

DR. JOAN ERDHEIM:

Freud, Dreams and Figure Skating

by EDWARD Z. EPSTEIN

Dr. Joan Erdheim, CSW.Ph.D., recipient of ITNY's 2008 Ice Angel award, is a psychoanalyst. A sports psychology counselor. President of the Psychoanalytic Society of the Training Institute for Mental Health. "I'm one of those people who always knew what I wanted to be — a psychologist," she notes.

Her office, on New York's upper East side, reflects her busy lifestyle, and she's hands-on: when there's an article she wants you to read, a picture she wants you to have to illustrate a point, she prints it out and/or zeroes it herself. She's fascinated by what inspires people, their passions, their dreams. "I've always been intrigued by the hidden meaning behind things; curious about psychoanalysis, interested in dreams. I love metaphors in thinking, writing — and making the inevitable connection to dreams."

The arts, sports and the inter-relationship and connection between them, have always captured her interest and ignited her imagination. When her daughters, Cara and Anna, discovered figure skating in a local indoor ice rink the size of a living-room, their Mom's interest in the sport intensified — and is still going strong.

She points out that Freud's biographer, Ernest Jones, defined what makes figure skating appealing to those who love to do it: "Skating combines and surpasses the joys of flying and dancing; only in a certain type of dream do we ever else attain a higher degree of the same ravishing experience of exultantly skimming the earth..."

Joan, daughter of Sally and David Balogh, was born in Staten Island, raised in Miami. Ice skating was only one of the sports she enjoyed as a youth. Her younger brother, Robert, today a successful lawyer, was an avid athlete. Their parents were eminent jewelers — Balogh, their New York store on Madison Avenue, was a unique shop that was an equal of Tiffany, Cartier and Van Cleef & Arpels in the quality and desirability of their merchandise. To anyone whose dream was fine jewelry, the windows of Balogh were a fantasyland. Joan's Dad is also an accomplished musician.

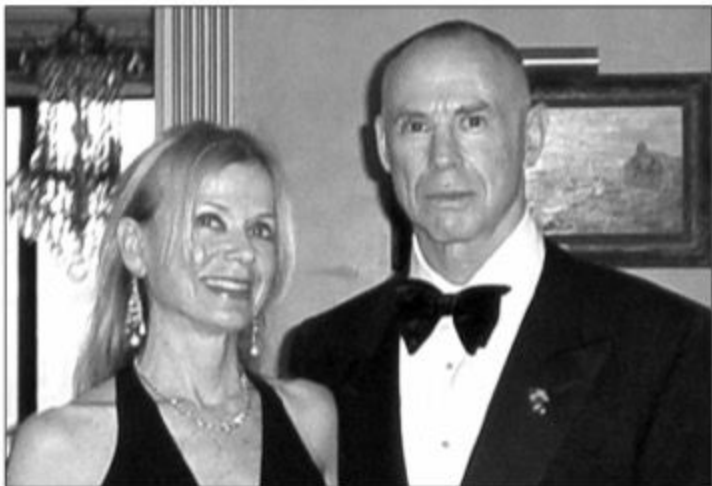
When Joan met her husband-to-be, Martin Erdheim, at a party — a one-time "jock," he'd been a star basketball player, captain of the Columbia team — he recalls

their initial encounter: "We ended up angry at each other, 'debating' the merits of Freud vs. Skinner, if you can believe it!" Martin was at the time employing Skinner's principles on how to alter employee behavior. Naturally, a love affair was launched, and the couple has been married since 1974.

Erdheim has four masters degrees; precious gems, diamonds and estate jewels are his business. "There's romance to beautiful jewelry," he notes. "But no matter how rare and valuable a collection, the wise man learns he's merely the temporary custodian of it."

The Ice Studio was a tiny indoor ice rink on Manhattan's upper East side. The Erdheims' apartment was in the neighborhood, and it was there that daughters Cara and Anna discovered the joys of skating. "Before we knew it," recalls Joan, "they were increasing sessions. Cara — she's four-and-a-half years older than her kid sister — was interested in advanced classes. There would be competitions, and Cara always competed and always won."

