



**U. S. F. S.
Governing Council
Skater's Alumni Dinner
May 2, 2008**

**From Whence
Comes the Joy of Figure Skating?**

Transcript of the presentation
given by Janet Lynn

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Comes the Joy of Figure Skating?**

By Janet Lynn

Good Evening! I'd like to thank all of you for signing up for this 3 hour seminar on outside edges....just kidding. But I have stored up a lot to say over 25 years!

Lindsey Weber and all who have worked on this dinner have done a fantastic job! Thanks for all the hard work you have done. Thank you Lindsey and the United States Figure Skating for inviting me! I am so very honored! I welcome Mr. Hershberger and *all* distinguished members of United States Figure Skating. I thank *everyone* here for coming tonight. Its so good to see old friends.

I am delighted to have been invited to speak to you at this dinner that seeks to help new generations of figure skaters.

When I was a new figure skater at age 2_1/2, little did I know that I was being entrusted with a unique and graceful culture and language that has brought joy to generations of skaters and observers. Many of us hold in trust the inheritance of our beautiful sport and art. Perhaps we can be inspired to find the best ways to transfer these treasures in healthy, excellent, practical ways to future generations of figure skaters.

I invite you to consider with me the question: From Whence Comes the Joy of Figure Skating?

Why do skaters start to skate? What compelled people throughout history to find ways to glide on ice and develop art forms with etchings and movements? Why did you start to skate, or be involved in skating? Why did I? Why are we still drawn to our sport and art?

What draws observers to enter into this magnificent gift of movement across a frozen surface?
Is it the sense of freedom? Is it when the illustrious skating language touches the soul of an observer?

I have concluded after years of consideration that the motivation to enter into the world of figure skating, whether as a skater, an observer, or in some other way, results from some sense of joy. In my experience, two of the main sources for the joy of figure skating are:

- 1) the graceful culture of figure skating
- 2) the graceful language of figure skating.

I was welcomed into a culture of figure skating that beckoned me to come and have fun! Come and glide and learn, and play on the ice with Turns.... Edges..... Stroking.... Hops....Jumps.... and Spins! Feel the fresh air flow across your face! See how fast you can skate! How many interesting ways can you can turn and glide on ice? Oh yes, there's music! Can you find ways for your feet and knees to express the rhythm of that music? You are welcome to glide and play..... join those who are drawn to moving across a frozen pond! Strengthen your body.... learn a fascinating language on ice.... get lost in practice... then fly and be free!

Figure skating has often been said to lift the human spirit. To those who have experienced this exuberance, skating reminds us of something grand in our lives, and it draws us back to its goodness.

Sandra Bezic and I recently reminisced about the sense of privilege and reverence we felt as we stepped onto a glided edge upon the ice. The inheritance of figure skating has an aura of a decent, wholesome and graceful culture. Many of my skating peers remember this graceful culture in their rinks and skating clubs, though each took on a personality of its own. At the Wagon Wheel Ice Palace this cultural inheritance was protected, taught and embraced.

I think that the rustic, quaint Wagon Wheel, which became like a second home for me, was the best place in the world to grow up skating. From this wholesome, family-centered place, I learned life lessons in the most marvelous way.

When my parents took me and my brothers and sister on a weekend vacation to this happy place, they found one of the most wonderful treasures at the Wagon Wheel, Miss Slavka Kohout. I was only 4. My parents were impressed with the sense of discipline that emitted from this enthusiastic young woman skating teacher. They asked me if I wanted to take a lesson to which I said, "yes!"

Miss Kohout, which I respectfully called her until I was a professional, created an atmosphere at the Ice Palace that is remembered with great affection by her students and many others to this day. Slavka created a skating school that upheld the wholesome, fun and healthy culture of figure skating and fully taught its language. The lineage of her own training must have given her direction and inspiration. She once studied for some time under Mr. Howard Nicholson, who Sonja Henie credits with helping her win one of her Olympic Gold Medals. Ever since, Slavka Kohout Button's influence has been strongly felt within the entire skating world.

The culture and joy of figure skating evident at the Ice Palace and in Slavka's skating school drew people from near and far to skate at all levels, to just observe, or to be involved in some other way.

