

FROM WHERE I SIT

JOHN COONEY

Once Upon a Slow Toboggan

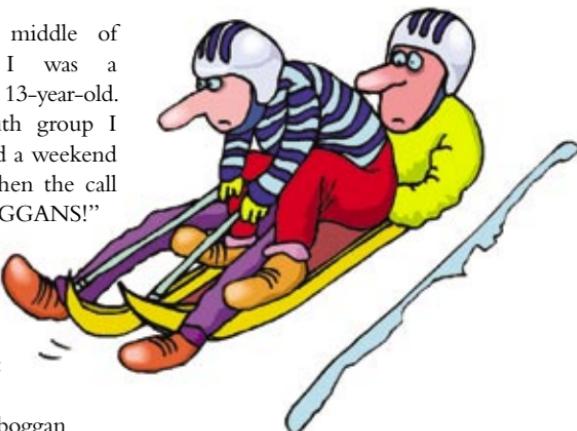
The subject of skiing came up recently. Wrong time of year, I know. But me and Mrs Cooney were wasting some lazy days. With friends. In the South Island. Drinking flat-whites and soaking up the scenery. There was patchy snow still there on some of the mountains. And when the subject of skiing came up, I confessed I hadn't. Ever. "But wait a minute," I recalled. "I came close to it. Once ..."

It happened in the middle of mid-winter, when I was a small-but-determined 13-year-old. It happened when the youth group I belonged to decided to spend a weekend in the snow. It happened when the call went out: "Let's build TOBOGGANS!"

Now, I never did anything by halves. And that call captured my fertile imagination, appealing to the adolescent genius that lurked within me.

True, I'd never ridden a toboggan before. And true, I'd never even touched SNOW! But hey (I figured), how hard could it be?

Well, one week later, with tools and timber and nails and screws sneaked from my dad's shed, I, John Cooney, had single-handedly built the bestest, most fastest, most beautiful toboggan in the world! Yes, it was solid – no way would this baby fall apart. It was also stylish – with cushioned seats-for-two. And (wait for this ...) it



could be STEERED – with braking levers cunningly attached to each side!

I can't remember what colour paint I used on my toboggan. But I can remember feeling inordinately proud. And I'm not making this up. On the Friday night of our departure, as two strong men heaved my creation onto the trailer, my fellow-youth-groupers were GREEN with envy. (Do you know: some of the slackers had just brought along sheets of old plastic? I mean, how embarrassing!)

They oohed and aahed and carried on, nudging each other and stroking the paintwork. And, on the long drive down, they each made me promise that I'd give them a go.

Well, we hit the mountain early next morning, and dragged my speed-machine up the nearest snowy slope. It felt like the entire population was watching, and I was so excited I could hardly breathe. But when I sat down in that cushioned seat for the inaugural flight, and my best friend hopped on behind, my work of art sank. That's right – SANK! And when we rocked back and forth to get it sliding, it just sank deeper. My friend offered to push, and I reluctantly agreed – but as soon as he stopped, so did I!

We hauled it up a steeper slope (man, that thing was heavy!) and tried again. But no amount of coaxing or shoving could get us moving downhill – let alone plunging from peak to peak like I'd dreamt of doing.

I finally had to concede defeat. My bestest, most fastest, most beautiful toboggan was a flop. A failure. A dead weight in that soft snow. And I was so disappointed I could've cried ...

I don't remember much else about that weekend on the ski fields. Except that someone took pity on me and loaned me a spare sheet of plastic. I, John Cooney, swallowed my pride and slid down the slopes on my bum and had so much fun!

My toboggan? Well, no WAY did I want to take it home! I'm ashamed to admit that, at the end of the day, we dragged the stupid thing around a corner, hid the stupid thing behind some rocks, covered the stupid thing over with snow, and left it on the mountain.

As far as I know, it's still there ... 

JOHN, GRAPEVINE'S FOUNDER & EDITOR,
MAY YET FACE A LENGTHY JAIL SENTENCE
FOR A CRIME HE COMMITTED 43 YEARS AGO:
LITTERING WITH INTENT!

THORT



***"The trouble with
jogging is that,
by the time you
realise you're not fit
enough, it's too far
to walk back!"***