

# The Washington Post

FRIDAY, MARCH 9, 2001

## Vignette: Synchronicity on Ice

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Special to The Washington Post

**T**oday is Super Bowl Sunday but you'd never know it on this bus headed south across the snowy hills of western New York. Several women with lacquered hair in tight, high buns with sapphire scrunchies (and one man) are on our way back to D.C. For us, this day has been "Synchro Sunday."

I am 48 and I've just taken part in my first team competition, the 2001 Eastern Synchronized Team Skating Championships in Buffalo. One of my teammates—Beth Libow—turns 40 tomorrow and her husband had invited her to celebrate the weekend in Paris.

"Honey," she said, "I can't. I'm going to Buffalo."

Like many on this bus, who range in age from 30 to nearly 64, I grew up ice-skating on the neighborhood rink. Inside I was burning to be a real figure skater.

Christmas before last, I asked my husband for skates and lessons and before you could say triple lutz, I was recruited for a synchronized skating team.

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Sitting around a table at Buffalo's Pearl Street Grill and Brewery this past Thursday night everyone chuckles knowingly as a team member describes the synchro recruitment routine. A stranger approaches you on the ice and tells you how well you skate. You are asked to try out for a team and soon you are signing away your savings and spare time.

Some of us are new to synchro and the rest are survivors of three D.C. area adult teams that went through various meltdowns last year. We are now officially the Capitol Steps Adult Masters team of the Skating Club of Northern Virginia.

The next day we arrive at a local rink for pre-competition practice. Our coach, Carrie Hess, starts our music, a Nat King Cole medley, and we skate into our first "block"—four lines of three skaters with linked arms. "What a day this has been," croons Nat, "what a rare mood I'm in"—as we execute a synchronized swing roll, double chasse, mohawk turn.

Then the wipeouts begin. In the course of this practice three team

members go down and when we try to spell L-O-V-E on the ice to illustrate Nat's lyrics we are downright illegible from the judges' seats. How will we go on the ice this Sunday?

Synchronized skating is an up-and-coming sport. Last year the first Worlds were held and one of the participating U.S. teams is here in Buffalo: The Haydenettes are breathtaking to watch—20 young women performing world-class ballet on ice. As they move from circle, to block, to wheel, at breakneck speed, it's like watching a school of fish or a gaggle of geese in synchronized acrobatic motion.

**O**n Sunday morning we can only hope the Haydenettes have left some fairy dust on the ice. For two hours it's a sort of middle-aged Degas chaos at our hotel as 11 women squeeze into stretch blue velvet, plaster our lids with eye-shadow and attain the desired bunned look. Our one brave male team member—Jeff McKinney—dons a debonair blue tux outfit.

Stacey Heckel, who was a child figure-skating prodigy, acts as our unofficial team spirit leader. Her mother, Marilyn Sickels, also skates with

us and serves as our costume designer.

In the locker room we put on our skates and over-the-boot tights. Then it's our turn to stroke onto the ice. This seems to be our day because we all are grinning from ear to ear and our chins are held high. We sail through our program and way past our personal best. Our L-O-V-E is legible!

Off the ice we are ecstatic. Thoughts of medals and a trip to the Nationals in Colorado Springs (March 14-17) dance in our heads. In this high state we bask—waltzing back to the locker room in a blue velvet mass—tasting Nationals, tasting a fourth place finish at least, tasting joy and relief from humiliation.

As it turns out we place fifth. We silently take off our skates, wondering if we heard right.

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The bus now is in Pennsylvania. Some of us are watching a movie but the bus driver has that other sporting event, the Super Bowl, on the radio.

In the seats in front of me, Marylyn Anderson reads and Barbara Kuhn watches the movie. Both were



CHASE COLOR, N. TOMAWANDA, N.Y.

**The Capitol Steps Adult Masters team, Skating Club of Northern Virginia.**

born on Feb. 22, 1937. They use their social security checks to pay for skating.

Earlier, Barbara had said, "Marylyn and I came to a synchro clinic in Frederick three years ago. When we left the rink we weren't sure what to do. We got in the car but before we'd driven a block away we turned around. I said, 'Marylyn, when we're in wheelchairs in a nursing home we're going to have something to talk about.'"

Addendum: Feb. 10—At last night's practice we got the news: Two West Coast teams have dropped out and we have been invited to Nationals!

*For more information on the Capitol Steps Adult Masters team: Susan Petrucci, 703-323-0674, ext. 40. Also, the Washington Figure Skating Club, currently sponsors an adult masters team: Midge Farkas: 301-588-3964.*