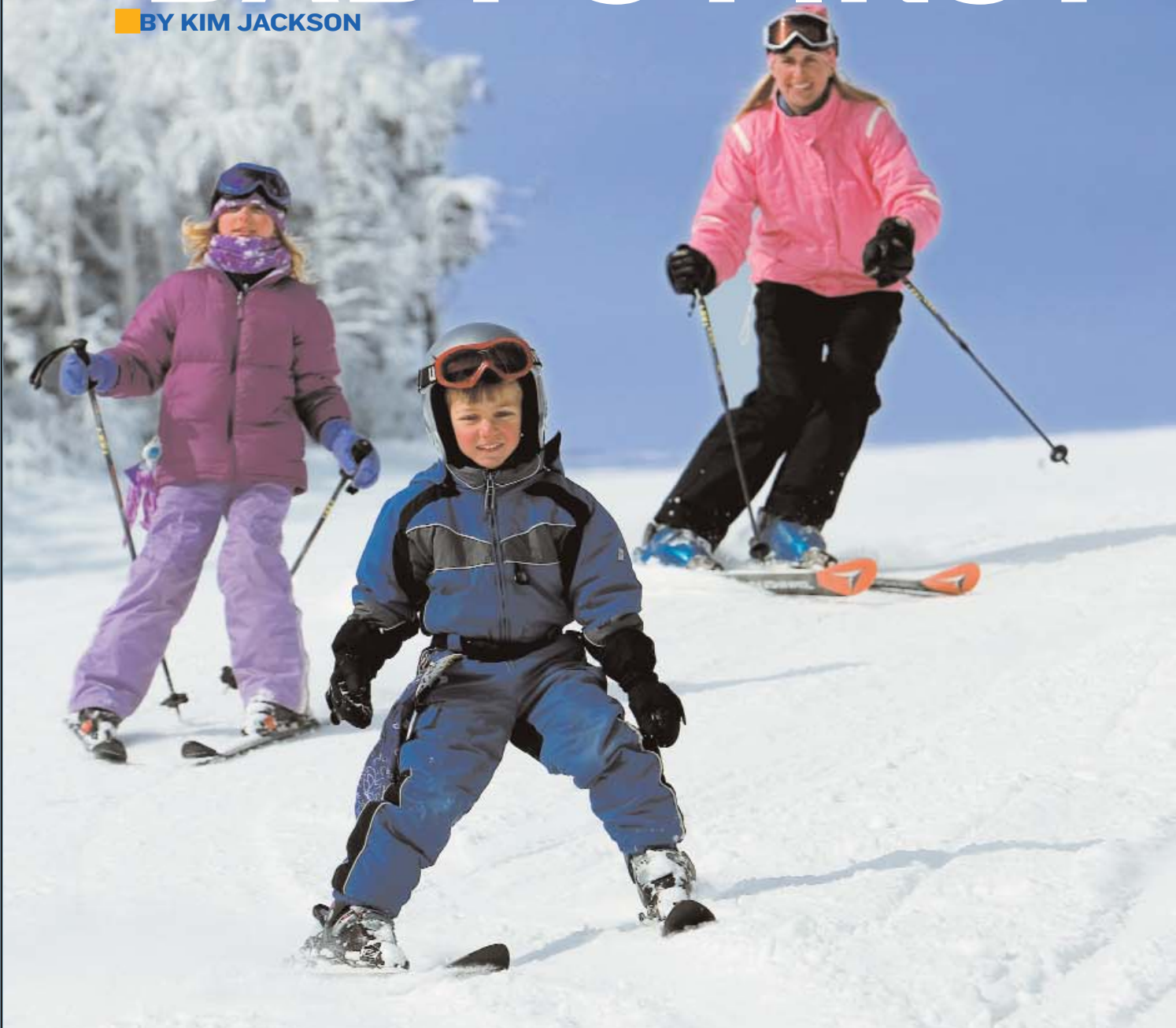


LEARNING CURVE

HOW TO INTRODUCE YOUR CHILD TO THE JOYS OF SKIING BABY'S FIRST

BY KIM JACKSON



In more than 25 years, I had never missed a ski season, until my daughter was born two years ago this December. Having a December baby meant learning to brave Vermont's harsh winters all over again, with baby in tow. Finding fresh tracks first thing in the morning was gone along with the good night's sleep.

Last season, winter number two, wasn't much better. My "days logged" consisted of one hour on a November morning plus a childless weekend where I did more work off the slopes than on. Pathetic considering I have more ski

resorts at my ski tips within an hour's drive than most Manhattanites have Starbucks.

Enter the upcoming season, winter number three, which I am plunging into with disgust and determination not only to return myself to skiing, but also to introduce Kelly to the sport for the first time.

Anxiety grips me. What if Kelly doesn't like to ski? Although my parents didn't ski, their friends introduced me to the sport, and it has always been an integral part of my life. It is the reason I moved to Vermont 10 years ago to



work at a ski area. I chose a college close to the mountains. In some form, whether it was bus trips to New England ski areas as a kid, organizing my college's ski club, or working in the ski industry at ski shops and resorts, from October to May, skiing is what I did. Now, not only do I have to figure out how to get my less than college-like fitness level ready for first tracks, I have to teach my daughter to do the same. And pray she likes to ski as much as her parents do.

Fear grips me. Where do I begin? Okemo Mountain's Alex Bordas feels the same way.

