

Trying to get inside the mind of Bode Miller is a bit like trying to keep up with him on the slopes. You'll never do it by playing safe. We took a chance and asked him for some exclusive face time and he invited us, and you, into his remarkable life, both at home and on the razor's edge of his career as the best skier in the world.

# Being BODE

## Young Man of the Mountain

Story by MEG CADOUX HIRSHBERG • Photos by JOHN HESSION

Here's what you might think you know about 2008 World Cup ski champion Bode Miller: the Franconia, New Hampshire, native grew up in the woods with kerosene lamps and an out-house, went to school only occasionally, and was raised by wolves. Well, maybe not wolves, but, to believe the media stories, he lacked all the softening refinements of civilization.

Pin him down with this portrait and he'll wriggle. This man will not be fenced in — geographically, philosophically or personally. What belief system Bode has is summarized best by the title of his autobiography: "Go Fast, Be Good, Have Fun."

Anyone who reads the sports pages is familiar with the "Go Fast" and "Have Fun" aspects of Bode

Miller's persona. But "Be Good"? Recently, when asked what he'd most want to communicate to his legions of fans, especially the young ones, Bode's surprising response had nothing to do with enjoyment, self-reliance or success. "The most important things in life are those moments when you do something purely because it's the right thing to do, even if no one is watching. Those fleeting, dumb moments, those little choices you make every day — someone drops something and you pick it up for them, you help someone across the road — that's when you have the opportunity to define your character. Most of the time there's no payback but you do it anyway. It's a process that builds self-confidence, at school, in sports and in life."



Bode Miller's workout routines are self-styled and iconoclastic, as is his training room in a barn at the family's organic farm in Sugar Hill.



The original family home has become more of a retreat for Bode, family and friends. The spot was named Turtle Ridge when Bode's dad realized it was shaped like a turtle shell. The house is built around a boulder that provides stair steps between levels.

Bode grew up steeped in small town, North Country values. In his autobiography Bode writes: "My family taught us that the best way to protect your own freedom is to watch everybody else's back. That's the essence of community." When Bode was young, the Franconia community often watched his back, doing right by him because it was the right thing to do — even though at that point no one was watching. During Bode's first Olympics in 1998, in Nagano, Japan, collection boxes popped up all over town to help pay for the family's travel there. As a child, Bode never had money for skis and equipment, but somehow he got what he needed from a few local benefactors. He'd hitchhike to and from Cannon Mountain, and someone would always pick him up and bring him

home. When Bode was a small boy alone on the mountain, locals would buy him lunch. "Bode grew up without much access to material things, but he knew that whatever he needed, he'd have," says his uncle and coach Mike Kenney. Adds Jean McLean, owner of Franconia's Floradale Flower Shop, "It takes a community to raise a kid — you're always somebody's other parent."

Driving north from Concord on I-93, the terrain starts to change around Plymouth. The landscape opens up, exit signs are farther apart and hills become small mountains. Stomach muscles that you didn't know were tense begin to relax. Keep going and the mountains grow bigger. Eventually the highway squeezes to two lanes as you pass

through Franconia Notch, past the ghost of the Old Man of the Mountain and the ski slopes of Cannon. Just north of the Notch, Cannon and Mount Lafayette loom over the tiny (around 1,000 residents) village of Franconia. In the 1940s Bode's grandparents Peg and Jack Kenney bought 450 acres in next-door Easton, with the dream of starting a ski lodge. Jack, an avid tennis player, decided to use the property to create Tamarack Tennis Camp instead, which is still run by the Kenney family. Bode grew up on this property; Jo, his mother, Bode's sisters Kyla and Genny Wren, and three of Bode's uncles live there still. When he's home Bode still works out in a tiny, dark, dusty room in the all-but-abandoned barn the family inherited with the property.

# BODEisms

Apparently living on the edge at high velocity provides a zen-like mental clarity. Consider the following bits of wisdom from the Bode-satva.

