

On the Ice

By Leo Frey-Heinke

“Do you know how to skate?” I interrogated Seim, my friend.

“No.” He responded. “Do you?”

“No, I don’t. I wonder how hard it is. I could slip and fall really hard!” I realized.

“Don’t worry, your snow pants and coat will cushion your fall.” Mr. Hurst, my teacher, assured me. “I think we’ll be there in just a minute.”

We were walking towards the Oliver skating rink. After we passed a row of townhouses with black, circular windows, we all turned a corner. As a thick, snow covered elm tree stopped blocking our view, we could see the big, blocky building which held the *Forbidding, Distant, Intimidating*



Rink.

We approached it, entered and went into...

The dressing room.

When I went into the dressing room, I was informed that I should take my boots off, and that a volunteer would help me with my skates. As I took my snow-resistant shoes off, a rush of cool air hit my feet. It's always nice to take boots off, but this was nothing compared to what I would feel later.

A volunteer mother in a heavy black coat came over and slipped my skates on. They were very hard compared to the cushioning that was on the boots that I had been wearing previously. When the volunteer tied up the laces on my skates, it felt like someone was squeezing me for foot juice.

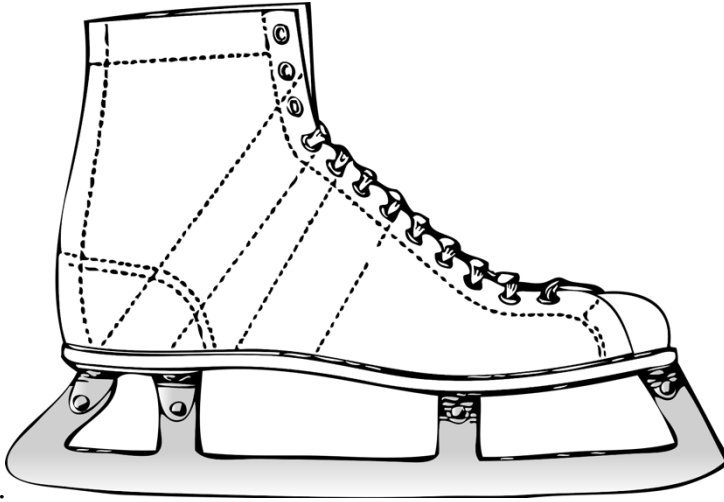
"They're so tight!" I complained in a whiny voice (keep in mind that I was only in grade 2).

"That's how they should be." she replied. "They need to be in the exact same position as your feet, so you can have optimal control of yourself on the rink."

"What does that mean? Optal?"

"Op_ti_mal. It means, um, perfect."

“ Oh. Do they have to be *this* tight?” I was frantically searching for a way to not be in terrible pain the whole time I was



skating.

“I suppose I could make them a little looser.”

She'd given in a tiny bit but I could see that I couldn't pry any more away. I then stood up and took a few awkward steps toward the Forbidding, Distant, Intimidating Rink.

When I got to the small box that you are in right before you go onto the Forbidding, Distant, Intimidating Rink I saw that all the things you hold onto when you're on the ice that help you stay up were taken. So I decided to go on without one. I took a few clunky steps onto the ice. *Clunk, clunk, clunk*.

“Woah!” I fell over backwards and landed on my butt. When I tried to get up again I fell over. I repeated this process again and again, until Mr. Hurst came over and demonstrated for me.

He got down next to me and told me to put one leg up with my knee bent and then to push myself up with my hands. I did as he suggested, got up and made my way over to the wall, where I decided I was less likely to fall down.

I saw an unused skater assistant and made my way over to it around the wall. I tried to imitate the other skaters, kind of pushing my skates behind me. I kept stumbling and having to hold myself up so I tried and tried until I thought I'd got the hang of it.

I confidently pushed away the assistant and exclaimed, "I don't need this anymore!" However, my mind changed when I slipped and fell. When I turned around, the assistant had been taken.

I toughed it out, trying repeatedly. Over and over I tried, and over and over I fell. Each time I improved no matter how many times I fell. Eventually, Mr. Hurst skated by me and said, "You're getting pretty good!" It was then that I realized I hadn't fallen over in a while.

I skated past Seim, who seemed to be improving similarly to me. "Bet you can't catch me!" I shouted over the roar of the Rink that was losing its forbiddingness, its intimidatingness and its distance.

"Oh yeah?" he said and started skating after me. I pushed one skate behind the other, gaining speed, and then, when I stopped pushing forward and started coasting...

I fell over.

Seim skated up to me and informed me that he had caught me. He then paused to ask, "Are you OK?"

"Yeah I'm fine." I responded.

As I started to stand up, a whistle shrieked. “Aw, I was just starting to get the hang of it!” I complained.

Seim expressed his agreement, then started to skate towards the Box in which the skater assistants were held. I followed suit. As we went back into... *the dressing rooms*, a volunteer father in a light gray coat came over and untied my skates. When I took them off, I felt a *huge* relief. I then shoved them into my nice, cushioned boots and put my skates in a bag. Mr. Hurst lined us up and marched us out of the building and back towards the school.

As a snow-covered elm tree stopped blocking our view as we passed it, we could see the big, blocky building which held the place where I had learned to skate, place that I hoped to visit again, the place which I now thought of as the un-forbidding, un-distant, un-intimidating rink.