

Why I love Sun Valley

A True Story about Life, Death and My Love of Skiing

John Rowe



For me, Sun Valley Idaho is the best place to ski. I live in California's Bay Area, so it takes me about five hours to drive to the Lake Tahoe area. But I never stop, I keep driving past Reno another eight or nine hours to get to the Ketchum-Sun Valley area, and it's worth every minute. Plus, the drive through Nevada and Idaho is absolutely beautiful.

One of the best things about Sun Valley is there are two mountains available for skiing, Dollar Mountain and Bald Mountain. Although Dollar Mountain is more like a big hill, it is one of the best places to learn how to ski in the world. Dollar Mountain is where I learned to ski back in 1981 when I was 21 years old.



My brother Dave explained the basics of how to ski, then made fun of me all that day. I went back to Dollar Mountain the next day by myself and was able to do what Dave taught me the day before. I learned how to stay in control, avoid other skiers and follow all the rules. The next day, my third day of skiing, Dave and his buddy Barney took me to the top of Baldy Mountain... More about that later.

My favorite ski lift at Sun Valley: Challenger – Bottom to Top up 3,140 vertical feet in 8 minutes! And there is never a line, except maybe during Christmas, New Year's and President's Holidays. There are no ski lifts in the Lake Tahoe area that even come close to the speed and elevation that the Challenger lift provides. This is one of the reasons I love Sun Valley so much.



Think about it, only 8 minutes to the top and you're up 3,140 feet, that's a lot of vertical. One of the fun ski games my brother Dave taught me at Sun Valley was to make a note of the Challenger ski lift chair number you ride up on, then try to beat it back down to the bottom of Warm Springs. If you can get down and back on the Challenger lift onto the same or lower chair number you rode up on, you're doing pretty darn well!

Repeat that several times and you've got a couple of days-worth of Tahoe skiing in – before noon! There is just no way you can get as much vertical, as much skiing in at other resorts as you can at Sun Valley. What I'm saying is the amount of actual skiing time compared to the lift riding time that Sun Valley offers just can't be beat. If you know of such a place, please let me know.

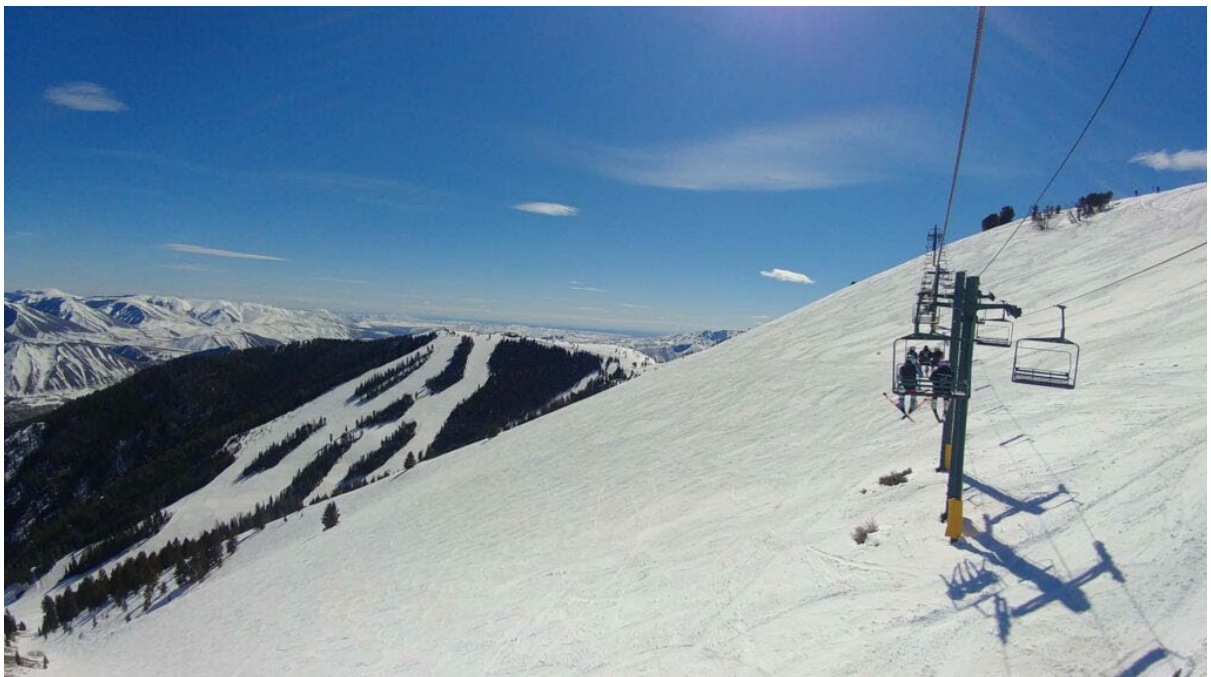
Another good thing is, the Challenger ski lift is at Sun Valley's Warm Springs base area, which has no beginner access. Therefore, the Challenger ski lift almost never stops. This means the Challenger's ski lift ride time is very consistent, almost as good as a clock. Before ski apps (on the old Quad lift) we used to figure if we made it to the bottom and got back on the same chair number, we made it down in 10 minutes. Now that the new Challenger Six-Pack is only an 8-minute ride, I guess it's time to speed things up a bit - Yeehaw!