I have delightful memories of one skating show at the Wagon Wheel where many mothers were involved making costumes, some fathers used their engineering and other skills to build props including a special ramp for the skaters to slide onto the ice. I remember even my grandfather used his electrical skills to make little battery operated lights for the tiniest beginning skaters to wear, so they could be important lightning bugs in the show. My brother's high school wrestling and football teams were recruited to work the spotlights for the skating show. They did a great job and had a blast!

The pearls that were forming in Slavka's school of figure skating had value that transcended our sport. Young people could grow not just in skill, but also in character, good manners, sportsmanship and self-discipline. I remember an atmosphere of expectation that skaters would be respectful of Miss Kohout, of each other, and of all who came to, or worked at the rink. There was not any other option.

The Ice Palace culture somehow allowed the sense of community, the hard work, and small accomplishments, themselves, to become the simple daily rewards. These pleasant rewards drew us back day after day, year after year. It was a healthy culture to which we could belong.

Conceive of a culture of skating where the young are just as welcome at weekly dance sessions as the more well seasoned skaters. The skaters with more experience took delight in taking time to dance with the younger skaters, helping them to learn the steps in the dances.

I believe that my peers and I skated for the pursuit of a gratifying social and creative exercise as much, or more, than for the pursuit of winning points or competitions.

When I was a young girl, one Saturday I skated for about 6 hours followed by having an afternoon lesson. After this lesson Slavka told me I could go home. I had skated enough that day. Slavka has told me that two

hours later she looked up from the lesson she was teaching and noticed that I was still on the ice “playing” in the public session with the many facets of skating. The simple joys of skating are what enticed me to grow from a small child to womanhood completely enthralled with skating.

Many of the practical life lessons that I learned from skating have been applicable to building a family and raising 5 sons. Perseverance was one of those lessons. It had to be learned to withstand the pursuit of excellence in the school of skating into which we were growing. Slavka’s high expectations of her students created a sense of community among us. I think the encouragement, and yes, even competitive natures, of each other pushed us forward and helped us to persevere through the work of refinement.

Saturday night workouts were in some ways dreaded by Slavka’s students, yet they challenged us in ways that bring back fond memories. After skating about 6-8 hours on a Sat., we finished with a one to two hour “workout” with about 30 skating students. The atmosphere was one of working together to try to meet the challenges of excellence envisioned by our determined coach standing on the bench in the hockey box.

Slavka had a creative, never ending list of exercises. Some of them were the mundane type, some were more fun.

These workouts included much stroking to music that developed perseverance, stamina, strength, musicality and other qualities ...bend come up, bend come up, was heard from the coach’s perch! Are you listening to the music? Bend your knees, stretch your free leg, point your toe...bend come up, bend come up!! Don’t bend at the waist! Are your feet coming neatly together when you change feet? Are your knees bending to the rhythm of the music!?

Can you picture 30 skaters doing endless edge rolls in order to learn speed, glide and flow; refining our positions and our knee fluidity? Forward outside and inside, back outside and inside. Is this fun yet? We did not yet understand that the repetitive nature of the exercises were forming us into higher quality athletes and artists.

Slavka created friendly competitions. Who can do the most axels in a row? One skater, Susan Lloyd, did one hundred, as the rest of us urged her on by counting each jump. Who could do the most changes on a sit spin? Who could do a flying sit spin going as fast as possible into it? What a sense of flight!

Practicing basics included fast scratch spins, break rotation into a hop, another hop and right into a backspin. This exercise simulated how to turn from a forward spin to a backward spinning motion in jumps. The exit of the back spin was a slow practice of the exit of jumps. We encouraged each other as we each took turns doing jumps; sometimes from standstill position and sometimes as fast and high as possible.

Footwork was described in spoken words. We would listen and then go out and translate the words into skating. We ran on our toes up and down the ice, forward and backward. We were to skate impromptu to beautiful classical music for minutes at a time using the skating language without running into each other.

One winter Saturday night we were all told to go into the skate shop and find a pair of rental hockey skates to put on. Yes, we all were wondering, what *this* was all about. The ice was not resurfaced after about 200-300 people skated on a 3 hour public session. The dance music went on, and Slavka told us to go out and stroke. We couldn’t depend on familiar blades for balance when the burning started in our legs!

