

# Nancy Streeter

## A Very Special Lady

by Edward Z. Epstein

Everything she does, she gives her heart and soul to," states Palmer Baker, who has known Nancy Streeter and her family for many years. "Whatever Nancy does, she does thoroughly. And she's very much her own person."

A woman of elegant bearing and quiet resolve, Mrs. Streeter has long displayed a passion for family, philanthropy and figure skating. Soft-spoken and charming, with sparkling blue eyes, she's a practical woman who possesses the rare ability to blend imagination with action. Through her efforts, the dreams of many have come true.

"I grew up in a family of skaters," she notes. There were two brothers, Monty and Nick, and "a house on the Hudson. My father [Montgomery Angell, a pioneer in the field of tax law] had been a hockey player at college." Nancy's Mom, Ellen, "was a mother in the days when mothers remained home, involved with their children."

Nancy first skated on the ponds of New York State, but home ice eventually became the fondly remembered Iceland rink, located in the old Madison Square Garden building on 50th Street and Eighth Avenue in Manhattan.

"I was around eight when I was enrolled in the Junior Club [of the Skating Club of New York]." She chose not to enter competition. "I did some ice dancing, which, in those days, consisted of two dances: the 10-Step and the American Waltz. Sonya Klopfer [later the wife of Peter Dunfield, a Streeter coach and friend] was one of the Club's outstanding competitors." [Sonya went on to win the U.S. figure skating championship in 1951, the Bronze that year in Worlds, and the Silver the following year].

"Figure skating has been a theme running through my life," muses Nancy. Did Sonya Henie further spark the young girl's love of the sport? "Sonya affected all of us! I remember her at Madison Square Garden, coming on the ice in a sleigh, wearing an ermine cape - I'm glad I saw her skate. She was absolutely magical."

Membership in the Junior Club included participation in special performances during the season. "All of us who skate have something of a performer in them, to varying degrees," notes Nancy. There was the annual New York engagement of the Ice Follies, "and the first number was always done by Junior Club members. In 'Old Fashioned Bouquet,' I was a forget-me-not. Yvonne Sherman [future two-time U.S. champion] was the rose in the middle."

Much later on, "I skated in Peter Dunfield's United Hospital Fund shows at Rockefeller Center. The adults had a number, the children had one, there were solos, pairs - Joan Scribner participated, Lucy Brennan, Bill Brennan, Toller Cranston. They were a lot of fun."

"Nancy got me interested in skating," remembers Palmer Baker. "I was her partner when she took her first dance test. It was the Fiesta, I think, and during the first mohawk I tripped her up." Nancy's strength of character asserted itself. "She got up, picked me up and passed the test," recalls Palmer.

From the ages of five through eighteen, Nancy attended The Chapin School. Intent on continuing her education, her interest shifted from the ice to Wellesley College, where she majored in the History of Art. (Her dedication to Wellesley continues to the present day - she is a Trustee Emerita.)

Soon after graduating, she married Frank S. Streeter, a Harvard graduate. Streeter had been a year behind Palmer Baker at Harvard, and the men became good friends after the war through mutual acquaintances. "My wife Alma and I saw Frank and Nancy fall in love and get married," he recalls. Streeter achieved outstanding success in the world of finance. ("His great hobby is collecting Americana," notes Baker.)

The Streeters and the Bakers sustained a rewarding relationship. "I never forgot Nancy's friendship and kindness when my wife was dying of cancer. She's one of the people who truly stood by."

With the arrival of the Streeter daughters - Ellen, Ruth, and Meg - it was only a matter of time before their Mom introduced them to the joys of skating. When the children were enrolled in the Junior Club, "that's how I got back to skating," recalls Nancy. Her friend Joan Scribner "persuaded me to get back on the ice for exercise, and I really enjoyed it." She eventually passed her second figure test, then "got hooked on ice dancing again. The second time around was much easier - it's 'in the bones' when you've started as a child."

The results were impressive: in time, she passed her Silver dance test. However, "as you get older, you have to skate more frequently, work harder. My daughters had reached a certain age and I was by then working part-time at The Asia Society [in the Public Affairs Department, Program Development], but continued to work with Peter Dunfield and Charles Fetter on the

pre-Gold and Gold dance tests."

Over the years, Nancy Streeter has observed and known first-hand many renowned skaters. Asked to comment, in a word or two, on a few of the legends, Streeter offered the following impressions: Tenley Albright - "Grace, speed." Carol Heiss - "Grace, precision." Janet Lynn - "Innocence, grace, power." Peggy Fleming - "Lyrical." Dorothy Hamill - "Strength, grace, musicality." Kristi Yamaguchi - "Tremendously appealing, fragile but strong." Michelle Kwan - "Extraordinary, determined. Takes over the ice, it's hers."

