

Like a Buddhist traveling an eightfold path to enlightenment, a figure skater must master eight edges in order to fully experience the gift of grace. Each of her two blades has two edges, an inside and an outside, and on each of these, she can move in two directions, forward and back: a total of eight.

The last and most difficult edge to master is the back outside. A skater performing this edge holds the arm corresponding to her skating foot in front of her body and her opposite arm slightly back and then gives a push with her nonskating foot, lifting it softly off the ice while turning her head so she looks over her shoulder and skates a half circle before switching feet.. Countless repetitions will engrave the bend of her knee, the cant of her ankle, and the pressure of her foot onto her muscle memory, until she can hold her edges as naturally as nonskaters walk. And only then can she feel the heightened sense of physicality that complete focus can give. But achieving such mastery can take years.

And then the years take her mastery away. Her muscles will stiffen, her vertebral column shorten, and her head's warning voice about a fractured wrist or cracked skull will drone on ceaselessly.

I never had great back outside edges, never felt completely secure on them, and now I've lost them entirely. Last season I vowed I'd get them back. Standing at one end of the red hockey goal line I'd push with my left foot to transfer energy to my right and then lift my left foot. But it dangled over the ice like some vestigial organ, never responding to the commands of my nerves, almost as if age had achieved what polio hadn't managed: made my left foot useless.

As for my arms and head, they behaved like what they were – seventy years old, with stubborn, crotchety minds of their own. By the time I reached the opposite end of the goal line,

the fleece linings of my gloves would be damp with nervous perspiration. I tried those back outsides maybe ten times over six months, and then resigned myself to enjoying what I have: seven out of eight. And maybe at my age that's all I need to arrive at greater wisdom.

I spend the better part of each session practicing my remaining edges. After ten, fifteen minutes, my mind begins to quiet itself and set aside its cluttering concerns — the postage stamps I need to buy, the call I've been meaning to make to my cousin Howard, whether or not I should get another estimate for a house painter — and concentrate on bending my knees and keeping my back straight and my arms outstretched.

Sometimes I look up and see in the lobby the parents of the skating youngsters flying past me. When I first began skating, waiting parents talked to each other. But now they almost always are bent to pixilated screens, their faces bathed in cold, blue light while they tap away in pursuit of another sort of edge, the one that will showcase their own break-away abilities. And distinguish them from the lagging pack wherever they work — someone has to pay for their children's skating classes.

Once I too had pursued that sort of edge. I had felt the need to make my mark, to leap ahead, to prove that I was sharper than everyone else. And so I sympathize with those parents.. The eightfold path begins with right intention, and doubtless they pursue their edge because they feel, as I once did, that the intention to pay for advantages for their children is right. How deeply my memory is etched with the time those parents are now living. And how I want to tell them to have faith: wherever their leaping children land will be just fine. Will be the destination their paths have been leading them to all along.

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Entry: Feb. 13, 1983: It's now Sunday. On Friday we had a blizzard - 24 inches of snow. I got a telephone call from my mother. She wanted to know if I was all right. I'm taking skating lessons.

A Tuesday afternoon, a Tuesday not long before I wrote the above quote, and I am in a conference room on an upper floor of the University of Maryland School of Law. Also, I am invisible. A group of young attorneys is waiting for a meeting to start, and I am among them. But not of them.

Being invisible is part of my latest job description. Tired of the three-hour daily commute to Washington, and offered a better salary I have taken a job at the University of Maryland's downtown Baltimore campus where an essential component of my job is to make other people look good. And myself as unobtrusive as possible. I am *professionally* invisible.

I write many of the campus's external communications and my function at the meeting is to advise these recent alumni about launching a newsletter. The young women at that meeting — as I recall all of those present were women — have thick briefcases of fine, burnished leather and wear power suits with shoulders sharp enough to slash the cheek of who's ever next to them.

One of their group is delayed in court, and as they wait, they chitchat . . . who's clerking for this judge or that, who's working for this firm or that . . . I have nothing to say, until a vivacious brunette switches topics. Now that she's passed the bar, she says, she's indulging herself in something she's always wanted to do.

“What's that?” another asks.

“Riding lessons! I'm taking riding lessons!” Sure, she says, riding lessons are expensive. “And then there is the equipment - the boots, alone are a fortune - but, still, I've always wanted to ride.”

“Is horseback riding something you can learn as an adult?” I ask, taking care to toss the question out so it lands softly but squarely — I’m bitchin’ tired of being invisible.

The young attorney flicks her hair over one shoulder and then smiles at me.

“Even if you never rode as a child?” I ask her again. “Can you learn to ride as an adult?” My question isn’t an idle one; I had briefly considered taking riding lessons, but then decided on skating. Both sports offer the thrill of speed, but only skating offers the additional bonus of a facility near my house.

“Well, actually,” the young attorney, “at one point, when I was a kid, I did ride. But then my life got so hectic, I gave it up. But to answer your question, yes, riding isn’t like other sports where if you don’t start when you’re young, forget it. Skating’s the worst. Everyone knows that if you haven’t begun skating lessons by the time you’re six-years-old, you might as well not try.”

I don’t tell her that to my family taking skating lessons would have been as foreign as owning a second car or having two bathrooms or pizza for Sunday dinner. My cousin Carolyn took tap dancing lessons, and I think my cousin Leona took baton lessons. And some of my classmates in St. Ambrose took accordion or piano lessons. But skating lessons? Skating was just something you did. You didn’t need anyone to teach you how.

That young attorney’s assumptive attitude about resuming the horseback riding lessons of her youth, corresponds with her relaxed posture at the conference table — she can’t imagine that her situation might have been otherwise. But, of course, time and circumstances might have given her an entirely different life. Might have given her my life. That afternoon, I am less than fifteen years older than the other women at the table, but I might as well be wearing a hoopskirt. The doors to the schools and courtrooms that these young womrn open so easily were unlocked

just a few short years earlier by woman like myself, Jennifer Skolnick and Sue Woolhiser. Women, who, as Sue will tell me later, “didn’t have a clue what we were doing.”

At the conference table I retreat into my invisibility and suck on the sour irony of the situation: What the bright young attorney doesn’t know is that I’ve given myself the gift of skating lessons in advance of my fortieth birthday, and am to begin that very evening.

Skating, I felt, would add some spontaneity to the careful choreography of our lives. A weekly menu is posted on the refrigerator. Grocery shopping on Thursdays. Laundry on Sundays. Bill is head of the Social Studies Department at Lake Clifton High School in Baltimore, plus he’s still teaching at Ner Israel. The boys belong to the choir at Grace and St. Peter’s, where there are almost daily practices, plus services on Sundays.

