



Blades of Glory

A mother discovers there's more to figure skating than those fancy costumes.

BY HEATHER MILLAR

"Mom!" yelled my daughter Erin, then 3. "I want to do that!" On vacation in New York's Adirondack Mountains, we had driven past the outdoor skating rink in front of the Lake Placid high school. In the rearview mirror I could see her pressing her nose against the car window, gazing at the ice-skaters twirling in their Lycra outfits. Enter that sinking feeling.

When I was pregnant, I spent lots of time worrying about what I would do if I gave birth to a "girlie" girl, someone who fussed over dolls and hated to get dirty. Erin turned out to be neither all girlie nor all tomboy. She does fuss over her dolls, but she also gives them tattoos. She wears green tulle and a tiara to dig for worms in our backyard. On the playground, she's usually the only girl chasing the boys, slashing the air with pretend swords and lightsabers. We call her our "pirate princess." So I was surprised that Erin was drawn to figure skating, something I suspected was a foofy pursuit with expensive costumes and pushy parents.

"Momm! Pleeeeeease?!"

The next day, she and I rented skates. Erin was like newborn Bambi: legs splayed, body boneless. After 15 minutes the tears began. Well, that takes care of that, I thought as we unlaced our skates.

... | the great outdoors



A year passed. Then we drove by another outdoor ice venue, Wollman Rink in Prospect Park, near our home in Brooklyn. Erin yelled, "Mommy! Skating!" The ski slopes are hours away and there aren't many outdoor options in New York City when it's 20 degrees and the only thing white on the ground is road salt. So I pulled into the rink parking lot and we rented skates again. Holding on to the side boards, Erin edged along the ice, knees stiff.

"I can skate, Mommy!" A few days later, she insisted that we go back. The next week, Erin let go of the boards and I pulled her around the rink so that she could get the feeling of gliding. That sealed the deal. "Faster, Mommy, faster!" She started taking lessons every week. I skated with her.

The winter Erin turned 5 she learned how to bend her knees properly, to stroke rather than step, to do swizzles (making an in-and-out pattern on the ice). By midseason, she knew about inside and outside edges. She could spin, make little jumps, skate on one leg for a bit. It surprised me how difficult it is to ice-skate well, how much bravery even a simple direction change requires.

Thursday became skating day: first a lesson for Erin, then her demonstration to me of what she had learned. Then we'd skate together for another hour or so. We got to be on smile-and-wave terms with the Muslim and Orthodox Jewish families who came to the rink in search of modest exercise for their long-skirts-only daughters.

Every winter Thursday, my swashbuckling child, now 6, charges onto the ice. "Hey, Mom! Try to catch me!" she yells, and she's off. Just as I catch up with her, she orders, "Try this!" and goes into a baby spin. Still out of breath, I copy her tentatively.

"Not bad, Mom," Erin says with almost adolescent forbearance. Then she zooms off again. I realize, not for the first time, that I have no choice (this is tiring!) but to let her go.



Three Things That Make Skating Easier

Skate Coach Early Skating Trainer: If you can't bring a straight-backed chair to the ice, consider this "walker" that a kid can push around the ice, saving parental backs and arms. Folds up for easy transport and storage. (\$33, skatebuys.com)

Leedom Stormer ski helmet: Plenty of kids just repurpose the bike helmet they already have, but I prefer a ski helmet, which extends farther down the back of the head. I only had to hear a head thwack against the ice once to decide it was worth the money. (\$60, leedomhelmets.com)

Bladerunner adjustable ice skates: Don't rush to buy leather figure skates, which cost more and require painful breaking in. These soft-boot skates have buckle closures that cut down on icing hassles and can be lengthened at the toe to accommodate four shoe sizes. (\$50, skatebuys.com)



Skate Coach Early Skating Trainer



Bladerunner adjustable ice skates



Leedom Stormer adjustable ski helmet

• on the dot For tips on getting kids to skate, go to wondertime.com.