The Challenger Quad

The Challenger Quad was built in 1988 and served well for 35 years. It was replaced with the Challenger Six-Pack in 2023. Check out my Challenger Quad tribute video: [Goodbye Challenger Quad](#) and my welcome video for the new 6-Pack lift [Hello Challenger Six-Pack!](#)

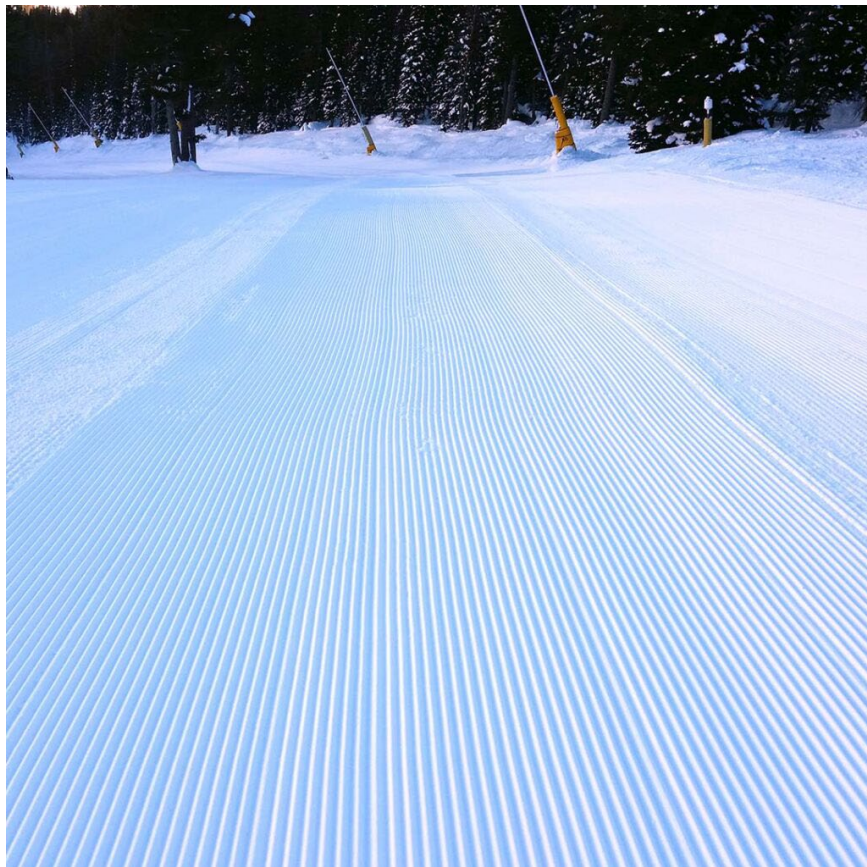
I love to start out early at the Warm Springs side when I go skiing at Sun Valley. I usually get on the Challenger lift as close to 9am as I can and then head over to Seattle Ridge. The deal is, Seattle Ridge gets the early Sunshine and the Warm Springs side is in shadow until later in the morning, so Seattle Ridge has the best early morning skiing at Sun Valley.