But they also are growing up. And the echolocation device in my brain that constantly had monitored their whereabouts doesn’t ping relentlessly anymore. I know where the boys are, but I don’t *sense* it. Every cell of my body and brain no longer serves as an antenna attuned to them. I feel I’m emerging into a new self, into someone who can stretch out her arms and legs and not touch someone needing a stuffed animal patched up, or help constructing a tabletop volcano.

Also, since writing that first article about Baltimore’s finest cheese cake, my list of writing credits has grown, and each article that’s been published has boosted my confidence. When an idea for a story strikes me, I no longer wait two weeks before picking up the phone and pitching it to an editor. I’m learning that editors are busy people. Reticence on my part serves neither my purpose nor theirs.

Writing, job, family — even with all that, I still feel as though I have energy to spare. So after meeting the young attorneys, I go home and cook dinner, and sail out the door to the rink at

the bottom of the hill for my first lesson. The few times I skated at Northwest Ice Rink, I'd seen skaters easily switching from facing forwards to backwards or spinning in center ice, and they made it look so easy, I felt there had to be some cipher encoded on their muscles and I wanted to learn it.

In Carolyn's old skates I stand with a clutch of other women, many of us with gray streaks in our hair and sheepish little smiles on our faces. Skating is a girlish dream, we know, one we probably should have packed away with our prom invitations and dried-up wrist corsages. But we'd watched Dorothy Hamill, the girl who started skating on frozen Connecticut ponds with her brother, go on to win the Olympics, and we want to release the spinning, jumping girls we sense within ourselves, too.

Our instructor is Georg von Birgelen, who once ran Baltimore's rink in the stadium parking lot with his wife Eileen. They now run Northwest's skate shop, where Eileen sells flouncy skating dresses and Georg sharpens skates. A compact man who slicks his thin hair straight back from his round face, Georg has a triangle of white t-shirt showing from the open collar of a plaid flannel shirt that he wears under a dark blue all-weather jacket.

While we stand with our backs to the wood and Plexiglas hockey barrier, Georg faces us with the mirrored disco ball slowly turning over center ice behind him. He rubs his hands together, as if he wants to kindle some enthusiasm.

"Ready?" he asks with a Swiss accent inflected with German "Ready?" This time his smile broadens: he's eager for us to have fun. Fun is the watchword at Northwest Ice Rink. Although, eventually, I will see two Olympic gold medalists skating there — one of them, Dorothy Hamill — the rink's board of directors designates the rink as a "family fun place." Other rinks limit the time the general public can skate so that competitive skaters can train, but

not Northwest. There, the purpose always will be fun. And the night of my first lesson, fun's just fine with me. I'm nearly forty and have been working ten years. Yes, bring on the fun.

"Make an upside down T with your feet," Georg says, "Like this." And he moves his left foot behind his right so his left instep meets the heel of his right skate. "Right arm, too, in front. Good. Left hand to the side. Now keep your back straight, bend your knees and push off with your left foot. And as you left foot leaves the ice straighten your knees and bring your left foot forward, slowly rotating it until it's in front of your right foot, and rotate your arms, too, so the right one shifts back, and the left one is in front. Like this . . . watch." Georg demonstrates, ending the move just as he said, with his left foot and arm in front, having etched a perfect half circle onto the ice with his right outside edge. Ice is Georg's natural element. Off the ice, he may be stooped and his gait hitch-hipped but demonstrating the right outside edge he's sure-footed and graceful. He executes it a second and third time, then says, "Now you try it. Don't forget to push."

I stand with my feet forming an upside down T as I've been instructed, but I can't move. The young attorney had been right: skating is a sport best learned young, when muscles are receptive to strange physics. The muscles of my left foot start talking back: "Why should we have to push? You're skating on Right Foot. Just tell Right to step on it. If we push, and you skate on Right, he'll get all the credit."

The reason for the push, I will later learn, is that skating is essentially controlled skidding. Just as a car with rear-wheel drive can recover from a skid more easily than one with front-wheel drive, my pushing left foot will transfer energy to my right in a move that's efficient and elegant. But also hard to master.

Eventually I get Left Foot to cooperate and push, but I don't even attempt to bend my knees as George has instructed – although I later will come to understand that bent knees are essential to skating – instead, I concentrate on rotating my arms and moving my left leg forward.

After having us try a few more right outside edges, George demonstrates the left ones and then he has us combine our outside edges, alternating right, left, right left up the rink in what should have been a series of half circles resembling a single strand of a double helix. But the edges Georg had made look so easy seem impossibly difficult. I had been warned; maybe I should have listened.

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Entry: Feb. 7, 1984, I'm taking skating lessons, part of my effort to be more focused this year . . .

Skating is a sport of contradictions, and those contradictions begin with the blade. Blades are as straight as rulers, but the marks they leave on the ice are curvilinear. Even a skater simply skating forward, will create marks branching outwards like the fronds of a fern. Skating forward is called forward stroking and it's executed on outside edges, which arc away from the skater's midline. Just as a car can switch from lane to lane and still move forward, a stroking skater will get where she's going, but balanced on her branching edges, she'll look better getting there.

Toward the middle of May, after I've been taking lessons for many months, and the night comes when I'm to learn my back outside edges. The class is taught by Eileen, Georg's wife. As soon as she tells our group to face forward I feel I'm back in algebra class when I was told that a negative number squared creates a positive. Neither my mind nor my body understand why Eileen is telling us to face forward if we're going to skate backwards. Because, as she will soon demonstrate, our edges will create a series of half circles along an axis, and at about thirty

degrees of the first half circle, the orientation of our bodies will change from facing forward to backwards. I try it and try it that night and many nights afterwards, but it never feels right.

The contradictions cripple me, and I become convinced that the fault isn't mine but with Cousin Carolyn's old skates and their flattering, but unsupportive boots. Beside the skateshop's little window where skates are dropped off for Georg to sharpen, hangs a little cork bulletin board with notices about equipment people want to sell. I have no trouble finding one advertising a pair of skates in my size that have clunky, firmer boots and good Coronation blades. And I buy them, certain they'll improve my skating, convinced the skater my mind's eye sees skimming over the ice, will emerge from the self who works all day, cooks dinner, nags the boys about their homework and then drives down the hill every Tuesday night.

But the new second-hand skates don't bring the easy transformation I'd hoped for. I get my body into the appropriate position, even push as I should, but then my blade slides away like a rudderless ship. Like George, Eileen, too, wants us to have fun, and she sees clearly that I am not. Beneath her mass of red hair, her dark eyes become honeyed with sympathy.

At the end of one class she asks to see my skates. When she examines their blades, she becomes horrified.

"Pat," she says, "these have no edges."

"What?"

