



Vail, CO Acres: 5,289 | Vertical: 3,450
Snowfall: 350 | Web: vail.com

Local's First Tracks: "Powder means playtime in the Sun Up and Sun Down bowls because of the new lift that went in this summer," says German-born Julia Salerno, who moved to Vail 10 years ago. "We're talking twice as fast. Take the gondola up from Lionshead to Chair 7 to get to these bowls the quickest. If it's the usual bluebird day, start with Straight Shot. It's exactly like it sounds—long, and wide, and fresh, and straight down. When you're ready to move on, hit Headwind for the same powder-perfect experience—just different scenery."

The Vibe: In Vail, it's highbrow fun, all the time. But Salerno, who's married to a ski patroller, says the best place to hang out is still Vendetta's—for the pizza and the patio. —**Jayme Otto**

PHOTOGRAPHER **JEFF CRICCO**
SKIER **BRADY SCHLICHTING**

the Shattering

by Greg Randolph, illustration by Jack Unruh

Sending it off the edge of the catwalk, I dropped into the trees no doubt chanting something to myself like, "I'm so rad." Surely I gave the air a donkey kick in homage to the beers I would soon suck through my ironic mustache on the après-tio below. With warm sun, good vibes, a free spirit, and a decent chance my woman would feel the spring thaw later in the evening, I felt myself master of my destiny.

But instability in the universal cluster, which some write off as karma, reared her head and the next moment would come to be known as the "Shattering." Landing softly right on line, I punched too deep into the isothermal snow. The glop took over my trajectory and sucked me into a grove of firs. I weaseled and fought to break free, recruiting hardwired instinct that 30 years on snow had taught. Momentum prevailed. The sound of every last air molecule escaping from my chest punctuated the forested silence. Twenty-four broken ribs, eight broken vertebrae, a broken and nicely separated shoulder, punctured and collapsed lung, (something called a pneumothorax) and, as I recall, a small shart in my pants that ended my dreams of beers and Scapple-like behavior. I eventually got up and skied the rest of the run, gasping not only for air but an explanation. What just happened?

The Shattering was the end of my ski season. Worse, it was the end of my innate skier's ignorance. Yep, not innocence, *ignorance*. When I returned to snow the next fall, I was in complete psychological disarray, unable to get out of even my own way. I cursed myself and waffled between wanting to quit skiing forever and forcing myself to ski hard and nonstop until I got my act together.

Mark Twain summed up my predicament once by saying, "All you need in this life is ignorance and confidence then success is sure." Success—in this case, not skiing like a complete pounder—depends on the confidence to control the things one can and refusing to recognize the perils that one cannot. The goal, in other words, is to be confidently ignorant. Sure, my confidence had been lightly rattled, but my ignorance had been completely shattered.

I knew the crash wasn't a result of a lack of skill or judgment. It was the random nature of exciting things wherein without danger there is little thrill. The Shattering was the settling of the tab for the thousands of times I'd charged a line and emerged unscathed to a chorus of whoops, hollers, and high fives. I'd grown a bit smug. But that rational knowledge was little consolation for the new pussyfoot version of me.

I had become hyperaware of my environment. The speed of hard snow scared me, trees seemed magnetic, and I had to recruit all my willpower to look beyond the tips of my skis. The flow was gone. Doomsday scenarios burned on my frontal lobe. *What if my binding releases as I cut back from the edge of that cliff band? Whoa, if I catch an edge here I might hurtle into a lift tower. Better scrub some speed, there could be someone popping out from under that cat road.* All I could visualize was my next likely grease spot. I needed my ignorance back.

We use the word "ignorant" improperly, accusing some of being ignorant as if it were the same as being stupid. But you can't help it if you're stupid. Ignorance, on the other hand, is willful and, believe it or not, can take a lot of effort. Which is why success relies upon it. If we couldn't ignore some risk we'd just sit around frozen in fear. No ignorance means no Wright brothers, no Everest, no NASA, no skiing.

Skiing is about assessing risks, coping if necessary, and then immediately shifting focus to the goal at hand. That's not only the key to ripping downhill with your hair on fire, it's the Zen of any endeavor. That moment when the world drops away and it's just you, moving without effort is the expression of the confidence-ignorance equation. Before the Shattering, I was quite adept at blissful ignorance. But now I had to work at it. Against the advice of people who cared about my physical well-being, I entered the dojo of the ignorant. I eventually emerged victorious, and I am pleased to say that once again I am one ignorant SOB.