In 1976, Nancy Streeter became president of the Skating Club of New York. The club was experiencing "terrible financial problems," and she accepted the challenge of helping to rescue it. "Palmer and Ed Ross, a lawyer in New York, were tremendously instrumental [in handling the situation]," states Streeter. She also became president of Sky Rink's Midtown Skating Corporation.

"The old Skating Club of New York was a Byzantine place," recalls Palmer Baker. "It had begun to disintegrate because of changing demographics - the women who'd been the backbone of the 'old' club led quite different lives than the next generations," he explains diplomatically.

By the mid-seventies, when Nancy took over, the club was about to lose its lease. "Nancy managed to keep the rink going (I subsequently brought in Jim Goodale) and between Nancy and Jim, they kept the rink alive for 20 years."

"Nancy was instrumental in the Club's involvement in building Sky Rink at 33rd Street, which cost a million dollars thirty years ago (an impressive amount of money back then for such an undertaking). She has made a real contribution to skating via Sky rink, utilizing all the concentration and full attention she pays to all her projects."

Streeter was cognizant of the effort. "It required real dedication on behalf of us all - perseverance, determination, a fanatic involvement with skating. The experience colored my life at that time."

Another institution which captured her interest and inspired her to action during those years was the Professional Children's School - "a private school in New York for students performing in the Arts, who are unable to find accommodation in standard school programs. Here, they are provided with a proper academic curriculum. I found that concept fascinating and important." She became and remained a Trustee, from 1967 through 1985.

*"For once in my life I really landed on my feet with a bang, for I was taken into one of the nicest homes I had ever been in, with the most tranquil home atmosphere, with people who were interesting, and really interested in*

*all the things that I liked. They made my time there as comfortable as one could ever hope for; [the Streeters] became, happily, treasured friends in my life."*

*-John Curry in "John Curry,"  
written with Keith Money  
(published by Knopf)*

"I had never heard of him when he came to stay with us in the summer of 1971," recalls Nancy. [Others benefited similarly from the Streeters' generosity: 14 year old Dorothy Hamill; 1977 national dance champions Judi Genovesi and Kent Weigle; and Alan Schramm, among others].

"My daughter Meg was 12, and I had told Peter Dunfield we'd love to have a little girl around Meg's age stay with us. It wasn't a 12 year-old female but John, who was 21 and British, that Peter recommended. 'You're crazy!' I told him, but he wore me down, and that's how John Curry became a very special part of the Streeter Family."

She vividly recalls her first impression of the skater: "It was at the old Sky Rink, on 33rd street. Coming off the elevators, one walked to a glass facade that looked out onto the rink - and there he was. Just remarkable, breathtaking. He skated with such beauty and grace, and possessed extraordinary potential. His style was different than everybody else's. He was so musical, expressive, strong. You were caught up by his talent."

Nancy recalls, with a smile, that John "looked younger than 21." He lived with the Streeters much of the time, "and we got to know many of his friends."

Nancy was not only Curry's friend and sponsor, but also his "grown-up sister," according to Palmer Baker.

Nancy acknowledges the description. "However," she adds, "there were times I had to lower the boom, to get John to concentrate on his triple jumps, which he hated."

The Streeters were on hand throughout the ups and downs of Curry's life and career. Nancy insisted there be "no publicity on Curry living with us - for the sake of his privacy, and ours!" Not an easy accomplishment, as his fame grew. In 1975, he won Bronze at Worlds, and then in '76, Olympic Gold and the World championship.

In 1978, Nancy Streeter joined Curry's skating classes at Sky Rink, which were memorable. "Just ask Randy Lane, Rob McBrien, Pat Dodd," she says. Not all in class were ice veterans. "Steve Rosenthal was a doctor who'd done no skating at all, but was determined to skate," recalls Nancy. "He wanted to spin, but was having great trouble. 'You're going to stay here 'til you spin.' John declared. He had no mercy on any of us. You'd come home exhausted but exhilarated! I learned more in six weeks than I thought possible."

After turning professional, Curry raised the art of figure skating to a new level. "John's show, of course, was the precursor of everything that's happening today," states Streeter. "Moir's Ice Theatre and Nathan Birch's Next Ice Age wouldn't be here if not for John. It's thanks to the commitment and determination of Moira and Nathan to keep John's vision of skating going that we're doing any of this..."

In the nineteen-eighties, when Curry was diagnosed with AIDS, Nancy made a life-changing decision. "One could either ignore the disease's existence - or do something about it. So many people I knew and cared about would be at risk."

She went to work at New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center as a Volunteer in their AIDS program. "The hospital wasn't doing very much," she recalls. "Everybody wanted 'it' to go away."

"The medical staff wanted lay people involved in putting an AIDS Program together," she explains. "The doctors knew the disease would be a big threat. They needed someone to organize the volunteers."

