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Winter Carnival Road Flares

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Myself
Logan, UT
December 2017

Winter Carnival Road Flares

Customs: Rites of Passage

Informant:

My name is Shannon Parks. I am 20 years old and am in my third year of my undergraduate degree at Utah State University. My degree will be in Elementary Education with a minor in Equine Science. I was born and raised in Steamboat Springs, Colorado. Steamboat is a ski town, and I was competitively ski racing by the time I was 7 years old. I stopped at 13 years old when I tore my ACL. I currently live in Logan, Utah, but maintain my Colorado residency. I was raised Christian, attending church primarily on Christmas and Easter. I am currently a captain of the Utah State University Equestrian Team. My hobbies include horseback riding, reading, hiking, camping, and watching Netflix with friends.

Context:

Winter Carnival is a weeklong festival held in my hometown of Steamboat Springs, Colorado. It has taken place the second week of February every year since its foundation in 1914. Activities include a parade on snow (snow that had previously been removed from the streets is trucked back in and dumped on Main Street. Typically about 600 tons of snow), the only band in the world that marches on skis, snow sculptures created by high school students, and the grand finale Night Extravaganza. The entire town celebrates Winter Carnival as a way to break up the lengthy winters. Kids only have school Monday through Wednesday allowing them to participate in the numerous activities.

The capstone to the week was the Night Extravaganza. Local firefighters would ski down the mountain with toboggans shooting fireworks, ski jumpers would launch themselves through flaming hoops, and the infamous 'Lighted Man' barreled down the mountain with literal backpack full of lit fireworks. The local ski club, Steamboat Springs Winter Sports Club always involved their skiers in the night extravaganza. Having grown up as a competitive ski racer I was always involved with Winter Carnival. I participated in the Night Extravaganza from the time I was six years old until I was 12. I tore my ACL the week before Winter Carnival when I was 13, leaving me incapable to participate.

Text:

The Night Extravaganza is a display of daring, unusual stunts that typically leave spectators in awe.

However, young children cannot be trusted to safely handle any pyrotechnics and instead are given glowsticks that are taped onto their bodies. At the age of 10 years old, children make the transition from beginner skiers to the competitive team. This transition is marked at Winter Carnival where the 10-year-old are entrusted to carry road flares down the mountain with the older kids, rather than glow sticks with the younger. The first time that I got to carry the flares it was terrifying to say the least. We

practiced our skiing pattern, putting out the torches, and what to do in the event of an emergency for weeks. The night of the extravaganza we were instructed to wear the warmest, yet rattiest snow clothes that we could find. We road up the chairlift before dark, about 5:30, and had to wait on the side of the hill for over 2 hours. Once the festivities started we watched as the 'Lighted Man' kicked off the celebration followed by the young children with glowsticks. It was our turn. Each one of the 10-year old's, including myself, had their torch ceremoniously lighted by an 11-year-old, who had transitioned only a year earlier. Once our flares were lit, we held them straight out, as far away from our bodies as possible, and began to snake our way down the mountain. At the bottom of the hill we placed our flares in the snow, extinguishing them without incident. We were now officially, full-fledged members of the traveling competitive team.

Texture:

Winter Carnival is one of the most joyous weeks of the year. The first time I carried the flares, however, the entire week was wracked with nervous energy. Once we were in place on the ski hill, having our flares lighted by our peers, it was a clear transition into a new group. Rather than simply being told that we were now going to travel across the state for races, we were subjected to a stressful initiation. The entire event created a stronger sense of team spirit, and brought everyone together as we transitioned into a new dimension of our sport.

Shannon Parks
Utah State University
Introduction to Folklore
Dr. Lynne McNeill
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