"They have no edges. Your blades are completely dull. They have no edges at all."

Over four months of lessons, I had thought skating's only edges were the ones I was supposed to execute; I didn't understand that my blades were supposed to have edges as well.

Gliding over ice, the edge of a blade creates friction that generates heat which, in turn, creates a layer of water a few molecules deep. That's why it's possible to skate on ice and not on

another slippery surface like glass. But the edge and ice also form a bond, which is what keeps a skater upright. This marriage of ice and edge works until one becomes too lumpy or the other too dull, and they reach what physicists call the edge of adhesion, the point where their molecular marriage disintegrates. Reaching the edge of adhesion is why cars skid on ice. Or a skater falls. For weeks I'd been trying to grip the surface with something that itself was a slick and as smooth as a cube of ice.

To test the sharpness of their blades, skaters perform an act of minor self-mutilation. Where it emerges from its cuticle, they lay a thumbnail on the edge of a blade and drag it to see if they've shaved off little piles of powdered fingernail. If they see mounds of keratin so slight they look like snow heaped by mice paws, their blades are sharp. If not, they have to be sharpened — I've heard of professional skaters sending their skates to Paris for sharpening — but that night, when Eileen tells me my blades have no edges, and I leave them with George I tell Bill I've been given the key I've been searching for.

He's interested, but not enough to shut off the television. If I've been working ten years, he's been working twenty, and, from where he sits, has another twenty to go. Plus, when he was in Israel, his father suffered a stroke compounded by dementia and for the past year has been living in a Veteran's Administration Hospital, leaving my mother-in-law alone in her little house on Maryland's Eastern Shore, where she's terribly lonely. Bill can neither extricate his father from his dementia nor alleviate his mother's pain. In addition, his supervisor has told him he won't ever advance to a more supervisory position in the Baltimore City Schools because he's white, so he will be teaching his second job at Ner Israel for as far as he can see, a prospect that exhausts him. So when I come bubbling through the door that night and tell him all about my edges, I must have sounded as annoying as the whine of Georg's wheel when he grinds a blade.

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After the Tuesday night classes, the rink holds a public session and most weeks a blonde woman slams into the lobby, bangle bracelets click-clacking, a sheet of bobbed hair over one blue eye. Nothing about her is beautiful. Not her crooked nose, or narrow lips, or squarish figure, but she almost glows with rare energy and intelligence — most definitely, not an invisible woman. Her name is Vida Roberts, and she is fashion editor of the News American, a now-defunct evening paper.

Her gin-husky voice is sanded with smoke and rueful complaint the night she plops down beside and starts putting on her skates. “Christ! The composing room lost my headline. How do you lose a damn head? I had to stop and have some wine. Just a glass or three.” She suddenly looks up. “And how are you?”

I’d lost touch with Mary Meade, and aside from Sue Woolhiser, Pat Burns Stolte, a friend from high school and college, and Bill Barnes’s wife, Anne, I don’t have many friends. Friendships take time, and time, at that point in my life, is a scarce commodity.

And I don’t truly befriend Vida either, so much as yoke myself to her. Her sardonic outlook, her breezy self-assurance, her job which I feel is glamorous compared to mine, make me want to grab on and go spinning through her hassles with the composing room, her glasses of wine or three. I don’t want her as a friend: I want her as a trophy. Through her I want to experience the life I might have if I had gotten off the train in New York that August afternoon I came to Baltimore.

On Tuesday nights, and sometimes on Sunday mornings, while she and I skate round and round we volley complaints: mine about the unimaginative university administration, and the

boys' middling report cards — I'm unabashedly ambitious for both of them — the worries about Bill's parents.

Parents are a major concern for Vida, too. Immigrants from Lithuania after the war, hers came to the United States, with Roma, Vida's older sister, now living in Atlanta, making their parents Vida's responsibility. But her major concern is her job. She's afraid that *The News American* will fold and she'll be out of work.

"On the other hand," she tells me as we skate, "it would be great to have a few months off. I want to sponge-paint my dining room; I'm going for a sort of Florentine palazzo look. Plus, I want to get up to New York for some damask remnants. I have a pair of chairs I want to upholster . . . I'm thinking something burnt orange, but not quite."

I've left my job at the University of Maryland, and am working across town for the Community College of Baltimore a few blocks from *The News American*, when I hear that Vida's been hired by the *Baltimore Evening Sun*. On a sheet of copy paper I draw a skate and scribble a note reading "Life is always a delicate balance." On my lunch hour I buy a single, gaudy flower and leave it and my note at *The News American's* front desk.

"You were the only one who understood," she tells me the next time we skate. "Everyone else was so happy, so busy congratulating me . . . but I'm tired. I just would have liked some time off. Just a month or two."

At *The Evening Sun* the pressures are even greater than those at her old job. Models, photographers, laying out the fashion page, she has to arrange for them all, in addition to writing completely accurate, utterly scintillating copy. Blockhead editors, prima donna designers, impossible deadlines, she rails against them all, but she's addicted to them, too. And it's driving

her to other addictions as well — whenever I ask her to go see a performance of skating stars she says, “Let’s go out to dinner beforehand, someplace with good cocktails.”

One night, in the middle of a performance, she grabs my arm, “I got to go.”

“Why?”

“I forgot to do my boxes.”

“Your what?”

“Those little teasers, those squares on bottom of the front page, I forgot to do mine. I gotta go.”

And so we leave and I wait in her old Dodge Dart and watch her run through the rain across the paper’s wide plaza and through its front doors. I watch her, but I don’t see her. I don’t see the woman who had almost no identity aside from her job. Instead, I see a woman I envy.

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In my mid-forties I’m leading a Choctaw life. In skating a Choctaw is a turn whereby the skater changes from one edge and direction to the opposite edge and direction on the other foot. I would sooner attempt a triple Axel as I would a choctaw — but that tricky turn captures perfectly the conflicting urges I felt at that time.

I need the stability of Bill and the boys at the same time I want independence. Vida’s unfettered creativity seems blessedly free of all the niggling concerns claiming me. Her work is so compelling, it’s self-obliterating. But it’s also self-affirming — there she is on the page . . .

“Vida Roberts,” . . . the little kid from Lithuania who made the big time.

The one bright spot in my high school career had been serving as the co-editor of Notre Dame’s newspaper, *The Pylon*. I loved learning the five W’s — Who, What, Where, When and

Why — loved those Saturdays when we laid the paper out in its special room deep in the school's basement, and loved seeing my name on the masthead.

Decades after that, when I was in my forties and the afterglow of journalism's Watergate triumph still burned brightly, and so did my desire to work for a newspaper. Running out on my lunch hours to interview people and typing stories at our dining room table after midnight, I was still chasing that dream. Plus, the 1980's was the decade of female empowerment and, in my forties, I wasn't ready to accept that I had been left behind.

