

The Deadly Cold

by Timothy J. Muise

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It was a bright but cold day, January 15, 1982, as we arrived at the beginning of the trail to Morey Pond. I snuck off with two close friends and smoked a couple of tightly rolled joints of deep hued Columbian Gold just to get my mind in the right frame for this spiritual journey. I had been there before, in fact lost my virginity there the year before, so Mt. Kearsarge had a great deal of spiritual significance for me. On this trip I was to be the wily veteran, the rock solid winter camping machine, and it would play out that way but not in the manner I planned in my ephemeral cannabis induced day-dreams.

Jim gave me the 5 watt, 3 channel, VHF walkie-talkie, that paired with his as I would be breaking trail for the trip. There was a nice layer of fresh New Hampshire crystalline snow, about ten inches deep, and I knew that my recently hot waxed U.S. Army cross-country skis would glide across this powder nicely. The ski in to Morey Pond is down hill and I planned on making great time. Jim instructed me, "Don't get too far ahead Tim. We need to stay close together." In my mind I said, "That won't be happening.", as the plan was to get far enough ahead so that we could stop and puff a bit more Gold, so I just gave Jim a stoned smile and nod of the head. The group heaved their packs onto their backs, gripped their poles and got their balance and off we went into the wilds of Kearsarge, New Hampshire.

Bob Beauparlant and I took off very quickly. Breaking trail in the powder was very easy for me and Bob was right on my heels. We cracked jokes, laughed out loud, and commented on how we rated the girls that were on the trip with us as we planned to invite a couple to enjoy some of Columbia's finest with us that evening. We made real good time and had skied for about twenty minutes when I heard the radio squak. We halted our nice progress and called Jim on the VHF. He conveyed that he felt we were too far out in front but I assured him that we were slowing down the pace after our brisk start. We felt that was a good idea and I put the radio back in the side pocket of my pack and touched the lighter flame to hand crafted spliff. Bob wished we had brought our 22's as he and I had done quite a bit of camping the previous summer feasting on squirrel meat and Grandma's molasses cooked on sticks in the campfire like you toast marshmallows. Quite grand when you are fairly blazed up. We started our journey again.

About twenty minutes to a half hour later the radio again squaked. This time Jim had urgency in his voice. My friend, Nancy Peavey, was suffering with the first signs of hypothermia and was having trouble skiing. Bob and I reversed direction and really put the peddle to the metal up the slight grade back to the main group. We reached the Party in about seven or eight minutes and I saw Nancy sitting on her pack with Jim hovering over her. She looked at me, kind of through me, and said, "What are you doing up here Tim?", like I was just passing through or something. She was loopy as her body temperature had dropped a few degrees. Jim said she kept falling over and could not ski. I then took charge.

I asked two of the other girls to unroll two blue sleeping bags as they zipped together and had them zip them up nice. I picked the girl Bob and I had rated as #1 to get in the double-bag with Nancy and wrap her arms around her for the body heat. We had trained for this but I never envisioned two females in the bag together. The situation was serious but I was not blind to the fact that two hot chicks were holding each other close in a sleeping bag: blame it on the Columbian I guess. We had many extra supplies as winter camping is taxing on equipment. I took four extra skies and nailed them together with tree branches Bob cut fresh with a bow saw. I got them good and secured and then layed some insulate pads (the pads that go underneath sleeping bags in the tent) across the top. I made two nice sturdy push poles from pine limbs that Bob cut and I put my extra wool fisherman mittens over the end toward me and fashioned tips that would lodge nicely against the reinforced cross beam of the limb in the rear of this makeshift sled. I grabbed the mittens by the bottoms wrapping my hands around the push pole, placed

the tops of the mittens against my shoulder and lunged my right ski forward. I was surprised that the sled moved fairly easy. Bob skied along side at first, trying to push with his ski pole, but that didn't work for too long as the trail was too thin and not trail broken on the sides. I was making fairly good progress on my own. I got a rhythm going and slogged along at a nice pace. I continued to ask Nancy questions, some she answered OK others she was clueless. Jim, with his really bad back rendering him unable to push the sled, called the AMC radio hotline on Channel 22 of the VHF and informed them of the situation. When I saw the end of the trail I could make out the box shape of the ambulance waiting there. Nancy was placed inside and Jim went on the payphone as well all waited on the school's bus. We had to sit there for a few hours while another school counselor came to sit with Nancy at the hospital. Our other instructor, Emily, had ridden to the hospital with Nancy and returned in a cab to ski with us back to Morey Pond. She reported that while she was with Nancy they gave her electrolites, intravenous vitamins, and hot chicken soup. She perked up quickly and was back to her old self before the new counselor arrived. We are all very happy Nancy was OK and it gave us a new perspective on the cold. The deadly cold.

Nancy and I are still friends. She has some serious drugs problems nowadays but I do still hear from her from time to time. Her and I attended many concerts together and had some very wild times after this trip. I even lived in an apartment building with her, which did not make my wife happy, and for good reason. Jim, the instructor, is still my friend. He attended the last Family Mass here at the prison. He should not have taken that trip as his back had been out for a week. He was appreciative of my ability to handle the situation and possibly save his job. I just did what anyone would have done. I was big , strong, smart, and willing. I miss those days but I consider myself blessed to have experienced such wonder. I climbed Mt. Kearsarge three winters in a row, and these memories are Gold, and from time to time I still think about two hot chicks in a sleeping bag!

FOR THE BOOK CLUB
2013

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