



CONFRONTING NEWNESS

LESSONS FROM *JYOSEI*

Fueled by onigiri and Pocky, Maddie Jones backflips while Taylor Lundquist and Brooke Potter look on. Asahi is the reward.



Allegedly, it was OK that we were skiing *at* the temple because we weren't skiing *on* the temple. Taylor Lundquist and a peaceful urban session in Nagano, Japan.

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A 20-year-old filmmaker working on her first project joins seven women, also in their 20s, to make a street-skiing film in Japan. They have three weeks. Most of these skiers have never made a street-focused film before, and many of them don't know each other yet.

What results from this whirlwind is *Jyosei*—"woman" in Japanese—a film that is unprecedented in the ski industry. But it didn't come without growing pains. In fact, these pains are the line on which the entirety of *Jyosei* is hung.

"We just took the ball and ran with it and didn't think much of it," says Maddie Jones, the 28-year-old Australian freeskiier who orchestrated *Jyosei*. "Often people look at trying to do a project like this and they're like, 'We're doing too much' or 'It's too big.' I never had that thought about it."

Maddie will tell you that's probably because neither she nor anyone else in the *Jyosei* crew knew exactly what they were getting themselves into. "There's nothing like what we did, it doesn't exist," Maddie says. "There's a couple of big-mountain, all-female projects, but in terms of street skiing, there's nothing for women. There's one part from Kaya Turksi in the 2011 Level 1 movie [*After Dark*] and that's it. There's no community, no nothing."

So Maddie set out to change that. In 2018, Maddie's friend, Brooke Potter, another skier who appears in *Jyosei*, mentioned the idea of doing a ladies' trip to Japan. Maddie ran with it, first by enlisting the help of Laura Obermeyer, who would be the sole filmmaker, editor and producer for the film. Laura was just 19 years old when she agreed to work on the project, despite having never created a full ski edit, having worked solely as a photographer prior to *Jyosei*.

Featuring additional cinematography from Natalie Oaks and skiing by Stefanie Mössler, Zoë Blewett, Taylor Lundquist, Brooke Potter and Mina Itaba (alongside Maddie and even Laura on occasion), the 12-minute *Jyosei* film follows the women from a quintessential Japanese landscape where they pop pillows through maple forests amid deep, FOMO-inducing turns, before shifting to shots in the streets and around tiny

ski resorts throughout the well-traveled locales of Hakuba and Myoko. We watch as they hit rails in the rain, embracing the slushy, dirty snow. The crew was graced with just four days of snowfall while in Japan in February 2019, but worked with it. Besides, the whole idea wasn't to ski pow—from the very beginning, the idea for *Jyosei* was to make a street video—but it's hard to pass up skiing powder when it's dumping.

The trip was three weeks of near-constant skiing, with hardly any time to absorb the culture around them. In lieu of the rush, Laura—now 21—is intent on giving herself much more time to film on her next go, which she and Maggie have already begun planning. But by any measure, they've found an immense amount of success with *Jyosei*, which has premiered in 30 cities around the world, including in Canada, Russia, Denmark and Japan, to hugely receptive audiences.

"I've had so many girls message us to say they're stoked to see this," Maddie says. "Girls in the industry are excited to see this representation."

They'll also continue to host premieres throughout the winter, all in an ongoing effort to provide a gathering point for female freeskiers.

"I want our project to be accessible," Laura says. "Ski movie premieres bring people together, and a common theme of our premieres has been girls coming out to see it. We want to foster the community aspect of women's freeskiing as much as possible."

This underscores what is probably most impressive, even endearing, about the crew Maddie ultimately assembled: They were breaking new ground, and in the process filling myriad voids that had yet to be filled by women in skiing. As a result, they put in place the building blocks of the community—and culture—they hope to create.



LEFT TO RIGHT

You'll only ever catch your tips on a snowbank while sliding a rail in Japan.

Mina Itaba, smiling in pouring rain and 50 mph winds, knowing there's hot tea in the vending machine on the way home.

Slamming and picking yourself back up on cheese-grater stairs—few do it as well as Mina Itaba.



"To me, *Jyosei* is a catalyst for girls' street skiing, and girls in film," Laura says. "Right now, when you think about women's skiing, you think more about the crews of backcountry babes that are out there crushing it, or the girls in the comp scene, but there's just not a lot in the way of filming or street skiing, so we're trying to navigate a new channel of media production for women."

So far, Laura, particularly, has felt immense support while navigating the filmmaking world. She's received help from other editors in the industry and, perhaps most significantly, was given support for the film by companies that had no past projects or videos by which to gauge her potential.

That trust and support led to a final product with all the sends, big hits and pow turns you'd expect from a ski film. But perhaps more significantly, what you get between the action are lessons learned in real time, the attempts and failures and additional attempts that often pave the way to landing a hard-battled trick. Indeed, what takes *Jyosei* beyond the novelty of an all-female cast hitting handrails in Japan is its portrayal of the in-between moments—the hugs, the high fives, the trying and failing and then trying again—the growing pains.

"The biggest lesson I learned [while filming] was to be patient with myself," Laura says. "That's a lesson we're all learning every day, but I wanted to make sure I forgave myself for not knowing what I don't know before I learn it. At the end of a day [of filming], we'd often say, 'Forgive each other, forgive yourself.' Because this was new for everyone and we were all learning together."

The cast is clearly confronting newness throughout the film, and what naturally follows are all the requisite fiascos that come with the process of facing uncertainty—with the landscape, with the culture and also with each other. Exposing the learning process allows the film to build a raw and honest narrative.

The success of *Jyosei* goes beyond the film, however. As women in a male-dominated scene, the crew displayed the benefits of creating an environment in which mistakes and bad days are allowed to happen. The growing pains are a given. As Mizuki Nakai, the narrator of *Jyosei*, points out at the beginning of the film, "With new experience comes growing pains. But, you see, these pains are often not pains at all. They are lessons." §