Lookout Lift



If the Lookout lift is open, I'll ride it to Bald's Summit and then ski down the Bowl Lane trail to Broadway Face, turn left and ski down Broadway then get on the Seattle Ridge lift. If the Lookout lift is closed there's a bunch of other ways to get over to Seattle Ridge, you'll have to look at the map and pick one for yourself!



If you start early enough you will be faced with nearly trackless corduroy, one of my life goals!

At the end of a fun filled day of skiing at Sun Valley, there's nothing like sipping on a local cold draft beer while sitting at the Warm Springs lodge bar or outside on the patio, the view of the Lower Warm Springs ski run is awesome!



Sun Valley's Dollar Mountain is the ideal place to learn how to ski or snow board. It is a super laid back, fun & easy place to learn.



Please stay on Dollar Mountain until you can ski or ride in total control as skiing on Bald Mountain is very dangerous for novice skiers and riders, and for the other folks on the mountain too.



[Me at St Luke's Hospital Ketchum, ID](#)

I should know, I got hit by a six-year-old kid March 25th, 2022 on Baldy's Cut Off run. The six-year-old boy broadsided me because he wasn't paying attention, didn't see me and was basically out of control and did not belong on Baldy Mountain at all. He should have been skiing on Dollar Mountain until he was able to understand the rules and ski under control.



The accident left me with a completely torn ACL, a torn MCL and a smashed meniscus. It was a total drag, but after pre-surgery physical therapy and daily home-work therapist directed exercise, I had surgery in June 2022.

Luckily the highly experienced Sports Medicine Orthopedic Surgeon [Peter G. Gerbino II MD](#) performed my ACL surgery. Then after more physical therapy and even more daily home-work therapist directed exercise, and after massive effort I'm finally okay now, and can ski again, Yeehaw!

After surgery while doing all the physical therapy and daily exercises it was my passion and love for skiing that pushed me to do all I could in my power every day, so I would be able to ski again. Hour after hour, day in and day out, week after week, I worked my ass off, and it worked. I went back to Sun Valley in January 2023 and went skiing.

My first day back, it was a beautiful sunny day at Sun Valley. It was Wednesday January 11th 2023. It was my first day of skiing after being hit hard and injured March 25th, 2022 getting ACL surgery June 15th, 2022 and working my ass off doing physical therapy etc. for months to get back in shape. And I did it - I was able to ski, almost like before!

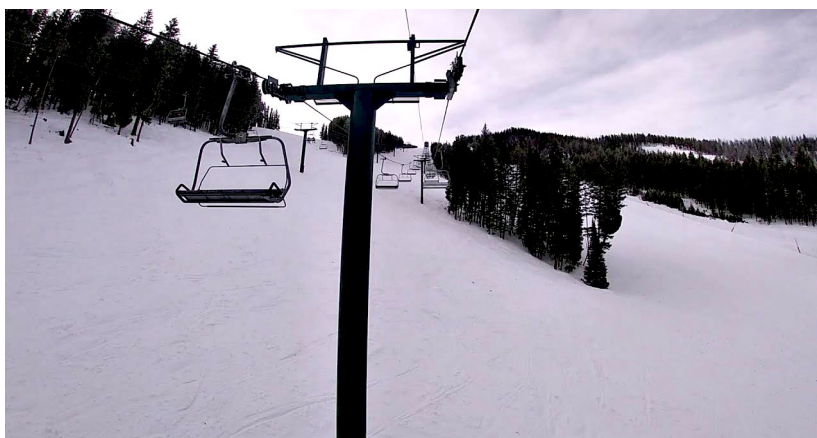
I rode the Challenger ski lift to the top of Baldy and skied all that day like nothing had happened. I felt a great sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. I celebrated that night thinking my return to skiing after the accident was complete. Unfortunately, I was wrong.

