

Growing up skiing

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The Wanderlust Mom



If you've raised a family in Telluride, or any other mountain town, your story is probably similar to ours.

When skiing first brought you here, you spent a few euphoric seasons full of bell-to-bell powder days, closing day outfit planning and buckets of après ski margs.

You might have found love on the mountain, flirting your way through glades and chasing each other down steep chutes, pretending not to show off. Some of that ski bum romance may have resulted in a long-term partnership, a blending of low-end bank accounts and a seat-of-your-pants-search for permanent housing.

And then, there were the babies. I remember 2006, when everyone who'd moved here around the same time as Trav and I was suddenly expecting a child. In those days, the newspaper printed an annual photo of the local newborns and the baby boom of 2007 filled the Daily Planet's front page with a jam-packed grid of tiny faces. When the babies started com-

ing, that's when skiing changed forever.

For the first couple of infant years, I didn't buy a ski pass. Snowy excursions meant strapping little Hudson to one of our chests and taking tenuous glides on flat Nordic trails, checking his nose and mouth constantly to make sure he had adequate air flow as he snoozed. Sometimes, we'd bundle him into a thousand layers, pack him into a sled and pull him around the neighborhood with our lab Sadie trotting along beside us, keeping watch. The layering and un-layering of those expeditions usually took the better part of a Saturday.

By the arrival of Baby Number Two in 2010, we quickly learned that having a toddler plus an infant meant one sure thing: more gear. We acquired a Chariot, a complex contraption that transformed from a bike trailer to a mini-camper on skis. With one baby secured to one of our bodies, the other, bigger one could be pulled in the Chariot, where they'd spend most of their time sleeping as we made trip after trip to various Nordic ski trails on weekends.

By the time our daughter was 20 months old and our son was 4, my husband decided it was time to take it up a notch. One sunny day in March, we packed up the car and traveled an hour and a half down the road to the classic,

old-school ski area Hesperus. With its one double chair and small network of trails, Hesperus, Travis thought, would be the perfect place to host our inaugural, whole-family ski day. Four-year-old Hudson was already a happy member of Telluride's preschool ski program, Comets, and was ripping down slopes with gusto. But Viv, four months shy of her second birthday, was another story.

"Can I ski with my baby in a backpack?" Trav asked the liftie at Hesperus. "Are you buying a ticket?" the guy replied. "Yes," Trav said. "Then go ahead."

Hesperus, sadly, has been closed for the past two years and a peek at its website revealed a 2023 decision to disallow babies in backpacks. But on that day back in 2012, our family made slow turns, all together on downhill slopes for the very first time. We relished every blissful, low-pitched second.

Just a few weeks later we hit Kendall Mountain Ski Area in Silverton. The mountain only had a T-bar then and a handful of trails. Hudson and I took a few quick runs together, and then it was time for the big show. Travis put Hud's miniscule hand-me-down skis on little Viv, held her tightly during the T-bar ascent and then, in the move so many mountain parents are familiar with, skied with her between his legs down the slope. She giggled and chattered the whole way and

then promptly fell asleep at the bottom of the trail. Over the next few years, Viv would become known for falling asleep on most chairlifts and even while skiing. You may not believe that a person can fall asleep while skiing, but we have the videos to prove it.

Between-the-legs skiing, happy days spent on Lift 10, midday hot chocolate breaks and end-of-day exhausted melt-downs shaped our ski lives for the next few years. And then, suddenly, we blinked and our children were teenagers and outskiing us. The two of them are freestyle mogul skiers now, hurling themselves off jumps into complicated aerial flips and charging down bump courses with knees locked, traveling across the world to compete, speaking a ski-language that often forces me to beg for explanation or look things up.

It's the oldest cliché in the book that your kids grow up overnight, but I swear the process is somehow expedited when they are skiers. As the next chapter of skiing for our family unfolds, I will put my best boot forward to the following: having gratitude for these mountains and all the joy they have brought us and trying my damndest to keep up. ■

Jen Julia is a mom, a wife, a playwright, a surfer, a skier and a wannabe ukulele player.

Will San Miguel County remain a community to come home to?

BY PAUL REICH

Guest Commentary

Will the people who work in San Miguel County still be able to live here? That question has been with us for years. This past year gave it new urgency.

Teachers, healthcare workers, tradespeople, service workers and young families face a difficult choice: commute long distances, work three jobs or leave altogether. Longtime residents and retirees, even those who own their homes, feel the pressure of rising property taxes, insurance and everyday costs.

The average local wage is about \$57,000. The median home price now exceeds \$2.6 million.

We can see the effects across the county. Fewer families raising children here. More workers commuting longer distances to staff our schools, construction sites, clinics, and businesses. More homes dark for much of the year.

Other mountain communities show where this can lead when they fail to act or respond with solutions equal to the scale of the problem.

In Teton County, Wyoming, housing costs pushed the workforce out until many of the people who keep the community running could no longer afford to live anywhere near it. The town remains prosperous, but it is a different place than it once was.