Ignoring the reality of my responsibilities and without any idea how I was going to pay for it, I apply to Columbia University's graduate school of journalism.

"Write and I'll sign it," Vida says when I ask her to write a letter of recommendation.. On a rainy afternoon I meet her at the plaza in front of the paper and give her my draft. She reads it and says, "Short and Sweet," meaning I hadn't had the common sense enough to make a strong case for myself amid all the bright young things I was competing against.

The months between applying and being rejected I live in a fantasy, actually imagining myself coming back to Baltimore on weekends and wearing my Columbia sweatshirt while I skate.

One Tuesday night I am skating beside a member of the rink's precision team, a troupe that performs like a dance company to compete against teams from other rinks. She has the soft eyes and inviting roundness of a Raphaelite voluptuary, but is unlucky in love — she once moaned to me that "Men just want to date girls who look like sticks."

"I might be going to New York for journalism school," I suddenly blurt.

"If you do, you'll have an affair," she says and skates off. Wow!

Of course I'll never know if she had been right or not, but there's no doubt that my attraction to journalism was fueled in part by the mind-blasting intensity the profession demands of smart people who work in close proximity and in an atmosphere that is both competitive and communal — a tensional stew that could find release in sex.

Vida, I thought, had the perfect solution for my own conflict between wanting the wanting of marriage without any of its constraints. She was married but she and her husband didn't live together. Instead, Byron, a journalist like herself, lived just around the corner from the big townhouse she was continually restoring. She was free to date or not. Free to be with a another man or not. Free to exercise her magnetism and pull Byron to her or not.

Looking back, I now think Vida's magnetism wasn't the reason Byron had stayed close to her. I think he stayed nearby because he was ten years older than she was and saw her through the clarity of his sobriety. And what he saw beneath the accomplished woman needing a glass of wine or three was a scared little girl. Maybe he sensed one day history would reach out and send her crashing.

"We couldn't stay in Lithuanian," she told me one night as we skated. "My father had fought against the Russians in the First World War, and when war broke out again, the Russians were coming from the east, so my mom took my sister Roma's hand and Dad carried me. We ended up in Hamburg. That's where we lived."

Another Tuesday, she handed me another memory.

"I saw the bombing," she said.

"What?"

“In Hamburg. I saw it. Mom had Roma, and Dad was carrying me. He put a blanket over my head so I couldn’t see what was happening. But, hey, tell me not to look, and you know I’ve got to. I kept lifting that damned blanket. I just had to see what was happening.”

What was happening was hell. Operation Gomorrah, the most concentrated aerial attack of the war created a 1,500-foot high tornadic firestorm that sucked the oxygen from air raid shelters and fed itself on fleeing people. It melted asphalt and held victims fast until they exploded. This is what Vida saw. Or at least what she said she saw.

Gomorrah took place in 1943, which would have made her one-years-old. Or maybe she had seen another attack. Or maybe she was older than she said. Or maybe she had told true lie. True because there was no doubt she was scarred by a wartime experience. But a lie, too, because the particulars like her age don’t fit. Had she actually seen the bombing? Or was she only told she’s seen it? And did the telling incise the story into her memory until nothing separated the actual from the imagined? Truth can be as hard to catch as an icicle crashing down from a five-story eve.

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At any public session, generally there are three types of skaters: duffers, people who want a few hours of fun; regulars, people who show up, week after week; and coaches, skaters accredited to teach by the United States Figure Skating Association. These last typically stand by the boards and watch their students.

But one Sunday a woman defying any categorization is at the rink. Clearly more skilled than a duffer or regular, she skates as well as a professional, but she has no student. She’s just out there. Just moving as if she has an infant’s pliant bones. Each part of her – her shoulders,

waist, hips – pivots from a center of unassailable stillness. She can jump and spin, yes, but it's her surety of place in space that sets her apart.

In a sport having no goals, or finish lines, skating's aim is *sprezzatura*, the art of making something difficult appear easy. *Sprezzatura*, as the philosopher Castiglione defines it, is the art which does not appear to be an art. An effortless artfulness. An easy elegance. A natural elan . . . the essence of skating.

In the nearly four decades I've known her, Peggy Goldsborough, has never skated without *sprezzaturas*. Now in her mid-seventies, she's still tall, limber, and slim as a model. And off the ice, she still strides through the rink's lobby with the cheerful athleticism characteristic of her patrician background — the Goldsborough family tree includes two Maryland Governors, and two members of the U. S. House of Representatives.

One Sunday, not long after meeting her, I look up from lacing my skates and notice a man staring through the lobby window and watching her on the ice. He's not her husband, whom I've met, but someone younger. Tall like Peggy, the man is tan, with hair grayed to the shade of good steel and wears boating shoes without socks, jodhpurs and a once-white polo shirt softened to the smoke of smoke, the sort of uniform favored by a certain class of Baltimorean who derives great comfort from minimizing the amount of money they have, understanding horses, and drinking good rye. He also has a purple swatch of flesh draping his lower left eye, the sort of bruise that comes from a fist or a drunken embrace with a toilet. And he is crying. Not sobbing, but not attempting to hide the tears running down his cheeks either.

I don't know who Peggy is to him, and will never know, but I will never forget how her beauty moved him. Head high, arms outstretched as if in a prelude to an embrace, bones flowing from one position into another she embodies what e. e. cummings " in his poem "Skating" calls

the “joy of zeal.” And how she smiles, not at the man nor anyone else. But at the girl she still senses inside, the girl she was before becoming a wife and mother of five.

Entry, Feb. 27, 1986: “Last weekend I went to Harrisburg (Pennsylvania) with Vita and Peggy Goldsborough. I bought some new skates . . .”

Peggy and Vida share a sisterhood of sprezzatura: Vida in her writing, and Peggy in her skating. They both understand that there are no short cuts to making what’s hard look easy. And they appreciate that we are driving to the sanctum sanctorum of skating. Neal Woods, who sells skate from his Harrisburg garage, is legendary for matching the appropriate boot with a skater’s abilities. And then the appropriate blade to the boot. The skater’s abilities is the key — he’ll ask for full disclosure.

But me? I’m sort of semi-sprezzatura girl . . . just along for the ride, always thinking there must be some easy way, some magical means to mastery. And that Sunday afternoon, I’m too naïve to grasp that I’m over-reaching. I’m just happy to rattle around in the backseat of Vida’s old Dodge Dart and have an afternoon with the girls.

