more than a foot of snow. Since he gave up skiing more than a decade ago, I'm not sure if he was really, truly appreciative of Mother Nature's gift.

Before he became a snowbird and ditched skiing in favor of sunny games of golf in Florida, Dad was an enthusiastic skier. He was ten when Santa gave him his first pair of skis. He was so excited he slept with them on Christmas night. Since no one in

his family skied, he finagled his way into the local ski club. Finagled because he was the youngest member ever; by at least five, maybe six or seven years. A couple of times every winter, he hopped on the snow train with the rest of the club and headed to Vermont or New Hampshire for a weekend of skiing.

After college, real life and other responsibilities kept getting in the way of his skiing. His trips north became more and more infrequent, especially after my sister and I came into the picture. Then he hit upon a brilliant idea, why not combine fatherhood with his long time passion. With my sister's enthusiastic support, he got his two little girls skis for Christmas. I was seven, Brenda was nine.

I don't remember sleeping with my skis. In fact, I must confess I did a lot of complaining in the first few years. More often than not it was the cold but lugging my skis across an icy parking lot, too-tight boots and the terrifying rope tow were all high on my hit list of complaints. However, Dad turned a deaf ear and wouldn't take no for an answer. Every Saturday and Sunday morning, he bundled us into the car and drove about an hour north and west to an apple orchard that doubled as a ski hill in winter. He taught us how to snowplow and guided us through our first rides on the perilous rope tow.

From day one Brenda stayed on the slopes for hours. She was fearless, grabbing hold of the death-defying rope and hurtling down the slopes. Not me. I got the après ski thing down early and spent as much time as possible sipping hot chocolate in front of the fire. Eventually I must have realized that these weekend forays onto the slopes were not going away. Or maybe I got a new pair of boots, ones that actually fit, or a parka that was good to 20 below. Maybe my dad refused to give me another quarter for cocoa or I just got bored sitting in the lodge. Whatever the reason, within a year or two, I stopped whining and figured out that skiing was actually lots of fun. Or at least more fun than sitting in the noisy lodge with its overpowering scent of wet wool, wood smoke and fermenting apples.

And so with apologies to the thousands who were stranded in airports last week, I shout with delight and enthusiasm, "Let it snow!"

Have a bright and snowy New Year!

Bon appétit!

Susan

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or just look like one!

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White Hot Chocolate

A grown up and more luxurious version of an old après-ski favorite! Serve this sinful hot chocolate instead of dessert on a cold and blustery night. Enjoy!

Makes 4 small servings

- 1 strip of orange peel
- 1/2 cup whole milk
- 1/2 cup half-and-half
- 2 ounces white chocolate, chopped
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 1/4 cup or to taste Grand Marnier (optional)

Use a vegetable peeler to cut a strip of peel from an orange about 2-3 inches long. Use a very sharp peeler to ensure you only get the orange part of the peel. The white pith is bitter.

Put the orange peel, milk and half-and-half in a saucepan over medium heat and heat until just below the simmering point. Remove the pan from the heat and add the white chocolate. Let the warm milk and cream sit for about 10 minutes to steep the orange and melt the chocolate.

Remove the orange peel and whisk to combine. Reheat to steaming, whisk in the vanilla and Grand Marnier. Pour into espresso cups and serve.

