

# Fresh. (on skiing)

## Just the Two of Us

FASTER. BIGGER. BETTER? NOT ALWAYS. *By Megan Michelson*

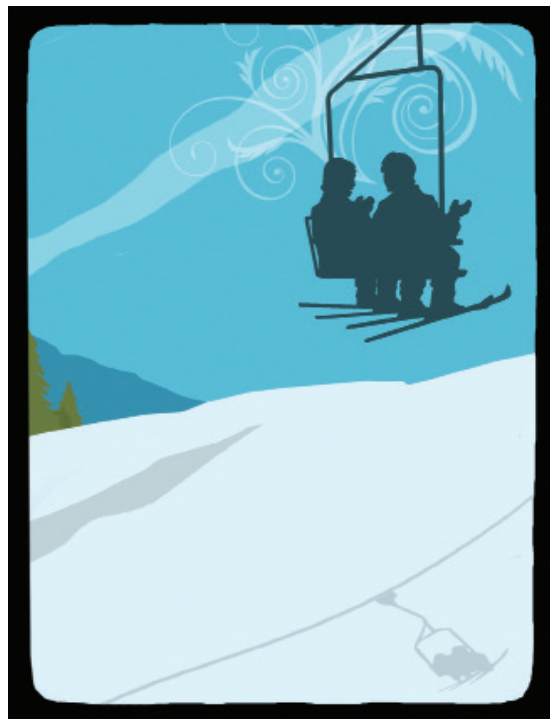
### Gad 2 at Snowbird was our escape.

We'd ride Snowbird's tram, crammed in with everyone else like cards in a shuffled deck. Then we'd make our way to the Gadzoom quad and chat politely with the two strangers who boarded the chair with us. "Snow sure is deep today, eh?" he'd say to the folks sharing the bench seat with us, giving me a sly smile from beneath his goggles.

Finally we'd get to Gad 2, a creaky, slow, fixed-grip double chair that took a blissful eight-minute tour of the treetops en route to a quiet summit. It was just the two of us, at last. That lift ride felt like the only place we could be ourselves, and be alone. We talked about everything on that chair; we shared our fears and concerns, our goals in life and our careers. We fantasized about traveling through Europe and enjoying high-alpine picnics. We sometimes just rode in silence, shoulders and ski tips brushing up against each other.

We grew close on that double chair. We knew we'd likely never be together in the long haul, but chasing each other through the powder-choked glades of Gad Valley's Thunder Bowl and Defiance Ledge, we could pretend that maybe, one day, it would all work out. And who really knew? As with all budding romances, the magic was about potential, not limits.

This winter, Snowbird is replacing Gad 2, which has been there since the resort first opened in 1971, with a shiny new high-speed quad. The new lift will cut the ride time in half, ferrying skiers to the top in a brisk four minutes.



On a double chair, a conversation can meander with a friend, a relative or a total stranger you've met suspended above the snow. Barriers are broken, secrets shared.

Gad 2 is just the latest in a series of old doubles being replaced by speedy new quads or six-packs, essentially buses on snow. In 2007, Vail swapped its aging Chair 10 for a high-speed four-seater, reducing the ride time from 14 minutes to a snappy six and a half. China Bowl mogul fanatics lamented the lack of rest and longed for the mellow pace of the old lift.

A few lingering doubles still exist out there in ski country: Crystal Mountain's

High Campbell, Sugarbush's Castlerock, Aspen's Bell Mountain, Arapahoe Basin's Pallavicini, Alpine Meadows' Alpine Bowl, and Silverton's one and only lift, a double they bought when Mammoth Mountain was getting ready to toss it.

Those chairs are leftovers from skiing's golden days of the 1960s and '70s, when the sport was more about connecting with friends in the mountains than counting vertical and crushing first tracks. Now, alongside rocket-paced chairlifts and wireless internet in gondolas, gear is designed to help you go faster, longer, harder. Yeah, it's hard to stop progress. But sometimes it makes you wonder what's progress and what's not. I'm in my early 30s, and I'm already sounding like an old-timer. Is the world changing that quickly?

On a double chair, a conversation can meander with a friend, a relative, or a total stranger you've met suspended above the snow. Barriers are broken, secrets shared. You have time to take in the scenery, to soak it all in. On a double chair, there's no escaping, no anonymity, and absolutely no rush.

As for the Gad 2 guy, it didn't work out, as predicted. And that's OK. But when Snowbird pulled down the old double chair over the summer, I felt a pang of sadness. That chapter of history is closed. I guess I'll be stuck riding Chickadee, the two-seater bunny-hill lift, when I'm craving some one-on-one conversations. I hope the kids don't think I'm weird. ●