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Everyone loves a hockey mom. Except maybe mom, strapped with slavish devotion into an SUV racing from one arena to the next, her waistline expanding, her hamstrings shortening until the day she realizes she has become a spectator in her own life.

Spare her the minor hockey platitudes. She gets it (and most days she even likes it). Once in a while, though, mom wants to feel the crunch, the swoosh, the speed. Mom wants a rush. And if that rush comes at 2,450 metres in the Purcell Mountains with a sexy New York bartender mixing drinks in her kitchen at night and a lean and lanky New Zealander with smouldering eyes dishing up smoked salmon eggs benny the next morning, all the power to her.

The old adage is true: Happy mommy, happy family. Sure, tubing, magic carpets and fun runs entertain the kids, but for the ultimate family ski holiday, put mom first.

Kicking Horse Resort, 14 km above Golden, B.C., and a two-and-a-half hour drive from Calgary, Alta., has a reputation that precedes it. Even the name intimidates. It attracts rock stars, daredevils, the guys who party hard and ski even harder.

It's extreme, it commands respect, it demands action. It's not a place for spectators.

And, some say, it's not a place for beginners. But I chose Kicking Horse precisely because it is so extreme, because it offers a pure ski experience: 85 inbound chutes, 128 runs, with 1,260 vertical metres on 1,143 hectares – and relative solitude. (That's another bonus for a beginner – little fear of being bowled over by boarders.)

We booked our trip with Bramble Ski, which organizes European-style catered vacations with operations in Verbier, Switzerland, at St. Anton in Austria and, now, at Kicking Horse.

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Helping her brother find a Good Footing – literally



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Put it down to the old Presbyterian work ethic.

"The thought was always, 'Well, why not just give him a job?'" says Kirsten Gauthier, 39, an entrepreneur who helped her brother Jonathan, by conceiving the idea for Good Foot Delivery in Toronto, a not-for-profit courier company that exclusively hires developmentally disabled people. "But we weren't really raised like that in our family. We had to do it ourselves.

"Our mother is Scottish, you see," she adds with a rueful laugh. "We knew that any kind of help you give anybody, you have to be careful. I didn't want to give Jon a handout because it wouldn't mean anything."

The result is an inspiring story about consideration of each other and their individual needs, built on the belief that encouraging self-sufficiency is the best kind of support.

It's good old-fashioned love, the yesteryear kind, before helicopter parents and children raised in a save-me help-me bail-me-out culture of over-nurturing.

Jon Gauthier, now 36, is the youngest of three siblings, born in Sudbury, Ont., to a father who worked as a school principal and a mother who was a teacher. "I don't really have a name for my disability," he says, seated at a table in the open space of his sister's design company, Production Kitchen, located in the Queen Street West area, where the courier service has a small office in the back.

Enthusiastic and funny, he isn't shy about discussing his challenges. "It's non-verbal, more a mental learning disability. I have trouble focusing sometimes. I have a lot of thoughts going on in my head." On the table, he has placed a notepad filled with points he wants to make about his business venture.

His sister fills in the medical diagnosis. "It's bits of autism, bits of cerebral palsy. It's not one thing. It's a spectrum. He has trouble picking up social nuance, so it's more like Asperger's in that way. There are things he's really into. Early on, before many in his generation, he was into computers."

In Sudbury, he went through the regular school system and to Cambrian community college, where he studied information technology.

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Second Opinion

The disadvantaged need more than universal sickness care. They need to get 'causes of the causes of poor health' addressed
André Picard, Page 6

Better Brain

Just got dumped? Research shows the brain registers rejection in the same way as physical pain. So is there a painkiller for heartbreak?
Mark Fenske, Page 5

Damage Control

How do I tell my friend I can't afford a fancy restaurant for his birthday?
David Eddie, Page 5



Hampson: 'They love being here and being part of a community'

» But his parents were concerned about his ability to support himself. At 19, he signed up for Ontario Disability Support Program, a government service that provides income support and employment opportunities to disabled people. Until he was 30, he lived at home and worked at part-time jobs.

"And then my sisters said, 'Okay, you're moving to Toronto,'" he says, lifting his hands in the air as exclamation. (The eldest sibling, Ruth, also lives in Toronto.)

"My parents were at a stage where they should be enjoying the rest of their life too. And Jonathan was at a stage where he was done living with Mom and Dad," Ms. Gauthier says.

He moved into an apartment above Ruth and found work – but never anything permanent. "We were just trying to stay away and let him find his own way," Ms. Gauthier says.

But in the summer of 2009, she could see that intervention was needed. He had financial trouble. He wasn't eating properly.

Good Foot Delivery, which just celebrated its first anniversary, was a perfect solution.

"It's a business, not just a charity," says Ms. Gauthier, who has run her own design and production business for 13 years.

"There's an opportunity to use his skills in social media, go out to business groups, have something to talk about."

Mr. Gauthier has more than 1,000 followers on Twitter, which has generated many new clients.

Ms. Gauthier asked a friend, Melanie McNeil, to come on board as executive director.

"We need that buffer between us," jokes Mr. Gauthier, who is head courier, as he glances at his sister.

The two siblings look alike with handsome features, dark hair and clear blue eyes. Growing up, they were often at loggerheads, they admit.

"I just didn't think he should get away with things. He should be treated like everyone else," she says.

Good Foot now employs six couriers, of various ages and disabilities, whom Mr. Gauthier trains. Using a similar model to Toronto's A-Way courier service, which hires people who've had mental health issues, Good Foot's employees all use public transit or go on foot to deliver



'This venture is just as much for me as it is for him,' says entrepreneur Kirsten Gauthier, of the company her brother Jon works for. FRED LUM/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

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Jon Gauthier

on why he likes his job as a courier

packages. Bikes are often too dangerous for them and none has a driver's licence.

Clients total 54 and include Virgin Mobile, Wind, law firms and creative businesses.

"I did a little poll of the couriers," Mr. Gauthier explains, unprompted, reading from his notes.

"What they like is no stress. They love being here and being part of a community, getting out and about. They love having a purpose."

Local businesses have pitched in. The employees get a free yoga class once a week at Downward Dog. Lunches are delivered free for them. Clients have donated hockey tickets. Others have given movie passes.

"What I witnessed with Jon was the isolation. When you have a disability like Down syn-

drome, it has a name, and you can create a program around it, and everyone can go to the same thing and get to know each other. But with developmental disabilities, it's so broad, and they're scattered throughout society. You just kind of get lost," Ms. Gauthier says.

Good Foot has helped Mr. Gauthier – "I have a routine. I have a responsibility. More confidence. I have to be here every morning at 9 a.m." – but it has also made a difference to his sister's life.

"The sense of responsibility around [Jon's disability] has always been a challenge for me," she admits. "This venture is just as much for me as it is for him." He now lives in an apartment that isn't close to either of his sisters.

As they prepare to go outside

to be photographed, Mr. Gauthier confides that he values his freedom. "I don't want to be hovered over," he tells me.

Earlier on, Ms. Gauthier had said that she doesn't interfere with his active social life. She trusts him to be responsible. "There are things that stress me out," she added. "Like I won't go to his apartment because it's messy."

Still, their bond is evident in their jokes, their honesty, the way she sometimes prompts him to more fully express his feelings, and the look he gives her – a mixture of sibling rivalry, irritation and love.

Just before they step outside, Ms. Gauthier approaches him to fix his scarf and pull his woolen tuque over his ears.

Silent, he patiently submits to her ministrations.