

# LAST RUN

By Peter Kray

## How You Carve a Niche of Community and Connection

**The 2011 Interski Congress** took place in St. Anton, Austria, the birthplace of Hannes Schneider, widely considered the father of modern ski instruction.

I remember how it took American skiing icon, and Level III alpine instructor, Glen Plake more than an hour to make the five-minute walk from the hotel to the demonstration slope. He had his trademark Mohawk spiked up in red, white, and blue plumage for the event, and told me when he finally arrived at the slope (I'd left the hotel with him), "I just stopped to talk with anyone who wanted to talk."

Then he and his wife, Kimberly, stood waving an American flag as fireworks streaked the sky. The crowd cheered the synchronized ski and snowboard choreography of each nation's team as they descended into the base area, where everyone danced to the pulsing throb of Euroclub music.

It was an amazing event for the PSIA-AASI National Team. The U.S. was the only country that brought representatives from every discipline, including adaptive, as Bill Bowness and Geoff Krill dive-bombed their sit-skis under the spotlights, laying razor-sharp arcs in the hardpack.

Other than the French, the U.S. was also the only team to teach fat-ski clinics, embracing the new raised-tip rocker technology and comfortably surfing the region's unending acres of off-piste.

AASI Snowboard Team Coach Lane Clegg and PSIA Alpine Team member David Oliver lauded the expressive opportunities of adding a touch of freestyle to every lesson.

And, in a standing-room-only indoor presentation led by PSIA Alpine Team Captain Michael Rogan, Clegg, and PSIA Alpine Team member Jennifer Simpson, Rogan said instruction was as much about "community and connection," as it was about technique. "No matter what equipment a student shows up on," Rogan said, "We will teach to that."

### NO LESSON THE SAME

Sometimes when people ask me, "How do you write about skiing every day?" I reply, "I work with snowsports instructors. Every



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one of them has hundreds of stories to share, and they are all different."

I look at a PSIA-AASI member and see a book behind every pair of goggles. A personal history built over a lifetime of beautiful, wind-blown powder days in the expressive signature of every downhill turn they make. And I believe there is also that wild, wonderful sense of individuality in every student.

You can teach the same lesson to the same person 10 days in a row and every day something will change about it. The snow, the conversation, or just how someone is feeling can completely alter the learning environment.

Which is what the "come as you are" attitude in Rogan's Interski presentation was hinting at. How you could make an entire feel-good movie based on every single "aha" moment any one instructor has given each of their students.

And how each of those moments made a student's day, or vacation, or maybe gave them the confidence to set more goals – like deciding to make their own career out of sharing the joy of snowsports. And *that* person's path in snowsports would have a completely unique storyline behind it.

### 3 KEYS TO GREAT TEACHING

I was sitting in a conference room in Copper Mountain, Colorado – almost four years after St. Anton – when PSIA-AASI Director of Education Dave Schuiling started to

sketch out the Learning Connection Model on a napkin. I realized in the moment what a natural progression it was from the St. Anton presentation, clarifying the equal importance of teaching, technical, and people skills in keeping anyone engaged in the learning process.

At Interski 2015 in Ushuaia, Argentina, the national team would again share its instructional innovation with the global community of snowsports educators, further refining each inter-connected aspect of the holistic approach to teaching in an ongoing give-and-take.

From Interski 2019 in Pamporovo, Bulgaria, to the upcoming Interski 2023 in Levi, Finland, the Learning Connection Model has evolved to accurately assess and meet the needs of every instructor and student, and, in the eyes of this writer, any teaching environment.

It reminds me of how far we've come from St. Anton, sitting in a pub – with PSIA-AASI Board Chair Eric Shekleton, now president of Interski, and 2004-12 PSIA-AASI Teams Manager Katie (Fry) Ertl – toasting the long-lasting influence of Hannes Schneider and celebrating how America was poised to make its own important contribution to the future instruction of snowsports. **32**