



Skiing with gravity

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When he isn't making millions laugh with his humor, he plays in a literary rock band called Rock Bottom Remainers. Other band members include Stephen King, Amy Tan, Ridley Pearson, and Mitch Albom. He and his wife, Michelle, live in Miami with their two children Rob and Sophie.

By DAVE BARRY

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I haven't attempted to ski for years, but recently I decided to take another stab at it. I was hoping they'd done something about the gravity problem.

Gravity is the biggest drawback to skiing. Without gravity, it would be a carefree activity: You'd put on your skis, head for the slopes and just ... HOVER for a while. Then it would be time for "apres ski" (French for "no longer skiing").

Instead, you have gravity. Huge amounts of it. Ski areas are located smack dab on top of giant gravity piles called "mountains." Most areas also use machines to make more gravity at night. Thus powerful forces are always trying to suck you, the skier, down the mountain and into large fixed objects such as buildings. This is why the Number One Rule of Skiing Safety is: "Never go up the mountain without a good reason, such as that it is summer."

This lesson was driven home to me dramatically the first time I tried skiing, which was in 1964 at a ski area in southern New York State, where much of the time, instead of snow, you ski on frozen mud (or, as we say in ski-area terminology, "excellent conditions"). I went with my friend Lanny Watts, who knew how to ski, and who, after watching me fall down repeatedly while I was still in the parking lot, decided that the best way for me to learn would be to go straight to the top of the mountain and see what happened.

Q. What do you mean by "very fast?"

A. I mean that, because of the Theory of Relativity, after a few seconds I had traveled in time back to 1963, and was still picking up speed when I penetrated deep into the woods.

Q. How deep did you penetrate?

A. One of the trees later bore my child.

Eventually I learned that the best tactic for skiing is: Never go DOWN the mountain. Always go SIDEWAYS, which involves less gravity. You want to creep laterally along the slope, like a giant parka-wearing crab, until you reach a safe place, such as San Diego. This can take months, but it is better than going down the mountain.

Also you want to make sure you have the right equipment. And

when I say "the right equipment," I mean, "not skis." The ski industry is always claiming that, because of new technology, skis are better than ever, but on my recent trip I noticed that the so-called "modern" skis still have the fundamental safety defect that has plagued skis from the beginning: They are slippery on the bottom. Combine slippery bottoms with gravity, and you have a recipe for disaster. This is why, when you go to a ski area, you see big signs, written by lawyers, advising you that by attaching these things to your feet and going up on a frozen mountain, you are admitting that you have the IQ of sauerkraut and are voluntarily forfeiting all of your legal rights, including freedom of religion.

If I were designing a ski, it would be called "The Inertia," and the bottom would be a combination of golf spikes, Crazy Glue and Velcro. My advertisement would be a photo of a skier standing on an extremely steep slope, such as the side of the Chrysler Building,

not moving at all, just sticking straight out horizontally, like a gargoyle.

If we had such a ski, skiers, freed from the threat of going down the mountain, would be able to focus their attention on the true essence of modern skiing, which is trying to contact other skiers via cell phone. I saw a LOT of this during my trip. Every 30 seconds or so, there'd be beeping, and all around me, people would frantically start unzipping layers of designer ski attire to see if it was their phone

ringing. If it was, they'd have a conversation like this: "Hello? Hello? Where are you? Have you seen Bob? He was with me, but then the gravity got him. Although one of his legs is still here."

My final tip is: If you're skiing with your wife, and you foolishly ride up the mountain on a chairlift with her, and for reasons that are never made clear she fails to get off at the top, so they have to stop the whole chairlift and make it go backward and help her remove her skis so she can climb down, and she is very embarrassed, this will turn out to be YOUR FAULT. Don't argue! Just accept it, and apologize.

Honey: I'm sorry.

(Dave Barry is a humor columnist for the Miami Herald. Write to him c/o The Miami Herald, One Herald Plaza, Miami FL 33132.)

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