



“Bar Down”

“Bar down.”

The excuse of a safety bar locks love in our lives.
We are inseparable in the secrets of paint blue skies
Our differences are left at liftoff, long forgotten
Our shared energy is sweeter than the Memorial Day sun
We are immersed in memories on this chairlift ride.
My sister and I are ride or die.

The pine, spruce, and snow of Oregon was in our spirit since birth. Naturally, we were both very young when we started riding the Mount Bachelor chairlifts. My sister – with a fascination for Shaun White at the time – switched to snowboarding at age 5. I was 8 by then, and I would stick with skiing.

My sister and I were close growing up. Yeah, she was eager to win at anything, but she also looked up to me. And I enjoyed my time with her.

When the bar went down over us on the Mount Bachelor Chairlifts, and we were carried up into the snowy azure, my sister and I were closer than ever before. It was just us.

I got to share in a mischievous mission with her. All our fellow skiers and snowboarders below our boots – they were our targets. Said mission: Surprise attack them on the helmet with snow. Once we locked our target, I would clap my skis together. My sister would take her free boot and wipe at her board or smack it. We would watch the powder with anticipation as it closed in on the unsuspecting people below and faded back into the snow. How hilarious, how triumphant, it would have been if our snow hit someone's helmet.

We shared a love of lunch together. It didn't matter if the snow was pellets on our face and our legs were slush, or if the snow was goodnight kisses and our legs were invincible, we always craved lunch. West Village Lodge, Sunrise Lodge, or Pine Martin Lodge, our plastic red trays always had chicken fingers, fries, and Gatorade. My sister's favorite flavor was Grape, mine was Fruit Punch. Mount Bachelor lunches were soul food (and drink). Tender heat for the prickly air, a sugar punch for the energy lost on Thunderbird. Looking back, getting to share it all with my sister made those meals as savory as the first and last meal ever.

When the bar was down at Bachelor, we were digitally shut down. No Snapchat, no Instagram. No texting, no AirPods. The only music was the deep choir coo of the wind, and the lyrics were our stories. That intimacy invited us to share limitless conversations on the chairlift. The top carousel was only a distant flicker as small as the snowflakes on our neck-ups and the space between the cable towers was time enough for a story..

The topics of conversation were as bountiful as the blizzarding clouds above: What we hoped to do in Sunriver that night – Dinner at the Owl's Nest. Goodie's cookies and cream milkshakes by the woodburning fireplace at home. Or a game of knee hockey in the living room. We could talk about Spongebob or *Pacific Rim*. Next to each other in the lounge back seats of our minivan, we watched those like it was our job on our trips to

Sunriver. We could joke about anyone or anything – blissfully blunt kid humor or unapologetic teenage humor – up on that chairlift, because no one else was close enough to hear.

We took countless chairlift rides. Multiple rides per day. Multiple days per vacation. Multiple vacations per winter season. Multiple winter seasons spent in the high desert of Oregon. We must have had hundreds of conversations. Maybe not *every* single ride was perfect. My sister's developing drive made me self conscious about my talent. I wasn't as competitive as her, but I still hated to lose. And between the two of us, we inevitably made a couple mean jabs. But when that bar was down, I don't have a single memory of conflict. We could never run from each other, unless we wanted to snap our legs or worse... Ride or die up on the chairlift. We had all the time to empathize and forgive on those rides. My sister didn't – and doesn't – hold a grudge for long, and I forgave – and forgive – easily. At the end of each day, every single ride was a gift.

As fantabulous as lunch was for the soul, the chairlift rides topped it. To experience my sister's spitfire energy and her caring energy only a couple snowflakes away, in her rawest, most loving form... To see her admirable rose cheeks fighting the cold... There is no breeze on Bachelor that could have put out her spirit.

When our chair finally met the top carousel, someone called "Bar up."

We slid off, ending our conversation for a little while.

Our energy separated, riding apart from each other down the mountain.

A growing topic of conversation on chairlift rides was ice hockey. That sport became more a part of my sister's DNA with each year. Oregon held no future for girl's hockey. So in early 2018, we called our last "Bar up" as Oregonians.

Southern Minnesota was – and is – a joke for downhill skiing and snowboarding. You hardly need a chairlift for the bunny hill "mountains." But even if the sissy skiers and boarders of Southern MN didn't need a chairlift, I would soon need one. My sister's

winters would be spent on ice rinks with her friends. She'd travel there riding shotgun with my mom or dad, watching her phone instead of rock 'em sock 'em robots with me.

From shredding her black diamond ice hockey run and my bunny hill video production run, my sister and I finally convened at Bachelor on March 29th, 2019. Us Minnesotans were on Spring Break, visiting our true home state. I'm certain there was a charm in my heart that day, to finally be next to her at liftoff. Prepared for a day of clapping, getting hungry, and fiendishly-laughing on the weathered leather seats. When the bar went down, my sister and I were each other's best friends. We still loved the same perfect lunches. We could still try and strike innocents with snow. We had all the time to talk about hockey, or Sunriver, or the crane machine we won earlier that trip. While the top carousel remained invisible, we could have learned all we had missed about the other's life. I was no longer searching for my sister's presence across the dinner table or through group conversations. Every past and present part of her was right next to my shoulder – for just that one day. Then we made our final call at Bachelor:

“Bar up.”

