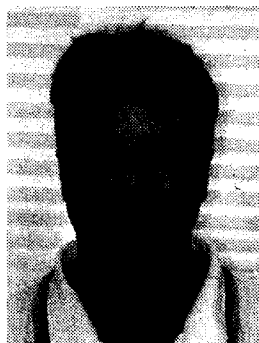


Mountain of youth: The lion overcomes all obstacles for children's charity

By **BILL HOWE**

Penn State Harrisburg Mascot



On February 22, Ski Liberty Mountain Resort held its second annual 'Mascot Day' as part of a daylong event to raise money and awareness for the March of Dimes Foundation. The March of Dimes is a research and support organization whose goal is to eliminate birth defects and pre-mature births. Funds raised in the past helped to eliminate polio. Through combined efforts, over \$3,000 in contributions were raised.

I arose that morning to sunshine and coffee. I had tossed and turned throughout the night in anticipation of how the day's events would unfold. You see, I am a proud member of PSH's Lion Ambassadors and my main contribution is to wear the Nittany Lion costume. I do fill it out fairly well.

Lion Ambassadors is a goodwill and charitable organization here on campus that sponsors a sub sale every fall. The money raised from the sale is used to host a big holiday party for less-fortunate kids and visit kids in the hospital. Eventually some of the proceeds will also be used to sponsor bingo with the seniors.

Today I faced my toughest challenge as a Lion in a competition against other more seasoned mascots. My veins coursed with a high-octane mixture of nicotine and adrenaline. For the un-initiated, being a mascot is not something you 'just do', it is a lifestyle baby.

Like the Freemasons or ELKS, we mascots have our own codes and rituals that are known only to those within the inner-sanctum. As some of you more worldly readers know, mascots never break character unless it is with a trusted grown-up and we can NEVER be seen with our heads off. The trauma a youngun' may experience from such a ghastly sight is beyond imagining. Not on my watch!

Today this old lion was going toe-to-toe with Edgar from the Baltimore Ravens, Testudo the Maryland Terrapin, Snowball the snow tiger, and Dude the snowboarding big damn beaver. Yeah, these overgrown and exaggerated representations of real wild animals were younger by ten to fifteen years and had gone to specialized camps in the off season (serious as a heart attack), but I am the Lion, hear me roar!

I was gassed by the time I slogged up the hill to prepare for the obstacle course. Cunningly, I allowed three mascots to go before me as I plotted the most expeditious route and searched for weaknesses. 3-2-1-go! I dove over the hay bale barricade and continued on. Like Papillion hurtling through the jungle of a French penal colony, I fought my way down the slope to sweet victory.

I finished in the middle of the pack at the basketball game of 'H. O. R. S. E.', which was played a little loose in the interest of time and boredom. Big animal paws do not lend themselves to accuracy. As evening approached, the mascots were shuttled off to the snow-tubing hill. Sid and Marty Croft would have reveled in our antics in the resort parking lot as we climbed into family mini-vans and ran amok amidst the confounded guests.

There is a sense of freedom that is attached to wearing a lion costume that is inexplicable. It is a license to play the fool without restriction. With this same freedom of anonymity comes a responsibility that is every bit as equal and even more rewarding.

I never forget for a moment why my fellow Lion Ambassadors entrust me with being the Nittany Lion. They know I give all of myself to making kids laugh and making alumni proud. I am gentle enough to cradle a baby in my furry arms as mother takes a picture, and sturdy enough to support a 240-pound orphan on my lap at the holidays.

That morning as I set out our items for the Silent Auction I met a little boy and his mother from the March of Dimes. He was 5 years old and was the ambassador for the organization.

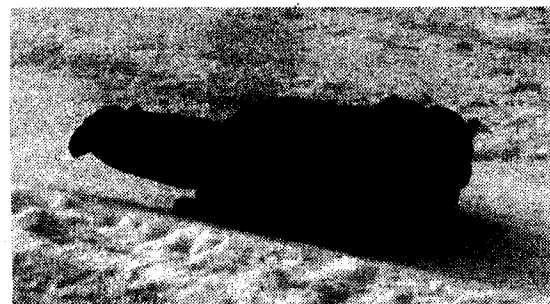
The first few months of his life were well-documented on the poster board at their booth. When he was born he weighed less than 3 pounds and fought every day just to live. Now at 5, he is strong and full of energy. He wanted to know if the Lion was faster than the Raven, he loves Penn State and JoePa, and the Nittany Lion. To him, on this day, on HIS day, the real lion from TV and cereal boxes was going to be there live and in-person. Damn right I was going to win.

Days later and my thighs still ache a little and my joints pop, but soon I will be back to my usual introverted, aloof state of being. Memories of being a mascot will fade, but as long as I have days, I doubt I will ever forget how tight that little boy hugged this lion's neck the day we became winners.

For more information about Ski Liberty, or to view more mascot photos, visit skiliberty.com. If interested in Lion Ambassadors, visit the alumni office.



Above: The Lion goes toe-to-toe with other mascots in a competitive obstacle course. Howe said, "Life as a lion is not something you just do, rather it is a lifestyle."



photos courtesy of Bill Howe

The Nittany Lion (Howe) completing an obstacle course event to raise money for the March of Dimes.

Penn State Harrisburg
Women in Society
Current Issues & Topics

Wed., March 31 and Thurs., April 1, 2004

Women in Society Topics:

- ♀ Women, Culture, and Spirituality
- ♀ Women and Finance
- ♀ Women in the Media
- ♀ Women and Wellness
- ♀ No Victims Here
- ♀ Voices and Votes
- ♀ Women Stereotyping Women

Exhibits and resources throughout the campus
Alice Marshall Women's History Collection, "College Women in the Early 20th Century", "Women Suffrage"-Penn State Harrisburg Library, "Drawings"-Morrison Gallery, "Apparitions of Woman"-Gallery Lounge

For more information
on the Women in Society Topics or how to get involved, call 717-948-6086 or E-mail vxd3@psu.edu or jcw1@psu.edu.

Refreshments will be served at all events.

This event is supported by:

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