

Sledding not all it's cracked up to be

By Esther Baird

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BEVERLY, MASS. - Today it's sunny and warm. Tomorrow it's supposed to snow "heavily" — up to 14 inches. Great. The snow pack in front of our house was finally starting to melt and we'd just stopped tracking rock salt through the foyer. All that sunshine and warmth was tantalizing. It almost felt believable. But here we are still squarely in the middle of January.

The relentless snow accumulation of the past eon — technically six weeks — did allow for a family first: We took our 3-year-old sledding.

She was excited about sledding in concept. But when we got to the hill and watched children whiz past us, the actual execution of sledding seemed daunting. It was a big hill after all, no mere slushy bump.

"Maybe we should just make snow angels," she said.

But my husband explained that sledding would be great fun and they made their way up.

Once at the top my 6'5" husband folded himself into the cheap, day-glo orange, plastic sled and wedged our daughter between his legs. It didn't look comfortable, or in any way aerodynamic. Still, they managed to pick up a bit of speed and no one fell out. It was a solid first run.

I watched from the sideline with our baby whom we'd immobilized in layers of down and fleece within her jogging stroller. Only her eyes were visible and they communicated to me that she, at least, was **not** having great fun.

The second run was a bit more — impactful.

My husband and daughter climbed back up the hill. They patiently waited their turn and had a decent trip down. It seemed like our daughter might finally be enjoying herself. But as they stood up there was a war-like cry.

We all turned and looked up the hill. We all saw the mother and son sledding duo. They had accidentally launched themselves downward before it was their turn. Not only that, but they were atop a gigantic sledding tube. It was the SUV of sleds — a huge mass of inflatable nylon, slick as snot on snow, with multiple handle positions to keep the riders firmly atop while it hurtled over everything in its path.

They were racing right towards my husband and daughter.

In the slow-motion moment that followed, it became clear that the mother, who was crouched over her son in a half-prone position, had absolutely no control over the tube. She was hanging on for dear life, and, pony tail flapping widely behind her, was doing the only thing she could as a sledder-gone-wild. She was screaming for everyone to, “*Look out!!*”

My husband reacted instinctively. With one swoop he yanked our daughter up by her arm and flung her off to his side. Ensnared in her wholly purple snowsuit, she made a lovely lavender arc through the air before landing safely in a snowdrift. With no time left to fling himself, my husband angled his body away from the incoming mother and son. They plowed into him with an explosion of snow and nylon whisking him completely off his feet and into the air — a fact he didn’t realize until I later played back his heroism. Still gripping the tube handles, the mother hung on as she and her son rocketed up and flipped over into the snow finally, finally, coming to a stop.

Since the ground was covered with a few hundred feet of snow — or at least three — everyone was fine despite being flung and tossed and shot canon-like about the hill. What’s sledding without a few body-slamming crashes? Well for one thing, it seemed to our daughter, it was not the great fun we’d promised.

Our daughter declared that she was done sledding. And really, who in her shoes — double insulated purple boots — wouldn’t be?

My husband and I looked at each other. Her entire future as a child in wintery New England seemed to hang in the balance. We couldn’t let her first sledding experience end on this explosive note.

“Oh no, we aren’t done yet!” I waded over to her. “I want a turn to sled with you.” My daughter protested but I forced an enthusiastic note into my voice and dragged her back up.

“C’mon sweetie, we’ll just go one time. Whoohoo!! Sledding is such *fun!*!”

“I’d rather make snow angels,” she muttered.

I gave her a big smile and we slid down with no further incidents thereby saving her wintertime North Shore childhood. Though, if the snow keeps up the rest of this winter, I think we’ll stick to snow angels.

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