



Sad News

Patty Ann (Miller) duPlessis

June 23, 1953 ~ December 11, 2017 (age 64)



Patty was born to Edward and Lucille Miller on June 23, 1953 in Farmington, NM. Her parents preceded her in death. She passed unexpectedly into God's arms on December 11, 2017 at the age of 64.

A talented ice skater, Patty competed nationally in figure skating. She placed 2nd in the 1968 US Figure Skating Novice Ladies Competition. After graduating from Del Norte High School she toured with the Ice Capades.

Gifted in many aspects of her life, Patty was a prolific poet, a sophisticated home decorator, and a brilliant mind. She had a wonderful sense of humor and was a big softy, even crying during television commercials. For the past decade, she had been employed by John Q. Hammons hotels, including Embassy Suites of Albuquerque, as Director of Human Resources. Well loved by her co-workers, she gave sage advice and guidance to all (with a dose of common sense and humor).

Her children, of whom she was so very proud, survive Patty, Eric duPlessis and fiancée, Rachael Zak, and Aimee Cochran and husband, Doug of San Francisco, CA; as well as her two grandsons, Holden and Mason Cochran. She was a beloved mother and grandmother. She also leaves behind her grieving family, her mother, Erma Miller; and her sisters, Doralea Lowery and Pam Wilson. Commonly known as the Four Miller Girls, they frequently gathered to share stories and celebrate life.

Patty was full of laughter, tenderness, and love. She can never be replaced in our hearts and will forever be missed.

Services for Patty will be held on Friday, January 26, 2018 at 2:00 p.m. at FRENCH - Wyoming, 7121 Wyoming NE. A reception for family and friends will follow at 5:00 p.m. at the Embassy Suites Hotel, 1000 Woodward Place NE.

[Click here for full funeral information](#)

Our Alumni in the News



Our very own Sarah Kawahara will be inducted into the U.S. Figure Skating Hall of Fame in January at U.S. Nationals in San Jose, CA. CONGRATULATIONS SARAH!! A well-deserved honor.

From Ice Network: "Known for her choreography of television specials, films and touring shows, Kawahara has earned two Emmy Awards for her work on Scott Hamilton: Upside Down and the opening and closing ceremonies of the 2002 Olympic Winter Games. Kawahara has choreographed TV specials for Hamilton, Michelle Kwan, Nancy Kerrigan, Toller Cranston and John Curry. She was inducted into the World Figure Skating Hall of Fame in 2017.

[Click here to read the US Figure Skating Media Release](#)

Legends of Australian Ice - Sharon Kay Burley (Sullivan)



BORN MAY 8TH, 1956 in Tripoli, Libya, eldest daughter of Pat and Nancy, who was the first ladies singles figure skating champion with Gweneth Molony to represent Australia at the Winter Olympics in 1952. Her father had been stationed at Tripoli by the American Air Force to build a golf course, but she returned to Australia when she was only three-weeks old. Her sister Robyn became the first Australian figure skater to hold an accredited individual world title, winning the 1979 World Professional Ladies Championship in Jaca Spain. Her sister Belinda owns and operates Lake Moodemere Estate with her husband, the sixth-generation Rutherglen wine producer, Michael Chambers.

Nancy guided her firmly in her footsteps and her youthful talent saw her frequently mentioned in the papers and magazines. She practised from St Moritz St Kilda and later at Iceland Ringwood, her parents rink in Melbourne under Canadian professional, Don Jeandron. Her photo was on the front page of the Melbourne Sun more often than any other athlete of her time. She became Junior Ladies Champion in 1969 and four-times Australian Ladies Champion, 1972–5. From 1972 to 1976, she was five-times World Championship competitor. Her placements were: 1972 19/21; 1973 21/28; 1974 26/28; 1975 25/27; and 1976 22/25.

Her mother took her to the northern hemisphere every year to get her the best training and at the age of eighteen she was selected for the 1976 Winter Olympics in Innsbruck where she finished twentieth in the figure skating event. The producers of the American show, Ice Follies, were there, scouting for grace and beauty over sheer athleticism. They signed her and American Dorothy Hamill, signaling the start of a new career in the US where she toured for five years with **Ice Capades**. Back home on June 5th 1977, she was feted on the television show, This Is Your Life. Later in November she finished sixth in the ladies singles of the Prague Skate.