In his garage, Neal Woods fits Peggy first, asking about the types of jumps she does, her spins, how often she skates, the level she’d reached before she stopped competing and got married. He asks whether she wants a dancer’s boot or a freestyler’s, the type of blade she prefers. Peggy’s answers are very specific. She knows what she needs are tools commensurate with her skills, not magical seven-league boots capable of transforming her.

Equally realistic, Vida orders a slightly lower grade boot than Peggy.

But when Neal Woods get to me, I have no idea what I need. All I know is what I want: I want to skate like Dorothy Hamill. And I don’t want to work very hard to do it.

Neal Woods crouches on his garage's concrete floor to measure my feet. "What kinds of jumps do you do?"

"Oh, I don't do any jumps."

"Not even a waltz jump?"

"Not yet."

"What about spins?"

"Not those either."

"So how long did you say you've been taking lessons?"

"Nearly three years."

"But no jumps or spins yet?"

"Pat's struggling. You could say she's a struggling skater." Peggy says. Cruel? Perhaps. But accurate, too

I smile gamely and agree with her, too giddy to be out with the girls to realize that, yes, a little waltz jump by that time shouldn't be out of the question. If Neal Woods is embarrassed for me, he doesn't show it. Instead, he suggests a very low grade boot.

At \$350 they're an extravagance given that Kurt is now a freshman at Hobart College and Matt has followed his brother to Gilman. When my new skates arrive, they're beautiful, their heels fetchingly high, and their leathery smell, intoxicating, and I'm convinced they'll transform my skating — how could they not?

But, of course, they don't; in fact, they worsen it — new skates are stiff and can take months to break in.

Still, week after week, I go to the rink and lace them up until my ankles become incised from my pulling my laces so tight and gradually I feel my edges gripping the ice. I begin each

session by practicing my edges, always starting with the first one George had taught, the front outside, and ending with the last, the back outside. When I catch my reflection in the Plexiglass hockey barrier, I'm beginning to look more confident, tilting into the curve.

One Tuesday night during the fifteen-minute intermission when the Zamboni cleans the ice I'm sitting next to Cheryl, another member of Northwest's precision team, and a very strong skater, both in her physical strength and skating talent. Large, with a sweet, round face and a soft cap of blonde curls, she skates with innate ability, and the unstudied exuberance of a twelve year old on a winter pond

"I noticed your edges," she says to me while we wait.

"What?"

"I've been watching you, and, your edges are looking very good. Really they are"

I glance down at my boots. Their pristine whiteness long faded, they're dull and scuffed. I click their toes. "When I got these, I made a vow."

"What kind of vow?"

"That I wouldn't polish them until I had really good edges."

"If that's the case, you can definitely do that now," Cheryl tells me. "When you get home, you get out that white polish. Your edges have earned it."

But I never do polish those boots. Coming from such a strong skater as Cheryl, her remarks, are validation enough. I didn't need to whiten my boots to know I was skating better and feeling better whenever I did. I was gaining control of my edges and leaving more confident tracings on the ice.

Now, when I recall Cheryl's chance comment, what moves me the most is that she didn't have to say anything to me at all. She could have kept quiet, could have withheld her approval

and just waited for the Zamboni to make one more pass over the ice. But she didn't. She chose, instead, to reach out. Chose to offer a word of encouragement to a struggling skater. Now, nearly thirty years later, I'm still grateful.

###

When I met him, Bill's parents lived across the Chesapeake Bay from Annapolis, on Maryland's Eastern Shore, where his father was in charge of training the Maryland Marine Police. But until he went away to the Marine Corps and then to the University of Maryland, Bill had lived in Frostburg in a little town in Maryland's mountainous panhandle where the winters are notoriously cold. Despite that climate, however, he had never skated.

"Once Dad bought my brothers and me a pair of skis," he told me, "but we never used them much. That was as close as we ever got to that sort of thing," meaning that skiing wasn't football, the only Schultheis-sanctioned sport.

I begin urging him to come to a Tuesday night session with me. Skating, I reason will give us something to share beyond raising the boys and checking off our weekly to-do lists. But he doesn't want to.

Exhausted from working two jobs and worried about his father, he's driven deeper into stony silence when his mother suddenly dies. Meanwhile, I'm feeling more energized and want more connection with him.

"Come skate," I urge.

"No."

Oh, come on . . . it will be fun."

"Leave me alone."

But I keep urging until he finally relents.

Only for him skating isn't fun: it's excruciatingly humiliating, As soon as he steps onto the ice, he can't stand up. At all. Even clinging to the wall, he can't keep his feet from slipping out from under him. Halfway around the rink, he starts to crawl. On his hands and knees, literally crawl. From the ice, he looks up at me, in a tortured mixture of mortification and rage – how could I make him do such a thing? Why hadn't I listened when he said he didn't want to skate? How come I was always pushing him into new, idiotic things?

Somehow he gets himself off his knees, and, clinging to the boards, and makes it off the ice. In the lobby, he tears at his laces so hard that they pop off their grommets. Hunched over, humiliated, he can't bear to look at me. When he finally speaks to me, his voice is hoarse with fury. "Go," he orders, "Go out there and leave me alone. Or do whatever you want. Just leave me alone." And so I leave him alone on the bench and skate by myself that night and for many nights afterwards.

Long after he and I moved away from Ranny Road, and Northwest Ice Rink had closed, and fifteen months into my widowhood, I will go to a party in Dickeyville, a West Baltimore neighborhood that once was an old mill town. It will be early October and still warm enough for most of the guests to congregate on the patio. I will find myself alone in the dining room with Herb Smith, a professor at McDaniel College who will recommend me for a position there.

The evening of the party Herb doesn't know that he had broken my heart the Sunday before. The centerpiece of Dickeyville is the Presbyterian Church, and on Sunday I had been in the pew behind him and his wife, Beth and had watched him lay his hand on the small of Beth's back as we rose to sing a hymn. Mute of words, but pregnant with mutuality, he had spoken to Beth in the silent language of spouses: I touch you, Wife, because you touch me. I will not tell him how his tenderness toward Beth had reminded me of what I had lost.

Instead, he asks about what I'm writing at the moment, and I tell him that I'm trying to write a memoir about ice skating and how I had taken lessons and, how, despite never having reached even a minimum level of proficiency I was still skating,

“Did you ever skate at Northwest?” he asks.

“Oh, sure.”

“I did, too, a long time ago. I thought skating would be something to bring my wife and me closer. You know, something to do together. It didn't work.” Herb's voice, mellow with regret, will have the same tone as Sally's when she once told me she sometimes wondered if she should have stayed with Hank.

