

Admit it, children of the '80s, you're singing that rockin' Juicy Fruit jingle right now.



Get Your Skis Shined Up

How a gum commercial remade skiing's image

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BY ANN WYCOFF

➤ IT WAS 1985. A-HA'S "TAKE ON ME" WAS IN HEAVY rotation on MTV. Americans were enjoying the refreshing taste of New Coke. Just about everyone had a Swatch and a really bad haircut. And the creatives along Madison Avenue decided that every product needed a rockin' jingle. Juicy Fruit, that old standby gum in the canary-yellow package, would be no exception.

The ski bums and snow bunnies of Mammoth Mountain were enjoying epic spring skiing and sunshine when a production crew rolled into town and called for open auditions. A rash of kids showed up to ham it up for the camera, unaware that a handful of them would hit it big.

Sandi Rowan, then 20 and known for her badass skiing and blond ponytail, worked at the ski school. She skipped the audition — she was too busy schussing the slopes — so the director had to track her down. "They cast 20 of us as extras — none of us were actors. We were ski bums, instructors, or patrol," Rowan says. "I remember thinking, 'A hundred bucks a day for three days work — cool!'"

Local race coach Gordy Johnson auditioned and got hired as a skier, but when the Ray-Ban-sporting, David Hasselhoff lookalike wedged between two girls, leaned in, and sniffed the gum, he secured his financial future. "They randomly chose that shot of me, and I made \$50,000 in residuals. It was awesome," he recalls. "Hell, back then I was just happy to make a hundred bucks as an extra and buy a round of drinks at the Yodeler."

"They built these massive jumps on the backside, and a bunch of us took turns going off them and doing tricks," says Rowan. "Very few girls were willing to go big, and I decided to go for it. In the commercial, I had just launched off a huge jump, landed at full speed, and pulled off that insanely fast Super G turn that made the cut." That also means Rowan got a cut of the big payout.

For both Johnson and Rowan, the gig financed some

serious ski-bum lifestyles, and even extensive travel abroad. "I went all over the world with those residuals — Bali, Australia, Thailand, Europe, and New Zealand," says Rowan. And the 30-second ad, which ran for several years, also paved a path for careers in the ski industry. Financially set for a while, Johnson pursued his dream of being a pro skier and made it into a couple of Warren Miller films, but his gift of gab led to a career in television and event announcing for skiing, snowboarding, and mountain biking. "At the Mammoth Village Championships they gave me a mike, and it's been in my hand for 30 years," explains Johnson, who has found success as Olympic commentator, World Cup announcer, and TV host/analyst for NBC, CBS Sports, and ESPN2.

Rowan spent some of her gum earnings on a degree at Long Beach State in recreation administration. "I was able to follow my passion from something that was a fluke," she acknowledges. "I also spent 20 back-to-back winters between the U.S. and New Zealand, and ended up being a ski-school director at New Zealand's Mount Hutt — which led to my present job as ski and snowboard school manager at Mammoth Mountain."

The Juicy Fruit jingle* also had a profound effect beyond Mammoth's locals; it resonated with Pac-Man-playing prepubescents across the country who saw skiing presented in a new light — as a hepped-up, Dayglo hot-dogging party on the sunny slopes. Suddenly, skiing meant back scratchers and daffies, and cutoff jean shorts and white Vuarnets — a far cry from spandex downhill racing suits and the dapper reserve of the Dartmouth ski team.

"We wore our own wardrobe for the shoot," Rowan reflects. "Back then, you didn't have to wear fancy outfits; you skied in your jeans and gaiters, and no one made fun of you. None of us did much acting over those three days. That's why it was so natural, and captured that free spirit. We were just having fun."●