

Eight Wheels

by Becky McGregor

Randy's first birthday party was over; his presents were scattered across the living room. He sat playing with his favorite, a truck he'd turned upside down, spinning its wheels. He was mesmerized by them. He could make the wheels spin fast, stop them, and make them spin again. There'd be lots of wheels in his life. They'd be on dump trucks and fire engines from Toys – R – Us, on the push car his dad gave him. They'd be on a tricycle that yielded to a bicycle, skateboard, cars, trains, and planes. All those wheels spinning, speeding up time, stretching the space between us, taking him away from me.

The ultimate taker would be love, of course. He'd meet a girl, fall in love, leaving us for his life with her. But that was years away. What I didn't expect was to lose him at age eight to eight wheels. On Christmas day in 1993, Santa gave all of our three kids rollerblades. They couldn't wait to get to the park, put them on and race around with their friends. We headed to the park after breakfast. It was only minutes before all three pairs of feet were incased in rollerblades. I helped my ten-year-old daughter stand, and she took off gliding, the dancer in her showing. My six year old Jeremy stood up on his own. He clomped around a minute or two, trying to walk in the rollerblades, but he got the hang of it and let the wheels take over. The joy in their faces made me smile.

Randy was our athlete — the Little League baseball catcher with the terrific throwing arm and the swim team competitor no one could beat — but he wasn't doing so well on the skates. The more he tried, the less he moved. He wanted to quit. I talked him into letting me push him up a slight slope, hoping

the roll back down would help him figure out how to use rollerblades. I pushed him to the top, expecting him to turn around, but he didn't. He rolled backwards. That was all he needed. He pumped his legs and sailed down the incline, and kept going. A smile spread across his face.

It didn't seem to matter he was skating backward; he was skating. He caught up with his siblings - Amanda and Jeremy skating forward, Randy backward. They raced. Randy won. He won the next race and the next one. I laughed with him, remembering the joy I experienced on four metal wheels clamped to my shoes.

One of the other fathers at the park on Christmas morning soon approached my husband and me.

"Hey, is that your kid skating backwards?" he asked.

"Yes, that's our Randy. He can't seem to skate forward, but he can backward."

The man extended his hand. "My name's John. I coach an ice hockey team. Has Randy ever ice skated?"

"No," I said.

"Do you know what ice hockey is?" John asked.

"Sure," my husband said. "My wife and I are big ice hockey fans."

"My team needs a defenseman who can skate backward. Do you think your son would be interested? Would you be willing to bring him to a practice? See if he can ice skate backward as well as he can rollerblade backward."

"We could ask him," my husband said.

"Great. He can teach my boys to skate backward, we'll teach him to skate forward. I won't charge you anything to be on the team. Our next practice is Thursday, 7 p.m. Let's give it a try."

"Okay, but no promises."

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Thursday night Randy laced himself into a pair of ice skates and took off flying backward. I watched his face and saw him fall in love. He was eight years old and had found his passion. That passion has consumed him since. It took him away from us in Florida his freshman year in high school to a prep-school in Connecticut. It took him after that to a college in Chicago.

Randy wishes he could've played professional hockey. The skills were there, but he didn't have the size and bulk to compete. Luckily Randy also wanted to go into medicine, the human body fascinated him. He follows hockey, and he ice skates, both forward and backward, when he can. When he can't, he straps on rollerblades and rides the wheels. A smile still consumes his face.

I know how fast and how far skating took Randy away from us. But he and I still share a child-like thrill of skating, wheels spinning with wind blowing through our hair. I believe one day Randy will fall in love with a girl, and they will have a child. At his child's first birthday, I'll show up carrying eight wheels, attached to a pair of children's rollerblades.



My name is Becky McGregor. I am a wife, mother of four, and grandmother of one. I was a Computer Engineer who wrote technical manuals and briefs. I retired and decided to write fiction, which resulted in a romance novel. Then my husband and I became the keeper of our family history and genealogy. I am now writing family stories and working on my memoir.