

## Skating Fun

At Satinwood, our school in the country, we couldn't wait until the older boys flooded the ice for skating. Students from grades one to nine, who enjoyed skating at noon hour, were all on the ice at the same time.

I started skating in grade one, wearing my white hand-me-down skates called tube skates. There were no picks and these had no ankle support. It seemed as though I was skating on the sides of my feet rather than the blades themselves.

At noon, I ran out into the hallway as soon as we finished our sandwiches, Mom had packed for lunch. I put on my snow pants, winter coat and boots, grabbed my skates and ran as fast as I could to the skating shack. Now, when I think about a skating shack, I envision a warm fire in the stove in the middle. This was not the case at Satinwood. My fingers were freezing as I took my mittens off to lace my skates. Mrs. Lowen, my grade one teacher, helped tie her student's skates. My mom, who taught grade nine, was there helping the little kids with their skates.

I thanked Mrs. Lowen and put on my mittens as I headed out of the shack to hop out onto the ice. It was like merging onto a highway, as I sped up as fast as I could to keep up with the flow of skaters rushing by. I didn't have the thrill of a glide, because of my skates, but it was still fun.

Eventually, I got better skates and I became a fast and confident skater. We played games like tag and crack the whip. When I was at the end of the whip, I loved the feeling of freedom mixed with fear as the momentum of cracking the whip sent me spiralling across the ice.

This went on day after day during the winter months without a hitch, until one day in grade six when our skating in physical education class came to a halt. Mr. Thornton, who ironically was a speed skater, didn't let us go outside to skate. My friend Autumn kept asking him to let us go outside, he got mad and laid down the law.

"Autumn has asked to go outside too many times," Mr. Thornton declared.

He thought we would blame Autumn, but we didn't. We knew Autumn was being our advocate. This is when I realized the difference between teachers who wanted the best for the students and ones who put their own needs first.

The next year, I attended Junior High in Satinwood. We were at the other end of the school. The young kids were not allowed past a line drawn on the linoleum. We didn't have a gym, but we must have received funding for gymnastic equipment that was set up in the multi-purpose room at our end of the school. We still skated at noon hour, but in phys ed we could now do what we called tumbling.

I learned to follow the sequence of running to the springboard, jumping high and flipping off the vaulting house onto the mat below. I went round after round, trying new moves of somersaulting and backflips.

When it was too cold to skate at noon hour we were allowed to go into the multi-purpose room where I played a 45 rpm record of Pretty Woman repeatedly, while the girls danced.

After graduating from grade eight in Satinwood, I rode the bus an hour each morning to Lacombe Junior High School to take grade nine. I said goodbye to my skates. I tried to learn basketball and volleyball with the town kids, but I didn't know the rules and hadn't perfected the moves.

In grade twelve, I enjoyed phys ed because we did individual sports like tennis, European handball, golf, and curling, but no skating.

It wasn't until I was in my twenties that I took up skating again—this time on figure skates. I took lessons, but the younger girls got more attention and I didn't enjoy using picks.

When I lived in Ontario, I used my kids' hockey skates whenever I got a chance to skate on the St. Lawrence River before it snowed. It was in Kingston when I learned how to speed skate. I attended a class every Saturday where our teachers taught starts, relays and how to make those crossovers while swinging my arms to keep balance and rhythm. I loved it, but had to move from Kingston, Ontario back to Red Deer to look after my aging father, where they didn't teach adult recreation speed skating.

I purchased my own hockey skates around the age of 50 and continue to enjoy skating at the arena starting every September. I love the freedom of gliding on the ice. Because I do the hockey drills, I have seen my boys do during their hockey practices, I see improvement from one week to the next. We go south for the winter, so I have to take advantage of September and October months to skate.

This winter I am going home for two weeks in January, and I hope to strap on my skates a few more times.