

# Skating rink helps us keep our cool

By Patricia Schultheis

When the temperature tops 90, it's time for ice. For many years — decades, actually — I've pursued figure skating, a sport for which I have neither innate talent nor requisite dedication. Mount Pleasant Ice Arena, where I usually skate, is being renovated, so on a recent Sunday afternoon, with Baltimore broiling under the midsummer sun, I took a white-knuckle drive up the Jones Falls Expressway, over the Beltway and then north on 795 to the Reisterstown Sportsplex.

When I got there, dozens of teenage boys were lugging hockey gear across the lot — not a good sign. Regulars at the Sportsplex know to double-check the times on its website, but I am not a regular. “You have just about a half hour to skate and then it's time for hockey,” the girl behind the ticket counter told me. “But I've come all the way from Baltimore,” I complained.

“Sorry,” she shrugged. I was just about to leave when a tired-looking African American woman juggling a toddler on her hip offered up sensible advice to this white woman through a simple question: “Why don't you stay?”

And, suddenly, things began turning in my favor. The teen behind the counter offered me a free pass for a future skate. And then, as I was lacing up, I saw Vera from Mount Pleasant — droll, disciplined Vera, who inflects her English with the seductive vowels of her native Belarus. She was on center ice with a little girl in pink who earnestly was attempting the same spin over and over again. I would learn later that the girl's parents are from Korea.

So there was Vera from Belarus and the daughter of Korean immigrants on center ice, while around them swirled an international stew. Teenage Muslim girls in headscarves swept past boys in yarmulkes as little children

of various hues stayed upright by pushing plastic penguins. And miscellaneous duffers like me wove through and around groups taking selfies.

And we were all cool. Cool in the rink's blessedly low temperature. And cool with each other. A skating human gyre, each of us was trying to keep our balance, get some exercise, keep out of each other's way and have a little fun.

But then a whistle blew, and the session ended. Even though I hadn't skated long, I was glad I stayed. Going out, I passed a man with tzitzit trailing from his shirt, taking a picture of a gaggle of laughing kids, many of them in yarmulkes. And in the lobby, the girls in headscarves were posing for pictures of their own. I saw the woman who'd advised me to stay and mouthed "Thank you." Her toddler still on her hip, she flashed me a smile.

Buoyed by having shared the ice with so many clever people like myself who'd enjoyed themselves while beating Baltimore's heat, I decided to avoid another white-knuckle highway trip and take the long way home.

Driving through Greenspring Valley I couldn't help remembering that some 30 years ago, just about when I started skating, demographers were predicting the population change I had just witnessed — girls in headscarves, boys in yarmulkes, daughters of Koreans and immigrants from Belarus, all going round and round together. As subtly as the silky corn tassels of Greenspring Valley will turn brown, We the People have changed. What a wonder. We're no long who we were, and that's OK. Doubtless, when those young skaters are my age they'll look out over some swirling American throng and think the same thing.

But I then turned on the radio, and I heard our president's rant about four congresswomen who should "Go back and help fix the totally broken and crime infested places from which they came." Initially my heart sank, but then I realized that my short time on the ice had showed me how wrong he is. Aside from his tweet's essential awfulness, it's also way too late. I know. I just spent a Sunday afternoon with the future our president fears. And, believe me, it's much cooler than anything he can imagine.

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