



Sad News

Gerry Willis – November 2017



For those who knew Gerry Willis I see on his wife Helga's page that Gerry has recently passed away in England. I worked with him and Helga in Ice Capades West Co., 1976 tour. He was always nice to everyone and was a lot of fun.



Sashi, Gerry, Helga & Ann-Margreth at Halloween Party.

Our Alumni in the News

Skating champion Karen Magnussen warns about ammonia gas leaks at ice arenas



Magnussen, 65, said the deaths of three men in Fernie, British Columbia, after an ammonia leak at the local arena is a horrible tragedy and she urged communities across Canada to ensure arena cooling systems are regularly maintained and inspected.

Dirk Meissner, The Canadian Press

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Canadian Olympic silver medallist and former world champion figure skater Karen Magnussen can still feel the spot deep in her chest where an ammonia leak burned her lungs six years ago, leaving her disabled and unable to go back to an ice rink to teach the sport she loves.

Magnussen, 65, said the deaths of three men this week in Fernie, British Columbia, after an ammonia leak at the local arena is a horrible tragedy and she urged communities across Canada to ensure arena cooling systems are regularly maintained and inspected.

"We're talking about children," she said in a telephone interview from her home in Langley, B.C. "Not to mention all the people who are there watching. This should be a priority. This is our national sport for God's sakes. People live in arenas in Canada."

Magnussen said she was a victim of an ammonia gas leak in November 2011 in North Vancouver at the North Shore Winter Club where she was teaching skating lessons.

"An ammonia leak happened, same as in Fernie, and I was very lucky to not be dead and end up the same as those poor souls in Fernie," she said.

[Click here to read Karen's entire article.](#)

Ice Theater of New York honor Tai Babilonia and Randy Gardner on 50th Anniversary of Partnership



Two Olympic Pairs – Ken Shelley & JoJo Starbuck, Tai Babilonia & Randy Gardner
and Richard Dwyer

Update on John "Snake" Adams IRMA RELIEF FUND



Hello Everyone! I wanted to post an update what the plan is to get this money to John. He is living in Tennessee with a friend at the moment and has not got a smart phone or internet access. This has made it challenging to try to make him a beneficiary so we decided to claim me as beneficiary and I am wiring the funds to him as soon as it clears. Ding Ding Ding... we have a winner! Finally all the money donated up till now is going into Johns account. Thanks everybody! I will keep this go fund me up and running just in case anyone wants to donate further, or share the post with their friends. :) Tricia Klocke

Bob Bennett Memorial



In June of this year, Willy Bietak Productions lost a dear friend and colleague - Bob Bennett.....This past weekend we celebrated his life at the most perfect location - our rink in downtown Los Angeles, Pershing Square. It was the ice rink that Bob last worked at 4 years ago at the amazing age of 92!!! Thank you to all who traveled from near and far to share the wonderful stories of his life.

Our Christmas Couple of the Month

Janet & Don Knight



Janet, where were you originally from?

I was born in New Jersey, my family moved to California when I was 10. Started taking ice skating lessons at 11 yrs. Turned professional at 13, skating at the Beverly Hilton Hotel.

Janet, which show(s) were you with throughout your skating career?

I joined Ice Capades at the age of 18 yrs. old in 1964, in the line and did understudy work for the first year. Second year, I had an opening number with Peter Voss plus line and understudy and by the third year I was full principal throughout the rest of my career.

I traveled with Ice Capades a total of 11 yrs. with all three companies, East, West and Continental. After my first 7 years with Ice Capades, 1964 to 1971, Don and I (who were married in 1969) left the road to teach at the Ice Capades Chalet in Santa Monica for 2 years, then we went to Europe with Holiday on Ice for 3 yrs. (1973 to 1976) then back to Ice Capades for 4 more years (1976-1980). (The first year back I was pregnant with our daughter Kelly, born in March 1977, who traveled on the road with us until she was 3 years old). I sold programs that year with Jim Plateroti).



Don, where were you originally from and how did you end up joining Ice Capades?

I was born in Hamilton, Ontario. My family moved to Dundas, Ontario where I learned to skate and took skating lessons to improve my hockey skills.

Don's Impressive Skating History

Three times Canadian Senior Men's Champion, 1965, 1966 & 1967. 1967 North American Champion, third in the 1965 World Championships. Represented Canada in 5 World Championships and the 1964 Olympic Games in Innsbruck, Austria. With that kind of a background, joining an ice show was the next step and Ice Capades was lucky to have him join in 1967.

