

Skating in the City

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Every year when the temperatures drop and the city rinks freeze at last, a new social season begins for a generation of youngsters. The minute the Fisher Park skating rink opened back in the early sixties, a new social season certainly began for me and my friend Judy. The rink was centrally located near three elementary schools, so we could easily meet and hang out with all our friends.

The public skating rink was laid out like a giant donut of ice circling a central hockey rink where there was always a noisy, fast-paced game in progress.

There was one major barrier to getting our season started: our parents weren't crazy about letting two eleven-year-old girls go skating after dinner alone, even though the rink was only three blocks away. So they needed work. We knew that if we could get permission for the first one or two nights, the rest of the season would be a breeze.

With equal measures of coaxing, cajoling, and pouting that problem was solved. Our next dilemma was whether to skate down to the rink, or walk, carrying our skates. Skating was quicker, but alarming when we hit the sand or bare cement on the sidewalk, which brought us to a screeching halt. Carrying our skates was a better choice because we had a chance to warm up in the heated shack when we put them on. As we approached, the crack of the hockey sticks hitting the puck and the slamming of the puck into the boards floated out on the clear winter air.

The changing shack was primitive. One door led to the girls' side, one to the boys'. Wooden benches lined the walls, with dozens of pairs of boots tossed underneath. A creaking door led to the middle room where the heater was fired up by one of the volunteer rink workers. We quickly tied up our skates and headed for the ice to meet our friends.

After skating a circuit or two, we all went looking for a game of "crack the whip". One of the bigger, more solid boys was needed to be the base of the whip, we girls were in the middle of the line, and we tried to find a smaller, light-weight kid to be at the end. Most kids knew that they would end up sailing into a snowbank when the whip snapped and the person beside them let go, but we always seemed to find a willing victim.

Once we were well and thoroughly frozen, a trip to Mike's corner store across the

street was necessary. The high school kids were lined up on the stools at the counter, devouring hamburgers and fries, but none of us had much money, so the shopping was minimal. Bazooka gum was a hit. We tried to read the comic with stiff cold fingers while the gum froze solid in our pockets. Thrills was another choice that fit our budget (still tastes like soap!) or those with a dime could buy a chocolate bar.

We were always looking for a place to warm up, and sometimes the only choice was the bathroom, a white-painted dingy building with a space heater big enough to sit on and hear our icy mitts sizzle as they shed melting pellets of ice and snow.

After a couple of hours, we staggered home, exhausted and chilled, but exhilarated at the start of another social season at the rink.