



How I learned to skate
tall and carry a big stick
By Judy Alexandra DiEdwardo

soul on ice

away from a kid young enough to cry for his mommy? But that was the least of my problems.

The first morning, the instructors asked us to skate by them so they could assess our basic skill level. Hoping to make a good impression, I power-skated past them in the prescribed hockey stance — knees bent and head up. So far, so good.

Next was an agility test, which involved charging full speed toward the center blue line, hopping over it, and power-skating the remaining distance. A 6-year-old noticed my apprehension and chirped, “You can do it!” But my spread-eagle landing proved him wrong. Even under 5 pounds of padded equipment, it was clear I was in for some major bruising — ego and otherwise.

As the week wore on, I saw that I’d seriously underestimated the little campers. They mastered all the moves and were fearless, their bounce-back bodies springing off the ice like rubber. Not a crybaby in the bunch. I felt productive but lonely as I practiced my hockey stops and passing, alone but for my faithful 6-year-old shadow.

Camp culminated with a real game, complete with scoreboard, referees and music. My pal begged me to play, but I knew I wouldn’t last a minute out there. After four days of camp, those angelic boys were beginning to look (and grunt) like NHL hopefuls. Any twinge of self-pity I felt at sitting on the sidelines quickly turned to determination as I watched my new role models etch their marks on the ice. Maybe I wasn’t ready for Nagano. But I’d braved the bruises and become a better skater than I ever dreamed I could be.

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I’d always thought of ice hockey as a blood sport played by brutes with a pain tolerance as high as their dental bills. Like huge spark plugs on skates, they’d charge *en masse* for the kill: a 6-ounce rubber puck traveling at 100 miles per hour. So why, my friends and family wondered, would a gentle thirtysomething creature like me enroll in Planet Hockey, one of the country’s premier coed ice hockey camps? Fact is, I’m a thrill seeker at heart who can’t pass up a challenge. And learning ice hockey would certainly be *that*, considering I’d just learned how to ice-skate. Besides, women’s ice hockey was about to make its debut at the 1998 Olympic Winter Games (held in Nagano, Japan, this month). This could be my big chance to hop on the cutting edge of a hot, new woman’s sport.

To help me prepare, Planet Hockey sent videos demonstrating basic moves (skating form, stick handling, how to pass a puck, etc.) and ice hockey-specific exercises to strengthen muscles and build agility. For the next couple of months, I practiced in my living room (and tried to perfect my snarl in the bathroom mirror).

When the time came for camp in June, I was primed for the kill. Until I met my classmates — 18 very polite knobby-kneed boys ages 6 to 12 — all of whom had at least a season of playing under their belts. (Planet Hockey runs coed beginner and adult-only camps. This was the only one I could fit into my schedule.) It shouldn’t matter, I told myself, feeling more like a den mother than a classmate; how could I take a puck



details:

Planet Hockey’s summer camps are held at 25 locations across the country from June to August. Cost ranges from \$250–\$360. Lodging and meals are not included. Contact Planet Hockey, 5911 SW Knightsbridge Drive, Portland, OR 97219; (800) 320-7545, in Canada (503) 244-7447.