Don, what inspired you to join an ice show?

I would always go to see the Ice Capades when they came into town and especially admired Ronnie Robertson's work and performances.

Janet, why did you want to join Ice Capades and was this your lifelong dream of skating in an ice show?

From the first Ice Capades show I saw at 11, I wanted to be part of that world. After one year of college I auditioned for Ice Capades with the thought of joining the show for just one season, then going back to school. However, my skating career progressed quickly and I stayed with the show.

Where did you both end up after you hung up your skates?

When we left the show in 1980 we settled in Burlington, Ontario. Don and I went into the food service business by owning and operating Pizza Delight Franchises for the next 23 years until 2003 in Ontario.

Our son Dave was born in 1983. Our daughter Kelly has two children, Jaxon 14 years and Brooklynn 12 years. Being grandparents is the best!

Don taught skating a few years after we left the food service business until 2011. I worked a few years at IKEA until 2008. We are both retired now enjoying life between our home in Burlington and at our cottage up north.

Don keeps busy these days looking after neighbourhood properties, gardening etc. up north by our cottage.

Don was recently inducted in the Hamilton Hall of Fame



[Click here to view his impressive skating history](#)

Well deserved Don. Congratulations!

We were both fortunate to have lengthy careers in the ice shows.

Working in the ice shows allowed us to travel the world and form wonderful friendships along the way. Don & Janet: donandjanet4@cogeco.ca

Videos of the Month

Underhill and Martini: 6.0 Of Their Best Programs EVER!



Trying to name 6.0 of 1984 World Champions Barbara Underhill and Paul Martini's best programs is like trying to name six of Julia Child's best recipes, six of Tracy Chapman's best songs or six of one of those football people's best touchdowns or home runs or whatever it is they do. I don't know anything about the team sports. I do know a thing or two about fantastic skating and as far as the marriage between music and movement and just simply beautiful pairs skating, Barbara Underhill and Paul Martini are two of the most talented and memorable stars the sport has ever seen. There's something larger than life about their skating that draws you in and something so authentic about their interpretations of music that puts you at ease and makes you completely in awe of their talent. Let's celebrate Barb and Paul by taking a trip down memory lane and enjoying 6.0 of their best programs! Grab yourselves a hot beverage (I

sound like Sheldon from Big Bang Theory) and get ready for some great skating:

[Click here](#) to watch some of their best programs.

More Trips Down Memory Lane

Doug Martin gave us some untold stories from our time on the road. How about sending in some new ones to share? Send them directly to gspoden@rogers.com

Even our Champions Otto & Maria Jelinek had their 'moments'



Our number wasn't going very well one particular night, and I was pretty mad at Otto, so as our number ended and the lights sent out, I gave him a little hit during the blackout. Then, when the lights were back on for our bow, we had to smile and look happy even though we were furious at each other. When the lights went out again I knew Otto would try to get me, so I skated off as fast as I could and ran backstage, past all the skaters and crew, with Otto running after me, and everyone wondering what was going on. I made it into

the girls' dressing room before Otto could catch me, knowing there was no way he would come in after me.

Another night, Otto had a nosebleed, but, as they say, the show must go on, so he stuffed his nose with Kleenex and we went out and skated, but it was awfully distracting to look at him during the performance and see the Kleenex getting redder and redder!

One night Otto got stuck in the hotel elevator on his way to the show. We had no idea where he was. He didn't check in on time, and I thought we'd have to cancel our number, but he finally arrived, a mere fifteen minutes before we were able to skate. He managed to get into costume and was on the ice right on time.

When Otto and I joined Ice Capades, we were opening in New York City. Since we were used to a much larger ice surface as amateurs, it was difficult to fit our program within the smaller Ice Capades surface. As we were doing our number one night, we were skating backwards as fast as we could. I still wasn't used to the smaller area, and didn't realize how close I was to the curtain. Well, I caught my blade on the curtain and slid under it right into the warm-up area backstage. As quick as I could, I crawled back under the curtain and rejoined my brother on the ice.

One mishap that wasn't so funny was the time we were doing the show in Atlantic City. We began our program with lots of speed, and did a small lift, which lasted the length of the ice surface. But Otto fell while I was in the air. I flew like a paper airplane and landed flat on my pelvis. I tried to get up to continue, but couldn't. I had to be carried off the ice with a full house watching me, which was mortifying. It turns out, my pelvis was broken, but we survived even that.

