

## Five Questions for Jim ‘Jimmer’ Hayes

Friday, January 18, 2013

### **Who are you?**

I am Jim “Jimmer” Hayes of Ballston Spa. I am a law clerk and a Professional Ski Instructor of America (PSIA) who teaches skiing at the Double H Ranch Adaptive Winter Sports Program and at Gore Mountain. I found out about the Double H program from my mother, who volunteers at the ranch in summer and winter. She introduced me to Ronnie Von Ronne, the former snow sports director, and Ted Lafforthun, assistant snow sports director.

### **How long have you been a Double H volunteer?**

It’s my eighth full season at Double H Ranch. I teach children, ages 6 to 16, with various disabilities — physical and/or cognitive — how to ski. I also train fellow Double H Ranch instructors how to teach the children. My first experience teaching skiing was during the 2005 Empire State Games for the Physically Challenged at Whiteface Mountain. I assisted in teaching a 16-year-old girl who had suffered a traumatic brain injury. She had never skied before, but the lead instructor and I spent the morning teaching her how to ski. After lunch, it was time for her to race. She wanted both of us instructors to ski through the course next to her, so that she could hold onto our hands. As she went around each gate, she would reach out for one of our hands, touching it ever so gently. I knew after the race that I was “hooked” on teaching skiing. The following fall I started training with Double H.

### **What does it take to become a volunteer?**

The desire to share a passion for skiing and mountains with children. There is no need for previous training of any sort. If you can ski, we will teach you everything you need to know. Instructors are required to complete at least 24 hours of training, part of which is attending the orientation that is held around the beginning of November. The training is generally held from late October through December on Friday evenings and Saturday and Sundays as well as part of Christmas week. We mostly train at Double H but do offer two to three training days at Gore Mountain as well.

### **When did you start skiing? Do you race?**

My father has taught skiing at Gore Mountain since the 1960s, so naturally Gore is where I started skiing in the 1970s. I have always enjoyed racing, whether it be local, mountain races or while at Siena College. My racing nowadays is relegated to NASTAR racing, but this year I plan on racing in the Monday night racing league at West Mountain, too. Both are open to the public. I also try to enter a mogul contest each spring if it fits into my teaching schedule.

### **What do you like best about volunteering?**

The children! I sometimes feel as if the kids teach me more than I teach them. I tell all the new instructors each fall that they will learn more from the kids than the kids do from us. We all have things that we deal with in life — financial worries, relationship issues, work stress — but that’s just life and if our kids at Double H are laughing and smiling,

then we should all be doing the same thing for kids who are dealing with things that are far more important than our day-to-day worries.

When I first started at Double H, we would bring qualified skiers to Gore a few times a year. To be able to share the mountain I grew up skiing with our Double H kids was awesome. My first Double H student was a skier named Patrick who has arthrogyrosis — a physical disability that renders him to a motorized wheelchair. He is also a bi-skier. A bi-ski is a sit-ski with two skis under it.

When teaching a bi-skier, I am attached to the bi-ski at all times via tethers. The tethers allow me to assist the bi-skier to turn and stop, although Patrick did not need much assistance. To see the excitement in Patrick's eyes each morning and to hear him laugh, which would lead to me laughing, as we skied down was an amazing experience. People heard us before they saw us. Patrick taught me to see the mountain through his eyes, which gave me a whole new appreciation for Gore.

Patrick and I went to the 2005 Empire State Games for the Physically Challenged at Whiteface multiple times, with Patrick winning the gold medal each time. After receiving one of his gold medals, Patrick surprised me by giving the medal to me. Words alone cannot explain the feelings that I had when he presented me with his winning medal. Patrick taught me that even if our bodies do not fully "cooperate" with us, life goes on.

Not only is Patrick a skier, he went on to graduate from high school, get his driver's license (his high school raised money to have a van fitted for him) and is attending college. Patrick, if you are reading this, thank you for the laughs and great memories.

— By Paul Post

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