On another day she took us outside on the porch and had us run up the steep steps by twos to help us lift into jumps and then run down trying to catch our weight and land softly with each step! It was common sense training like when Rocky Balboa, in a later sequel of Rocky, chose to train in rustic, grueling circumstances in winter as he prepared to compete with the most high-tech boxer in the world!

Slavka encouraged her students to all work together helping each other. For instance, when any of us would lose the timing for a jump, Slavka would find one of her students that was doing the right timing and have us jump next to them to regain our timing. Once when I was National Champion, it was one of Slavka's more novice skaters who helped me get my timing back. While training for a competition during the Christmas holiday, all of Slavka's students would make a circle in the middle of the rink during a very crowded public session. Each would take a turn doing a jump or spin in the middle, and then be critiqued by the others if necessary. We were a team and we loved it! At least I did!

This sense of community also breeds responsibility to the younger generation of skaters, while teaching leadership and individual creativity. One summer Slavka assigned to each of her advanced competitive students one of her younger students. We were to find music for them, cut it, and choreograph an exhibition program for them to perform during summer Saturday night exhibitions.

The *culture* of figure skating at the Wagon Wheel Ice Palace had its own personality and inspired many configurations of joy for skaters of all different levels, skills, and interest. A community of people were just having fun in the pursuit of becoming more and more proficient at figure skating. It was an inviting, healthy and safe atmosphere to learn to skate and to grow up.

There were many people, not just skaters and coaches, who were building the culture of skating. The support I received from my family was extraordinary, as my parents encouraged sports to learn self-discipline and character.

I always knew I was loved by my family, win or lose, in any competition. After a wrestling match in Illinois, my brother drove, with part of his wrestling team, to be in Philadelphia as I tried to make the Olympic team at age 14. He surprised me and showed up to give me a hug a few hours before my free-skating competition. The unity and love of my family met the graceful culture of figure skating.

Is there really a skating mother who would invite an intense competitor of her daughter to spend a few days having fun in Vienna, Austria, after a summer European tour of skating was cancelled due to warm weather and outdoor rinks? Yes, my mother was wise in life and sport. The great laughter and fun that was shared by these two competitors, Julie Lynn Holmes and I, helped forge a lifelong friendship going far beyond figure skating. This good will is an important part of the culture of figure skating in which I grew up. Can we encourage a new generation to grasp the life-long lessons, discipline, character and friendships that can be born from our sport and art?

The compelling sense of these stories describes a wholesome, graceful culture of figure skating. This culture springs from the patient, steady pursuit to learn a unique and beautiful language used on ice. Personal exhilaration, creativity and character building possibilities are inherent in the skating culture I have described. And best of all, the good sportsmanship that this kind of culture breeds gives honor and esteem to the skating world.

Tell me, what child would not want to skate in such a culture? What parent would not want their child to grow up learning the language of such a great sport in such an atmosphere?

The figure skating culture with which I have been acquainted is exuberant. Those who have known this culture hold its priceless treasure in a trust that must be transferred so it is not lost. For generations, figure skating has transferred its culture to new figure skaters. The inviting, delightful culture of our sport and art manifests joy for the skater and observer and is one pillar upon which to build figure skating for future generations.

Yet.....There is something more than a beneficial culture that draws people of all ages to want to skate, be involved in skating or to watch figure skating. The second joyful motivation is found in the graceful language of figure skating.

There was not anything particularly cunning that brought me to the skating rink day after day for over 17 years. Nor is there anything remarkable now that brings me to a cold rink to skate after almost 25 years off the ice. The gratifying pursuit is simply in learning a healthy and exquisite language.

A working definition of the *language of figure skating* was written in 2007 with the help of great skaters, judges, choreographers and coaches. It appears in "*The Language of Figure Skating: A Resolution*". This definition states:

The language of figure skating portrays intrinsic qualities of refined flowing movement, technique and style that transform a simple skating element into a joyous expression of technical sureness and artistic freedom."

Every area of life has its own language. Math, medicine, engineering, business, etc. Those who want to excel will learn well the mental, physical and practical language of their craft.

