



KÜHL[®]

SHOP KÜHL

VIEW ALL

ADVENTURE

HIKING

TRAVEL

STYLE

FOOD + DRINK

DIY / CRAFT

SOCIAL

WELLNESS

THE BENEFITS OF SKIING WHILE GRIEVING

SKIING

By KÜHL Editor on April 15, 2024

5 MIN READ

Table of Contents [\[Hide\]](#)

Sadness and despair engulfed my existence after my husband, Ira, lost his three-year courageous battle with glioblastoma in July 2023. Even though anticipatory grief

had warned me of the inevitable, the reality of Ira's passing was devastating. Unlike most of my peers who remained single until their late 20s or early 30s, I married my soulmate when I was 18 years old. After 48 years of marriage, I was single and simultaneously trying to cope with the rollercoaster ride associated with grief. Would I find comfort in participating in activities that Ira and I cherished, or would I need to forge a new path?

Except for a handful of years, Ira and I had skied together every winter. We were hooked on this exhilarating sport long before we relocated to Colorado 24 years ago. Without any reservations, Ira returned to the slopes after his near fatal ski accident at Keystone Resort in 2010. Our passion for skiing was taught to our four children and later passed down to our grandchildren. For years, our sons looked forward to our family tradition of skiing on [New Year's Day at Keystone Resort](#). Happiness abounded whenever we were in a mountainous terrain together. Even though it was impossible to predict how I would react to being a solo skier, I feared that skiing would no longer be a joyous activity without Ira by my side.



A view from Keystone's Bergman Bowl.

Instead of dwelling on the potential loss of happiness, I should have recalled Helen Keller's words, "When one door of happiness closes, another opens; but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one which has been opened for us." Despite my trepidations, I hit a milestone during the 2023/2024 ski season. I skied 30 times at Keystone Resort and five times at [Copper Mountain](#). By far, this was the most that I had ever skied.

A smile comes to my face whenever I think back to December 5, 2023, when I drove the first time to Keystone Mountain as solo skier. The previous December, Ira and I had skied together for the last time. As I dealt with flashbacks, I had to motivate myself to get out of the car. I was terrified to ski solo. While subsequent visits were less challenging, I had to repeatedly remind myself that I had to move forward and not get stuck. When I put my skis and boots away for the last time in April, I was proud of what I accomplished.

Despite my trepidations, I experienced awe and felt Ira's presence. I was captivated by Keystone Resort's newly opened Bergman Bowl where I had breathtaking views of the surrounding mountains. Even though it was considerably colder at this above tree line location, I paused to appreciate the immense beauty of this incredible place. Whenever possible, I allotted extra time to visit this secluded and peaceful spot on the backside of the resort.



Early Morning Start at Copper Mountain.

My day-to-day encounters with the majestic beauty of Colorado have yet to minimize my ability to experience awe. Year round, I am exposed to the wonders of Mother Nature in the Front Range as well as in the nearby Rocky Mountains. However, for the first few months of the grieving process, my senses were muted. Most things in my life had lost their vibrancy. It wasn't until mid-February when I walked and rode a bicycle along Hilton Head Island's shoreline that joy and awe were able to enter my life every day.

While on the slopes, I periodically stopped to capture mountain vistas and the sun rising in the morning sky. These encounters with nature provided opportunities to appreciate life instead of dwelling on my sadness. I felt invigorated and connected to the world around me.

Skiing opened a pathway to new social connections. After months of being isolated in my home, I suddenly could chat with an assortment of skiers and boarders on chairlift rides and with ski groups at Keystone Resort and Copper Mountain. At Copper Mountain, I graciously accepted the media opportunity to join the [Over the Hill Gang program](#) which offers guided experiences four days a week from 9 AM to 3 PM by certified instructors. Since I was part of a group of four to ten participants who preferred groomed runs, I didn't have to ski solo or be alone during lunchtime. The instructors offered useful ski tips and guided the group throughout the day. My senses were in high alert as I navigated unfamiliar terrain, a variety of ski conditions, including powder days and mini mogul runs, and tackled the resort's racecourse. It had been decades since I accepted these downhill ski challenges.

I also had the opportunity to ski at least once with my grandchildren who are old enough to ski and a few times with my adult sons. My four sons mastered their skiing on Keystone Mountain and now they were passing down our family's passion for this sport to their young children. My spirits were lifted when each of these grandchildren let me know how much they enjoyed skiing with their grandmother.



*Sandy and Ira Bornstein
Copper Mountain
February 14, 2022.*



*Sandy Bornstein at
Participating at Copper
Mountain's Over the
Hill Gang.*



*Sandy Bornstein skiing
at Keystone Mountain
with grandchildren
Bode and Asher.*

Compared to other ski seasons, I fared better because I avoided frigid and snowy days. I took advantage of blue bird days and spring ski conditions. This was possible because I blocked off large chunks of time to ski that did not interfere with my Front Range obligations. I was intent on creating a routine that prioritized time outdoors in the sunshine and maximized my days skiing. I understood the amazing value of remaining active while I was grieving and fortunately had the resources to follow through.

Over the years, I have read research studies that highlight the benefits of embracing nature and other articles that suggested that skiing improves mental outlook, reduces the risk of premature death, and possibly adds years to one's life. Skiing was a perfect way to enjoy Mother Nature. I had the freedom to structure my mornings as I pleased with the added benefit of improving my balance and reduce my anxiety levels. In April, I was sad to see the ski season end,

but thrilled that skiing had minimized my loneliness and created a better mindset.

Near the end of Stephanie Cacioppo's book, *Wired for Love: A Neuroscientist's Journey Through Romance, Loss, and the Essence of Human Connection*, she states, "To love someone when they're gone just means holding them closer, keeping them in the part of the brain that feels like your heart." If I hadn't started this transformation process, I most likely would have remained isolated in my home and unwilling to take the first step to ski solo.



Sandy Bornstein Sunrise Walk at Hilton Head.

Featured image: A view from Keystones' Bergman Bowl.

All photos curtesy of Sandy Bornstein.



KÜHL Editor