I always dreamed of being a solo skater, but Otto and I were always a pair. One night during our performance, he landed his axel but his blade broke and he couldn't continue skating. I immediately said I'd finish the number alone, thinking I'd finally have my chance to be a solo

star, but oh, no, Otto took my hand and dragged me off the ice with him, so he ruined my only hope of skating a solo.

If only we thought about it then.....



Jim Custer came across this newspaper clipping recently and thought it fun to share. The picture was taken and published in the Charlotte, N.C. Newspaper, January, 1967 on our arrival to the city by train. It was during the years we toured with the ICE CAPADES. George Verbewski, a friend and comedian skater also with the show, and I decided we could travel easier with casters on the suitcases. They worked perfect. Only problem, we didn't get a patent on our original idea. Yes, we were the first ever to do this.

Comments from November Blade

Thanks for keeping me in touch with all the skating happenings. So sorry to hear about Ludmilla Protopopov. What a legendary team and inspiration she was to us all. I remember watching their backstage rituals when they guest starred in a show I was in, and then, of course I watched them many times over the years as they cast their "spell" over the ice. And...Tai and Randy, another iconic team. Congratulations on 50 years! - **Tanya Sterling Shaffer**

This is one of the best editions of "The Blade" in a long time! I particularly enjoyed your stories on the Protopopovs, and Tai & Randy, since I was lucky enough to tour with BOTH these amazing Pair Teams, in Ice Capades! – **Stephan Klován**

Upcoming Events

“GO FIGURE,” THE RANDY GARDNER STORY

SPECIAL BENEFIT PERFORMANCE

At the West Hollywood Council Chambers Auditorium, January 5 & 6, 2018

All proceeds fund the AIDS Monument at West Hollywood Park

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Compassionate and chillingly revealing, “Go Figure,” the live autobiography of National and World Pair Figure Skating Champion and two-time Olympian, Randy Gardner, comes to the West Hollywood Council Chambers Auditorium January 5 & 6, 2018. The event is sponsored by the City of West Hollywood’s WeHo Arts Program and all proceeds benefit the AIDS Monument Foundation at West Hollywood Park.

After decades on the world and Olympic stage with Tai Babilonia as “America’s Sweethearts,” Gardner goes solo with a raw, riveting expose of his life unfolding beyond thin ice.

“Go Figure” is a play, an emotional journey, and according to Gardner, “one of the most rewarding things I’ve ever done.” The venue’s intimate atmosphere offers the perfect setting for Gardner’s “behind the scenes” storytelling of mysteries long hidden from champion status. From the disappointing injury that took the pair out of the Olympic Games just minutes before the performance of a lifetime, to discovering he was adopted as an infant, to reparative therapy when he came out as gay, Gardner masterfully weaves the thread of life that heals and connects us all. Get ready to laugh, cry and be inspired.

“I found out my birth mother gave me up after being raped at age 17 by a family friend. When we finally met, she couldn’t believe I was her son,” recalls Gardner. “She said, “You’re Randy Gardner, I’ve been following your career for years, I’m your biggest fan.” For Gardner, he was grateful to look like somebody else. He fit in.

“Go Figure” is written and directed by Joshua Ravetch, co-creator of Carrie Fisher’s Wishful Drinking and the 2017 World Premiere of Chasing Mem’ries starring Tyne Daly. Running time is one hour and 20 minutes and includes a special appearance by long-time skating partner Tai Babilonia. The January 5th performance is free via invite only at <https://gofigure-randygardner-weho.eventbrite.com>

Tickets for the performance on the 6th start at \$75. All proceeds will assist in the construction of the AIDS Monument at West Hollywood Park across from the Pacific Design Center. Says Gardner, “I want to help the LGBT community and the next generation of athletes by opening up my heart and coming from an authentic place.” When it comes to spinning life into provocative storytelling, Randy Gardner brings home the gold. Honest and astonishing, “Go Figure” is a great ride.

EVENT:

“Go Figure” starring Randy Gardner
West Hollywood Council Chambers Auditorium
625 North San Vicente Blvd., West Hollywood 90069

TICKETS: (Recommended for 12yrs. of age and up)

7pm Friday, January 5th special performance friends and family via invite only: <https://gofigure-randygardner-weho.eventbrite.com>

7pm Saturday, January 6th Tickets, available at: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/randy-gardner-a-live-autobiography-tickets-39522100667>

[RandyGardner’s 2018 schedule](#)

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