



# FALL LINE FAMILIA

FOR THE SONS OF CANADIAN EXTREME SKIING PIONEER  
ERIC PEHOTA, THE TRACKS ARE THERE TO FOLLOW.

BY DEVON O'NEIL



**T**he bony chute known as DOA plummets off the top of Blackcomb Peak in British Columbia like a giant test tube. Its rock walls are speckled white by rime, and sharp talus lines the snowy edges, giving it a sense of doom when viewed from above. Eric Pehota, standing next to me at the mouth of the couloir, made the first descent of DOA in 1986. Everyone assumes it stands for Dead On Arrival, he says. “You have to be really old school to know it means Down, Over and Around.”

**IT'S A FLAT-LIGHT WEDNESDAY** in early December, and Pehota's two sons, Logan and Dalton, wait alongside him. “Looks kinda thin,” Eric says with a grin, preparing to drop in. He moves toward the entry and focuses. Logan, 16, and Dalton, 15, watch like baby hawks as their 47-year-old father snaps his skis back and forth down the peppery couloir.

When he is halfway down and tucked inside a skier's eddy, his sons follow one by one. Neither says a word before dropping in, but their technique mirrors that of their father: crisp, smooth and with a power that belies their size. They pull off next to him and wait for me to join them in the safe zone.

The subsequent section is especially rocky, and with a long slide awaiting any misstep, the four of us opt to downclimb. Logan and Dalton shoulder their skis and cruise down the snowy scree. At the bottom of the rocks, we click back in and ski to an open face called Bodybag, where hip-deep powder is not uncommon. It is only boot deep today, but that makes it easily the best snow on the mountain. Having been starved for soft snow, I can't

conceal my grin when I reach the valley floor. Eric is happy I'm happy, but, ever the powder hound, he laments the fact that it wasn't hip deep like it usually is.

He looks at Logan and Dalton, then me. “A lot of parents probably wouldn't be comfortable taking their kids into that,” he says. “There'd probably be child services waiting at the bottom. But I feel good about it.”

After a dozen inbounds runs at Whistler/Blackcomb, where I watch Logan and Dalton repeatedly make steep hard-pack look like child's play, my lasting memory is of them skiing DOA. It's not because they ski it at their age—some of the best teenage skiers in the world hail from Whistler, and most started skiing lines of consequence as Little Leaguers. (Logan skied a 7,000-foot line above his home in Pemberton when he was 12, one year after he first skied DOA.) And it's not because their dad *named* many of the lines that matter here in this mind-blowing backcountry. The memory will stick, I realize, because I have never seen any father more connected to his sons, skier or otherwise.



**Top: Spittin' Images: Eric and Logan, two decades apart.**

// Photos: Scott Markewitz (l) and Eric Berger (r)

**Bottom: Outside their Pemberton home.** // Photos: Blake Jorgenson

**E**RIC'S RELATIONSHIP WITH LOGAN AND DALTON sheds a unique light on the power of nature and nurture. On the nature side, Eric is the most prolific big-mountain skier in western Canada's history. "I only count majors, but everything we skied back in those days was basically a first descent," he says. "What I consider majors, I'd probably say 25 or 30 first descents that really stick out: definitely climbed it and skied it, tough approach, a prominent peak in an area that maybe encompasses 50 square miles. Stuff like that."


Eric still skis about 60 days a winter in the backcountry, but once Logan and Dalton were born, he shelved his ambition to teach them his way of life. This is where nurture comes in. "We never had babysitters or anything like that," he says. "I used to get hassled when I took the boys out skiing by people who thought I was irresponsible. They would kinda look at me sideways when I had 'em up sled skiing or ski touring when they were super young, you know, climbing a peak when they were five or six years old. Usually I'd hear about it later. But other people

who knew me would go, 'Oh, that's just Eric out with his kids.'"

Long before he named his sons after two of Canada's largest peaks (both of which he has skied), Pehota was at home in wild terrain. He grew up in Mackenzie, a tough, redneck logging town in northern B.C., skiing what he calls "snow that was groomed by God." He didn't ride his first chairlift until he was 17.

After he landed in Whistler at 19, he and his friends, notably the late Trevor Petersen, set entirely new parameters for backcountry skiing. Traverses were out. Steep, technical, exposed descents were in. Most of today's B.C. talent grew up hearing about Pehota and his friends tackling mountains that had never been skied.

In 1988, Eric was bartending in Whistler when he met Logan and Dalton's mom, Parveen, who worked at the same bar. "I just remember they were playing ski videos, and I was like, 'Oh, that's you skiing?'" she says. "I was 22 and Eric was 25."



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**Far Left:** The youngest can hang, too. Skier: Dalton.  
**Left:** Eric filling his parental duties in Bella Coola, British Columbia.

If Eric is the family's steely chassis, Parveen is its feisty engine. Over dinner at their Pemberton home Parveen chides her husband as a "wannabe pro skier" and hassles him for peeing on the bathroom floor. "I stepped in it!" she shouts, to which he replies from the kitchen, "Oh, sorry. Just use your sock." But as one might expect of a woman who slaughters turkeys in her back shed, she doesn't stay up at night worrying about Logan and Dalton's backcountry forays. "I'm proud of where they ski. I love it. I think it's awesome," she says. "I don't have any fears, because it's Eric, right? I put my trust in him. I know nothing about the backcountry. Chairlifts are enough for me."

