



## Sad News

The Legacy of Ludmilla - Sept. 28, 2017



Within forty eight hours, the figure skating world learned about the deaths of 1948 Olympic Silver Medallist [Hans Gerschwiler](#) and 1964 and 1968 Olympic Gold Medallist Ludmila Protopopov. Gerschwiler and Protopopov join a long list of skating luminaries who have passed away in 2017 - [Bob Turk](#), Donald Gilchrist, Ricky Harris, Mary Parry and Roy Mason and [Arthur Apfel](#) among them.

If you're reading this blog, I don't need to tell you who Ludmila Protopopov was. A two time Olympic Gold Medallist, four time World and European Champion with her husband Oleg, she was perhaps one of the most exquisite pairs skaters of all time. A three time winner of [Dick Button](#)'s World Professional Championships, her annual appearances in the Evening With Champions shows at Harvard University were an inspiration to so many. She was living proof that age is just a number. She was a figure skating legend from a time before skating put math over mindfulness... but that wasn't the half of it.



For starters, there's the story of Ludmila and Oleg's 1979 defection from the Soviet Union. Yuri Felshtinsky and Boris Gulko wrote of the events that fueled the Protopopov's decision to leave the Soviet Union in their book "The KGB Plays Chess": "For a number of years, the outstanding Soviet figure skaters Ludmila Belousova and Oleg Protopopov came under pressure from Soviet sports functionaries. The harassment campaign was initiated by the KGB, which did not like their independence, their extensive contacts with foreign athletes and representatives of foreign sports circles and media. 'Little Vermin' kept on writing reports about the skaters' negative attitudes toward Soviet reality, about

their admiration for the Western way of life. On the basis of these reports, memos were prepared for the Central Committee, which then gave orders to the State Sports Committee would clamp down on the couple. The consequences were not slow in coming... When in 1988, at the Calgary Olympics, the famous duo with other former Olympic champions and prizewinners, the head of the State Sports Committee, Gramov, told the Canadian organizers of the event that if Belousova and Protopopov came out on the ice, the Soviet delegation would boycott the closing ceremony at the Olympics. (They) did not come out on the ice." According to a March 1988 article from the "Montreal Gazette", Soviet officials were apparently concerned that if the Protopopov's skated an exhibition, "the crowd would boo the Soviet athletes as they marched into McMahon Stadium." Oh honey, please...



The Protopopovs in their winning free skate at the  
1968 Winter Olympic Games.

It never gets old to watch perfection again and again.

[Click here](#) to view their free skate.

## Alumni in the News

### Ice Theater of New York to honor Tai Babilonia and Randy Gardner on 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Partnership

By Maura Sullivan Hill



Babilonia and Gardner. *(Photo credit Michon)*

Tai Babilonia and Randy Gardner first took each other's hand on the ice at the ages of 8 and 10, respectively, in 1968. It was the start of a journey that led to five pairs titles at the U.S. National Championships, from 1976-1980, and a win at the 1979 World Championships.

They overcame Olympic disappointment, after an injury to Gardner took them out of the 1980 games, and weathered personal trials, like Babilonia's battle with addiction, to embark on a successful career as professional skaters and performers. Now, 50 years later, the duo is as united as ever — though not on the ice quite as much as they used to be. They don't perform much these days, but Babilonia works on presentation with the students that Gardner coaches, and they both perform in his stage show, "Go Figure: The Randy Gardner Story."

“I can’t believe we’re saying 50 years, and it seems like it went by fast,” Babilonia says. “But in another way — my god, that’s a long time! From 8 and 10 years old, and I just turned 58, it’s mind-blowing.”

Gardner echoes his partner, and muses on what has made it work for so long: “It’s quite special. I never thought we’d be doing this. It’s a lot of compassion, compromise, exploring and growing together, and a shared passion for skating and work and being a pair team. A lot of life lessons have come along the way, too.”

As the great “Tai and Randy” — as fans call the beloved pair — celebrate this 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Ice Theater of New York (ITNY) will honor them at its annual benefit gala and performance on Oct. 30.

“We honor skaters who have displayed artistic aspirations within their skating career, or who have stayed in skating and enhanced the sport during their lifetime, and Tai and Randy personify that,” says Moira North, the founder and artistic director of the Ice Theater of New York. “Going into their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of working together, we wanted to honor them. It is a professional marriage that needs to be celebrated.”