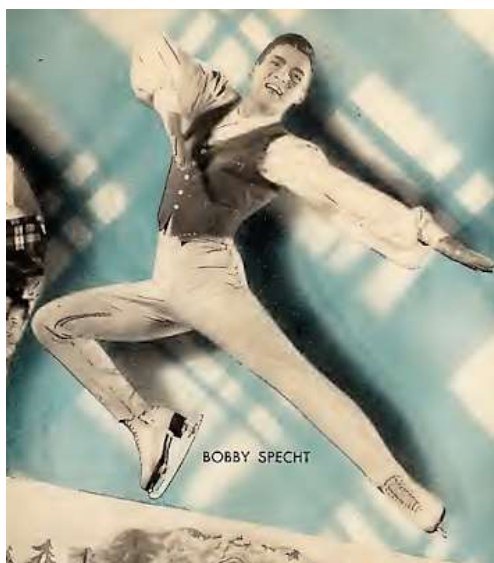
In 1980, she skated with Robyn on the Mike Walsh Show in performances choreographed by Nancy with well-known singers Colleen Hewitt and Simon Gallagher. In 1981, she and her family were invited to tour and coach in China. The visit culminated with her performance with Robyn in Beijing for twenty thousand very excited Chinese spectators. She was a principal skater with Robyn in Torvill & Dean's Australian Tour after the couple had astonished the world at the 1984 Winter Olympics in Sarajevo. It was arranged and choreographed by Nancy through Michael Edgley.

She is currently coaching at Iceland Ice Rink, Bundall, Queensland, and still operates the ice rink business with her husband and children that her father once managed. She was one of the inaugural inductees to Ice Skating Australia's Hall of Fame in August 2004 with her sister Robyn and both parents.

From the skating biography of Sharon Kay Burley (Sullivan) soon to be added to the Legends website.

Image On the NISAA Flyer, Iceland Ringwood, 1974. Courtesy Pat Burley.

[From Black And White To Technicolor: A Bobby Specht-acular](#)



The son of Oscar and Agnes Mae Specht, Robert 'Bobby' Specht was born October 22, 1921 in Superior, Wisconsin. His grandparents immigrated to America from four different countries and his father was a successful dentist with his own private practice. Bobby and his two brothers had a comfortable childhood, enjoying meals prepared by a live-in maid when he wasn't attending classes at McCaskill Junior High School.

Though he often whirled around the old Curling Club rink at Belknap and Oakes, Bobby didn't start skating seriously until he was thirteen years old, when he caught the attention of coach Frank Sullivan. Under Sullivan's tutelage, young Bobby became the sixteenth person to pass the U.S. eighth figure test. In 1938, he won the bronze medal in the novice men's event at the U.S. Championships in Philadelphia. The following year he captured the novice title. In 1940, Specht took on

double duty, winning the U.S. junior title and teaming up with Chicago skater Joan Mitchell in pairs.



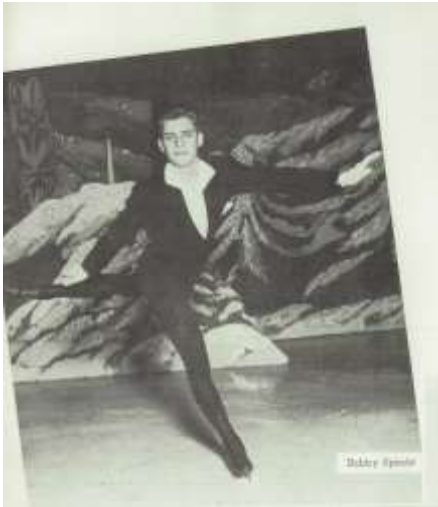
Joan Mitchell and Bobby Specht. Photos courtesy "Skating" magazine.