The refined and complete formation of a figure skater is created by studying and practicing the language of figure skating. The appealing language of figure skating is a lustrous pearl to those of us who have known its grandeur. Its many layers can develop and engage the physical, the mental, the emotional and the spiritual facets of those who study it. It should not be relegated to a museum as ancient. Without this language, figure skating is not figure skating anymore, but must assume another name.

This winter I found a book called the *Art of the Snowflake*. In it are actual photographs of incredibly precise, uniquely designed snowflakes. Not one is like another. I pondered what the process is to form a snowflake with precision which is then free to float and fly through the air.

Like a snowflake, each figure skater is unique. Their style, personality and gifts will not ever be like another. They should not try, or be required, to be like another. The skating world should move away from an unsuitable climate of rules that easily melt away each skater's unique qualities. The completed formation process instills the many precise facets of the language of figure skating into each skater. Through this formation process, each one can then develop his or her own personality, style and gifts within the context of skating language, giving them the freedom to float and fly on ice, adding something beautiful to the world.

How did I, and others in my era, learn the language of figure skating?

Skating language is based upon the edge as the source of our sport and art. Refined elements are almost always performed on edges. Edges are the imperative connecting threads of figure skating. Anyone who has attempted to skate even a simple edge can attest that edges are, undeniably, sport. The athletic form of these beautiful curves on ice can, amazingly, become art.

My grammar school of learning the skating language was school figures, practiced along with Slavka's other distinctive exercises and training methods that I have already described. School figures instilled in my mind and muscle memory the foundations of edges and turns in ways that nothing else can simulate. I do not know a better method to learn the intricacies, precision, center of balance on a thin blade, and the glide and flow of edges and turns than by the practice of school figures.

As an adult, I cannot skate any edge or turn correctly or safely unless I go back to school figures to try to reform the muscle memory that allowed me so much freedom and joy when I used to free skate. I am learning about every muscle that I used to take for granted, that gave me balance and control. My mind remembers

completely the physical formation I am seeking now when I skate, yet it is very hard to achieve again. I often wonder how skaters who no longer have the exercises that taught me these qualities of skating are gaining the body and mind formation that can allow them freedom and safety. These slow exercises are the essence of how I learned the language of skating on ice.

I now believe these exercises were invented by highly intelligent people who understood the physical and mental formation needed to skate securely. When I was learning them, I did not know that school figures were the source and formation of the physical safety and stability that allowed me to skate with abandon.

I am absolutely convinced that school figures gently form the body in ways that develop core strength in specific muscular pathways that are distinctive to skating. These supple, moving muscular pathways make the skater secure and safe while performing edges and turns, hops, jumps and spins. You cannot do a school figure, especially a complex one, without putting your body into the correct alignment and position that will strengthen and protect it. School figures gently prepare the body for all the various dynamic impact resulting from skating elements.

Envision early morning, or middle of the day, or later in the evening, the quietness of about 18 blades whispering as they make circles and turns on the ice, with an atmosphere close to that of reverent concentration. This slow and steady movement creates mental and physical discipline, develops supple strength, and forms a strong center line of axis. This discipline can translate into being able to glide on any edge, make any turn correctly at any speed, and turn on the ice, or in the air, with stability and safety.

Slavka's school of figure skating defied the present day demand for instant gratification. Distinguishing exercises on ice, along with school figures, taught me a lovely language. In the process, I often felt like I was playing on the ice. The delight of small accomplishments could be experienced daily in this slow, methodical school of skating, giving me the mental and physical structure for flight on ice.

My memories of skating are astonishing to me.

Join with me as I remember being 12 years old having the body formation, alignment, control, strength and ingrained knowledge of the complete language of figure skating to be able to jump at will with such height that I felt like I was floating across the end of the rink. In mid-air, I could stop rotation so that I felt like I was standing in air, after which I could finish the rotation and land softly. Talk about freedom and joy!

I could skate swift back crossovers as fast as I could go and fly into a flying sit spin with complete abandon and pleasure, all while having unrestricted confidence in my well trained body for such feats on ice.