### The Show

The Ice Theater of New York is the first nonprofit ice dance company in the nation, dedicated to figure skating as one of the performing arts and a dance form. For more than 30 years, ITNY has provided “a venue for artistic voices and collaborations, to see what’s possible in our icy world,” as North puts it. The company also puts on performances and skating clinics for students in the New York Public Schools in all five boroughs, exposing them to a new form of physical activity

and artistic expression.

ITNY’s annual fall benefit show and gala is their main source of fundraising, and this year’s show not only honors Babilonia and Gardner, but will also feature a performance from Russian Olympic and World Champion Evgeni Plushenko.

It’s Plushenko’s first show on U.S. soil in 11 years, and he is returning to skate in honor of his agent, Ari Zakarian, the recipient of the ITNY Alumnus Award. Zakarian, a former ITNY performer, will receive the award in recognition of his success as an agent and producer of ice shows, particularly in Russia, Japan, and Korea.

After the show — which will feature a number about global warming, a tango, and an ensemble number to “Rhapsody in Blue,” among others — ITNY will present the awards at the gala, which will include a silent auction, dinner, and dancing. Missy Vanburen and the late Marilyn Kasputys will receive the Ice Angel Awards for their generous financial and volunteer support of the organization through the years.

### Grateful to Be Honored



Babilonia and Gardner became World Champions in 1979 in London and performed at Wembley Arena at a royal gala affair for Queen Elizabeth. **(Photo credit Tony Duffy)**

Babilonia and Gardner were paired by their coach, Mabel Fairbanks, the first African-American inducted into the [U.S. Figure Skating](#) Hall of Fame for her efforts to break the color barrier in the sport. Both said that they never expected to still be working together 50 year later, but it is a friendship and partnership for which they are profoundly grateful.

“I call it five decades of the best roller coaster ride ever,” Babilonia says. “Yes, we did some amazing things on the ice and representing our country, and we had an amazing professional career. But through all of it, it’s the friendship for me. I’m so proud of it and protective of it.”

The pair won their first national title in 1976, but their performance in 1975 didn’t give any indication of what was to come. Babilonia remembers struggling with a growth spurt that year.

“It was almost like I forgot how to skate,” she recalls. “It was the roughest year for me and Randy. The lifts were hard, the jumps were off, and there was chatter around us, about maybe needing different partners.”

But Babilonia and Gardner — and their coach, John Nicks — didn’t waver. “The next year, everything went back to normal, we won our first national title and qualified for the Olympic team,” she says. “You don’t see that now. If someone is having problems, they are onto the next partner, but that wasn’t even a thought for us.”

Though both Babilonia and Gardner attribute their commitment to each other as the key to their success, they are grateful for the support of family, friends, coaches, and mentors.

“I’m looking forward to all the people that are going to be in the room: past honorees; people who I, or Tai and I together, have looked up to; mentors and people who have been an inspiration and support to us,” Gardner says. “The room is going to be full of those kinds of people, and it’s an honor to have them there as the Ice Theater of New York is honoring us.”

Babilonia agrees: “It is going to be special, and I’m so honored. I’m starting to work on my speech, because there are a lot of people in our circle to thank.”

### Tai and Randy Today



Babilonia and Gardner. *(Photo credit Norbert Schramm)*

These days, Babilonia and Gardner still work as a team, just in different capacities. They’ll occasionally break out some pairs moves — like their famous spirals or spread eagles — for fun, but their last formal performance was in Scott Hamilton’s CARES Foundation ice show in Cleveland three years ago.

Gardner is on the ice several times a week as a coach and choreographer in the LA area, and Babilonia often works with him to help students polish their programs and presentation skills. Babilonia also works as a motivational speaker with “Ready, Set, Gold!”, a mentoring program in Los Angeles middle and high schools led by former Olympians and Paralympians. Her son, Scout, is now 22 and will graduate from the police academy in December.



Dorothy Hamill with Babilonia and Gardner *(Photo credit Jay Gendron)*

And though they aren’t performing on the ice any more, they do perform together in Gardner’s stage show, “Go Figure: The Randy Gardner Story.” Gardner says the show is a live autobiography, and Olympic Champion Dorothy Hamill is also part of the cast. After a successful debut in LA in 2015, the show will have a 10-day run at the Delaware Theater Company in Wilmington, Delaware, starting Jan. 18, 2018. For more details, visit [randy-gardner.com](http://randy-gardner.com).