Despite a rocky first year of competition as a pair, by 1941 it seemed the duo were hitting their stride as a team. Specht and Mitchell won the 1941 Midwestern Championships but an infected ankle kept Specht off the podium in his senior debut at the [1941 U.S. Championships](#) in Boston. He did, however, claim the bronze in the pairs event. Patricia Alber's book "Joan Mitchell: Lady Painter" recalled Specht and Mitchell's free skate at that event thusly: "The Chicagoans hit the ice like a wildfire and, with Bobby skating through the pain and the crowd roaring, put in a performance blazing with daring and fight - yet slightly off. They left town bearing third-place trophies." The winners that year were Eugene Turner and Donna Atwood. Remember the name Donna Atwood... we'll be hearing more about her later.



Donna Atwood and Bobby Specht. Photos courtesy the 1953 Ice Capades program.

In 1942, a knee injury ended Joan Mitchell's career and Bobby turned his attention back to singles skating. He won the Midwestern senior men's title ahead of Minnesotans Arthur F. Preusch II and Robert Premer. At the 1942 U.S. Championships in Chicago, he completed his triple crown to win a senior title to go along with his novice and junior ones. Even more impressive is that through all of this, he was at university studying architecture.



With the World Championships put on hold by the ISU in the height of World War II, Specht opted to turn professional, tour with the Ice Capades and enlist in the military. The November 2, 1942 edition of "The Pittsburgh Press" talked of Specht's enlistment in the U.S. military: "While appearing here with 'Ice Capades of 1943', Bobby enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps, and was sworn in. He was told that he wouldn't be called to report for duty for four or five months, so in the interim he will continue to appear with Ice Capades in its cross-country tour." During this period, he and his mother moved in with professional skating star [Belita Jepson-Turner](#), whom the newspapers reported he was dating... although that wasn't exactly the case. In a March 2016 interview, [Bob Turk](#) recalled, "Bobby was very, very gay and never tried to hide it. He and Alan Konrad were sort of lovers for a time, but he never really had a lover until the end of his life."

After being discharged in the army in November of 1943 due to rheumatic fever, Bobby returned to the Ice Capades and again did double duty, headlining both by himself and with a new pairs partner... his former competitor Donna Atwood, who turned professional at the ripe old age of sixteen at the onset of the war. The two were paired by tour owner John H. Harris and starred together in ice ballets adapted from "The Sleeping Beauty" and Sigmund Romberg's "The Student Prince". They made the cover of "Life" Magazine and appeared on "The Colgate Comedy Hour", "The Ed Sullivan Show" and "The Steve Allen Show". Bobby even lended his visage to a newspaper advertisement by The Thomas Scalp Specialists on men's hair loss. During this period, Bobby was known as the host with the most. Whenever Ice Capades would come to Beverly Hills, he'd rent a house and throw lavish parties, attended by a who's who of the figure skating world. They'd often last until three or four in the morning.



Bobby Specht and Sandy Culbertson in John H. Harris' production of "Snow White"

In short, Bobby was kind of a big deal in skating in the fifties. When Donna Atwood retired from professional skating to raise her children in 1956, Bobby soldiered on and continued to skate with Ice Capades and club carnivals until 1964, when he broke his foot. He remained with the tour for a time, taking on the roles of the producer and publicity director. In these capacities, he worked with Bob Turk, who was once his understudy. Turk recalled, "Bobby didn't have any delusions of grandeur... nothing. He was the sweetest guy. When we were younger, he and I used to act like crazy fools. He called me Turkey."



Bobby Specht and Donna Atwood

Bobby also coached skating for a time but later turned to the bottle heavily and lost his vision. Bob Turk recalled, "He could have had eye surgery and he didn't and they just found him down on the floor." Bobby's death at the age of seventy seven on January 11, 1999 in Palm Springs, California devastated many in the skating community. His legacy lives on through the work he did in giving back to professional skating, which had given him so much during his career as an Ice Capades star.

