

POWDER

THE SKIER'S MAGAZINE

THE PILLARS OF A MOUNTAIN GUIDE

ONCE UPON A TIME IN SLOVENIA

HOMEMADE IN AFGHANISTAN

SOUTH DAKOTA GOLD



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Ski Towns Twinkle

BY COLIN CLANCY



Photo: Garrett Grove

PULLING INTO A SKI TOWN at night is one of those rare moments of awesome stomach-clenching excitement, akin to childhood Christmas mornings or heading out to trick or treat. The snowbanks are piled high along the road like some kind of snow-globe winter wonderland, the headlights of groomers shine high up on the mountain, and the holiday lights glisten through January, February, and March. They all contribute to that feeling of unbridled energy for what tomorrow will bring. Especially when the snow starts to fall during that last hour of the drive and the anticipation builds for one of those days that gives you chills many years later when it pops into your mind on some muggy late July evening.

It's been this way since I was a kid when I was lucky enough to have a best friend whose parents owned a cottage at Crystal Mountain, Michigan. We'd be packed and ready to go before the Friday school day, and as soon as his dad got out of work, we'd pile into the Suburban for the three-hour drive north. We'd be in the back: me, Geoff, his brother, and his brother's friend of choice playing "GoldenEye 007" for Nintendo 64 on a tiny TV propped on the armrest. Once we got off the freeway onto the two-

lane highway toward Crystal, we'd shut the TV off, the suspense too great to continue our argument about who got to be Odd Job.

This scene played out nearly every weekend from December through March, from 1998 through 2002. Later, in college, we'd drive to the same house, and though our beer-soaked weekends had a different vibe, that anticipation remained the same.

Crystal's night skiing meant that on a clear evening we could see the lit-up runs from miles away. And if we made good time, we'd have an hour or two of riding, always until last chair, whether rain, sleet, or snow. If we didn't make it in time, we'd hike for some sledding, or climb onto the roof for backflips into the snow behind the house, or at least a hot tub session—always hoping in vain that we'd meet some girls our age.

Yes, the Saturdays were great, first chair to last, early pancake breakfasts before the lifts opened, late spaghetti dinners after they closed. But those Friday nights are what stand out most sharply in my memory.

The feeling was the same when our college ski team showed up to a new resort on Friday night before Saturday morning's race, and the same when

we arrived at Copper Mountain, Colorado, after powering through an all-night and all-day drive for the first of our ski bum seasons while taking breaks from school. It was the same when I flew into Salt Lake City for the first time, the mountains in silhouette against a purple sky with the last light of day.

And it was the same last April, as I pulled into Red Lodge, Montana, after an eight-hour drive from my home near Park City, Utah. I felt the familiar magic of seeing the brilliant Christmas tree on the main drag, the groomer lights twinkling high above on a spring evening that felt like mid-winter, and the first falling flakes that gave tomorrow the possibility of a powder day.

But those things aren't what give me goosebumps, what make me feel like a child again. It's the anticipation of what's to come—that full body sensation that happens while playing with snow and gravity in this silly sport that I love so very much.

A native Michigander, Colin Clancy now lives in Utah's Uinta Mountains in a cabin with his fiancée and two dogs. He may or may not still play James Bond video games for nostalgia purposes.