



A figure skater's life has its...well, ups and downs

By Peter Feniak

"Am I emotional?" Elizabeth ("Call me Liz") Manley laughs and rolls her eyes. "Just ask my husband!"

Her good humour is infectious. Her eyes sparkle. Chatting one Friday morning in a quiet ice arena, Canada's sweetheart of the

Calgary Olympics is clearly feeling good. She smiles often and talks easily about the ups and downs of her remarkable life—a life that gave Canadians a performance they'll never forget.

As Vancouver's Winter Olympic Games approach, thoughts return to Calgary and Manley's dazzling display in the 1988 Olympic figure-skating finals. Her freestyle long program—which included five triple jumps (complete airborne triple rotations)—on the evening of February 27 is now Canadian legend.

"I was possessed," Manley wrote in the first of two autobiographies (*Thumbs Up! The Elizabeth Manley Story*, 1990). "I was on such a high, I felt I was actually flying, and I didn't miss a single thing. When I slid to a stop, I was in shock."

Flowers rained down; someone tossed her a cowboy hat and she put it on, circling the ice, waving, giving the thumbs-up. She scanned the cheering crowd, searching for her mother, Joan Manley.

"That medal's about my mom," Manley says today. "It's about us doing it together."

As the surprise Olympic silver medallist—

Olympian flew home to Ottawa and was met by a crowd of 5,000. Magazines hailed her as Woman of the Year. Some 7,000 Canadians wrote her fan letters, and the down-to-earth skater, over 18 months, answered every one.

If her profile has been low in Canada in recent years, there's a simple reason: "I was in the U.S. for 18 years," she says. "I came back for my mom's illness." She reappeared on Canadian television in the late summer of 2009, speaking on behalf of Ovarian Cancer Canada to heighten awareness of the disease that took her mother's life in 2008.

This winter Manley will be highly visible at the Winter Olympics in Vancouver, bringing her infectious enthusiasm to her role as figure-skating commentator for CTV.

Now, sitting in a viewing area above the ice at the Mainway Recreation Centre in Burlington, ON, watching young skaters from the local team practice moves, Manley remembers her own early skating years.

"I knew that I loved it," she says, "but as an adult now, when I look at kids, I know if it's not truly in their hearts, it's not going to happen. I wanted it! That's what my coaches

saw. They saw my love for it and how much I wanted it."

She became one to watch. And she was also nearly crushed by the expectations that came with that potential.

Elizabeth Manley

just a fraction of a point from gold—Manley became an overnight sensation. She'd been all but overlooked in the media hype surrounding the two favourites, East Germany's Katarina Witt and the U.S.A.'s Debi Thomas. Proudly wearing her medal, the compact

Competitive Fire

Elizabeth Manley was born in Belleville, ON, on August 7, 1965, to Joan and Bernard "Red" Manley and welcomed by four older brothers. A military family, they moved often. She took her first skating lesson with

borrowed hockey skates on a frozen lake outside Winnipeg at the age of five. By Grade 3, she was skating every night with the Trenton Figure Skating Club, back in Ontario, learning the exacting routines that become the foundation for skaters.

Her talent was evident early, but the family couldn't afford extra ice time. The rink-keeper was willing, though, to provide ice time for

ished an impressive 13th at the World Championships.

After a stumbling performance in Skate America, however, it was determined that her skating had to develop further. She moved full-time to a training program in Lake Placid, NY. Living away from home for the first time, shy among peers she barely knew, coping with a demanding new coach, constantly chided about weight gain showing on her five-foot frame, Manley found herself overwhelmed. She wrote later, "I couldn't seem to break the spiral—loneliness made me reclusive, which made me even lonelier.... I wanted desperately to have friends, but did everything in my power to discourage them."

Today she remembers: "All those pressures came in—representing the country, keeping the weight down, living away from home. It just took the fun out of it for me." The teenager was so unhappy that her hair was falling out in clumps. Discouraged, depressed, and lost, she quit. "My health was not worth the sport."

She was summarily dropped from the national team. She returned to high school in Ottawa and put skating behind her—almost.

"Within six or seven months," she recalls, "I realized how much I missed it, how much I really did love skating. [Coaches] Peter and Sonya Dunfield convinced me to come back. They were tough. But they were also sympathetic."

With the help of caring coaching, psychological counselling, and the unbending support of her mother, Manley fought back. She regained her balance, and her national ranking.

After finishing second again in the Canadian Championships in 1984, she competed for Canada in her first Olympic Games, in Sarajevo.

A thrilled 18-year-old, she was torn between intense preparation and the excitement of the Games: "You think, *This may be my only Olympics*. You want to experience everything, you want to go to the other events, stay up late, and talk to the other athletes. I



Canada's Elizabeth Manley (left) celebrates her silver medal win in the figure skating event along with gold medallist Katarina Witt (centre) of East Germany and bronze medallist Debi Thomas of the U.S.A. at the 1988 Winter Olympics in Calgary.

free after everyone was gone, so Liz and her mother slept until midnight, then trudged off to the rink, where Joan would knit and change music tapes.

By the time Liz was a teenager, the family had moved to Ottawa and she was an emerging star at the Gloucester Skating Club (to which she remains connected today). Then her parents announced they were separating. Her brothers remained with her father, and Liz and Joan Manley moved into a small apartment and, despite scant resources, continued to pursue the skating dream.

Manley had talent and intense competitive fire. She wanted to win and she did—first regional, then provincial competitions. In 1979, still a junior, she became the first Canadian woman to land a triple jump combination in competition. After finishing second in the 1982 Canadian Championships, she joined Canada's national team and fin-

came 13th. Reasonable, but it was also a good learning experience going into Calgary. I knew what not to do.”