Today, I'm 22. She's 19. I don't downhill ski anymore. She doesn't snowboard anymore. I'm pursuing creative writing in Rochester. She's pursuing D1 hockey away in Ithaca. I'm an introverted softy. She's a quick-talking badass. I have Wegman's microwavable lunches alone on my dorm couch. She has divine campus food for lunch with close friends and teammates. We can go months without calling or seeing each other in person. Our most intimate communication is texting “I LOVE YOU SO VERY VERY MUCH!!!” every night.

Last summer in Northern, Northern Minnesota, our family was on vacation with family friends. May 25th, 2024, We were driving to Lutsen Mountain to ride the Alpine Slide. We would ride sleds down the mountain, weaving through all the shades and heights of green. The pine and aspen-birch reached up into the sky, a sky that spilled down into Lake Superior. The air was as clean as when God first made it, holding our skin captivated in a crisp massage. You had to raise your head to see the mountain tops,

and you needed a chairlift to get there. The Oregonian in my sister and I's souls felt a little bit of Oregon in Minnesota for once.

There was a tug at my heart, which had gone empty, as I looked at the chairlift en route to the top of the Alpine Slide. Not only because that thing looked like it was made for my sister and I when we were about 10 years younger and about 80 pounds lighter, but because I subconsciously hoped to ride with my sister. I wanted to be close, to converse, but feared she would only be riding with her hockey friend. My heart filled back up when she stood next to me at liftoff.

When the bar went down, it was just us.

Our dad's genetic humor shined through and I finally got to see my sister either laugh at me, glare at me, or both. Because, in direct contradiction to our fear, no doubt she or I tried to rock the lift, towering above little yellow flowers and our doom.

At the top carousel, my sister called "Bar up." Immediately, an avalanche of nostalgia from Mount Bachelor washed over me. I was officially back on those beaten leather seats, bleeding a little yellow foam; Those seats that were expressive murals of brand stickers. Most importantly, I was back on those seats with my sister. My sister, who I love, who I don't see enough, now as close as a sympathetic sunray.

She drag raced her friend down the slides, leaving me to watch her slip away into the trees. But we still found ourselves at the liftoff point, and the bar still fell over us that day.

Proceeding rides, we reminisced. About what exactly, I'm not sure, but there was an abundance of memories. Being at Bachelor with the Brennan's or swallowing our skill back on green circle runs when we were with the Bauer's. Our signature lunches, no matter the day or our age. The one time we didn't get Gatorades and both got Sprites (#wannaSprite) – A humorous nod to the LeBron James commercial that always played at our hometown movie theater. Our attempts at hitting people with snow (It was too bad the Alpine Slide didn't emerge from the trees and slink under the chairlift for my sis and I to relive our mischief – We could have clapped dirt off our shoes or yelled something witty).

Preparing again for the Alpine Slide, the ceaseless competitor in my sister swaggered out. We united in fun banter about going “full-send” (as I like to say) down the slide, especially on the hump and the sharp left curve: *Could we avoid using the brakes?* Aside from Oregon memories and the thrill of this unique nature activity, I don’t know exactly what else we talked about. I’m sure I asked questions about hockey and her Division 1 collegiate future. She likely sighed with a smile as I playfully tried to inflate her non-existent ego when I called her “The GOAT” or “McDaddy.” Any jokes I made, she probably laughed at with her wide, pure smile. Not necessarily because I’m hilarious, but to humor me, not make me feel like an embarrassment. I wouldn’t put it past her to have asked me about college, my favorite classes, and what I want to do in the future. I would have blabbered on too much about creative writing. She would lose patience, but not her ability to listen to me.

Suspended in God’s perfect air, we were untouchable. Our mom was yards upon yards away and the slide riders were lost in the woods. I wish we shared secrets. I could have poked the bear if she was snapping any special boys or had a boyfriend in real life. If I survived, I could have followed up with [REDACTED]? To even it out, I could share my [REDACTED] obsession, my kink for [REDACTED], or even [REDACTED]. She can be a vault and sometimes “guy stuff” makes her want to send me off the lift like the snow on her board. But my shoulder was right there to reassure her she’s safe. With a couple secrets, we would be closer than that pewny chairlift could dream. And besides, maybe we could make an eavesdropping Goldfinch or Robin laugh.

Floating through past memories of Oregon while wrapped together in the present, my sister’s ass-kicking armor dropped. Her brown eyes glistened with empathy, reminiscent of her young velvet cheeks. I saw her teeth in a full smile, a smile just like mine. Her demeanor coated me in a humble warmth. A warmth that melted into me, into my heart – The same way I feel when she cares.

I know she always cares, that she means what she texts. But from one carousel to another, it's tangible. It's only us, and our love has never felt better. I could have taken that slide all summer to amend days long past.

But we only had a day pass.

The top carousel rose over the turf peak, making each conversation and each word more precious. Life together in laughter and nostalgia flew closer to the ground. Each tower we passed stole a great story or a potential future memory. The mechanical hum of the carousel suffocated our secrets. My sister and I would soon full-send the slides...

One last time.

An unsaid goodbye.

Riding apart on our own paths.

Separating this energetic warmth we have.

Taking hidden secrets back to our lives.

Still each other's ride or die.

"Bar up."