

# NANCY NOW



Photo: Ivy Angel

by EDWARD Z. EPSTEIN

She does not live in the past.

The chiseled features, reminiscent of the young Katharine Hepburn, remain intact — and the skating magic continues to scintillate — but Nancy Kerrigan Solomon is a woman of today, and her lifestyle, outlook and professional life are one-hundred-percent *now*. She's living proof that after the whirlpool of World and Olympic competition — and, in Nancy's case, far more than that — there can be an exciting, rewarding, productive life.

The world knows the story: In January 1994, in Detroit, Nancy was assaulted by a "mystery man" as she was training for Nationals, preparing to defend her title (won the previous year). An incredible drama subsequently unfolded, offering the impact of a cliff-hanging TV reality show.

The attack on Nancy struck a common nerve: violence was a deplorable part of what had become the everyday world, and

it had invaded the figure skaters' domain. "Now these young athletes have one more thing to deal with as they pursue excellence in sports," observed Peggy Fleming, who fervently hoped that Nancy would "not let this incident destroy the bright future she's earned."

Nancy was an observer, not a participant, at the Nationals that year (Tonya Harding won the title), and only time would tell if she'd be able to skate again: if the injury resulting from the attack had occurred one inch lower, it would have shattered her kneecap.

On the road to recovery, she competed in the Olympics, in Lillehammer, with the world, literally, watching. Few will forget the night of the long program. Nancy skated the performance of a lifetime, technically and artistically wonderful, looking breathtaking in a shimmering Vera Wang creation. She was the embodiment of the

American Ice Princess, and she'd met every challenge.

Victory was Nancy's, or so it seemed. Then, the results: she won Silver, missing out on Gold by one-tenth of one point in artistic impression from one judge (the East German). But the world had fallen in love with Nancy Kerrigan: she'd been bold, courageous and was a survivor. To the present day Nancy evokes that era in skating — there's never been one remotely like it since — and her transition back then to the next phases of her life was the next challenge.

No one sets out to be a "role model," but Nancy has always been a great one because she's always known who she is. From the beginning, her success on the ice — and her personal values — have been rooted in a rock-solid support system: parents Brenda and Dan, brothers Mark and Michael; close, loyal, lifelong friends like fellow skater Paul Wylie.

Joan Erdheim (this year's Ice Angel Award winner) relates a revealing story about Nancy's mom: "Brenda Kerrigan is not a stage mother. She loves being a *mother*. When complimented on Nancy, she replies: 'Your children must be wonderful too.'"

Enduring, back in '94, what could easily have been a crippling physical blow — then the letdown of losing Olympic gold by an excruciatingly narrow margin — could have meant, for many people, a lifetime of bitterness and regret.

In the tradition of her predecessors, Peggy Fleming and Dorothy Hamill, Nancy looked forward, and made the transition to pro career and private life with grace and courage. In 1995, she fell in love and married Jerry Solomon, agent/manager/entrepreneur. Today, their four children — Clay, nineteen, from Jerry's previous marriage, Matthew, eleven, Brian, three, and Nicole, four months, are the joys of their lives.

Nancy's thriving career has consisted, over the years, of live appearances, corporate endorsements, tours and television: ten years starring for Tom Collins in "Champions on Ice," Disney's "Dreams on Ice," Feld Entertainment's "Grease on Ice," StarGames' production of "Footloose on Ice" and her own show, "Halloween on Ice." She has also written two books, including "Artistry on Ice," published by Human Kinetics.

She's a woman of strong opinions and one wonders if she's ever thought of becoming a teacher. "I had two of the best — Mary and Evy Scotvold. There's a *strong* commitment involved in teaching, you have to feel you're there all the time for a student. My children are still so young, I don't have that kind of time, but I'll tell you what I do — I have a hard time keeping my opinions to myself, and if I see a skater that looks like they need some pointers, I try to help. It bothers me seeing someone doing something wrong — so I attempt to correct it. I'm not so sure my 'help' is always appreciated!"

Does her career come first? "I'm a Mom first, and my whole family has always been involved in my career. If I have a commitment, Mom and Dad will stay with the kids, that kind of thing. We've always supported each other, that's what family is about."

Does she miss the excitement of competition? "I'm still competitive, that must be in my genes, but I'm also in my late thirties, and being a great competitor is more than just being in the right frame of mind — the muscles aren't as responsive, the body doesn't function at the level it once did. One has to lower expectations — the jumps require more preparation and effort, mental as well as physical, than they once did."

Skating has certainly influenced how she leads her life: "My whole life has been discipline, and that carries over when it comes to raising a family. There are so many schedules involved, pre-school, school and everything else that comes into play. The transition from 'skating star' to Mom fell into place quite naturally. I *always* wanted to be a Mom."