Beth is Herb's second wife, and he's her second husband, and to everyone who knows them, the joy they find in each other is evident, but, still, that evening, it will be the memory of Herb's first marriage that snags him. A confident, self-assured man, that evening he looks haunted. What if, instead of skating, he and his first wife had tried art lessons? Or clog dancing? Or gardening? What if they hadn't tried to manufacture a common interest at all, but had merely let one flounce out the door with a bagful of blades while the other waited at home? What if they had just waited, or tried a little harder, and woke up one morning to find they'd synchronized their moves and that at last they'd achieved spousal sprezzatura?

###

Feb. 8, 1988 . . . We went to a Georgia O'Keefe exhibit at the National Gallery this Saturday. It was too crowded to see anything. Also, I tried to go skating on the Mall, but the skates were so dull I almost killed myself, so I turned them in. It was very cold. Bill and I enjoyed ourselves, though.

The choctaw, . . . one edge in one direction, the opposite edge in the other . . . that was me in my forties. But my diaries from that time also reveal that Bill and I took time from our spinning lives to go to movies and plays or simply for walks on summer evenings, as if we are

trying to reprise those early days when we had pushed Kurt in his carriage through the alleys of Charles Village and shared without speaking the whimsical sight of a fat robin perched on a blue gazing ball.

We seem to have realized that from that point on, our shadows were falling before us. We had only to look at my father-in-law to realize that our lives' curves had crossed a zenith and that the angle of light has changed.

I remember standing at our kitchen sink one Saturday when Bill had gone to visit his father in the V.A. hospital, and suddenly thinking that it wasn't right that Bill drive alone to the hospital at the head of the Chesapeake alone. Married for nearly twenty years at that point, I had regarded marriage as a mutually undertaken enterprise, the raising of children, the fulfillment of familial and social obligations, the accumulation of goods, the multifaceted bonding of sex. But until that moment, the supportive aspect of "wife," had been a minor aspect of my being "Mrs. Schultheis." Perhaps the mnemonic motion of my hands moving, as my mother's had, through the suds wakened the realization of how lonely Bill must feel driving up to visit his father who wouldn't even know he was there. After that kitchen-sink moment, whenever Bill went to see his father, I did too.

The visits were always the same: my father-in-law lying beneath a white sheet on a narrow bed in the middle of a ward full of other insentient patients. His eyes open, but whatever he was seeing transpired only in his mind.

Bill saying "Dad, I'm here," but his father giving no response. A second, a third time, Bill says "Dad, I'm here. It's me. It's Bill." Again, no response. And me hearing beneath Bill's saying "It's me. It's Bill, Dad." the third son's plea for recognition that he is more than a single corner among the four-square Schultheis brothers. But it's a recognition he never gets it.

As we watch, Henry slowly untangles his right hand from his sheet. And then, pressing his index and third fingers together, he lifts his hand to his mouth to place a phantom cigarette between his dry, eager lips. And then, as we watch, he inhales, his chest, despite his condition, still broad, expanding, and then deflating as he blows ghost smoke toward the fluorescent light above his bed.

“Dad, oh Dad,” Bill says. But he can do nothing, say nothing to reach realm where his father now lives. We stay maybe twenty more minutes and then leave.

Sometimes on the way home, we stop to see Johnny, Bill’s younger brother. Or go to lunch at the Red Fox, a small restaurant in Bel Air, the town where Sally and Hank had lived. Or stop at CMart, a quirky place selling high-end clothes at deep discounts on a highway a half-mile from Red Pump Road, where they had their first house — the memories of visiting them there, unspoken between us.

Bill and I are learning to make our moves so we won’t trip each other up. Like pairs skaters, each of us spins on a separate axis while attempting to achieve synchronization with the other. The space between us is drawing us closer.

The first Christmas Kurt is home from college, I look at the presents jumbled under the tree and compute that they are worth two tickets to Europe. If we save and limit gifts the next year, we could go to abroad I reason, so we make a pact: next Christmas we will spend no more than five dollars for any single present and go to London. We leave the day after Christmas.

In a picture Bill snaps of me on that first trip abroad — he and I will take many others — I am standing in Trafalgar Square, staring intently off to my left, so totaling absorbed by whatever I’m seeing that I seem oblivious even to myself. I don’t know if I’m looking at something

transpiring across the square or if I'm like my father-in-law and wandering in a private realm in my head.

Eleven months after that trip, on a rainy November evening Bill and I are sitting in a nearly empty restaurant on the Baltimore side of the bridge spanning the Chesapeake Bay. That night Bill has in his pocket a very healthy check, and he and I could have gone to dinner anywhere — the very best restaurant in Baltimore, or Washington, or even Paris. But we are eating in Howard Johnson's.

After his mother died, I had urged him to buy her house, saying that we could rent it out while it increased in value. He agreed providing I negotiate the mortgage. Since neither of us wanted to be long-term landlords, we kept it three years and then sold it to the young couple who had been our tenants. And that night Bill and I are flush with cash and our own acumen.

“One last time” he says, “one last time.” Stopping at that Howard Johnsons had been our ritual ever since the boys had been little and we headed home after visiting his parents.

That night Bill isn't sad or melancholy when he says, “One last time.” He's just acknowledging a reality. The house across the bay hadn't been his boyhood home, but it had been where our boys had played on the beach while my in-laws stayed in their cramped little house and watched TV, and where we cut Christmas holly from their back yard to decorate our house on Ranny Road, and where I had sat on the porch with my mother-in-law and watched my father-in-law using a cane to walk up the road paved with oyster shells and heard her mutter, “Don't grow old. Whatever you do, don't grow old.”

Selling it signaled a chapter in our lives had closed and a ritual dinner feels appropriate. Even though I know I'll order the steamed clams, I study the menu, and when I glance up, a

heart-burst of emotion has flooded Bill's face – tenderness, gratitude, happiness – they're set out in little tears beading his lower lids. One blink and they'll fall.

“What is it?”

“You have no idea.”

“No idea of what?”

“Of how right you are for me.”

There, in that roadside shrine to all things standardized, commercial and transient, my husband has given me an amazing gift. The astonishing realization that my singularity joined to his forms a solid unit. We balance each other.

Yes, I *was* right for him. And he was right for me. In the dynamic of our marriage, I provided the push and he provided the grip. Camping across the country, going to London, buying my in-laws' house, they had been my ideas, but just when I was reaching the edge of hysteria and fearing that I had pushed us into disaster, I'd feel Bill's steadying hand. And knew we'd come out okay.

By that night in Howard Johnson's, we had been married nearly twenty-two years, and our lives had become richer, our kisses sweeter. Perhaps our abraded lives saved us. The very tensions – the chronic dissatisfaction with our jobs, our worries about Bill's parents, my over-arching ambitions for the boys – the very tensions that had threatened to overwhelm us had, instead, generated the heat enabling us to survive. Like the thin layer of liquid created by a skater's blade, maybe the friction between us had enabled us to stick together without ever reaching the end of our mutual adhesion.

