



Stumbling *through* Stouffville

with Bruce Stapley

Skating on Thin Ice

Forgive me for being a month or two past the season here. But the punch line of this column hinges upon a joke I love to tell during the Holiday Season about how it came to be that the angel got to sit on top of the Christmas tree.

It seems Santa had been having a very bad day one Christmas eve - Mrs. Claus was after him to cut back on caloric intake, Rudolph had come down with the flu and the elves were threatening to go on strike again. In the midst of all the turmoil, a messenger comes to tell Santa there's an angel at the door with the Claus Christmas tree and she wants to know where to put it... And that, of course, is how the proverbial angel came to sit atop the Christmas tree!

Okay, on with the column. It would appear my two young sons are both possessed of that quintessential Canadian gene that leads most kids born here to want to strap on the blades and take to the ice. We're regulars at the indoor arena on the Ninth Line for public skating sessions on

Wednesday afternoons. Griffin, of course, is a rambunctious rookie "Tim Bit" in the tyke house league, and he, his older brother Drew and myself have been taking to the natural rink maintained by the local fire fighters at the Town Park for shinnys as of late.

Great fun. Except that my wife Susan and I have reached the point where our winter-dried fingers are becoming split and prematurely arthritic from tugging, twisting and tying the skate laces of our boys and ourselves every time we take to the ice. Especially when Drew and Griffin insist upon pulling their laces right out of the eyelets when they take their skates off, making it necessary to ball up the always-frayed ends and somehow stuff them back in the next time we go to the rink.

And while it's bad enough wrestling with this task indoors, it becomes an exercise in full-fledged finger fridity when undertaken outside on a numbingly cold day at the park. So it was understandable that on a recent, formidably cold outing there that I almost met my

Waterloo. Having endured the obligatory tie up session with the boys, I somehow managed to find enough reserve to lace up my own skates before thrusting my frozen, aching digits into a cold pair of gloves.

I was just starting to enjoy the experience, almost forgetting my icy fingers as I flipped the puck back and forth with the boys. It was then that this young lad of about 11 or 12 accosted me from the side of the rink. "Sir," he beckoned, a sort of hangdog expression on his face. And I knew what was coming next. "Could you please tighten my skates?"

How could I refuse? He was so polite. Even though it took a good two hours for my fingers to finally return to a serviceable state.

Never again, I swore. And hey, if Santa can have a bad day, so can I. So if you should happen to see a kid leaving the park one cold winter's day with a skate protruding from the back of his snow pants, don't worry - it's not the beginning of a new youth fashion craze!



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