

Sad News

Elise Knowles Whitney – July 2018



Sadly from Elise Whitney's daughter -

"Facebook is not the ideal way to communicate news like this--I really wish there was a better way. My brother Evan and I wanted to let Elise's friends know that she passed away in her sleep several weeks ago. The end came suddenly for her, and he and I have been trying to work through a number of things. When we got access to her phone this week, we suddenly realized how many of you had been reaching out in concern to her via email and messenger. So we decided to go ahead and post something publicly.

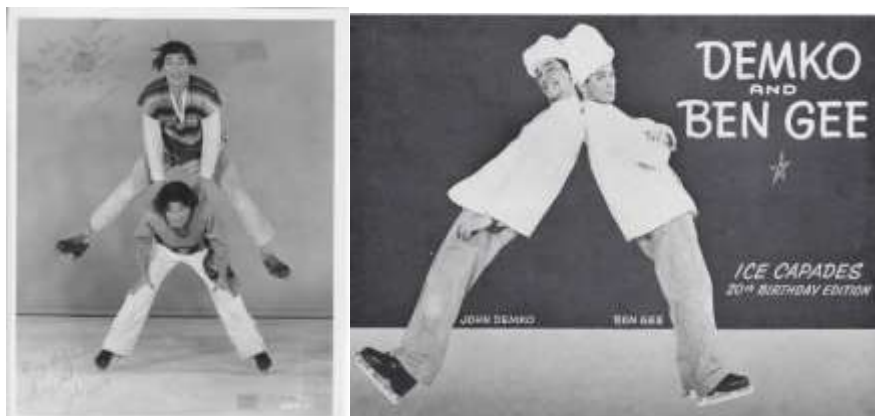
Please know that she treasured her friendships. Her memories of her time in Albuquerque and her years in Ice Capades were some of the highlights of her life. I know that being able to be in touch with so many friends from that time on Facebook sustained her through some challenges in recent years. We are grateful to everyone who has been her friend and supported her. We hope very much that she is at peace."

Johnny Demko – August 1, 2018

Demkowich, John S., 82, professional ice skater and senior exercise instructor, died Wednesday, Aug. 1. Memorial service 11:30 a.m. Friday, Aug. 10, First United Methodist Church, Broken Arrow, OK

Johnny was born in Hamilton, ON and had been with Ice Capades for six years. Married to Patti Cox, talented Ice Capet. Was a pro hockey player. In addition to his features in comedy – "Two Zany Cooks" (paired with Ben

Gee) and “Babes in Toyland”, John also had the all-important job of keeping skates for the cast in top-notch condition.



[Click her to view a video on John's life.](#)



Launching a new Website (NOT the Facebook page)

This does **NOT** replace “The Blade” that you receive each month

BUT an added bonus for your reading pleasure

I had created for the 2015 reunion a website with all the information pertaining to the reunion but now that has passed, the name is now -

www.icecapadestheblade.com

Wanted to create another outlet of information for our alumni. This site will be more informational & historical, containing Ice Capades memorabilia, all in one place for easy access.

It will have **REUNION AND EVENT UPDATES** when they are received so bookmark the link and check back often.

Included in the website:

- In Memorium – our alumni who have passed since 2010
- Show Rosters, Show Itineraries
- Cast pictures, program covers, historical pictures, etc.
- Past reunions – pictures & videos. Pictures from 2015 reunion are still available through a photo link.
- Past issues of The Blade
- Show videos – have compiled as many as I could find

You are welcome to copy and take any information posted.

It's still a work in progress and will be adding items as I receive them but please feel free to let me know if you see something missing or would like to add to this site

If you know if someone who would like to receive The Blade, please send me their email address.

Email me directly at gspoden@rogers.com

Not to worry, The Blade will still be sent to you every month.

Our Alumni in the News

Choreography legend David Wilson, a man in demand

by [Jack Gallagher](#) - Aug 21, 2018



Sometimes in life we encounter a person who is a veritable force of nature.

Dynamic, honest, emotional. The kind of individual that stops you in your tracks.

David Wilson is one of those people.

After a short time with Wilson you feel like you have known him forever. He possesses a charm that is disarming and the ability to laugh at himself.

Wilson is a visionary whose clients have enjoyed success at the highest levels. Genuine is the word that best describes him.