*"No options, no excuses, never complain, never explain, just make it happen, and so I did."*

On ski racing: "You get a minute, maybe two, and then it's over. You better shine."

*"Ignoring global warming, it seems to me, is like ignoring Hermann [Austrian ski champion Hermann Maier]. Even if you could, it wouldn't make him go away."*

"I just don't respond well to orders ... and I follow advice only if I ask for it, and I never ask for it."

*"Here's my small bit [of advice]: everything you need to succeed is inside your head; listen to yourself."*

"I follow a simple plan: go fast, be good, have fun."

*"Falling is part of life."*

"I'm a citizen of the United States of America, and to me that means that life's purpose is the pursuit of happiness — 'pursuit' being the operative word. Happiness isn't an excuse to slack; it's an opportunity to be your best, to create a life's work, to make your mark. If this is news to you, then it's definitely time to get off your ass and do something extraordinary. Happiness awaits."

*"I always err on the side of good; things never go badly with good — that is, simple niceness, a smile, a nod, a gracious reply ... niceness will always pay off... one good deed begets another — I see it too often to doubt it. Call it viral niceness."*

"Lose any baggage [preparing for a race], personal or otherwise, go ninja, and wipe your mind clean of negative thoughts ... Don't add to the list of unknowns ... the little voice inside your head better be saying 'Yes you can,' because if it isn't, prepare to die."

*"Act from conviction, never from fear, and know the difference in yourself."*

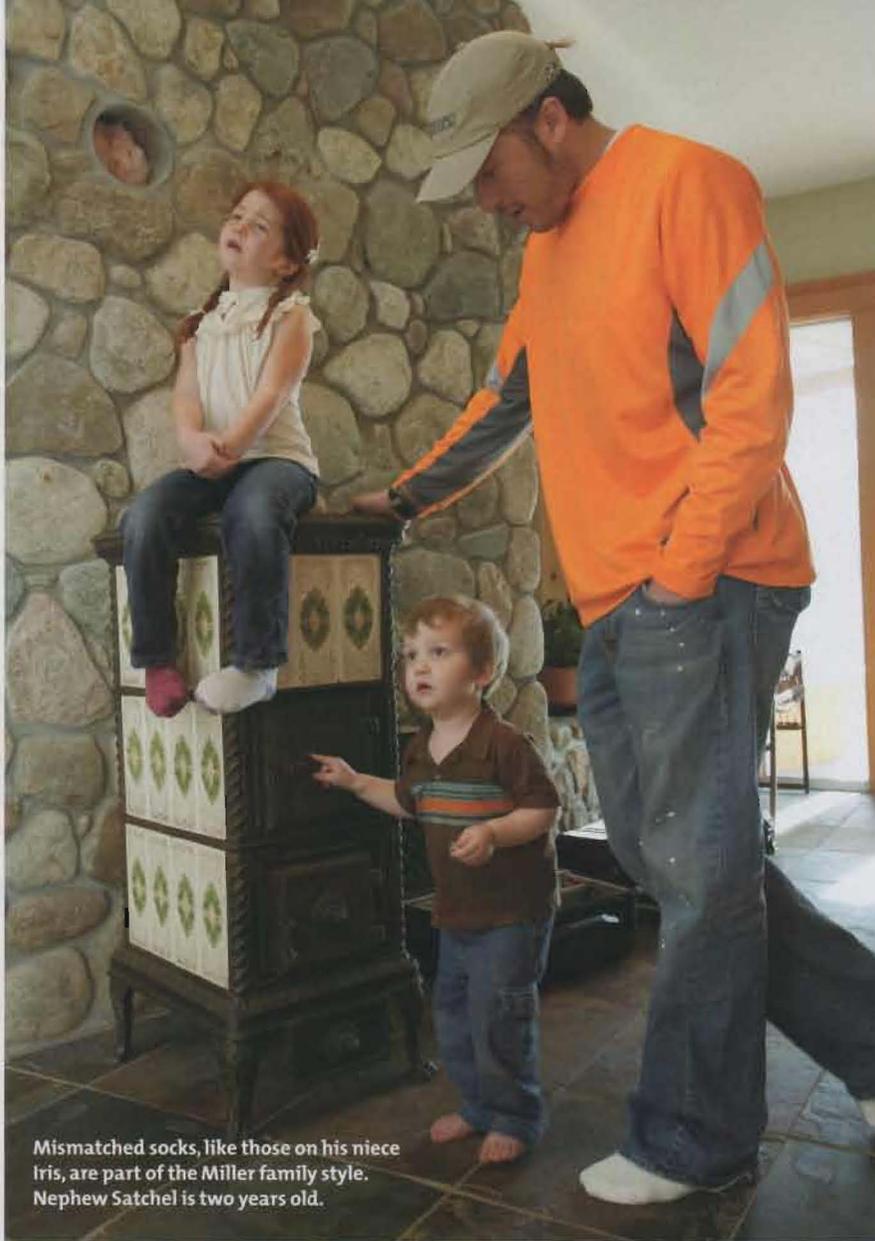
"... life for me is one long seek-and-enjoy mission ... If you're not fundamentally happy, something's wrong."