I could hear beautiful music while skating and feel my body respond as the music flowed through my mind and body. The music would inspire the creation of impromptu footwork and moves on the ice just for the fun of it! Even though my ability to perform the language of figure skating is now *very* limited, this musical inspiration is still captivating, even if only doing edges.

I remember the creative process of choreography. Body alignment and control allow the use of an unending variety of smoothly connecting movements across the ice. Patterns of movement can use all of the language of figure skating including edges and turns, hops, jumps, spins and stroking on ice. The snowflake comes again to mind as I think of the intricate and appealing patterns that can be created by a skater on the ice.

When I look at my programs, I am amazed that I could actually do the turns and edges, footwork and movement into and out of jumps and spins that were choreographed for me. I am absolutely impressed by the choreographic genius of Slavka Kohout Button. She weaves the skating language on ice as if it were a flowing story or a tapestry, exactly to the music.

The work to choreograph the original *Afternoon of a Faun* meandered as Slavka and I listened to the music on the ice and started moving. I was soon told that I was to think of being a timid young fawn playing and running through the woods, jumping through bushes and over streams. When I watch the *Afternoon of a Faun* competitive program that I did in 1968 to make the Olympic team, I get so excited by the movement of my feet that speak the music. These movements of the feet and knees to music can bring inexplicable joy to both skater and observer.

Imagine with me the great internal drama of skating alone on one end of the rink, awaiting my turn, while participating with the John Curry Skating Company, as a work of choreography is being created to the music of Ravel's *La Valse*. Can you feel with me the music actually move your body, knowing that a complete dictionary of the language of figure skating is at your disposal and you have the control to use it to skate with abandon with edges and turns, hops, jumps and spins? Can you sense the joy, though no one is watching and there is nothing to win?

The skating language is an enthralling type of play on the ice. Discovering that the language of gliding feet and bending knees on ice can speak what music is saying is pleasurable to any level of skater. It is imperative to teach and know the language of figure skating in all its fullness for it is within this language that the beauty and joy lie for both the skater and the observer.

The culture and language of figure skating are not complete without the most important pearls of figure skating.... those who are drawn to skate and those who are inspired to watch. My stories have hopefully expressed the joy of a figure skater. I believe we now have a perspective to consider and imagine what draws people to want to watch figure skating!

One eager fan told me she has enjoyed watching figure skating because it has been relaxing in years past. She said many people's lives are stressful. Watching beautiful figure skating has been a way to relieve stress. Unfortunately, it now has the opposite effect on her. She keeps hoping she will see more beauty and freedom again.

Another skating fan told me that she likes to see character in the skaters. She said that character is seen in skaters by their body language, what music and costume they choose, and how they present themselves, as well as their ability to perform with their skating skills to music.

An enthusiastic fan of skating said she has been fascinated by the freedom and beauty that skating can portray. There is something in these qualities that has made her feel inspired and good about herself. Though she cannot skate, she felt like she also could go out and accomplish something beautiful or good.

Someone else said that being able to skate is a privilege for those who have been gifted with the talent and opportunity to skate. She feels equally privileged to watch those who have worked hours and hours to excel at their skating to make it appealing and beautiful. Their work and courage in turn opens up wholesome entertainment and enjoyment for the non-skater. She wondered out loud if skating is becoming only a sport competition, instead of an expression of something uniquely beautiful.

Every person that I have listened to talk about today's skating has said he or she could easily do without young women holding their skate and pulling it in some, often unpleasant fashion, over their head. This skill is a great achievement, but really is not related to beautiful and joyful skating.

Many avid fans are expressing that something intangible, that made skating fun to watch, is now missing in figure skating; that "something" has nothing to do with personality, marketing or stardom. "We want the beauty back", many fans have said. I believe all of us in this room must know what many fans cannot explain: the beauty is hidden in the graceful skating language.

For me, figure skating is not eternal, yet it does have the ability in all its fullness to uplift the human spirit. I personally received many fan letters that told of how skating uplifted someone's spirit or inspired them. Indeed its beauty and joy can touch the human spirit in an eternal way. Many have told me so and it certainly has been so for me.

That is why it is with such great sadness that many of my colleagues and I observe the present direction of the sport and art that we love. We do not recognize it anymore and sadly aren't often drawn to watch because it is irritating.