The Canadian sat down recently for an exclusive interview with Ice Time and talked about his work with Yuzuru Hanyu, his relationship with Yuna Kim, and how he became one of the best choreographers in the history of skating.

Wilson was in Japan earlier in the summer choreographing for Hanyu at "Fantasy on Ice" and creating short programs for Rika Kihira, Kaori Sakamoto and Mai Mihara. He has a long relationship with the country dating back to his work with Midori Ito in the 1990s.

The 52-year-old Wilson was born in Toronto and grew up in a small town to the north of it called Nobleton (Ontario). He began skating at a young age but was not able to excel competitively.

"I was a nobody. I wasn't even able to make it to the national level of competitive skating," Wilson recalled on a summer evening in Tokyo. "I never competed past novice. I didn't have the athletic component. I had a double axel but no triple jumps."

Though he may not have been a champion as a skater, Wilson became skilled enough to perform with the **Ice Capades** for five years touring North America and setting himself on the path to fame.]

[Click here to read the rest of the article](#)

Sharing Memories

An article written by alumni Bonnie Atwood after attending the reunion in 2005.

2005 Ice Capades Reunion Revisited

By Bonnie Atwood - 6-14-05



Thomas Wolfe said you can't go home again. But can you *leave* home again? That's what I felt like I was doing in June when I went to my great big fat Ice Capades reunion in Vegas.

It was déjà vu all over again. At the tender age of 19, I had left the security of my boring suburban Arlington home where I grew up, to run away and join the "the show," as we insiders called it. I remember that morning vividly. I was thrilled, walking on air, riding high. I loved my new super-short Vidal Sassoon haircut (it was the very latest style). I packed one suitcase and stuffed my skates into a bag. I called a cab, kissed my folks good-bye, and I was off to the Greyhound bus station, Atlantic City-bound. The song "Summertime" kept running through my naïve little head: "One of these mornin's, you're gonna rise up singin.' You'll spread your wings and take to the sky."

Flash forward 38 years and countless experiences later: I walk in my front door and look at the mail and there's a letter from my old friend Huck telling me I HAVE to come to the Ice Capades reunion in Las Vegas.

Reunion? Vegas? Even after that year of national touring with the show, I had never been to Las Vegas, and it's the one city in the world that I never wanted to visit.

"It's sleazy," said Huck. "It'll be like the first day we reported to Ice Capades."

Yes. Sleazy. Ah, to be 19 again, and sleazy. And lovin' it. Those were magic words. I HAD to go.

The dress code was described as "Cocktail chic: Just go for it!" Our very own Pat LaLand got me started. She went with me to Nordstrom's the night before the VPW spring conference. What a shopper! I settled on a short black lacy trumpet-style skirt with a bright blue organza jacket. Perfect. (Or, as Paris Hilton would say, "it was hot.") A waitress named Jesse, at Richmond's Can-Can Restaurant, gave me her black choker to complete the look. (She got a big tip.)

So I got up on the morning of June 11, singing "Summertime," and I jetted to Vegas to revisit my coming of age. In 1966, I was leaving schoolbooks, Gino's Fried Chicken, and curfews. Today I was leaving deadlines, cooking, mortgage payments, and all those dustbunnies and unread newspapers under the beds. I felt almost the same sense of escape, the same sense of adventure. Sweet freedom!

The very first night was worth the entire trip. Over wine and cheesecake, Huck (her real name was Hillary; we all had nicknames) and I and talked for hours about the past 38 years. She was the same person she used to be--zesty, full of fun, and the genuine article. This was the girl who had introduced me to the hippie culture, which, by the turn of 1967, was making its way east just as our troupe was traveling west. Huck always seemed to be ahead of the curve. When the show toured Chicago, she took me to "The Leather Fetish," a leather shop where we both bought capes. By the time we reached California, we were wearing those short-lived orange paper mini-skirts, talking about love-ins, and listening to the Doors (Huck knew the guys in the band). Today, Huck and I looked and acted much the same way we did years ago, and our lives had taken many of the same interesting turns. There was so much to talk about.

The next morning, after a luxurious room service breakfast of coffee and strawberries, it was time to find our fellow show people. You know you are part of a rowdy group when even in a *casino*, you are directed to "Follow the noise." We followed the noise and found them. The 500-member rat pack.