For her part, Parveen fills the parental seat at basketball games and cross-country meets, a role Eric has no interest in. "I think I maybe went to one or two games when they were younger," Eric says. "Sunday mornings." Anything related to skiing is a different story. To teach them rescue protocol, he hid an avalanche beacon in the old trailer next door—the one housing the rally car he built from scraps, next to the sawmill he used to cut the wood for their house—and taught them how to find it as fast as possible. Now that they are 17 and 16, he focuses on more advanced skills. He explains the secrets of probing and digging techniques, and he instills a way of looking at

the mountain that has kept him alive while many of his best friends have died.

"They know not to stand in terrain traps, the bottom of moraines or creek beds where there's a slope above you; move through hazardous terrain quickly and don't hang out and lollygag," Eric says. "I think it's essential they learn that at a young age, especially growing up in an environment like this. Hopefully it'll

imprint it in their minds and keep 'em safe later in life when they're getting after it by themselves and I'm not around. Like Logan out touring with his buddies—they're getting to that age now where I'm not going to be there."

**DUE TO THE WAY THEY SKI,** it's easy to mistake Logan and Dalton for grown men if you don't know who they are. But in many ways they're no different from the teenagers next door. Case in point: The morning I ski DOA with them, we meet at the base of Blackcomb, and the first thing I notice is a purple shiner peaking out from under Logan's goggles. I don't mention it when we shake hands, but before we load the lift, Eric makes sure he is between Logan and Dalton. "They can't sit next to each other," he says, half-smirking.

A few minutes into the ride, Eric acknowledges the black eye and asks the boys to tell me what happened. Logan offers a simple explanation. "I don't hit Dalton back."

"Yeah you do!" Dalton yells from the other side of Eric.

The story slowly trickles out during the lift ride. Their parents had driven to town, the phone rang, an argument ensued over who would answer it, they started wrestling, Dalton grabbed Logan's sweater,



Logan puts his shiner on ice on Whistler Mountain.



Pehota pillow pillaging. Skier: Logan.

Logan knocked over Dalton's penny jar, all hell broke loose.

Dalton: "I was standing there and he hit me, like in the face, and then we went over to my bed, and he was pretty angry at that point. He said: 'Stand up and fight me.' So I just punched him in the face. Then he started hitting me with a mop, and then it kind of ended."

Logan: "It's all Dalton's fault. He just had to punch me in the face."

The banter continues later in the morning when we exit the resort. Having left their touring setups at home, Logan and Dalton hastily strap their skis to their packs and start hiking up the fall line, chattering like squirrels. Eric and I affix our skins and take a lower-angle route, forgoing conversation to listen to the dialogue above.

"Look at them just *bickering*," Eric mumbles, shaking his head. "Boys!" he calls out to his sons. "You might want to save some of that energy for the top."

He turns back to me, lest I get the wrong idea. "The truth is, when it really comes down to it, they know what to do. If they're skiing and one falls, the other one is right there next to him. I don't really coach that. I think it's some kind of brotherly love from another planet. I've seen it."

**WHILE DALTON WILL LIKELY CONTINUE RACING** for a year or two, Logan has already begun to make a name for himself in the professional freeskiing ranks. Last March in Silverton, Colo., he placed sixth at Red Bull Cold Rush—the world's most prestigious test of all-around ski skills—as the youngest athlete in the field. His big-mountain lines overlapped those of Sage Cattabriga-Alosa and Dave Treadway. Among others, he finished ahead of Tim Durtschi, Josh Bibby and two-time champion Sean Pettit.

"He skied well this week, but definitely not even up to his potential," Treadway, a Whistler local who has watched the Pehota boys grow up, said after the event. "So even though it looked like he did really well, he's got a lot more to him. He has the potential to be right on top."

Said Cattabriga-Alosa, "It takes a while to become a smart skier—it took me a while—but what I saw in Logan here was a smart skier."

Later that spring, Logan filmed with Matchstick Productions for two weeks around Whistler, alongside Eric Hjørleifson. (His dad's advice each morning at the heli port: "Throw down when it's time. Don't do anything stupid.") The early reviews were glowing. "I've never seen a kid Logan's age with such a maturity and grasp of what it takes to ski in the backcountry," said Matchstick executive producer Murray Wais.

Major ski brands are taking notice, too. After spending most of his life riding his dad's sponsorship coattails, Logan signed contracts with Oakley and Rossignol this summer. He's a member of the B.C. Freestyle Team and is aiming to make the 2014 Olympic slopestyle team (he routinely lands double cork 1260s and switch double 1080s in the park).

Closer to home, some of Eric's friends now invite Logan and Dalton to ski with them even when Eric can't. Eric tells me this on his porch, throwing back a Kokanee while elk he killed and butchered last fall sizzles on the grill. You can tell that more than many of his sons' other achievements, this makes him proud—his own partners considering his sons to be worthy partners. "Logan hooked up with a really good friend of mine whom I ski tour with a lot and totally trust, and they just had an epic day skiing these 2,000-, 3,000-foot chutes out of bounds," Eric says. "He's not allowed to bring his buddies down those lines."

It worries Eric ever so slightly that as Logan and, later, Dalton get more involved with big-mountain filming, there could be pressure to ski lines they wouldn't normally ski. If he has to, he says, he'll hire guides he trusts to accompany the film crews and make sure Logan's line choices are sound. A moment later, he reconsiders. "Honestly," he says, "I think he'll be wise enough to make those decisions on his own." ■