But I know that somehow the graceful culture and language grew over many years, even in the midst of adversity. In doing so, it is not unlike the formation of a pearl. An oyster's internal world becomes disrupted and irritated when something intrudes into its shell. The balm created by the oyster internally to heal an irritation is called mother-of-pearl. The mother-of-pearl is applied layer by layer upon the intruder within the world of the oyster. After a long time, usually a few years, a beautiful, much desired pearl can be found inside the oyster's shell. The oyster has inherited the ability to create a beautiful pearl as it protects itself from unhealthy irritations that change its internal environment.

The equivalent of mother-of-pearl for the figure skating world consists of the graceful culture of figure skating and the graceful language of figure skating. This balm can protect the health of both our sport and art. The application of both to anything that threatens or irritates the health and beauty of the world of figure skating, and its participants, is equivalent to a priceless, radiant pearl.

Refined athletes or artists know the necessity of honest evaluation and application of corrective measures. They practice to form and refine their skill. They work hard, and they evaluate. They adjust their path and training when necessary to stay healthy and to improve so they can reach for their goals. Skaters would not be wise if they did not listen to honest and trustworthy evaluation about why they are falling on a jump, why they are slipping on an edge, why their turn was not graceful and steady, or why they are spinning out of control, or hardly moving on a spin at all. It is wise to know if the skater's joy of skating is diminishing, and if so, why. Such evaluation often goes back to correcting foundational basics.

Slavka carefully evaluated my weaknesses in school figures. This evaluation led her to invite Mr. Pierre Brunet to work with me on them. One summer after I had already been National Champion 3 years, Mr. Brunet used the wisdom and patience of a saint, and worked with me to completely reconstruct my school figure technique. An entire summer was spent on this task. At the beginning, I was utterly frustrated and discouraged because I could no longer even glide around one circle with ease. As we worked and worked to change my habits of movement, my school figures became more secure and consistent than they had ever had been, giving me enjoyment, really, for the first time. The corrective measures were beneficial.

An athlete who wishes to be a champion, or an entity that wants to lead and succeed, evaluates and makes changes in order to stay healthy, to improve and to reach for a high goal. Diminished joyful participation in skating, or other legitimate concerns related to new ideas, rules, or competitive standards of measure for our sport and art, would be compelling reasons for the internal world of figure skating to seek honest evaluation. If it is wise for the athlete and coach to evaluate, it is also wise for an entity entrusted with the inheritance of the culture and language of figure skating to honestly assess its health, technique and goals.

It is unpleasant and hard for me to be so honest with you, such a very distinguished group of people who have invested time, resources, energies and talents into the world of figure skating, but it must now be said: Figure skating is on the wrong path. Many of my very distinguished colleagues and I don't just wonder, we know skating has taken a turn that is not correct or healthy. Those who are not afraid to be candid say that the skating structure and required content is now boring. If figure skating stays on its present path, the figure skating that we all have known and loved will not survive another generation. How this status of skating has

come into being does not matter. I believe that the best intentions have been employed. Yet, it is now time for everyone who loves figure skating to do what they can to put skating on the right path. It is time to study how to skate, instead of studying a massive rule book and how to gain points. Many are trying to earn a living in a sport and art that they barely recognize. Skaters and coaches are working hard and are not at fault. They simply don't have the benefit of a structure or incentives to learn the essence of skating as my colleagues and I understand it to be. I believe many former champions if they were asked, would be willing to help work towards a healthy future for figure skating.

Perhaps the question raised earlier: "From Whence Comes the Joy of Figure Skating?" is a prescient question with which to re-evaluate the direction that skating should take.

What makes a skater want to grow up and mature in the world of figure skating? Will young skaters want to grow up skating if the requirements to succeed put undo stress upon their young bodies and cause serious injuries and pain? Will parents want their children to pursue a sport that requires unnecessary risks that could cause long term damage to their child's developing body? Is the skating language being adequately taught so that skaters will become physically and mentally strong and supple, in ways that relate exactly to figure skating, preparing them for dynamic impact? Do they have the opportunity to embed a complete dictionary of figure skating language in their mind and muscle memory so they can be free to express themselves? Are skaters called upon to know and perform a language that can give them safety and joy?