The next day was overcast so the light was flat making visibility poor. Also, even though it was a Thursday and the weather wasn't great, there seemed to be a lot more skiers on the mountain than there was the day before. I was not prepared for the result. I arrived at the Warm Springs lodge early as usual and as I rode the Challenger lift up the hill, everything seemed normal.

But when I arrived at the top of the mountain, I saw a large group of people and for some reason I got worried I was going get hit again. I decided to go back down the Warm Springs side instead of going over to Seattle Ridge like I usually do. Then, something I never imagined happened to me.

As I started my way skiing down the Warm Springs Face, a fairly easy but steep blue run, I'm not sure if it was the poor visibility or this sudden fear of being hit from behind by other skiers that overtook me, the fact is I instantly lost all my confidence and felt extremely paranoid. The result was I had lost my nerve and became too afraid to turn left.

I was stuck halfway down the Warm Springs run totally overcome with fear, completely scared shitless. I broke down. I cried. I never expected this. Shaken, and feeling totally defeated, I slowly slid down to the top of the Greyhawk lift.



I was able to get on the Greyhawk lift and ride it down to the bottom. On the ride down I felt like a total loser, like a failure, I cried thinking I may never be able to ski again. I had never had to ride a ski lift down before. It was a major low.

As I was taking my gear off in the Warm Springs Lodge a fellow skier sat down nearby and asked me how I was doing. Maybe she saw something was wrong and wanted to help. Thank God she was there that day. I gave her the short story of what I was going through and she shared the most important information with me.

She explained she'd been in a similar situation, she also tore her ACL, had ACL surgery, and the most important thing she shared with me was, when you go back to skiing do two things:

1. Stay to the extreme right or left of the run you are skiing down.
2. Whatever you do while you are skiing, don't look back, just stick to one side of the run or the other and don't worry about skiers behind you. And just have fun!

It was the best advice, and came and the most important time of my skiing life. I wish I could thank that wise, inspiring young woman and tell her how important, effective and logical her advice was. She basically saved my skiing life, and I am eternally thankful to her for that. The bummer is I was so focused on my own failure at the time, that I don't even remember her name.

She told me I needed to take it easy, to slowly relearn to ski and that I won't be able to ski like I used to for some time. This never occurred to me. After all, I was able to ski the day before with no problems. So, what happened this morning? Somehow, I had completely lost my nerve, and my ability to ski, and I knew it. It was a terrible feeling...

After a few beers and lunch at Lefty's, then another beer or two at my hotel room, I thought deeply about the day's events and decided to take the young woman's advice.

The next morning, I went over to the River Run base at Sun Valley. Lower River Run is a beginner run so that's where I started my ski rehab. I did what the young woman suggested, I stayed tight on one side of the run or the other and, I didn't look back.

It wasn't easy at first, I still felt scared. I kept thinking someone was going to come up from behind and hit me, again. But I knew deep down if I gave up now, I'd never be able to ski again. I love skiing so much, I just couldn't give up.



[Dave Skiing at Sun Valley](#)

I thought about my late brother Dave. Having lived at Sun Valley for decades, Dave had become such a great skier. He had achieved that incredible style, you know those skiers you see now and then that look so natural, like their head and upper bodies never actually move while their legs and hips do all the work as they effortlessly glide down the hill. Dave could ski like that. I always dreamed of being able to ski like that too. I refused to give up.

I kept trying, and, I did it! I was able to regain my nerve. I was able to ski again, and after a few runs, I knew my crisis was over. I skied down lower River Run over a dozen times that day - Yeehaw!

The next day, I went back to the top of Baldy Mountain at Sun Valley, and skied down Warm Springs, right past where I got stuck two days before, staying tight on one side of the run or the other and not giving a care to the skiers behind me. I will admit I do ski a little slower now than I did before the accident. The good thing is, I can still ski!

The reality is though, I don't enjoy the black diamond runs as much as I used to. I can still ski black runs, but after ACL surgery I'm mostly interested in the green and blue runs. I just want to take it easy and have fun! One thing for sure, I don't want to get injured again. So, I am careful.