*"Somebody said later [after Bode lost a race] that I might as well have stayed home. That's a bad attitude to take. We'd give up at a lot of things in life if we knew in advance how difficult they'd be, or how badly they'd turn out. But then we'd never excel at anything, or even learn much; we'd be a culture of half-asses and middling wannabes. So thank goodness we can't see into the future. March on, I say. It's our only option."*

— Taken from Miller's autobiography, "Go Fast, Be Good, Have Fun"



When in New Hampshire, Bode could bunk at his lovely, recently constructed home at Bretton Woods ski resort (given by Bretton Woods as part compensation for Bode's former role as director of skiing), but he prefers his spare, tiny room at Turtle Ridge Farm in Sugar Hill, next to Franconia. Bode bought the 650-acre farm — a local historic treasure Bode renamed for the ridge in nearby Easton where he grew up — a couple of years ago to save it from development. Thousands of pounds of mostly organic vegetables and hundreds of eggs from the farm's chickens are sold each summer at the farmstand. Bode's sister Kyla Miller uses one wing of the farmhouse for a cooperative preschool she founded. The school emphasizes the values that Kyla, Bode and their



Mismatched socks, like those on his niece Iris, are part of the Miller family style. Nephew Satchel is two years old.



Kyla Miller hugs her brother in the family's Bretton Woods kitchen.

siblings, Genny Wren and Chelone, were raised with. "We set up the pre-school to allow the kids to be natural, to feed the chickens and experience the farm and appreciate the outdoors. We want them to trust people, to have confidence and coordination. Things are too fast and furious now."

No one skis faster than Bode Miller, but he grew up in a slow world. His parents, Jo and Woody Miller, chose to raise their kids in a rustic house a mile-long walk into the woods — famously without plumbing and electricity — on the Kenney land in Easton. Woody named their homestead Turtle Ridge not only because the ridge they occupied had a turtle-like bump, but because the turtle — peaceful, slow, pure and unchanged — is Woody's totem, and a lot like Woody himself. A quiet man, with a graying beard, flannel shirt, work boots, jeans and the electric blue eyes of his children, Woody says that Bode's childhood years spent wandering the woods and mountains "taught him that he can figure things out for himself." Adds Steve Heath, owner of the Franconia Village Store: "Bode's independence comes from spending more time outdoors, away from people. He was always testing his mental and physical strength. Self-reliance creates a feeling of independence. Obviously he was born with a God-given talent. But growing up here he developed the confidence to go against the grain."