Streeter proceeded to do so. "She became a ruling force at the hospital (her husband Frank was a governor there)," explains Palmer Baker. "With John Jacobs on the staff, Nancy and John were the protagonists who created the AIDS Center at New York Hospital - a very unusual development for a conservative hospital (at that time all hospitals were conservative regarding AIDS). Along with Jacobs, Nancy deserves the credit for what was accomplished there."

"John [Curry] was taken care of there, but never as an 'in' patient," declares Nancy. Another stricken skater was Patrick Dean (former dance partner of Moira North). "Patrick was an 'in' patient and charmed everyone on the floor," remembers Nancy. "He was very needy and felt he was well taken care of there." Towards the end, "he went home to his family."

"When I went to see Patrick at the hospital, the full impact of Nancy's contribution hit me," states Palmer Baker. "What it really meant to the people who passed through that Center."

Mrs. Streeter's involvement was total. "In the early days, we were the advocates and support group for the stricken. There were drug users, hemophiliacs - the totality of the disease was staggering, yet it was perceived in a very narrow way..."

"I tried to explain to people what it was all about. I'd never worked with drug abusers before - didn't know if I could. I learned that



they were people. For me, the inner reward was tremendous, amazing. One of the most rewarding things I've ever done, I'd been living in New York my entire life - and had never understood the breadth of the city until I became involved with the AIDS Center.

"My hope has always been that those stricken would get good medical care."

Meanwhile, the disease took its terrible toll on Curry. "John didn't want to be really sick in New York, and for the final two years, he went home to stay with his mother. Those years brought them very close - and it was very important to both of them that they had that time together." To the present day, Mrs. Streeter remains in regular touch with Mrs. Curry. "It's important for her, and for me, too."

Mrs. Streeter's vision for Ice Theatre coincides exactly with what John Curry's would have been. "It's so rewarding for skating itself, and for skaters - the opportunity for talented skaters to shine - that's the legacy John's given all of them."

"He knew what he wanted - he set the stage for the experimentation of today. 'Everything done can't be a masterpiece.' It's so important to continue, and heartening to see them get recognition and backing. John would be very proud of what Ice Theatre has done, and what it's doing."

Nancy glows with pride when discussing her family. Eldest daughter Ellen (named for Nancy's mother) is "a very successful travel agent," notes Palmer Baker. Ruth is a producer for "60 Minutes" ("she has worked with Ed Bradley for years," notes Nancy). Meg is a prominent director/producer, primarily of skating competitions and events ("she has worked on every Olympics since 1980," states her Mom). Nancy's nine grandchildren are the joys of her life.

Over the years, for much needed rest-and-relaxation, the Streeter family has always loved

the tranquil beauty of Sun Valley, Idaho, long a favored retreat for winter sports enthusiasts. An ideal place to unwind, have fun - and reflect.

Reflecting on her varied endeavors, Mrs. Streeter notes: "It's very rewarding to be able to pick and choose your pursuits - some, I fell into," she points out. Yet, she is wary of the public spotlight. (She expressed surprise at the amount of time required for our interview: "All that time talking about me?" she exclaimed.)

An observation Keith Money made about John Curry applies directly to Mrs. Streeter: "...modest and yet, refreshingly, completely without false modesty."

"The art and cultures of other countries - India, China, Tibet - fascinate her," observes Palmer Baker. Nancy's passion for skating remains unabated; she travels to competitions and knows the current skating scene and the people in it. "She is a familiar face at key events," to quote Baker.

People in all walks of life have reason to be grateful for what Nancy Streeter has accomplished (and will undoubtedly accomplish in the future). Without question, she is one very special lady.

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Edward Z. Epstein is currently at work on a book with ice dance champions Maya Usova and Evgeny Platov. His latest book, *BORN TO SKATE: The MICHELLE KWAN Story* (Ballantine), is currently in its fourth printing. A skating devotee since childhood, Epstein is a former Middle-Atlantic States Novice champion.

*Congratulations  
to Nancy and  
continued success  
to the  
Ice Theatre  
of New York*

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**Aja Zanova**

Dear Nancy,

**Tonight we celebrate you!**

"He who pursues righteousness and love  
finds love, prosperity and honor..."

...The righteous give without sparing."  
(Proverbs 21:21 and 26)

"To be esteemed is better than silver or gold..."  
...A generous person will himself be blessed."

(Proverb 22:1 and 9)

Thanks for being *such* a blessing to so many.  
May God continue to bless you richly!

With Much Love,  
JoJo Starbuck

**Congratulations**  
***Ice Theatre  
of New York***  
**and to**  
***Nancy Streeter***

YOUR DEDICATION AND  
LOVE OF THE ART OF SKATING  
IS UNMATCHED BY ANYONE

WITH LOVE AND RESPECT  
**SALLY BRAYLEY BLISS**