###

May 1, 1990 I have a job as a copy editor for the Baltimore Sun. I just hope I keep it and that I do well at it. This weekend I went to see an ice show with Vida . . . The Next Ice Age. It was beautiful.

On a Sunday night, years after we have moved from Ranny Road, Kurt will call me.

Mom,” he’ll say, “have you seen *The New York Times*?”

And I laugh, knowing he’s asking whether I had seen the article about adults with Attention Deficit Disorder. By that Sunday evening Kurt will be an attorney with two sons of his own, but his success has come from an enormous effort. Not until he had passed the bar and was practicing for several years would he learn that he had ADD.

Once he was diagnosed with ADD he told me he thought I had it too, but I ignored him until the night of that phone call. The test for ADD is relatively straightforward, and, yes, I have it. The little pill I take every morning is highly effective, but until I started that daily regimen my life, especially my scholastic and professional life, is chaotic — I will end up being fired from five jobs.

By the time I wrote the diary entry above, I have left the Community College of Baltimore to take a position at The College of Notre Dame (now Notre Dame University of Maryland,) where I will stay for three months before getting fired. Then, the clips of articles I sent in response to an ad in *The Sun*, result in my being invited to take a copyediting test covering national and local politics, the structure of Maryland’s government, sports and grammar. I score higher than anyone who’s ever taken it, but I have no idea what a copy editor’s responsibilities entail.

The first person I call is Vita. “I’m on the desk! I’m on the desk!” I shout.

“Well, great.”

“But I don’t know what I’m supposed to do.”

“I guess you’ll just have to wait to find out,” she says — I should have known I’d be in over my head. Speed and performance are demanded, but ADD makes doing both simultaneously nearly impossible.

Two or three weeks after I’m at the paper another copy editor named Kathy tells me “None of us wanted them to hire you. We took a vote and told them you weren’t qualified.” My dream job is quickly turning into a nightmare. A book on word usage disappears from my desk, and when I complain, mysteriously reappears. When I don’t catch “sole” in place of “soul” my mistake is immediately circulated around the newsroom, and whenever I do make a “good catch,” it’s immediately disparaged.

And I can’t rely on Vita for advice. Across the newsroom, she’s usually frantic arranging for photo shoots, models, and interviews. Besides she’s an editor on the storied paper of H. L. Mencken, while I work on “zoned” editions, small tabloid-type inserts stuffed into the major daily. In the newsroom, my position relative to hers is akin to that of the little girls who dash onto the ice to gather the teddy bears tossed in adulation to an Olympic gold medalist.

Still, one evening she stands up and calls to me from across the newsroom. Her palms are raised in quizzical exasperation

“What?”

“The Andrews Sisters?” Somewhere in a quote she’s editing is a reference to the WW II – era trio and she doesn’t know who they are. I tell her about the close harmonies of Maxine, LaVerne and Patty and she turns back to her computer. That was one of the few instances where the gap in her understanding of America’s wartime experience was exposed.

Her own horrifying experience, as far as I know, she shared with almost no one but myself. One Sunday morning, shortly before I began at the paper she surprised me by showing

up at the rink — she almost never skated by then. She told me about how her family had taken her mother to Pimlico Racetrack for Mother’s Day — “Mom loves the ponies. We had the best time. And then my father said he liked my brother’s girlfriend ‘even though she’s Jewish,’ and we all laughed because how can he make such a stupid remark when Roma is Jewish.”

I almost tripped. What was she telling me? Her family were Catholics. Was she telling me, then, that her mother had had an affair with a Jewish man, and then had his baby? But no. By the time we circled the rink once, she gave me the black hole whose rim I believe she’d teetered beside her whole life.

“Roma’s mother was Mom’s best friend, but she married a Jew. When the war started he took off for Paris. He left Mom’s friend and Roma . . . nobody knows what happened to him. Of course Mom’s friend might as well have been Jewish because she had married one, and Roma was a Jew because her father had been a Jew. The Nazis had that all worked out . . . all broken down . . . how much Jewish blood it took to make a Jew. So my mother’s friend came to Mom and asked her to take Roma. Mom, she has the biggest heart, what could she say? . . . she took her. And that was that.

“Of course they couldn’t stay in Lithuania because everyone in their village knew what they’d done. Besides it wasn’t safe for my father. So he carried me, and Mom took Roma and we walked.”

Into the belly of the beast.

Vida was smart and observant. She saw how effortlessly her parents assumed the role of being parents of two daughters, not one. How they walked down the streets of Hamburg, a little girl by each hand, and smiled Good Morning to the Gestapo. How her father agreed with the baker that Yes, his daughters didn’t look alike, but they both loved Herr Baker’s strudel. How

her mother would mutter through a mouth full of pins while shortening a skirt, “Vida, I need my pinking shears. Ask your sister to get them.”

From parents whom she loved she learned the necessity of constructing an utterly convincing artifice, of playing a role to such perfection that the actress became indistinguishable from her part.

And she learned that her life was worth no more to her parents than Roma’s. My husband was a historian and he told me the price for harboring a Jewish child: The Gestapo hanged you from a lamppost. After they hanged the Jewish child. Who was hanged after yours. Which meant the distinction of being first to hang would have belonged to Vida.

I knew this story when I began at the paper, but I never mentioned it. There, Vida’s Rosalind Russell act was wearing thin, almost cartoonish. And whenever she’d dash into the Ladies’ Room for a forbidden cigarette, then I’d hear the younger staff volley snide remarks.

“How do you say cocktail in Lithuanian?” “I wonder what the Jim Beam collection will look like this fall.” “Probably the same as Johnny Walker’s.”

I couldn’t help thinking that if she had been Jewish, perhaps her drinking and aura of impending calamity would have been understood against the backdrop of the Holocaust, but I didn’t say anything. I was in over my head and I wanted desperately to keep my job. I felt protective of Vida, but I said nothing.

Another time she called to me across the newsroom, and when I looked up her face was ashen with alarm.

“What’s wrong?”

“Georg has died.”

A constant newsfeed ticks across the bottom of our screens, and she's just read that Georg has had a fatal heart attack. At the rink.

She nods toward the Ladies Room, and I follow her. Inside, she pulls out her cigarettes and offers me one. Street sounds from five stories below float through a little frosted window while we sit on a cracked, green leather couch and smoke — defiance in the face of such unexpected bad news feels appropriate.

“How old was he?” I ask.

“It says he was seventy-five. He just keeled over. He was sitting on a bench.”

“When did it happen?”

“A few hours ago.”

“Did it say anything about a service? I imagine there'll be a service.”