Bode's mother Jo (who was divorced from Woody when Bode was a young boy) agrees: "I think Bode's success as a skier comes partly from growing up with nature — his comfort with the elements, the ground, the snow. He has a sensitivity to and understanding of the terrain. For his first 10 years, when he wasn't in ski boots he was barefoot. He can look at a ski course and pick a unique line. That comes from a life of looking at the ground, walking on rocks and climbing trees." In his autobiography, Bode rhapsodizes about childhood delights like "coming across secret fields of pink and white Lady's Slippers, or a stash of fiddleheads to be harvested next year at a profit. In the deep shadows there's moss so thick you can bounce on it like it's a trampoline. Or fields of sharp granite rocks as big as tall ships, plowed up by the glacier that came through here a mere hundred thousand years ago."

## FRANCONIA CONNECTION

Kenney/Miller family connections to Franconia run deep and Bode is a great source of hometown pride. Steve Heath, whose family has owned and run the Franconia Village Store for more than half a century, posts Bode's ski news on the store bulletin board daily. Reflecting on small-town life in northern New Hampshire, Heath celebrates what the North Country has to offer: "People here do give up something in terms of jobs, culture and social life," he says. "But we live here for the quality of life. It's an outdoor paradise. We're on vacation every day."

The Village Store has long been the gathering place for the community, where neighbors swap gossip and argue politics, and it provides a camera-ready snapshot of life in northern New Hampshire. On a Formica table next to the meat section in the back of the store sits the daily crossword puzzle from today's *Caledonian Record*, printed in nearby Littleton. A customer sits there on a rough wooden stool, and with assistance from the guy cutting meat, she fills in a few blanks. "Every day people who have time come back here to pitch in a word or two," she says. "We usually have it finished by the end of the day." People here are loners, but are not alone — they come together over countless events, from sports to crossword puzzles, and in tragedy, too: When Bode's uncle Bubba drowned many years ago, hundreds from the community gathered at the Miller property and, forming a huge circle, they held hands. In his autobiography Bode writes: "You can't dream up a place like this, though you might like to."

Notwithstanding these encomiums about the value and richness of small-town life, Bode has ambivalent feelings about the culture in northern New Hampshire. Relaxing in jeans and a T-shirt in the small, casually furnished living room of the Turtle Ridge farmhouse, Bode looks at home. (Not so his current female companion, a pleasant, black-clad Canadian blonde who constantly checks her BlackBerry). "I love this area and my family is great," he begins. "I appreciate a lot of what's here and try to help — that's why I bought the farm. People here are in your corner for the right reasons. They won't throw you under the bus if you lose." He continues: "I am a product both of their support, and also of my direct resistance to their input. A lot of people here are run-

## Why is BODE MILLER the best skier in the world?



According to Bode's coaches, John McBride and Mike Kenney (Bode's uncle), Bode's unique collection of attributes work together to make him the best skier in the world. Asked to list those particular qualities, they observe that Bode:

>is calm, confident and focused in high-pressure situations.

>has great body awareness, response time, agility and balance.

>is hard on himself and holds himself to a high standard.

>has an analytical mind that allows him to help design his equipment and visualize the ski that will work best for him. His mind is always churning.

>is an independent, free thinker who breaks rules, which allows him to re-think conventional wisdom. For example, he was always ridiculed for leaning too far back on his skis. He can do this because he has amazing balance and great ankle strength. By keeping his center of gravity behind the ski, he can go faster.

>makes micro-adjustments quicker than other skiers. He can make split-second recoveries. He can stay unbalanced longer than others.

>shortens

the radius of his high-speed turns, taking a more direct line to the gates.

>developed his own training regimen. He has a nutrition consultant. He has his own cook and travels in his own RV. These are important factors in maximizing his fitness and readiness.

>has a huge capacity to train and to sustain a high level throughout the season. On off-days or after races, he often plays competitive tennis. He keeps mentally fit and at high intensity. He doesn't think himself into a peak athletic state — he's always there.

