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Natalie Dayvault

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Natalie Dayvault

Finalist

Creative Non-fiction Category

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### Why do I love Figure Skating? Good Question.

I grew up a figure skater. And now that I say that, I realize that I am *still* growing up a figure skater. And it's funny, because when I tell people that I'm a skater, they usually react with a super awe-filled look and say something like, "WOW! That's so crazy. I couldn't even stand up, let alone *spin around* or anything." And they're right! It is COMPLETELY crazy.

Sometimes when I'm skating, I stop for a second and really consider what it is I'm doing.

Jumping into the air, spinning around twice, and then landing back down (HARD, I'll have you know) on one foot. And I think, "This *is* pretty cool, isn't it?"

I figure skate because I love it. It seems like you'd *have to* love it, considering how much time it takes up. I mean, who would voluntarily spend 15+ hours per week doing something they hated? I did. I've hated skating too. I've hated how tiring it is, I've hated how judgmental everyone is, and I've hated how bad failure feels. I said I figure skate because I love it, but after all the bad, how can I still love it *really*?

Skating *sucks* about 30-40% of the time. It sucks! It's hard, it's painful, it makes you tired and hungry ALL THE TIME, it takes a toll on your emotions, and it supplies you with COUNTLESS opportunities to feel inadequate. So what *exactly* do I see in this yin yang of a sport? If I'm looking for the obvious positives, I guess I talk about how much skating has taught me about character. I could talk about my growing sense of perspective, or improved knowledge of hard work. I could talk about how *freaking beautiful* figure skating is, and how good it makes

you feel to watch a video of yourself being pretty. I could talk about the friends you make at 5:00 in the morning, and keep because you both *get it*. But none of that is what really makes me love it so much.

Midway through 2016, I hit my first “rough patch.” I was stuck on a jump called a double axel, and no matter how many I practiced, I always landed a half rotation short. I was working my butt off in my off ice training classes. My muscle mass was increasing, and so was my jump height and speed. So why couldn’t I do it?! I watched the 12 year old prodigies around me land them left and right after just a year of practice, and I felt so *old*. I felt behind, I felt heavy, I felt like the wash up. I always refer to that year as my “year that didn’t count.” I was so wrapped up in what I *wasn’t* doing right that my brain had no space to look at how much I had accomplished. I thought about quitting that year. I thought about how nice it would be to live a regular life instead of a skater’s life, and how much more confidence I would have if I didn’t skate. Thank GOD I didn’t listen to myself.

After about a year, I started to pull myself out of that rut, slowly but surely. Double axels were still difficult for me, but they weren’t looming over me anymore. They weren’t perfect, but they were doable. I felt like I had learned more about myself in that year, and I was generally happy with the way I had handled things. I didn’t quit, and I didn’t blame anyone other than myself. Despite the fact that I was beginning to feel better, I was still easily discouraged and generally cynical about practice. I was trying to think positively, but it was hard!

Later that summer, I started having a lot of issues with my left foot. I felt sharp, stabbing pains in it on every landing, and on the takeoffs to half of my jumps. I went to the doctor, and ended up having to take a month off to heal inflamed ligaments in the top of my foot. Now remember, I had *just* gotten a hold of my double axels. Like, JUST. I didn’t want to take time

off! I was going to lose it again! While this was happening, I felt so unlucky. I knew I should've been glad my foot wasn't broken, and that a month really wasn't *that* long, but it still seemed like a pretty sucky thing to have happened. Looking back though, I think it was the best possible thing that could have happened.

During that month off, I had a chance to live the life of a non-skater. And you know what? After fantasizing about waking up late, spending time outside, being with friends, and binge watching TV shows like *normal* people do, I realized something weird. I HATED it! I hated not having something to work on. I *missed* it. I missed running programs every day, I missed spinning until my head hurt, I missed working on timing footwork to music, and I even missed double axels. I missed all the things that had made me feel so angry for so long. Why? I couldn't explain it if I tried. But I missed it.

So when I came back, I was ready. I was motivated and confident and excited to skate again. And that feeling brought me back to the reason I started skating. When you LAND that jump, when you are FINALLY able to reach your foot in that spin that makes you look like a pretzel, when you strike your ending pose RIGHT on the music, it is completely and totally worth *every second* of the bad.

This past year, at the most stressful competition of the entire season, I skated a close-to-clean long program and placed 5th out of 28 girls. That 5th place earned me a slot to the final rounds, where I ended up 25th out of over *one hundred and fifty other girls*. If that doesn't shake the last remaining bits of self doubt out of you, I don't know what will.