

## The Home Forum®



**SKATING PAIRS:** Yang Tae-Hwa and Lee Chuen-gun (left) of South Korea practiced at the Salt Lake Center last week. Holly Smith and Jeremy Hansen (below) will pick up bouquets, stuffed animals, and the occasional pizza thrown onto the ice after skaters' performances at the Salt Lake City Games.

AMY SANCETTA/AP

# Skating with the STARS

• KIDS ARE SHARING THE  
• ICE WITH OLYMPIANS –  
• AND HELPING TO KEEP  
• EVERYTHING CLEAN

**M**OST people can't even get tickets to the Olympic figure-skating events, but one group of kids will be right out there on the ice at the 2002 Winter Olympic Games. They're the "flower sweepers." It's their job to pick up all the flowers and stuffed animals that people in the audience throw onto the ice after a favorite competitor has skated.

"Not many kids ever get to go out on the ice at an Olympics," says 11-year-old Jeremy Hansen. "I had to practice really hard." Jeremy has been skating for two years and practices three times a week. He was one of 35 young skaters selected as flower sweepers for the Winter Games in Salt Lake City. (You may glimpse sweepers at work during the Men's Short Program on TV tonight.)

Sweepers have to be good skaters, and they have to be fast. They only have two minutes between competitions to clear the ice for the next skater.

Sixty boys and girls tried out for the flower-sweeper positions in September. They had to meet several requirements just to take the test. "We wanted the sweepers to be from Utah," says Katie Clifford. She's the sports coordinator for short-track and figure skating for the Salt Lake

Olympic Organizing Committee. The youngsters also had to demonstrate a certain level of skating proficiency by passing a standard qualifications test.

Plus they had to be a member of a local skating club, and they had to write an essay about their favorite figure skater. Skaters between 8 and 12 were eligible.

During the final test, the 60 skaters had to go out on the ice and pick up items similar to those that are thrown during competitions. According to Ms. Clifford, that can include flowers, stuffed animals, T-shirts, even bags of candy.

At one skating event, an entire pizza (in a box) was thrown to a skater known to enjoy pizza. And skater Todd Eldredge, who collects Bugs Bunny memorabilia, was once thrown a stuffed Bugs Bunny nearly four feet tall.

To a sweeper, speed is important. So is a good eye. Sweepers must spot and retrieve anything that might have fallen off the skater's costume. A single sequin could trip up the next competitor if it isn't removed. Six judges observed how well the young skaters could stop quickly, turn cleanly, and pick up items gracefully. They had to skate forward and backward and through a course of cones.

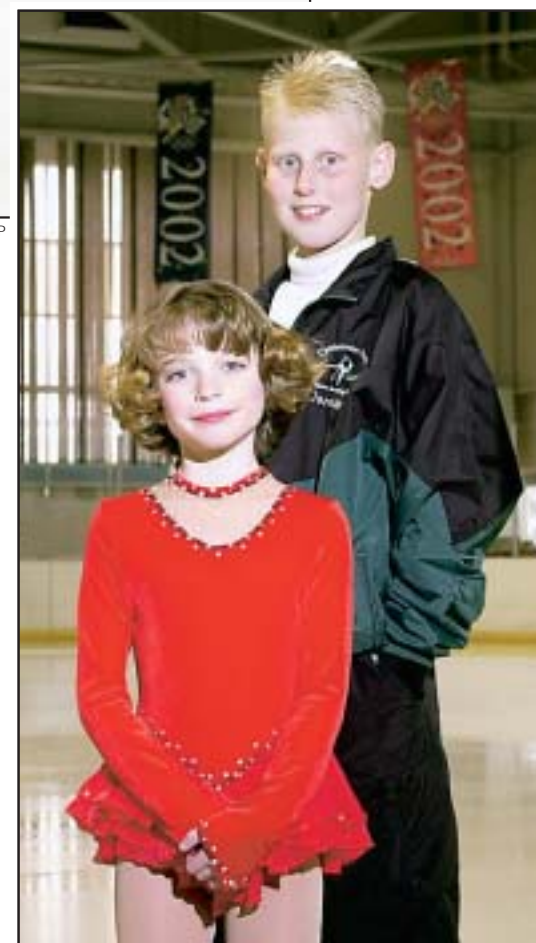
After the test, the names of the skaters

who passed were put into a hat. Thirty-five names were drawn to fill the flower-sweeper squad. The sweepers were put into groups of seven and assigned to two of the skating competitions.