>believes in taking the big risk and going 100 percent. He could easily ski like a machine and wind up on the podium a lot. But his philosophy about the sport is almost aesthetic — trying to cheat and beat physics gives him a certain reward. Consequently, he falls a lot. (As a *Time* writer put it, he either lands on the podium or on his posterior.) But Bode chooses to be authentic to himself as a sportsman.

To see some of Bode's more amazing moments ski racing, go to [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) and type "Bode Miller" into the search area.





ning away from the pressures of modern life. Nobody leaves. So few people respond to their ambitions. They don't prepare for their retirement. What if something goes wrong? People around here hope for the best and assume that the community will pick them up when they fall. They stagnate. My feeling was that this was not for me."

Jean McLean, whose family has lived in the area — and owned Floradale Flower shop — for many generations, has a more seasoned perspective on life in the North Country: "It's hard to live up here," she acknowledges. "Most people work in trades, like landscaping or carpentry. There's not a lot to do. But this place builds strong character. Bode's hiked all

these mountains. A lot of these kids are fiercely independent, like Bode. You don't see a lot of followers. Kids don't hesitate to say what they think. They challenge things and people."

Bode's legendary willingness, even eagerness, to challenge conventional thinking is often a source of irritation to coaches, most particularly to his former coaches on the U.S. Ski Team. As a teenager, Bode was the first to use a shaped ski in racing — now use of this ski is standard. In vain his coaches tried to get Bode to lean forward on his skis to race in a more conventional style, but he insisted on shifting his center of gravity to the back of his skis — a form that younger skiers are now trying to emu-

late. Most audaciously, and famously, last year Bode decided to part ways with the U.S. Ski Team and form Team America. He'd been a member of the U.S. team for 11 years and was tired of haggling over what he considered their arbitrary rules and their decreasing level of financial support. Now Bode has his own team with his own coaches, nutritionist, training regimen and highly-mobile caravan that travels around Europe during World Cup races, which allows him to train where the skiing is best. "Bode never really listens to anybody," says Mike Kenney. "He is always fully confident in his decisions athletically. He keeps breaking rules."



Bode and his mother catch up during one of his visits to the family's home at Bretton Woods, while nieces Isabella, age 8 and Iris, age 5, play.

## THE FULL-BODY RUSH

Six-two and a bit over 200 pounds, Bode is all sinew and muscle. His body is taut and powerful, but his face is relaxed. He has striking blue eyes and some facial scruff — the only feature that makes him look anywhere near his 30 years. He has the rumpled demeanor of an adolescent who would rather be sleeping or eating or hanging out with friends or just about anywhere else than sitting down for yet another interview. His sponsor-logoed cap never leaves his head — even during his appearances on the *Ellen* and *Conan O'Brien* shows shortly after he won the World Cup. Bode is gruff but not overtly macho; when he remembers to smile, he's disarming. He is highly articulate,

intelligent, opinionated and funny. What Bode lacks in warmth, he makes up for in authenticity.

Though raised in the slow-paced culture of the North Country, Bode worships speed. "For the full-body rush of speed and excitement, nothing beats alpine skiing," he writes. His dream is to some day ski as fast as the natural universe will allow. The fastest he's been clocked going downhill is around 100 mph, 20 miles an hour faster than most people ever go in their cars. At top speeds a racer can pull between 3 and 4 Gs, just like a fighter jet. Racing at this level, he writes, is like a high-functioning form of meditation. It's a death-defying act: "one wrong move and I'm toast." In an interview, Bode explains that most racers rely on instinct, because it's difficult to make real-time decisions at such high speeds. But he tries to live in those critical moments — to consciously react to what's in front of him with lightning reflexes.

Recently a British sports blogger complained online about "the frat boy larks" of American athletes. "I'll make an exception, however," he wrote, "for the ski racer Bode Miller. The way he flew that massive jump [in Kvitfjell, Norway], holding his tuck like a man in a wind-tunnel, and then turned left in mid-air a few seconds later, represented the purest physical poetry sports has to offer."