Skate Guard is a blog dedicated to preserving the rich, colourful and fascinating history of figure skating and archives hundreds of compelling features and interviews in a searchable format for readers worldwide. Though there never has been nor will there be a charge for access to these resources, you taking the time to 'like' on the blog's Facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/SkateGuard> would be so very much appreciated. Already 'liking'? Consider sharing this feature for others via social media. It would make all the difference in the blog reaching a wider audience. Have a question or comment regarding anything you have read here or have a suggestion for a topic related to figure skating history you would like to see covered? I'd love to hear from you! Learn the many ways you can reach out at <http://skateguard1.blogspot.ca/p/contact.html>.

Video of the Month



Peggy Fleming's appearance on To Tell the Truth – April 25, 1966

Thanks to Richard Morse for his eagle eye in finding this gem.

https://youtu.be/U_6iL4ztavM

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

John Bate shared these 'interesting' Stories

One of my favorite times was the last show of the tour, any given year. We usually closed in Fort Worth, Texas. One of the numbers was called Dancing Waters, had a large circular tank with various fountains of water timed to the music. I assisted ballet director Jerry Renaud, operating the controls. We were undercover and secluded at center ice. Unbeknown to Jerry, I put liquid soap into the water tank one night. During the performance, Jerry was concerned with the appearance of the fountains and all the bubbles that started overflowing over the top of the tank and even into the area where we were operating the controls. Everyone on the ice knew what was happening, and they were all laughing. After the blackout, when we went backstage, I told Jerry whoever did that should be reprimanded or fined. I never did tell him it was me, but I'm sure he know I was the culprit.

Once again, the last show on tour, I assisted Freddie Trenkler, with Roy Gibb, Doug Austin and John Demko in a number called 'No Time for Sergeants.' We had a quick change for the next number, which was called 'A Salute to the Black Watch'. Prior to Freddie's number, I switched Roy Gibb's costume with mine. Roy was over six feet tall, and I was much shorter. Well, you never heard so much cussing and panic when he realized his costume was missing, but he didn't have time to go looking for it. He worked himself into my costume, kilts and all, hit the ice even though he looked like he was wearing a mini-skirt. The rest of the cast cracked up when they saw him. Of course, we blamed it on the wardrobe person.

One of the fun stops on our US tour was Dallas, TX. One year we stayed at a hotel called Cliff Towers. We had a party in the room of Barb Olsen (O'Gara) and everyone was having a good time. Claudette Groal, who roomed with Barbara, came out of her bedroom in her pajamas and told everyone it was time to leave. Mike O'Gara and I grabbed Claudette and put her in a roll-away bed, folded it up so she couldn't get out, rolled it down the hallway to the elevator, pressed the lobby button and sent her on her way. What a greeting for the people milling about downstairs. She turned out to be a real 'Sleeping Beauty.'

These are just a few of the fun-filled times we had. There are dozens of stories I could tell, like hiding the weigh-in scales, and adding vodka to the water cooler at the Race Track tank date in Phoenix. We were all so fortunate to have worked with Ice Capades, and to have had so much fun doing it. We did three shows a day, for several days. Then we'd move on to the next city and start all over again. It was all part of the experience. There were days you could leave your hotel door wide open and ask any passing cast member to come in and join you for a nightcap, or just say hello. Our Ice Capades memories will live on in our hearts forever. What a special time it was.

Comments from December Blade

Thank you for the lovely blade this month. It means so much to me because I know these people from my past so well. Don and I grew up and skated and travelled together when we were kids and Otto and Maria used to come to the Dundas Skating Carnival to skate on several occasions. It was a lovely read. Thanks again. - *Mary Jane Mayes-Peachman*

Thank you so much for this! I always loved watching both Janet and Don Knight perform in the show...so happy to learn more about their life now too! And the Jelineks were my Pair Skating Heroes! (I remember proudly giving a book report about On Thin Ice in school!) Getting to hear Maria's stories about some of their non glamorous moments was such fun! I really appreciate your efforts and promise to send some "back in the day" Ice Capades pics soon! - *Jo Jo Starbuck*

Just a short note to say how much we enjoyed reading the article you wrote about us in the Blade, in fact, the entire Blade was such a good read, you really have a talent for writing. We want to thank you again for thinking of us. We look forward to your next issue. – Janet & Don Knight

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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