Jeremy was assigned to the pairs freestyle (last night) and the ladies short program (Feb. 19). Ten-year-old Holly Smith was assigned to the ice-dancing freestyle (Feb. 18) and the men's short program (tonight). Holly has been skating for five years and practices four times a week. She has already won two local competitions and would like to be in the Olympics herself someday. But she won't be allowed to skate with the competitors or even say hello to them during this year's Games.

**W**E CAN'T talk to the skaters or try to get their autographs or anything," Holly says. (Her favorite skater is Tara Lipinski.) Sweepers are not to distract competitors in any way, and everything they pick up is handed to the skaters' coaches. The skaters get them later. A box is put near the ice so skaters can donate any items to a local hospital.

The tradition of having flower sweepers at major skating events has evolved over many years. Benjamin Wright, who has been a figure-skating historian, judge, and referee for decades, can remember having



ANDY NELSON - STAFF

people help clean up the ice for the past 30 or 40 years. "The skaters themselves used to pick up the few items thrown on the ice years ago," he says. "But as more and more flowers were thrown, the skaters needed help gathering everything up." The contest organizers began asking a few people to help out. Formal tryouts and matching costumes for sweepers have been around for the past five or 10 years.

Skating organizations try to discourage the audience from throwing anything on the ice, says Dale Mitch, former curator of the World Figure Skating Museum and Hall of Fame in Colorado Springs, Colo. Even a stray flower petal can stick to the ice and trip up the next skater.

Now, all flowers must be wrapped in cellophane or a similar covering to try to prevent such mishaps. Stuffed animals have become more popular, along with

*Continued on next page*

## Wanted: young flower sweepers

**T**HE Olympics aren't the only competition in which flower sweepers are needed. You might find opportunities to be involved in a figure-skating contest in your area. But you'll probably have to prove your ability first.

The sweepers for the Winter Olympics had to pass the standard United States Figure Skating Association preliminary-level skills test. Here are the moves they had to demonstrate:

**Forward Crossovers:** While skating forward on a curve, one foot crosses in front of the other as you stroke from foot to foot. Crossovers are used to turn and to prepare for jumps and spins. Skaters must be able to do crossovers while turning in either direction.

**Backward Crossovers:** While skating backward on a curve, one foot crosses in front of the other. You must be able to do backward crossovers while turning in either direction and while alternating from one direction to the other.

**Power Threes:** "Three turns" are named for the numeral three that skaters carve into the ice with their blades when performing these turns.

Three turns help you change direction from forward to backward (or backward to forward) as you skate.

There are eight variations on the three turn, depending on the foot used, the edge of the blade used (inside or outside), and the skater's direction. A "power three" is a backward three turn that uses the skate's outside edge.

For the power three, you skate backward in a curve on one foot. Then you rock your weight from the back to the front of the skate while turning your skate (and yourself) around. Now you're facing forward. Finish the turn with another curve.

**Spirals:** These sound like spins, but a spiral is actually a glide on one foot. The other leg is held up behind the skater. A spiral can be going straight or turning, backward or forward. For the preliminary skating test, you must be able to glide on either foot, on both the inside and outside edges of the skate.

S.J.H.

■ Learn more about figure skating at the US Figure Skating Association website: [www.usfsa.org](http://www.usfsa.org).



MARK J. TERRILL/AP

**OLYMPIC FLAIR:** Peter Tchernyshev and his partner, Naomi Lang, are shown winning the United States Figure Skating Championships Jan. 12. That earned them an Olympic slot.