The main reason I came to love Sun Valley so much is because my brother Dave lived there. When we were young, we lived in the wealthy town of Los Gatos, California. My dad owned a successful construction company and we were living the high life, had a house with a swimming pool and I thought we had it made. I was even thinking I'd get to go to college. But my dad was a drunk, and was abusive. Dave used to hide me (to protect me) when dad was drunk and on the war path. Later, my mom discovered dad was having an affair with his secretary and divorced him.

It was just luck when in 1973 as Dave was hitch-hiking through Idaho heading to Coeur d'Alene that Jack Corrock picked him up. Evidently, they hit it off as Jack offered Dave a job. Dave returned to Ketchum a few months later, went to work for Jack and never left. I had to go to Ketchum to visit Dave.

The first time I went to visit Dave in Ketchum was during the summer of 1975. I fell in love with the raw beauty of the Sawtooth mountains instantly. It was blazing hot there, over 100 degrees outside. I remember going to some creek or river nearby and hanging out in the water to cool off. It was a great time. Skiing never entered my mind, yet.



A few examples of Dave's Art plus a framed Sun Valley Trail Map hanging in my office

Dave would talk about skiing. Evidently, he picked up the sport. He had ski gear everywhere it seemed like. Dave was a gifted journeyman carpenter and started making Sun Valley suns as art, and for fun.

Dave and his best-buddy Barney also moonlighted as gatekeepers for the Sun Valley Snowsports - Race Department. So, they never had to pay for ski lift tickets, and always had extra ski vouchers laying around.

The honest truth is I've been a totally spoiled brat most of my skiing life at Sun Valley and have almost never had to pay for a ski lift ticket. Thanks again to my brother Dave and his buddy Barney. And to Candy and Dan of the Sun Valley Snowsports - Race Department, where Dave and Barney worked as gatekeepers. I was also a gatekeeper back in the mid-1980s once, and then took over Dave's slot after he passed in 2012.



John & Barney Gate Keeping at the 2016 U.S. Alpine Championships

The thing is, Sun Valley is very generous with ski vouchers for Snowsports-Ski race course workers, gatekeepers and all the other volunteers. Dave and Barney would give me their extra vouchers all the time. Sun Valley even gave Barney an unlimited pass in 2016. Why? We never knew...

Back to 1981 and my third day of skiing: I had learned the basics my first two days. By the end of my second day of skiing on Dollar Mountain, I was confidently able to turn left and right, and to stop whenever I needed.

On my third day of skiing Dave and Barney took me to the top of Baldy and down the 'Broadway Face', then down the 'Broadway' run. Dave told me: 'Follow Barney', and Dave followed me down. After having a daughter and teaching her to ski, I now understand why they were doing that.



Dave & Barney

I skied fine that day, never fell down once. Years later when my daughter Hailey was seven years old, Dave, Barney and I took her up to the top of Baldy and down the 'Broadway Face', then down the 'Broadway' run exactly like Dave and Barney took me. I told Hailey: 'Follow Dave and Barney', and I followed Hailey down. Kinda sounds familiar. Another reason I love Sun Valley so much.



[Hailey Skiing!](#)

My wife Callie and I had started taking Hailey skiing at Tahoe when she was five years old. Her very first day was at Mt. Rose. We had booked a semi-private lesson for her hoping she'd get some expert advice, and also so we'd be able to get some skiing time in. It seemed to pay off. By the end of that day Hailey was actually skiing pretty good.

Hailey took a group lesson in the morning the next day and by the afternoon, we were all skiing together and Hailey was doing pretty darn well for a five-year-old, Yeehaw!

We continued to take Hailey skiing at Tahoe several times during the following years. When we took Hailey to Sun Valley for the first time at seven years of age, we didn't bother taking her to Dollar Mountain. We took her straight to the top of Baldy, and she skied fine.

Year after year each winter Hailey, Callie and I would return to Sun Valley to visit Dave and enjoy the best skiing in the world we knew of. What's really cool is over the years during our winter trips to Sun Valley, Hailey got to spend enough time skiing with Dave that she actually picked up his style, and as a result is an incredibly gifted skier.



