



1455 West Lake Street  
Minneapolis, Minn. 55408-2648  
(612) 827-3232 • [www.sfl.org](http://www.sfl.org)

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Media Contact**  
Cara Barnes • Publicity & Public Relations  
(707) 443-6632 • [cara@quik.com](mailto:cara@quik.com)

## **Ski for Light: Inspiring the Inspirational**

At age sixteen Raychelle Thomas became a mother. This was followed by a failed, abusive marriage that produced three more children. As the single mother of four, Raychelle managed to complete nursing school and find work as a home care nurse for children with genetic disorders. On May 5, 2006 Raychelle woke up for work as usual but could not see or lift her head off the pillow. "I thought I was just tired," she recalls. "I blamed everything on being tired." Two days later the police found her passed out at the wheel of her car in a ditch. Raychelle was diagnosed with a cerebral tumor and began taking medication to relieve the pain and fluid pressure in her brain but her eyesight worsened. She was later diagnosed with Retinitis Pigmentosa.

While this may have been the final blow for some, it was just another chapter in Raychelle's inspirational life. "I cried, I laid in bed for a few days and then I got down to business," says Raychelle. "I did not have time to feel sorry for myself, I had to find a way to provide for my children." Since losing her sight, Raychelle has learned Braille, sign language and brushed up on her Spanish. She is a member of her local Lions Club and is employed at the North Carolina Eye Bank. "My grandmother taught me to be strong and a leader, and that there was nothing I could not do," smiles Raychelle.

That same year Raychelle met Renee Abernathy of the North Carolina Division of Services for the Blind and the two became fast friends. Renee told Raychelle about Ski for Light, Inc., an all-volunteer, non-profit organization dedicated to promoting an active life style among visually and mobility impaired adults through the vehicle of cross-country skiing. Ski for Light (SFL) hosts an annual week-long international event in which visually and mobility impaired participants are paired with instructor/guides to share a week of cross-country skiing and fun on the snow.

Renee kept talking about SFL and finally convinced Raychelle to attend the 2008 event in Bend, Oregon. Raychelle had never skied before and wasn't sure about the idea but thought that she could always sit in the chalet and drink hot chocolate. "Renee explained to me that there would be none of that," laughs Raychelle.

"I had never been on skis before and I was terrified. I fell as soon as I put my skis on and just knew I would never get it right." Raychelle, of course, did get it right. "The first time I made it down a dippsie doodle on the trail, I yelled Whooo Hooo!" While primarily a recreational event, Ski for Light attracts skiers at all proficiency levels, from beginners like Raychelle to more advanced competitors. The week of skiing and evening activities culminates in an Olympic style race/rally and awards banquet. Raychelle recalls, "There was this part of me that just wanted to finish the race for my own accomplishment, and in the process, I learned what real sportsmanship is all about."

"I met so many extraordinary people and have talked about SFL ever since I returned. It will always be what I focus on when I just need to think about that something that made me so happy and was so beautiful and special. Ski for Light changed my life; it gave me a whole new activity and a whole new family. I can't wait until the family reunion!"

Held at a different U.S. location each year, the 34th annual Ski for Light International Week will take place from Sunday February 1 through Sunday February 8, 2009 in the Wasatch Mountains of Utah. Participants from every corner of the U.S. and around the world will stay at the Marriott Hotel and Conference Center in downtown Provo, and ski at the Soldier Hollow cross-country ski area in nearby Midway, Utah.

To be a guide, no experience with visually or mobility impaired people is necessary. Instructor/guides should be intermediate level classic cross-country skiers. SFL holds an intensive one-day training session with veteran skiers and guides. Prospective guides can contact Guide Coordinator Brook Yates at [brookyates.sfl@gmail.com](mailto:brookyates.sfl@gmail.com), (970) 333-4035, or Brenda Seeger at [seegerb@hotmail.com](mailto:seegerb@hotmail.com), (218) 253-2010.

Visually impaired individuals interested in attending can contact Visually Impaired Participant Application Coordinator Lynda Boose at (906) 370-7541 or [lboose@up.net](mailto:lboose@up.net). Mobility impaired individuals can contact Mobility Impaired Participant Application Coordinator Dianne Brunswick at (602) 504-3521 or [dmbrunswick@msn.com](mailto:dmbrunswick@msn.com).

Additional information and event applications can also be found at [www.sfl.org](http://www.sfl.org).



**Ski for Light, Inc. is a registered trademark. All rights reserved.**

**Ski for Light, Inc. is registered with GuideStar® at [www.guidestar.org](http://www.guidestar.org)**