Would they even remember us? We were there only one year. Many of the “kids” (you are forever called a “kid” in the show) toured for 20 years, although these “lifers” were rare, because your feet usually gave out long before you turned 40. (After endless rehearsals and dancing on your toes for as many as 10 shows a week, our feet were shot.) Did our friends remember Huck and Bonnie Belle after all these years? We went to find out.

It was a lesson to everybody who dreads high school reunions: Go forth and meet those people who knew you when. They looked beautiful to me. A little older, yes. But they remembered us, and welcomed us with such open arms. Even the show’s stars were totally accessible now. Make no mistake, these show people would have totally maxed out on the extroversion portion of the Myers-Briggs test. It was impossible to keep them down. This was a reunion of all 65 years of Ice Capades, so I found not only the skaters from my year, but I met those dazzling stars that I had seen from afar when I was a little girl.

I met people like Yvonne Dowlen. Now 80, she had joined the show at its start in 1940 with the legendary Sonja Henie. Yvonne was still skating, still loving the limelight, and, as Huck said, basking in “her due.” And there was my great Californian roommate Nancy, who now lives in Scotland. Nicole had joined the show from Quebec and we had to teach her English as we practiced our steps. Gloria from Toronto was there—her folks had a Chinese restaurant and used to send us the best almond cookies. And if we have aged, it has been with grace. Yes, that IS Faye as the skating grandma in the Centrum Silver TV commercial! There were many more. I think our screams drowned out all those gamblers who were making those weird mechanical “zonk, bling, ka-ching” noises down the hallways of the Flamingo Hotel.

That night we gathered around the crystal blue pool and laughed about those good old showbiz days so long ago. Somebody had set up a big bathroom scale to remind us of our dreaded weekly “weigh-ins.” (A few added pounds meant a stern lecture from Nicky and Lucille, the wardrobe people.) There was a blackboard just like we used to use for the show notes. (“Train leaves at 7 a.m. tomorrow; have your trunks in the hall by midnight.”) Somebody was walking around yelling “Thirty! Thirty minutes to Showtime!” I think all of our Pavlovian reactions went into overdrive when we heard those words. There were posters, newspaper clips, snapshots, old programs, and steamer trunks. All the memories that meant so much to us. (Some better off unsaid).

I told them that the reason the trip was so special to me, besides seeing old friends, was that I wanted to revisit the person that I used to be—that 19-year-old wide-eyed girl. Before the newspaper gigs, before the desperate housewifery, before heavy-duty eldercare. And they all nodded in complete agreement. That’s what they wanted, too—to revisit the people they used to be, and to make sense of it all. And we found that we still were those same beautiful teens that we had been when we had those long ago adventures. Like old army buddies, we reminisced into the balmy Vegas night.

In the morning we had a photo shoot. It was much like the old days, with frustrated “line captains” trying to get us to shut up and line up by height. We grouped by decades. The forties, the fifties. My sixties group. And all those newbies that came after. We all hammed it up for the cameras. The show went out of business a few years ago. So we were *it*. The last of the cast of “*The Greatest Show on Ice*.”

The last and most special event was the gala banquet the last night. We ate, drank, danced, and shot endless photos. We watched a slide show of all the photos we had sent in to the reunion committee. We heard speeches. We laughed about the long train trips, the falls, the time Bob’s toupee got hooked onto a skater’s costume just as she started her number. Some speeches were in tribute to the beautiful people we had lost through death. My own beloved skating teacher, Gerry Renaud, had just died five months before. To Gerry, Shirley, Leonard, and all the others, we raised our glasses in a toast. There was not a dry eye in the place.

Jo Jo Starbuck got up and reminded us of something that some of us had forgotten. It had been so long since we had sat in the audience of this great ice show, that we had forgotten the audible gasp that always came from the spectators when the lights first went up and the ice was filled with color, feathers, sequins and chiffon. The gasps kept coming as the skaters glided in graceful unison, and skillfully merged into precise lines and fast wheels.

Yes, I concluded. You *can* leave home again. And sometimes leaving home equates to *coming* home to many friends that you thought you’d never see again in your life. We know we didn’t cure cancer. We know we didn’t make the world safe for democracy. But we also know that we made the world more than a little bit better. And we had a heck of a lot of fun doing it. [Click here](#)

Special Video of the Month



Oleg Protopopov skates a tribute to his late partner Ludmila on 8/25/18 during the exhibition at the end of Lake Placid Adult Skate Week 2018.