To buy tickets for the Ice Theater of New York benefit show and gala, or to donate to ITNY, visit [icetheatre.org](http://icetheatre.org).

<http://figureskatersonline.com/news/2017/10/13/ice-theater-of-new-york-to-honor-tai-babilonia-and-randy-gardner-on-50th-anniversary-of-partnership/>

## Help for our Alumni

**One of our Ice Capades family is in need of our help. Tricia Klocke has graciously organized a John Adams Disaster Relief Fund.** Please read below and if you can help in any way, it will be greatly appreciated.



**John Adams was hit hard by Hurricane Irma.** He lost his home and everything he owned. I am copying a post below from his good friend Brad Doud that was on Facebook. Also here is a photo of Snakes latest post. He is probably in a state of shock right now. Please if any of you can help out with a donation it would be of some help to him I'm sure! I have been in this situation before and

it is so helpful to have some money to buy the immediate necessities... To lose everything you have is just a so devastating! Any donation no matter how small, will be so appreciated. Thank you.

"I'm asking for some help! I know a lot of my Ice Capades family that live in Florida have had a rough go of it with the hurricane and bad weather! I'm very sorry for all the loss & stress it has caused you, your family & friends! It truly is awful! But my buddy Snake is in a really bad way also. Total loss! House, cars, all appliances yup you name it! And yes the true meaning of life for snake "Air Boats" all gone, fully insured, fighting with them through every turn of the swamp. I'm asking if by any chance anyone has or knows of someone who could lend him a RV he could borrow until some stuff gets ironed out. He can't put it on his property for a few weeks because there is still 2 or 3 feet of water over a foot or two of mud/clay so it might be a while before he can use it but if maybe some advance planning could help get something's lined up and relieve some of his stress! If anyone can help, I will now owe you! Thanks!!" Brad Doud

Click here to access the gofundme link: <https://www.gofundme.com/snake-adams>

# Where are they Now?

## **Rannie Renner Beaver – West Co. 1983 - 87**



### Where are you from and which shows were you with?

I was born and raised in Portland Oregon. I joined Holiday on Ice International silver division 1981. Then in Jan of 1983 I joined Ice Capades West Co. After auditioning in Portland, I continued until Mar of 87' ending in West Co early as Mike and I were expecting. We spent 7 years in Oregon working, I as a bank teller and Mike as supervisor for Epson, Portland.

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

My mom took me to Ice Follies at age 6 and I told her I wanted to do that some day. I didn't start skating until I was 14, a bit late but it was expensive even back then

### What is your fondest memory?

Favorite memory, becoming friends with Dorothy, Tai and Randy, Peter and Kitty, Scott Hamilton, Robin Cousins, Barbie and Paul, people I idolized in the skating world I was now, as a teen working side by side with.

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

After Ice Capades we spent 7 years in Oregon, then relocating to Las Vegas in 1994 where we still live. Mike (Beaver) worked for MGM 20 years and is now fully retired. I worked 10 years at a horse ranch, and 10 years at MGM in wardrobe. I've been fortunate enough to work with Wayne Newton, Tom Jones, Liza Minelli, Chicago and the Cher cast during her residency in Vegas. I currently work for 'Vegas the Show' at Planet Hollywood and have been there almost 4 years. I did take a 1 year break from 'Vegas the Show' to be the head of wardrobe/costumer for a show produced by Chippendales called 53X. It was on open 10 months at the Paris. After it closed I was able to go back to 'Vegas the Show'. Over the years I have helped make costumes and do wardrobe for MJ Live show and several cruise ships and parades with my friend Lori Palmer.



What do you do in your 'spare' time? Even in my busy life in the entertainment industry I still have time to freelance sew from home and spend time with my 4 grandkids. 2 girls and 2 boys. Mike is fully retired and a busy babysitter of the grandkids when I'm working. Eventually we hope to retire back to Oregon or Washington. Stop by to say hi to Rannie. She'd love to hear from you. [fancyshmany50@gmail.com](mailto:fancyshmany50@gmail.com)

## Pictures of the Month



On behalf of the World Figure Sport Society, Olympic Champion Dorothy Hamill inducts Richard Dwyer (Mr. Debonaire) into the World Figure & Fancy Skating Hall of Fame. Barbara Wagner inducts Olympic Champion Dorothy Hamill into the World Figure & Fancy Skating Hall of Fame at the 2017 World Figure & Fancy Skating Championships & Festival.