Any tips on how to handle nerves when performing? "For me, it's all about being prepared. If you feel prepared, you should be okay. Nerves are there for a reason — they warn you when you shouldn't try a jump or spin — and even if you are well prepared, nerves are always there. In international competition, you want to be a first-rate representative for your country, that's on your mind and can make you nervous. I practice channeling my nerves; sometimes one has to fight for a great performance — it takes time and experience to learn how to do it, and things can still go wrong! You have to practice how to compete — how best to use the warm-up time, for example."

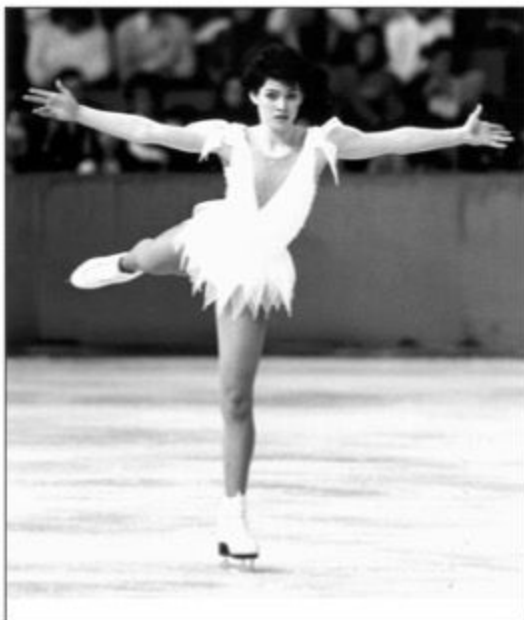


Photo: Michelle & Paul Horvath



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Today's competitive skating scene? "The rules have all changed since I was competing. The financial cost of being a competitive skater is still outrageous, but it's down considerably since school figures were eliminated. We used to have to buy separate pairs of boots and blades for figures, and had to buy huge amounts of expensive ice time to practice figures.

"In some ways, I think the new rules in free skating are an improvement — they give credibility to every move, spirals and spins now count. But the technical requirements have become so great that creativity is being stifled, the programs often look the same, they're even structured alike — some skaters don't even bother skating to their music! Everything is aimed towards accruing points, and that's *not* an improvement over the 'old days.'"

How does she deal with the challenge of staying in shape? "It's hard. I don't live in a gym, and I'm not a fanatic about my diet. That's been a major change for me — going from being incredibly fit all the time to, well, being a Mom who, basically, when she has time, swims and skates to stay in shape."

Do the kids skate? "I skate *fast*," states Brian, three, and he means it. Matthew enjoys skating, and on occasion the boys have appeared with their Mom on ice, recently in Kristi Yamaguchi's "Friends and Family" show, and others.

In 1999, she established the Nancy Kerrigan Foundation, in honor of her mother, to help non-profit organizations that support the vision impaired and in 2007 she was named a national spokesperson for the Foundation Fighting Blindness. She's also an active fundraiser for Campaign SightFirst and has appeared in many benefit ice events — "An Evening of Championship Skating," Kraft "Dreams on Ice," "Skate Against Hate," "Stars, Stripes and Skates" and "Frosted Pink."

In 2001, she was voted Outstanding Mother of the Year by the National Mother's Day Committee, and received the prestigious Henry Iba Award, an annual Citizen Athlete Award for excellence "in the sports arena and life." (Iba was a renowned basketball coach.)

Most recently she appeared in the 2006 Fox television show, "Skating with Celebrities," served as a correspondent for "The Insider" at the Turin Winter Olympics and shot a cameo appearance for the movie "Blades of Glory," the film for which 2007 ITNY honoree Sarah Kawahara created the skating sequences.

Currently, Nancy is hosting the third season of her own television show, "Nancy Kerrigan's World of Skating" on Comcast CN8 and is also the lead commentator for several webcasts on the IceNetwork.com.

It's been quite a career so far and, hopefully, as the famous song lyrics say, "The best is yet to come." ITNY founder Moira North notes: "Nancy Kerrigan is a wonderful example of an artist who has stood the test of time, no mean accomplishment in today's competitive skating world where it seems that anyone approaching the age of sixteen is deemed ready for retirement! Like ITNY, Nancy has evolved and adapted to changing situations and times, while always maintaining her integrity and setting, and reaching, new goals. Congratulations, Nancy, we're thrilled that you're our honoree for 2008."

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EDWARD Z. EPSTEIN has written twenty books, including "BORN TO SKATE: The Michelle Kwan Story." Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward, Mia Farrow, Lana Turner, Lucille Ball and Jennifer Jones are among his other subjects. A lifelong figure skating enthusiast, Epstein is a former Middle-Atlantic States Novice champion. His biographical essay on Sonja Henie was published by "Scandinavian Review," and he helped organize a festival of Henie's films for MoMA. Epstein is a graduate of NYU.



Photo: Michelle & Paul Harvath