[Click here to view this beautiful tribute.](#)

Animal Acts ~ Dawn Marano

Christie Adams wanted to share this wonderful memory written by Dawn Marano. Christie joined the Ice Capades in the fall of 1974 as an advance publicist and was assigned to promote our West Company. The following year I promoted East Company. Then I returned to my home town of Honolulu, Hawaii. I worked full-time and more in public relations for 25 years.

Posted on [May 20, 2015](#)



Forty-some years ago a company of sixty-one ice skaters, two chimpanzees, and a flock of white homing pigeons arrived in Atlantic City. Ice Capades had been opening its new season in the Convention Hall on the Boardwalk every summer for decades. A few ushers who'd seen their first ice show there as kids liked to brag about bringing their grandkids now. Sometime in between, this once glamorous seaside town—drawing regulars from Philadelphia and New York, with street names familiar to anyone who has ever played a game of classic Monopoly—had gone to seed, so our booking, and the Miss America Pageant that followed, were still Very Big Deals in 1974.

Most of us new members of the troupe had only just graduated from high school, and for most of my peers, touring with an ice show for a year or two or five would be a lark sufficiently colorful and carefree to fill a few photo albums. Me, I believed I was beginning my show business career and was conceited and officious about that belief—which explains why I didn't have any friends back then, nor any photo albums now to speak of. I was eighteen and misunderstood many things about world. One was that ice show spectaculars such as ours—one part vaudeville, one part (sort of) ballet, one part circus—were not inviolable traditions; they were doomed. By the mid-eighties Ice Capades, and their cousins Ice Follies and Holiday on Ice, would go extinct, fossilize and turn up as the Wikipedia entries they are today, hyperlinked with that other defunct form of wholesome family entertainment, the TV variety show.

Why doomed? Large economic and societal forces surely had a role. And much as I wish I had the sophistication to tell the story that way, from the safe distance, say, of a cultural theorist, I do not. What I do know is that I was raised in Los Angeles, that I suckled on the myths made in Hollywood—that I tap danced every afternoon on a piece of pegboard I borrowed from my father's garage and dragged in front of the hulk of our console TV when the "Mickey Mouse Club" came on, thinking that if I could see *them* they could see me and know that I was a Mouseketeer, just one who hadn't been discovered yet.

What I do know is that in July and August of that year, the year of the chimpanzees and the pigeons, I was largely oblivious to the fact, among other things, that a disgraced man, a desperate liar, was about to become

the first United States president to resign from office. I was aware that hippies existed (wore strange clothing, listened to loud music with offensive lyrics, had promiscuous sex, and reeked of pot and patchouli), but only vaguely appreciative of the young protesters, my age and a scant five years or so my senior, who'd taken to the streets by the thousands upon thousands to end an illegal war and its (obscene and mounting) body count.

[Click here to read the rest of the article](#)

Comments from August Blade

As always... you are the best! Who else gives of themselves so selflessly so that so many can keep our connection with each other across the years and miles? Ice Capades may be gone but it lives on in our hearts. In my mind, we still hear "10 Minutes"... then "2 minutes"... we've checked our makeup and whether our gaiters are securely fastened... our hearts beat a little faster waiting to take the ice. We've practiced the Turk Step so many times it feels like walking. We're all older now, but the youngsters that lived and loved what we were chosen to do remains the unique bond that we share. Thank you again for being the steward for maintaining all of our varied and incredible memories. – *Steve Williams*

Upcoming Events



On May 25th to May 28th, 2019, onboard Royal Caribbean's Symphony of the Seas, we will be celebrating 40 years of Willy Bietak Productions. Come join us for this incredible reunion of friends, family, skaters and employees from around the world!!!

REMINDER to make sure you book your Bietak Celebration Cruise today!

We also need your help. If you have a cast photo from any Bietak Production show you were part of, please email a copy to reunion@bietakproductions.com. Make sure to include in the email the show name, year, and location.

Visit <https://www.bietakproductions.com/bietak-celebration/>



<http://www.icetheatre.org/>

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