Bode Miller won the World Cup Overall title this year, having won it for the first time in 2005. He also took the title in the Combined (timed slalom combined with timed downhill runs). His total of 31 career wins in World Cup races is the most in U.S. history. While most competitive skiers specialize in either the speed events (downhill, super-G) or the technical events (slalom, giant slalom), Bode does it all; he is recognized as being one of the very best overall skiers in the history of the sport. In 1998, at the age of 21, Bode made his Olympic debut in Nagano, Japan. He went on to win two silver medals at the Salt Lake City Olympics in 2002, but failed to medal in Torino in 2006 — the same year his "frat boy larks" got tsk-tsked worldwide, garnering headlines like *Newsweek's* "America's Top Ski Bum"

and *Time's* "Rebel on the Edge" — angering and alienating Bode, and embarrassing the U.S. Ski Team.

Bode refuses to get caught up in medal fever. This attitude has been widely denounced as reflecting laziness, a refusal to take the sport seriously or as bravado to cover any future losses. Bode dismisses all the armchair psychoanalyzing. "I'm always out to ski hard," he says. "If I get good results, that's ideal. The effort and intensity are the only things I can control. If the other guy skis better, I don't get the results." The six-month long World Cup championship is a true test of a skier's consistency and versatility. Bode might race 40 times during the World Cup season, which minimizes the effect of any one particular race. But in the Olympics, winning a gold medal comes down to a skier's form on a given day. Since races are won or lost by hundredths of a second, a gust of wind or a slight temperature shift causing a micro-change in the texture of the snow can be "the difference between being a total disgrace or coming out with three medals," says Bode. "I was there, in Torino, I know how close it was. But we get so blinded by medal counts."

Bode's coach, John McBride, agrees that Bode holds himself to the very highest possible standard of performance: "I've seen him feel great about a race he didn't win, and I've seen him disappointed by one he won because he didn't lay down a performance he thought was worth winning." Bode only has fun when he does his best, but when he does his best he usually wins.

Bode generated a lot of negative ink during the 2006 Olympics. Widely perceived as being the raucous, hard-drinking playboy of skiing, he was roundly condemned for apparently sacrificing his place on the podium for the pleasures of the late-night party ("Have Fun"). This culminated in an infamous "60 Minutes" interview in which Bode spoke of how difficult it was to ski-race with a hangover. "He wanted to sabotage himself," says his sister Kyla. Adds Woody: "That interview was a way to fight back. Bode felt owned, controlled, by the spon-



sors, by the media, by the emphasis on medals above all else. The partying, drinking, hanging out with models — he both loves and hates it. Money is not a big motivator for him. He's trying to find a healthy way to relate to all of it." This past ski season, Bode stayed true to his recent pledge to stay sober. "Not drinking this year was about holding himself accountable to a higher level," says coach McBride.

Now that he's reached the very highest level of the sport, what motivates Bode to keep competing? It's not the money, according to his family, though he does like to help causes he cares about. Bode's mother Jo says, "His drive comes from his passion for skiing, from the satisfaction of doing it well."

"It's what I love," says Bode, simply. He does have personal achievement goals, such as becoming the first man to finish a World Cup season with 14 victories. "But I'd be surprised if I were doing this for more than a couple more years," he says. "I'd like to have a family and be more involved in managing the farm." He calls the Olympics "completely corrupt" and is not sure he will compete in 2010. Olympic athletes are taken advantage of, Bode says, and the billions of dollars that flow into the event are often ill spent. But he values "the Olympic dream that still lives in people, in kids most of all."

