

MARNI HALASA

ARTISTRY ON ICE AS A WAY OF LIFE

By Sharon Woolums



When a young Marni Halasa watched Dorothy Hamill skate in the 1976 Olympics, she could never have imagined that that moment was going to change the trajectory of her life. Watching Dorothy skate her long program on TV, Marni leapt off of the furniture and twirled around in her socks, captivated by the Olympic Champion's smile, style, and artistry.

"Dorothy was not only a powerful

technician, her artistry allowed her to emotionally connect with anyone watching her, and that really spoke to me," said Marni. "I wanted to be exactly like her."

All of sudden, gymnastics, ballet, and piano took a back seat to skating, and Marni started to skate every day. She would often forsake family vacations to skate in the rigorous summer camp at the Winterhurst Figure Skating Club in

Lakewood, Ohio. Marni also credits her parents for appreciating that figure skating was a sport that required sacrifice. Driving to the rink at 4:30am for a 5:30am lesson in school figures was no problem for the full-time working parents.

"I was very lucky — my family supported my passion and Cleveland had a thriving skating community. All I had to do was show up and work hard — but I



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never felt it was 'work' because I enjoyed it so much," said Marni.

Even academics couldn't keep Marni away from the rink. Although she attended Carnegie Mellon University, achieved a law degree from University of Pittsburgh and a Masters from the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism — she still went to the rink almost daily. Initially, she was working at the New York Law Journal, but everything seemed to change when Darlene Parent found Marni practicing 8th test paragraph loops on a public session at the former Sky Rink on 33rd Street.

"I saw her tracing those insanely difficult loops and instantly dragged her to the skating school office," remembers Darlene about the US Figure Skating Double Gold Medalist. "I told her that Sky Rink needed teachers and that we were not going to take 'no' for an answer!"

Eventually, Marni realized that she belonged at Sky Rink, not only coaching, but also performing with ITNY, involved in repertory pieces such as "La Revolte Des Enfants" and "Hot Chocolate." That led her to explore other performing endeavors like rollerblading on America's Got Talent, bellydancing in "Sex in the City 2," and skating on floats in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade.

"I started to listen to that voice within all of us which asks if you are happy. Whenever I was coaching or performing with ITNY, I was happy. It was sheer delight to immerse yourself in a creative process where your body is the art form. And I started to appreciate the importance of being personally fulfilled," she said.

That important life lesson also led to Marni creating the Sky Rink All Stars, a theatrical children's group that has medaled eight years in a row at the United States Figure Skating National Showcase. The team continuously pushes the envelope of what is good theater — using dance, choreography, acting, and props. The team has taught underprivileged children how to skate with ITNY's outreach program, performed at Johnny Weir's birthday party, and even placed second at the Coney Island Mermaid Parade.

"It started out very organically. They were all friends that just wanted to skate together. But then something magical started to happen — they became a team with a vision. Often, out of complete chaos, something beautiful can evolve. And I attribute that to the group dynamic. It teaches children the life lesson on how to create and work together," she said.

Passion did not stop at skating. As an activist, Marni ran for City Council in 2017 and 2021 to help small businesses. Her newest venture is opening Hells Kitchen restaurant/wine bar, The Purple Tongue, with her husband Peter Cecere and Otis Banks. But no matter what other project piques her interest, she is confident she will always have a strong presence at Sky Rink.

"One of my personal goals is to be the next Darlene Parent," she laughs. "Like Darlene, I don't think I can ever retire because there is so much more to contribute. Every day, I thank my lucky stars that I am part of this wonderful icy world. Makes me think I must have done something good in a previous life."



CONGRATULATIONS MARNI.

You are Gay Games figure skating's
best and brightest ally.

We hope to see you again in Guadalajara
at Gay Games 11 in November!

Laura Moore | Chris Lipari | Wade Corbett



Congrats Marni!
Here's to nearly 4 decades of
UNFORGETTABLE adventures
and amazing friendship.

Your boundless energy and enthusiasm
are second to none. Love You! Amy