"I don't know if I would call it fear," said Bordas, The Jackson Gore Inn's front desk manager. "But I'm concerned about him being cold, intimidated or me pushing him harder than I should, which is one reason why I recommend ski school." Three-year-old Max Marley Bordas will hit the slopes for the first time this winter.

"I plan on putting him in the Mini Star's Program to get him started on the right track," said Bordas. "Children's instructors know how to teach kids. It's their business. Covering the basics is important, then your kids will be proud to show you what they learned, and you'll enjoy quality slope time with your family."

I'm trying to envision a typical morning getting out of the house. Ski

ONE THING I WOULD ENCOURAGE ALL PARENTS TO REQUIRE OF THEIR CHILDREN IS WEARING A HELMET. IT'S JUST A SMART CHOICE. —JENNIFER COTA
OKEMO INTERNET COORDINATOR

bag packed. Check. Extra diapers. Check. Sippy cup and favorite crackers. Check. Advil. Check. And that's just for a 20-minute drive to Okemo from my house for Kelly's "introduction" to the sport.

Mom of two, Jennifer Cota, has the inside scoop on how to plan for a longer stint at Okemo. Okemo.com. She's the internet coordinator for the resort and as mom of Madison, 9, and Logan, 5, she knows she needs to pack the bags for the day's weather, remember which boot fits which child and make sure the skis are on the car.

"Use Okemo.com to check conditions the day you plan to come," said Cota. "And be flexible. If it's a really cold day, it's probably best to pick another day. You want that first day to be enjoyable for everyone. Also, involve your children in the decision-making process. We have a great web site for kids called okemonsters.com. Browse the site together and expose them to pictures of other children having fun on the mountain. Ask them if they'd

like to try skiing or snowboarding. If they're involved in that decision, they're more likely to enjoy themselves and want to learn."

While I'm still a little panicked, I know I'm headed in the right direction. Okemo Owner's Tim and Diane Mueller really have created the ideal ski resort for families, right down to making sure there are two day care centers; one at the main part of the ski area and the other at the new Jackson Gore base. As parents who raised their children on the snow, they know that convenience is key and what it means logistically to get up in the morning, strap on snow gear, make it to lessons on time, eat a healthy lunch; oh yeah, and have fun.

"One of the many benefits of Jackson Gore is that you have it all right here," said Bordas. "From the moment you check in, your car is valet parked or you can self-park, your skis are checked for you and can be picked up slopeside in the morning and you are escorted up to your room by our bell staff. The lobby is even boot-friendly. We have fun and easy slopes for beginners and after the slopes you can relax by the fire in the lobby with an order of s'mores. There's an arcade for kids, heated pool, indoor and outdoor hot tubs."

So I'm ready. We'll put a ski bag onto Kelly's Christmas wish list, find

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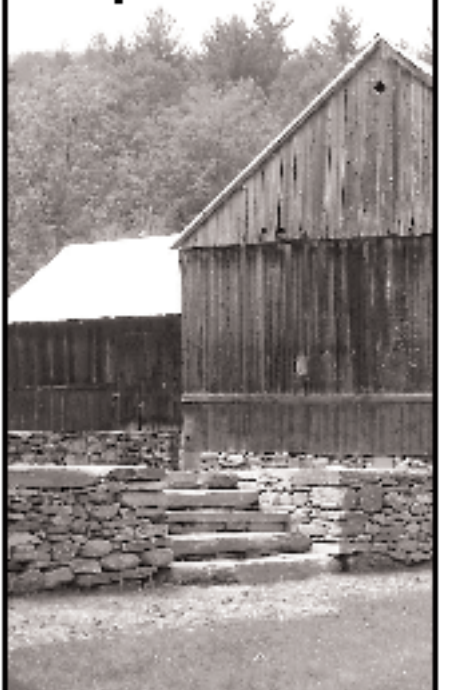
warm, non-bulky clothing and waterproof, insulated mittens. And no cotton socks, no matter what. I've got the vision now. A cute little two-year-old wobbling around in her ski gear, eating snowflakes off her tongue with a grin the width of the Hudson River. We'll visit the Sugar House Lodge and O-Zone Pizza for a slice of pizza, her favorite, and have s'mores tabletop dessert at Coleman Brook Tavern. Eventually we'll find the Kid's Glades network, trails not found on the regular Okemo trail map - you need to get a special guide exclusively from the Learning Center!

However, according to Okemo's Learning Center Director Dan Bergeron, Kelly isn't quite old enough for structured lessons yet, but she's ready for a fun, easy introduction the sport.

"A rule of thumb is that if the child is not potty trained yet, then the child is not ready for a lesson," he said. (We're working on the potty training. I still have a few months until the warm sun of March, when I plan to show Kelly the ropes.)

"Expectations should not be set too high either," said Bergeron. "We often get parents that drop off their barely 4-year-old to our Snow Stars program and pick them up at the end of the day expecting their child to be able to

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"You need to approach things incrementally in both skill development and duration," said Bergeron. "It's important to develop balance and agility on the equipment before we can expect to develop turns or stopping skills. The most important thing is to keep it fun. If it isn't any fun for them, then they aren't going to want to do it." So Mommy's motto this season? One ski at a time.

Kim Jackson moved to Vermont 10 years ago "for a couple of years" but never left. She is now a part-time writer and project director at a graphic design studio and full time mom and wife. She lives with her family in Bridgewater Corners, Vermont.