

The Safety Site

Monica Palmer, Safety Administrator

Recreational Skiing takes Responsibility & Control

In 2020 I held a Safety Story Contest. I have decided to again post the stories in our newsletter. Each story concerns a member's own experience where safety prevented or diminished an accident or injury, or where lack of safety may have created the situation. The story below, written by Gary Drew, was the first-place winner.

Helmet Safety

I learned to ski late in life starting at age 50, so by then I had developed all of those attitudes that I was a strong and generally tough guy. So I didn't see the need to wear a helmet because snow was generally soft and I wasn't going to do any racing or anything, so why spend a \$100 on an expensive hat. So I skied for 4 or 5 years like those other macho guys.

All of that changed when I was on a ski trip to Steamboat Springs with a bunch of friends from Knoxville, TN in 2002. While skiing with my buddy, David, we had decided to stay on the mountain until the lifts had started to shut down to get the most out of the time skiing and were on the last long run back to the lodge. By this time of the day a lot of the trails had been in the shade for sometime and were beginning to refreeze in places. So we were taking our time to make sure of the surface conditions. We stopped in an area where several trails joined leading to a cat trail which was the way back to the lodge. While standing there we realized we were on a sheet of ice with virtually no skiable snow on it. I hadn't anymore than commented about our footing when my skis flew out from under me and I landed on the back of my head. I'm not sure how long I was out, but my friend said it was at least 15 seconds. With some help I got my last ski off and was able to get to my feet. We stood there for 10 to 15 minutes looking for the ski patrol to go by and maybe give some help. But after about 10 minutes and getting colder, I decided to try to ski the rest of the way back to the lodge down that cat trail.

I made it back to the lodge but missed dinner that night and stayed up longer than normal just to be sure I was ok. To say the least I had a headache for 3 or 4 days after, and didn't go skiing the next couple of days. But I did go shopping the next day! That day I bought a helmet and would have paid \$500 for it, because I had learned a big lesson.

That story should be enough to at least inspire you to consider a helmet if you don't wear one now. But I have one more tale to tell you. About five years later, while skiing with a client in Washington at Crystal Mountain Resort, fog rolled in making visibility about 15 to 20 feet at best. With me not knowing the mountain, the client was doing his best to find an easy way down on trails that were wide so we would have some room to ski slowly. Unfortunately, one of the trails was closed which forced us to ski across a mogul field to get to another wide open trail. I'm not a good mogul skier and on the last mogul I got spun around and landed on the back of my head in that helmet I bought in Steamboat. Like the other fall I was out for 10 or 15 seconds and woke up with the client asking me if I was OK. I asked him to step back so I could focus on one of three images of his face spinning around in front of me. He helped me to my feet and we waited sometime for me to get my vision to straighten out so we could proceed the rest of the way down to the lodge.

I decided to skip seeking medical attention again and went to the bar for a beer and to sit down. While taking off my jacket I felt something sharp sticking me in my neck. With the jacket off I still felt this sharp object and reached down inside my sweater and pulled out a piece of my helmet. That's when I took a good look at the helmet and realized that it was split down the middle from front to back. Basically, that helmet saved my life! If you're not skiing with a helmet, you're playing Russian Roulette with your life.

Gary Drew