

Ex-ice performer seeks stability in Eugene



Liz Screechfield spent four years traveling through Europe and South America with the Holiday On Ice International show.

Photo by James Marks

By Frale de Guzman

Of the Emerald

"Traveling with the show, I went away from everyday reality and into the performance life," says Liz Screechfield, former ice skater in the Chorus Line of the Holiday On Ice International show.

"I lived, ate and worked with the same people. My outside contact came from friends made outside the show and from the people I met in the cities we toured," says Screechfield, who moved to Eugene this year.

Screechfield skated for Holiday On Ice International from 1979 through 1983. She joined the show at age 20, two years after Tom Robertson, an ex-barrel jumper from the Ice Follies show, discovered Screechfield at an ice arena in her hometown, Santa Rosa, Calif.

Screechfield says that Robertson helped her improve her techniques and introduced her to people that opened the gates to the international show.

Holiday On Ice International toured in South American and European countries.

"The first year of show life was the most difficult. You had to stick up for yourself when you're in the show. You have to be forward and aggressive and say what you think," Screechfield says.

The troupe traveled in four groups. Each group was made up of 75 to 80 individuals, including 50 Chorus Line skaters, 10 soloists, five skaters in animal and comedy acts, and five managers. The rest of the people in the division were crew members.

Professional skating is an exciting education, but it's also a tough life filled with demands and pressures, Screechfield says.

Directors strictly enforced thinness. Girls who exceeded their required weights were fined between \$2 and \$20. They were weighed every two weeks, but those on the "black list" were weighed every week.

The competitive atmosphere often created tension among "backbiters and rising newcomers."

But working in the show offered more reward than the approximately \$200 a week in earnings, Screechfield says. The experience widened her outlook on life and was a lesson in getting along with others. Although many of the skaters were catty, others were friendly and helpful, Screechfield says.

Screechfield adds that performing and making people happy was rewarding work. "It feels great to have the audience appreciate your energy on the ice. I loved going out into the audience during the animal numbers. It was a time where the skaters in the number, dressed in their costumes, went out into the audience to shake their (the spectators) hands."

Screechfield says the highlight of her international career was meeting friends and families from different cultures.

"In Germany I went to a family get-together in the countryside. It was great," Screechfield says.

The ice show toured from September through June. Tour breaks varied between one and three months, and during the breaks Screechfield always returned to Santa Rosa to visit her family.

In 1983, at the end of the production, Screechfield decided to leave the show. "If you stay in the show for long, you become addicted to it," she says.

Screechfield says she was ready to return to a more stable life. She remained in Genoa, Italy for a year and a half and taught aerobic dance classes before returning to the United States.

Screechfield says she wanted to see her family and was interested in studying languages, an interest developed while traveling with the ice show.

Currently, she is sitting in on a few University classes and is interested in instructing aerobic classes. She says she would like to eventually start an ice arena in Eugene.

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