### **A COMMUNITY OF LONERS**

Bode is a loner from a community of self-reliant, yet interconnected loners. His

ability to trust his own instincts and shut out unwanted noise in the form of others' opinions and ideas is more than a small reason for his great success. His coach John McBride says, "Skiing is an individual sport. It takes a different mindset than a team sport. You have to dig down deep to find the inspiration. Bode is an independent and free thinker. The fact that he doesn't worry about what people think allows him to break new ground. But underneath all those layers he's created to protect himself, he's really a family guy, a community guy. He's very loyal to people, especially to those who don't want anything from him." Bode acknowledges that he has a natural instinct to push everyone away because it's more efficient in blocking outside voices and influences. But he's



The farmstand is open during the growing season.

You probably won't catch busy Bode at the farmstand very often.

Right: Bode gives the steer a bit of attention while Cannon Mountain, where Bode trained as a child, looms in the background.

## BODE'S TURTLE RIDGE FOUNDATION

After achieving financial success as a skier, in 2005 Bode created the nonprofit Turtle Ridge Foundation as a way to "help people in need and give back to the community," according to the foundation.

([www.turtleridgefoundation.org](http://www.turtleridgefoundation.org))

TRF supports:

- ◆ Adaptive Sports programs (which help disabled children and adults participate in sports)
- ◆ Boys and Girls Clubs in New Hampshire
- ◆ Ski scholarships and supplies (like winter jackets) for kids in need
- ◆ Other charities, such as the Michael J. Fox Foundation and The Lance Armstrong Foundation, which are relevant to TRF's broad mission to support "health, diversity and sustainable living."

In order to fulfill the "sustainable living" portion of TRF's mission, Bode bought Turtle Ridge Farm in Sugar Hill, which had been threatened by development. In addition to producing thousands of pounds of (mostly) organic vegetables for the community, sold at their farmstand, the farm is the site of a nonprofit day care created by Bode's sister Kyla Miller. Kyla, along with TRF Executive Director Adriana Cohen and other TRF board members, works with Bode on the foundation's mission and direction.

For the past several years, TRF has sponsored "Bodefest," a two-day charity event at Bretton Woods Ski Resort in which Bode skis with, coaches, reads to and answers questions from local disabled kids. The event raised money for the Bretton Woods Adaptive Ski program.

This year's event—a golf and tennis tournament called "Bodebash"—will be held on Saturday and Sunday, August 23 and 24 at Turtle Ridge Farm in Sugar Hill. Bode (an avid tennis player and golfer) and his extended family will attend. There will be numerous other fun activities for all age groups.

Saturday evening, participants can enjoy live music and eat a sumptuous meal created by a chef Joe Petersen from locally grown produce and meats. The dinner is also part of the New Hampshire Farm to Restaurant Connection series of Growers' Dinners ([www.nhfarmtorestaurant.com](http://www.nhfarmtorestaurant.com)). Event proceeds will support TRF. Pre-register for the event at [www.turtleridgefoundation.org](http://www.turtleridgefoundation.org).

In addition to event proceeds, Turtle Ridge Foundation is funded by Bode personally, by Bode's ski sponsors and by TRF members and donors. Recently, director Cohen asked jewelry designer Rachel Leigh to design a turtle necklace, the sale of which will also support the nonprofit.

come to recognize that such a defensive response "pushes away all the good stuff, too, and leads to a lonely place." In a bid to knit the ski community, Bode created a popular social networking site, [www.ski-space.com](http://www.ski-space.com), for skiers and snowboarders to connect, buy gear and share stories.

Bode Miller lives by deceptively simple rules — he's fast, he's good, he has fun. He can be prickly and defiant, but Bode lives large: he works hard, he's vital and vibrant, he's fiercely loyal to his friends and family and he regularly takes it — everything, that is — to the limit. Granite Staters can take pride in his spectacular achievements, and try to live life like Bode races down mountains: from start to finish there's only a minute or two — better make it shine. **NH**



Growers' Dinner at TRF August 23 is part of the BodeBash.

[www.turtleridgefoundation.org](http://www.turtleridgefoundation.org) to register