“Not yet.”

“Are you going?”

“No . . . I don't think so. You?”

“No.”

Neither of us skates very much anymore — hours are erratic and days off keep shifting — still, I manage to get to the rink a little more than she does and I recall one of the last times I had seen George. Tags with their owners' names dangled from the laces of skates he'd sharpened and stored in pigeon holes above his grinding wheel — the whole space smaller than a walk-in closet.

“Schultheis,” I told him . . . “S C H U L,” as he checked one tag, then another, pulling his glasses off his forehead, squinting at the names, his scalp glistening through his thin hair slicked back in the European style of his native Switzerland.

“Here they are,” his relief showing in his tight little smile, his fingers twitching and trembling as he laid them on the green carpeted ledge below the little window to his skate shop. I’d always detected an undercurrent of mendacity beneath George’s eagerness for us to have fun, the way he rubbed his hands together and said “Ready?” suggesting he had calculated his take from each class.

And that afternoon in the Ladies Room with Vida I can imagine the man who once had toured with Sonja Heny, who once had entertained people worldwide with his amazing jumps through hoops and over rows of barrels, sitting on a bench in a woebegone ice rink on a floodplain pinched by a highway and a culvert, sitting, holding a paper cup of vending machine coffee. Seventy-five, and after a lifetime on ice, sitting and holding something hot.

“Now we’ve got her sister,” he told me that last night, when I picked up my skates.

“What?”

“Now we’ve got her sister,” Georg’s his upper lip was beaded with perspiration. Eileen was several years younger than he was and had grown up in large Irish family from Massachusetts. A natural talent, she used to practice her skating jumps as she walked home from school and when she met George they became a performing duo, traveling all over the world.

But then, one by one, Eileen’s siblings died, and the care of her mildly retarded sister devolved onto herself and George.

“Now we’ve got her sister,” he said again as he took my folded bill — he could put up with grinding a living out of sharpening skates and teaching Tuesday night classes, but he couldn’t put up with sharing Eileen.

Sweet and perennially girlish Eileen had seemed to me like the depended partner in the marriage, fluttering from one class or lesson to another in a perpetual air of distraction, but always attuned to Georg.

“Poor Eileen,” I say to Vida “What’s she going to do?”

“She’ll be fine.”

“But she did everything with him. How will she ever manage?”

Vida puts out her cigarette. “She’s a lot tougher than you think. She’ll be fine.” Then we leave the Ladies Room and go back to work.

Vida’s right: After the initial shock, Eileen *is* fine. She finds someone to help run the skateshop and resumes giving lessons. And she takes care of her sister. I don’t skate often, but when I do, I see the sister waiting in the lobby, her hands thrust into a oatmeal colored coat, her grey hair parted in the style of the 1940’s. Always with a little, mild smile, not quite masking her general air of disassociation and dependency. I believe she would have followed Eileen to the moon.

“We’re going to Ocean City!” Eileen tells me one day in the rink’s parking lot. “My sister and I always loved the ocean!” And so she and her sister go to Ocean City. And then I hear that she and her sister have gone all the way to Florida

Years later, long past the time when he waited while I flounced out the door to skate under the spinning disco ball, and after I’d been fired by *The Sun* and Vida, herself, has died, I will stand in the skateshop while Eileen measures me for new skates. They’re the ones that Bill will buy me for Christmas, the skates I still have. By that Christmas he and I will have entered our marriage’s sweetest time.

###

April 1, 2004. Today I wrote a little. Then Bill and I went to see a movie that had Georg Von Birgelen in it. Then we went out to lunch at Belvedere Square and bought Charlie (our first grandson) a birthday present.

I've seen them, the ones who stay too late at the game, seen them bundled in eight-year-old parkas, standing at the boards, shouting instruction to a student whom they know will only achieve a middling ranking in a mid-level competition. At best, it has to be a tenuous livelihood, one eked out in checks scribbled at the end of each lesson.

George and Eileen had seemed a little more secure. They, after all, had the skate shop, and, aside from his sharpening machine, the only outlay George had was his skill. Having no product to buy wholesale and sell retail, the money passed over the carpeted ledge of the little window to his work area flowed one way. Still, his fingers were tremulous when he took it.

He must have wondered How did I end up here? Once he had toured with Sonja Henny, skating's greatest star. Once, he had thrilled audiences all over the world. Once he and Eileen had known big name entertainers like Elvis Presley. He had only to walk past his shateshop to be reminded on that.

Hanging beside the shop's little window was a black and white photograph of his and Eileen's younger selves. He's wearing a white shirt with loose sleeves, and his feet are positioned in the upside down T as he taught us the night he first demonstrated an outside edge. His right hand holds Eileen's left in front of him, while his right arm encircles her waist. She's wearing a strapless, skirted costume with a Milky Way of sequins from from one breast to the skirt flounced over her opposite thigh. No one as young and vigorous as the couple in that picture ever thinks they will be old. Thinks they will ever end up sitting on a bench in woebeyond ice rink, holding a cup of coffee from a vending machine.

For her contribution she had made to skating, her bravery following Georg's death and her sweet nature, Eileen was much loved at Northwest, and, when she recalled a short movie Georg had starred in, a group of her friends set out to unearth it. Even when they located it in the Library of Congress, they had to wait seven years for the archive to make a print. Bill and I already are grandparents the morning we go to see it in a local theater that has arranged a special screening.

There are maybe forty of us that morning in the theater with Eileen whose smiling sister sits beside her. And then the lights go down and the movie begins. "Winter Capers" is the sort of promotional short the Hyway Theater back in Bridgeport used to show before Saturday afternoon matinees when I was in seventh grade. A black-and-white thinly veiled advertisement for winter sports in the Catskills, it has the famed Concord Hotel for a backdrop. Georg's segment is less than a minute, but, oh, what a time!

In slow motion, he jumps over chairs, and then over a card table flanked by bridge players — I have the feeling there's nothing this youthful Georg can't do on blades. Finally he bursts through a paper hoop held by two pretty young girls. His body jackknifed at his waist so his legs stretch in front of him, he bursts through the tissue drawn over the hoop with his arms opened wide, as if he can embrace us.

And, as I watch, I get the feeling that maybe he can, that maybe some wonder of photonic physics has reached through time and delivered this vibrant, youthful Georg to us who sit in the dark. This dynamic Georg certainly is more real than the faded man I saw through the skate shop window.

This George flying through space, and, has a smile illuminated by a power beyond the sun's. And, to all of us in the dark, he seems to be saying, "Come over. The separation between

us is only tissue-thin. Just jump through. Sonja, Elvis, me, we all did it. Look, we landed on our feet. And we're having fun. You will too. Trust me. Just jump. Trust me."