Extreme happiness making memories with family and enjoying the best skiing in the world, to something I never expected, the ultimate feeling of despair and loss after learning of my brother Dave's untimely death.

Dealing with death is never easy, and I'm still learning how. My mom died in 2009, and my dad died in 2010. Dave passed on July 12, 2012. In January 2013, Barny Ogden, Jack Corrock, Jack's daughter Anne, Tom Barker, Randy Buck, my daughter Hailey and I spread Dave's ashes on Baldy Mountain while enjoying a beautiful day of skiing at Sun Valley.

Then my other brother Bill died August 15, 2017. Later we spread Bill's ashes at the same locations on Baldy Mountain while skiing where we had spread Dave's ashes.

So, my brothers are together again. Whenever I want to visit my brother's memorials, all I have to do is go skiing at Sun Valley.

This is why I love Sun Valley.



John with his wife Callie and daughter Hailey at the base of Challenger – Yeehaw!

David Lynn Rowe



March 19, 2009

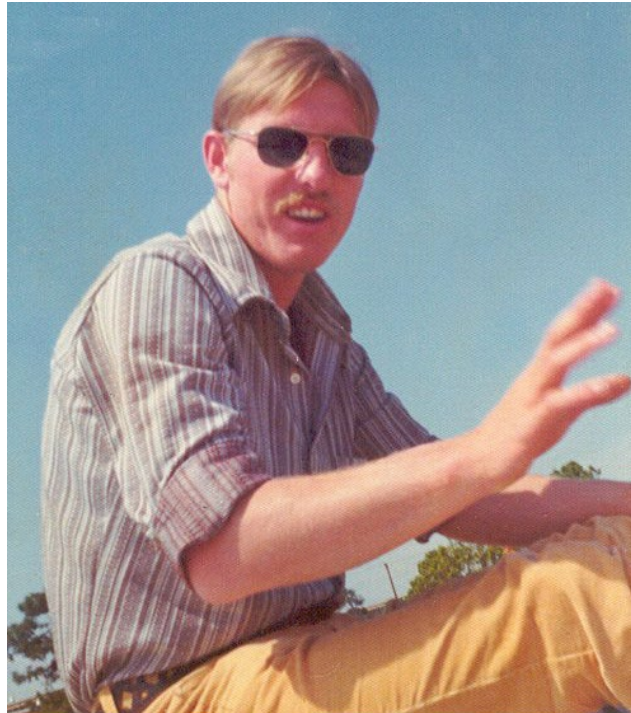
Born Feb. 18, 1954, passed away peacefully in his sleep on July 12, 2012, in Kamiah, Idaho. A master carpenter and avid skier, Dave resided in the Ketchum-Sun Valley area from 1973 to 2007, and was a frequent visitor since relocating to Kooskia, Idaho.

Dave is survived by his sister, Cristine Fawcett of Las Vegas, Nev., and his brothers, Bill Rowe of Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, and John Rowe of Marina, Calif.

A celebration of Dave's life will be held at Boundary Campground in Sun Valley starting at 4 p.m. on Friday, July 20, near the ski slopes that Dave loved. All Dave's friends are invited to join in helping Dave "carve his last turn."

[Link to Dave's Facebook Tribute page](#)

William Lee Rowe



William Lee Rowe, born January 7, 1953, passed away peacefully August 15, 2017, in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.

Bill grew up and graduated high school in Los Gatos, Calif., where he was a popular athlete. During his four-year tour serving in the US Army, Bill traveled to Germany, Austria, and Switzerland spending his free time snow skiing and enjoying the local beer in each country. After receiving an honorable discharge, Bill worked in the cable TV industry while living in the bay area. During this time Bill enjoyed playing softball with his friends which included many memorable post-game celebrations. Later Bill moved with his family to Ketchum Idaho, then Winters California, and finally Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.

Bill is survived by his sister Cris, brother John, daughter Leah, sons Billy and David, and grandchildren Shianne, Tevis, and Avin.

All are invited to a celebration of Bill's life to be held at Pebble Beach aka Osprey Point at Lake Coeur d'Alene, Idaho on August 15, 2018, 1PM.

[Link to Bill's Facebook Tribute page](#)