

I love to skate. I love going fast. I love the feeling of the wind whistling in my ears as I whip around my block on my in-line skates or the ice rink on my freshly sharpened skates. When I skate, it feels like I'm flying. And I love that feeling. It's the feeling of joy, spirit, and freedom. That's why I want to do speed skating. I began skating when I was three or four years old. At that time I really didn't like skating lessons very much, I guess because it was a lot of "follow the leader", which I found boring. Mom chose not to put me back into skating lessons because I hadn't enjoyed it. I've always liked doing things independently so it was no surprise to my Mom that I learned to skate on my own. Every time I skate I have more and more fun, and get better, and better, and better. I remember when I was a very little girl, and I had these tiny figure skates that said *Angel* on the side. I loved them so much and I was devastated when they got too small. I've always been able to skate well, and when people ask me "how do you do that? You're so good!" I don't know what to say. Skating comes naturally, especially in-line skating, but in-line and ice skating aren't that different, you just have to get a feel for the ice.

I believe maintaining a healthy and active lifestyle is very important, and sport is a big part of this. I haven't had a lot of opportunity to ice skate but I in-line skate all summer and I am involved in other sports. I have become a good team player and enjoy soccer, basketball and volleyball. I plan to try out for the track team this spring at school. I also love dance and drama. It's hard to fit everything into my schedule so I have to make a decision each year, on which one I want to participate in more. It's always a difficult decision.

I've never seen anything so inspiring as the athletes that speed skate. It's so amazing to watch the athletes zoom around the track, never stopping, never slowing down, even though their legs are burning, feet hurting, bodies tiring, they just keep on going until they cross the finish line and the race is over. (In fact, I used to "skate" around my living room in my slippers pretending to be an Olympic athlete). Just watching the athletes receive their medals, makes me realize that this is what I want to do when I grow up. But to get into the Olympics you have to train, train, and train. I would love to win this contest because it would be amazing to meet Christine Nesbitt, and to skate with her would be a once in a lifetime experience and the most exciting and inspiring day anyone could ask for. Even if I don't win, I know I will be heading up to Canada Olympic Park lots this season.

- Michelle S.