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bags of candy. As long as people throw items to skaters, flower sweepers will have their work cut out for them.

Is there a bad side to being a flower sweeper? "We don't get to brag about it," Jeremy says. For security reasons, sweepers were instructed not to talk about their jobs, and to keep especially silent about

the top-secret opening and closing ceremonies, in which they are also involved.

But while Jeremy, Holly, and the other sweepers couldn't say anything before the winter Olympics began, they will be noticed during the competitions, and they'll have something very special to tell their friends about after the Games are over.

Sharon J. Huntington

### TODAY'S ARTICLE ON CHRISTIAN SCIENCE

Bringing a spiritual perspective to daily life

## God spoke my prayer

IT WAS PROBABLY because of a junior-high biology class, where we talked about creation. I lay awake for hours one night, thinking about the origin of life, the reality of God, and my place in creation. The details of my young girl's reasoning are vague 40 years later, but I remember arguing backward. If humans came from monkeys, where did monkeys come from? What gave amoeba life? Where did electrical impulses come from? Who made the sun? Instinctively, I knew there was too much order and beauty in the universe for it to be an accidental, chaotic chain reaction of matter.

But the significance of that experience wasn't the accuracy of my theological line of argument. The significance was that whatever depth of thinking was going on made me feel loved and cared for – a fact which, in retrospect, feels like a miracle in itself in light of the painful things I was dealing with. At 12 years old, I was coming out of a history of sexual and physical abuse; my parents would fight so badly that my mother would threaten to take the kids and leave. I was alienated from my mother and had no one to confide in.

But that night at the end of seventh grade, I reasoned about God and my place in the universe and found some comfort, despite all the unresolved issues. Why? Because I believe God was speaking my prayer. He loved me in a way that moved me mentally to a space outside the ugliness that threatened to swallow up my life. It would take another 10 years of struggle to feel worth, purpose, and the confidence to trust another's love, but now I feel an unshakable security in my life that depends only on my relationship to God.

This intimate communication is what made God known in Bible times. God's word called Elijah out of the depths of suicidal tendencies to continue his work despite opposition. David sings in the Psalms of God's comfort when the king he adored pursued him with malicious hate. God's communication guided and reassured prophets like Jeremiah when his people's corruption had brought them into Babylonian captivity. God's word was surely part of the resurrection of Jesus.

The primary evidence for God has never come directly through external

circumstance. God has a much less cumbersome (and tidy!) way of making Himself known. He speaks to the human heart, bringing our thought into accord with Him.

The human mind is a thick soup made by all the leftovers in the refrigerator of human experience. But cutting through the soup is a clear channel of communication – God's love making itself known. God is the Mind that gives us fresh ideas when a project gets stuck. God's truth gives us our conscience and keeps nudging us to our highest sense of right. When we feel like we can't figure out who we are, God is the Soul that makes us notice the goodness that is the foundation of our day. When the chaos of human life confuses and scatters our thought, God is the Principle that reestablishes order. It is God's love that tells us we are worthy of love when relationships are broken or strained.

### The primary evidence for God doesn't come through external circumstances.

It's true that even when you admit God communicates with us, it still seems like the messages can be erratic, selective, and sometimes unknown for too long a time. But Christian Science explains that the only reliable source of consciousness is the Mind of God, unfolding to His children strength, inspiration, and peace. The belief of human minds separate from God, trapped in the vagaries of materialism, seems to interrupt that communication. But the more we admit we love the freshness of what God reveals, the more we stay close to the good ideas. The good news is that even if we forget this perspective, God's love moves us out of the preoccupation with explaining evil.

The book of Isaiah presents God's word in this way: "My people shall know my name: therefore they shall know in that day that I am he that doth speak: behold, it is I" (52:6).

It is God's divine intention that we know our divine origin and the love with which we have been blessed.

*Spirit imparts the understanding which uplifts consciousness and leads into all truth.*

Mary Baker Eddy  
(founder of the Monitor)

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