She arrived in Calgary weak with the flu and avoided all distractions as she restored her strength. Sports psychologist Dr. Peter Orlick had taught her to visualize a perfect skate program. When her moment came, she stepped onto the ice and made it happen.

After the Olympics

Later that year, Manley proved Calgary was no fluke with a silver medal at the World Championships in Budapest, despite a mysterious tape break during her program and some dubious scoring. (Manley says “most” of the political scoring at major competitions has been dealt with.)

Her second autobiography, *As I Am: My Life After the Olympics*, follows her as she turns professional and joins Ice Capades. It is a less happy tale.

Professional skating gave her—and her mother—some financial stability after years of debt and swollen credit cards, and she loved skating and performing, but star status came with a price. As Manley tells it, her schedule was exhausting (15 shows a week was normal), her employers were demanding, and she was dogged by fluctuating weight. When she wore down and her weight plummeted, rumours started that she was a party girl and difficult. She became caught in a long-term, long-distance obsessive romance that ended badly.

“Yes, the second book was a little angry,” she says now. “I wanted people to understand that it’s not all roses. I did have fun as a pro skater, but there were times...well, I’m a very normal person, I’m so normal. And just when you think you’re with a group of people who have accepted you, you find out they’re trying to better themselves by hanging with you. It wasn’t sincere. And for me it was about being with people who are sincere and who would support me. It’s very hard to find that in show business.”

Maintaining her U.S. green card, she lived

in California and then Las Vegas to be near her managers. Moving into coaching, she relocated to Florida and finally to Philadelphia, coaching alongside the noted Uschi Keszler. She remained close to her mother and to fellow Canadian skaters Brian Orser and Elvis Stojko, both tight friends. And she found herself in a romance that lasted, with former junior hockey star Brent Theobald, whom she married in 2006. (He’s now an Ottawa-based financial adviser.)

In May of 2007, Joan Manley was diagnosed with ovarian cancer, and Manley came home.

“My mom and I were best friends. We were attached at the hip; we were inseparable. My

Manley had talent and intense competitive fire. She wanted to win and she did.

whole life was with my mom. I’m not gonna lie to you: when she died, I was at the lowest of lows. I did not know if...well, I knew I was going to get through it, I just didn’t know *how* I was going to get through it. I gained 35 pounds, I was miserable, I had no confidence. I hated going to the rink. I didn’t want to coach. I wasn’t any good to anybody. I was worried about my marriage. I was worried at being so sad and out of shape and just not feeling good about me. It wasn’t a pretty picture.”

Then an opportunity came along with a company called Herbal Magic, which offers a weight loss/nutrition program. They were searching for a public face for their product.

“I thought, *Maybe this is what I need. A project. Something outside of skating.* And it was somebody who wasn’t frowning on me for being overweight. It wasn’t to publicize my ‘bigness;’ it was to help me. They knew I had just lost my mom, they knew where I was mentally. I looked into them—I wanted to make sure it’s a healthy product—I found out it was normal healthy eating,

with supplements. I said, ‘Yeah, I’ll give this a try.’

“And it’s worked for me. I’m a size 2, I feel like a million dollars, I’m in demand again. I’ve got this CTV job. I feel alive. I feel like I could conquer the world right now. And you know, every morning I wake up and I look up at the sky and I say ‘Thank you, Mom,’ because I truly have this feeling that my mom is looking out for me.”

Manley remembers the words her mother gave her when her teenage skating world caved in: “She’d say, ‘Things happen for a reason, and good things come to good people.’”

Good things came. In addition to representing Herbal Magic, Manley is national spokesperson for Ovarian Cancer Canada. She’s also active with the Alzheimer’s Society of Ottawa, in support of her father who lives with the illness. Her friends at the Gloucester Skating Club in Orleans, east of Ottawa, have named a skating facility after her. She continues to

speak to audiences about dealing with depression. And she bubbles with excitement about the upcoming Olympics. “The Olympics are alive in Calgary to this day,” she grins. “It brought the country together, and I think that’s what the Vancouver atmosphere’s going to be. It’s going to be a memory forever.”

As for Manley herself: “I feel like the old Liz again.”

You can sense that on this morning as she jokes with the arena staff, pulls on a pair of well-worn figure skates, and takes to the ice. The few people working in the arena turn and watch. It’s something special to watch the Olympic champion on the ice again, skating with speed, precision, and grace, all of it seemingly effortless.

Her warm-up ends with a few brisk moves and she skates over to the boards, laughing. “Hey, it’s been a while,” she beams.

It has been a while. It’s good to see Liz Manley smile again. ■

Solution to **Puzzle #63**

4	3	7	5	2	6	8	1	9
1	9	8	7	3	4	2	6	5
6	5	2	9	8	1	4	7	3
5	7	9	8	6	2	3	4	1
8	6	3	4	1	7	5	9	2
2	4	1	3	9	5	7	8	6
3	8	4	6	5	9	1	2	7
7	2	6	1	4	3	9	5	8
9	1	5	2	7	8	6	3	4

Solution to **Puzzle #64**

7	3	4	2	1	6	9	5	8
2	8	5	4	3	9	1	7	6
9	1	6	7	5	8	3	2	4
5	4	3	8	7	1	6	9	2
6	7	8	9	2	5	4	3	1
1	2	9	6	4	3	5	8	7
4	6	2	5	9	7	8	1	3
8	5	1	3	6	2	7	4	9
3	9	7	1	8	4	2	6	5

Above are the **solutions to this month’s Sudoku puzzles**, page 61.