There is growing evidence that the present structure and system of skating lacks adequate opportunities and incentives for skaters to study and learn their craft. Many of the highly advanced skaters of today do not know what even beginning skaters of my era knew about basic skating. Choreographers of the finest caliber have told me their stories of frustration. World class skaters have not known what a change-of-edge is and when shown, could not perform it.

While athletic advancements in our sport have been amazing, a high level skater could perform a triple loop and lutz, yet when asked to perform a simple forward outside eight did not know what it was, and when attempting to hold the edge for a complete circle was grinding the skate with an out of control free leg swinging, not being able to complete one circle. This is shocking. A well aligned forward outside edge is foundational. It is the basis for elements such as an axel and spins, and so much more.

Successful skaters cannot skate 3's to the center, thus cannot do a three turn for choreography and hold the back inside edge. A whole group of young, but established skaters at a choreographic seminar could not perform a back inside edge. These stories are very disturbing and irritating, but they are the truth. Many similar examples of a lack of the basic knowledge and skills of figure skating could be told. These stories do not portray the joyful freedom that I experienced on ice.

This is not about old fashioned skaters resisting change or the natural evolution of skating. As my present ballet teacher, Robin Sturm said, "it's about quality". I believe my colleagues and I want to preserve a language that can create beauty in the world that we all can enjoy watching. I can't imagine even trying to skate beautifully with flow and glide and do fantastic jumps without a sound ability to skate and glide on all the edges, to skate smooth turns, to perform change-of-edges and to know the names of all the edges and turns. From where would come the joy of figure skating?

I would not have been able to succeed as a skater in the present structure and system. First of all, I could have never put my body into the unpleasant flexible positions that are now required. I simply was never flexible no matter how hard I worked at it. Secondly, my imperfect body absolutely needed the formation of school figures in order for me to feel secure and want to grow up into womanhood figure skating with freedom and joy.

The lingering joy in my own stories is a living perspective relating to the skating culture and language that inspired me to grow up in figure skating. I want new generations to learn and enjoy what I have had the privilege to master and enjoy. My narratives relate a deep jubilation that figure skating has provided to me and to many others. Revealing them to you is meant to inspire, and impress upon, the world-wide skating community to rise and honestly examine its present structure, its rules, its health and its future direction so this incomparable joy will continue to live and breathe. Like the oyster applies the balm of mother-of-pearl when something threatens its health, everyone involved in figure skating can apply the graceful culture and language of figure skating to anything that causes stress, disruption, or irritation in the world of our magnificent sport and art.

I am grateful that I inherited, with my peers, a skating world that was graceful, safe, decent and dignified. The gift of figure skating came joyfully alive to me through its culture and its language.

I invite you to join those of us who want to pass on this incredible gift!! In order to preserve the beauty of figure skating that we have all loved, I am appealing to United States Figure Skating to act now by sponsoring a non-political commission led by former gold medal champions. I ask that these champions of figure skating be charged with the task to choose all members for the commission, as well as participate in assessing, with all freedom and candor, the health of figure skating. The commission should define the best structure and incentives for safely learning the complete language of figure skating. Their task should also include defining the kind of system and requirements that are healthiest for our rising athletes, and most enjoyable for those who watch. Presenting USFS with concrete recommendations, and a plan for implementation, should be the goal of this commission. We cannot wait another season. Many snowflakes are waiting to be formed so that audiences can enjoy their freedom and flight across a frozen surface!

Those who hold in trust the inheritance of the culture and language of figure skating yet have time to find effective ways to pass on that inheritance to future generations, before it is lost. The radiant pearl of the joy of figure skating will follow for both skater and observer.

Thank you again for inviting me to speak and for your patient and kind attention.

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There are two books available for those who are interested to explore ideas about figure skating in more depth. They are "*The Language of Figure Skating: A Resolution*", and *Echoing Whispers on Ice: Edges*". The first is an inspirational resolution about the language of figure skating that has been endorsed by many legends of figure skating and others who have been an integral part of skating history. *Echoing Whispers on Ice* is a 54 page commentary by Janet Lynn on the many facets of edges. An order form can be found on the next page for your convenience.

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