San Miguel County is not Jackson. But the same pressures are here and the question is whether we act before those changes become permanent.

That is part of why I decided to run for county commissioner. San Miguel County Democrats recently nominated me as their candidate for District 2, and I wanted to share what is driving that decision.

For me, this is personal. My wife and I raised five children here. All five gradu-

ated from Telluride High School. Today we face a question that once seemed unthinkable: whether our children will ever be able to come home and build a life in the place they grew up. It is their hometown. The question is whether it will still be possible for it to be their home.

I have spent more than twenty-five years serving and caring about this community, serving on the school board and the hospital board, working in rural healthcare, and running a small Main Street business. Those experiences taught me that the best decisions happen when government listens early, explains clearly, and works openly and collaboratively with the people affected by those decisions.

A county commissioner cannot control every market force. But a commissioner does decide how growth is managed, how development approvals account for the housing and infrastructure they require, how public dollars are spent, and whether the process is transparent enough to earn the public's trust. Those are real levers, and they matter.

San Miguel County has already taken important steps. Voters have supported dedicated funding for workforce housing, and local governments have made real progress. But the challenge requires sustained cooperation across the county so that our resort, rural, and agricultural communities all stay strong.

The choices we make now will determine whether San Miguel County remains a community people can come home to, or simply a place people come to visit.

Paul Reich is the Democratic candidate for District 2 county commissioner.

Leer en español:

¿Seguirá siendo el Condado de San Miguel una comunidad a la que regresar?
¿Podrán seguir viviendo aquí los tra-

bajadores del Condado de San Miguel? Esta pregunta nos ha rondado la cabeza durante años. El año pasado se volvió más urgente.

Maestros, personal sanitario, comerciantes, trabajadores de servicios y familias jóvenes se enfrentan a una difícil decisión: viajar largas distancias, tener tres trabajos o irse para siempre. Residentes de larga data y jubilados, incluso aquellos que son propietarios de sus viviendas, sienten la presión del aumento de los impuestos a la propiedad, los seguros y los gastos diarios. El salario promedio local es de aproximadamente \$57,000. El precio medio de la vivienda supera ahora los \$2.6 millones.

Podemos ver los efectos en todo el condado: menos familias criando hijos aquí. Más trabajadores que viajan largas distancias para atender a personal en nuestras escuelas, obras de construcción, clínicas y negocios. Más hogares sin luz durante gran parte del año.

Otras comunidades montañosas muestran adónde puede llevar esto cuando no actúan o responden con soluciones a la altura del problema. En el condado de Teton, Wyoming, el costo de la vivienda expulsó a la fuerza laboral hasta el punto de que muchas de las personas que mantienen viva la comunidad ya no podían permitirse vivir cerca. El pueblo sigue siendo próspero, pero es un lugar diferente al de antes.

El condado de San Miguel no es Jackson. Pero las mismas presiones persisten, y la pregunta es si actuamos antes de que esos cambios se vuelvan permanentes.

Esa es una de las razones por las que decidí postularme para comisionado del condado. Los demócratas del condado de San Miguel me nominaron recientemente como su candidato para el Distrito 2, y quería compartir los motivos de esta decisión.

Para mí, esto es personal. Mi esposa y

yo criamos a cinco hijos aquí. Los cinco se graduaron de la escuela secundaria Telluride. Hoy nos enfrentamos a una pregunta que antes parecía impensable: si nuestros hijos podrán algún día regresar a casa y construir una vida en el lugar donde crecieron. Es su ciudad natal. La pregunta es si seguirá siendo posible que sea su hogar. He dedicado más de veinticinco años a servir y cuidar de esta comunidad, formando parte de la junta escolar y la junta del hospital, trabajando en el sector sanitario rural y dirigiendo un pequeño negocio en Main Street. Esas experiencias me enseñaron que las mejores decisiones se toman cuando el gobierno escucha con anticipación, explica con claridad y trabaja abierta y colaborativamente con las personas afectadas.

Un comisionado del condado no puede controlar todas las fuerzas del mercado. Pero sí decide cómo se gestiona el crecimiento, cómo las aprobaciones de desarrollo contabilizan las viviendas y la infraestructura que requieren, cómo se gastan los fondos públicos y si el proceso es lo suficientemente transparente como para ganarse la confianza del público. Estas son palancas reales e importantes.

El condado de San Miguel ya ha dado pasos importantes. Los votantes han apoyado fondos específicos para viviendas para trabajadores, y los gobiernos locales han logrado avances reales. Pero el desafío requiere una cooperación sostenida en todo el condado para que nuestras comunidades turísticas, rurales y agrícolas se mantengan fuertes.

Las decisiones que tomemos ahora determinarán si el condado de San Miguel sigue siendo una comunidad a la que la gente pueda volver o simplemente un lugar de visita. ■

Paul Reich es el candidato demócrata a comisionado del condado por el Distrito 2.