## 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](mailto:gspoden@rogers.com)

### Feeling like an 'OLD' Gypsy

**Dave Pitts recalls** - As usual, we comedians and novelty acts were in our dressing room, joking about never having to grow up and be our age when normally quiet, Freddie Trenkler spoke up and quietly stated, "My biggest age reality check came when one of the new girls came up and calmly stated, "My mother use to skate with you."

**Bonnie Atwood** had a similar experience with Bobby Specht. When I finally got to meet him, I gushed, "I've loved your skating since I was just a little girl." He didn't take it too well. I think "stab me in the back" were his exact words.

### Oh those dreaded Weigh In's still haunt us today



**Tom McKusick** recollects his weekly ritual of weigh ins. Am sure we all have our own stories. Send them in. We'd love to hear them.

My first year on the road (Ice Capades) and Thursday came and my life changed forever!!! [Denise Kuchiki](#) came in the makeup room and said..."Okay boys strip down and get on the scale"! I moved to the back the room and then she said to me...come on I don't have all day! To which I said, "My mother never told me it would be like this..."! To this day I HATE SCALES and especially on Thursdays 😊

We all should be this lucky, as **Francine Plummer** recollects.

Weigh-ins were the pits, especially since they could lead to fines. I only had one experience with my weight being out of balance, and that was a time when my weight was too low. We were playing in Utica, New York, in 1966, and I remember Ed Pierce bringing me donuts constantly, saying, "Eat, eat! Enjoy? This may never happen again!" And he was right, it didn't. To this day, every time I step on a scale, those memories of 'surprise' weigh-ins flood through my head like it was yesterday.

## Comments from October Blade

*My heart is broken for all of us. Thank you Carl for YOU ...!!! You will be deeply missed ... My deepest Sympathy and Condolences and prayers to family ,friends and extended show friends (" family") he is loved and will be deeply missed - Liv Lunde Ramos ... Ice Capades 62-69 ... Pacific on Ice 71-73 ... Ted Turner productions*

*Love "The Blade" and love you for providing it. Since I never put on a pair of skates during my years with Capades, I never had to be jealous of anyone who did, so I could love them all. But I loved Shirley most of all. She has been gone for more than 2 years but reading "The Blade" always brings her a little closer. - Phil (Winter) Wylly*

*"Showgirl of the month" is a fun idea. Thanks for your continued work on the Blade! - Mark Beck*

*Also, do want to thank you for the great job you are doing with the Blade...enjoy reading all the news and updates!! Keep it up, please!! Kathie Hannah*

*Love this! Thank you for all your hard work putting this together! - Rozann Smith*

*Thanks, Gloria! Love the stories about first-show experiences. - Patty Harms*

*Just wanted to write you a note to say how surprised and honored I am to be in October's Blade. Saw the picture of Aja, Rita, Donnie and then there was me. Know it was taken at one of the reunions but cannot remember who took it. Sadly we realized all three of them have passed. They were indeed "great" all three of them.*

*Then the write up. Took a while but remember Doug Martin phoning John and I for stories when he was doing his books and one of them was when we joined the show.*

*We thoroughly enjoy receiving the Blade each month. You are wonderful to do that. Know it reaches so many of us, especially with the " Ice Capades Family" spread all over the world. It keeps us all in touch which is so special. Just please keep up the great work. – Marilyn & John Bate*

*Thank you for giving us all these news, and keeping us together! I enjoy it tremendously! - Adèle Gendron. Ottawa*

## Website Update

The reunion website – [www.icecapadesreunion2015.com](http://www.icecapadesreunion2015.com) is temporarily off line. Even though the reunion is over, the plan is to continue to use this site for alumni updates so please keep checking back from time to time as news will be added periodically. Don't forget, there are also show rosters for your reference, updated obits, reunion pictures and upcoming events. If you would like to be removed from receiving The Blade, please type 'unsubscribe' in the subject line and send it to me directly. [gspoden@rogers.com](mailto:gspoden@rogers.com)