The mini-rink became "almost a second home." The girls' skating shifted to Sky Rink, on 33rd Street on New York's West side, but: "I was never a 'skating mother,'" states Joan emphatically. "I gravitated towards the 'normal' ones. And I was never interested in the fast track of World or Olympic competition for either of my daughters." At Sky Rink, where the girls were enrolled in The Skating Club of New York, Joan met Moira North; it was, as Bogart says to Claude Rains in "Casablanca," the start of a beautiful friendship. Joan was invited to join the board of ITNY (since 1999, her purview



has been the Silent Auction).

The Erdheim girls enjoyed the New York skating scene, often participating in the annual Christmas shows at Rockefeller Center. Summers the family went to Sun Valley, where skater/performer/choreographer Gia Guddat became a family friend (and the girls' coach). "Anna met Brian Boitano and Katarina Witt on the ice one day," recalls Joan. The two Olympic champions had collided mid-rink, "and Anna skated daintily between them and said hello!"

"Follow your passions, I encourage that," states Joan. "Be adventurous. Don't run dry." Helping people to fulfill their potential is her aim. "But — and this is crucial — I teach working to achieve *balance* in life, that's the key." In any field, the motivation to succeed can spring from an unhealthy source; sometimes from the need to overcompensate for some perceived deficiency. "Look, if your parents have the ambition for you to succeed, if Mom or Dad possess that 'killer instinct,' as some have labeled it, but *you* don't have it — it's a major problem. Distorted relationships result from situations like that. Parents must be in synch with their kids, lead them in the right direction. You can't ignore a child's temperament; putting pressure on a kid will backfire, you can't go against the grain. But if parent and child are 'in synch,' they will arrive at the right place together."

Helping people on their journey to the "right place" — and she's careful to point out that it's a cautious, gradual, deliberate process — is Joan's *raison d'être*. "I advise that you can't let yourself get bogged down over things you can't control — you do the best *you* can. For a competitive skater, what I tell my patients to work on — and it's not easy to do, there are techniques I teach to enable them to do it — you work on skating *for yourself*, doing the best you can, move by move — don't allow yourself to be preoccupied by what your competitors are doing. You have control over what *you* do, not what others do."

Joan points out that a sense of humor — and what constitutes humor varies widely from individual to individual — "a sense of humor is one vitally important defense in coping with situations you can't control. 'Lighten up' — there are ways to do that — can be a valuable tool for someone under stress. And if a physical injury, or some other trauma, occurs to an athlete, it's essential for



them to have developed psychological tools to survive. One has to be able to reshape one's dream, one's passion, to fit reality. I teach how to distinguish between fantasy and reality; how to achieve goals through 'focusing,' and other techniques."

Anna Erdheim's skates get less of a workout these days — her sports today are tennis, golf and biking; she's a Colby graduate, and her interests are business and commercial real estate. Cara's interest in skating hasn't diminished. She's come a long way since the Ice Studio days — in 2006 she won the Championship Gold Ladies event at the 11th Annual U.S. Adult Figure Skating Championships in Dallas. A graduate of Colby, she's currently working on a PhD in English.

Joan has done extensive graduate and post-graduate work — "I guess you could say that my husband and I are lifetime students," she laughs — and works

with a highly diverse patient population. She has written numerous articles, been recipient of many awards, including the Louis Moreault Memorial Award, Training Institute for Mental Health, New York (the Institute's founder, Vincenzo Conigliano, was one of Joan's mentors).

The Volunteer Ice Angel Award is "a most welcome honor," states Joan. "I know how devoted Moira has been to her dream of a working, thriving Ice Theatre, and it's gratifying to observe how successful she's been in achieving that dream. I've always been inspired to support Ice Theater, because it represents a bold undertaking fueled by practical hard work and discipline. Moira has not only accomplished this, but, to her everlasting credit, she hasn't 'dumbed down' the concept, she prevents that from happening. Congratulations, Moira, and thank you again for the Award."