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EXCLUSIVE
MAGAZINE 2023

Inspiration

WOMEN OF
INSPIRATION

The background of the image is a close-up, diagonal view of a light-colored wood grain, likely oak or maple, showing natural texture and color variations from pale yellow to light brown.

OLYMPIC PARA DRESSAGE HOPEFULS

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Para-Dressage

Para-dressage is a type of equestrian competition that is designed for riders with disabilities. It is a discipline of dressage, which is a type of horseback riding that focuses on precision, control, and grace. In para-dressage, riders with disabilities compete against each other in a series of tests that are designed to showcase their riding skills and their ability to control and communicate with their horses.

Para-dressage competitions are organized by class, with riders being grouped according to their type of disability. This allows for more fair and equitable competition, as riders with similar disabilities are able to compete against each other on a level playing field. There are a number of different classes in para-dressage, including classes for riders with visual impairments, physical impairments, and cognitive impairments.

In a para-dressage competition, riders are judged on their performance in a series of tests. These tests are designed to showcase a rider's ability to control and communicate with the horse, as well as a rider's overall riding skills. Riders are scored on a scale of 0 to 10, with 10 being the highest possible score. The rider with the highest overall score is declared the winner of the competition. Para-dressage is an exciting and rewarding discipline and provides riders with disabilities the opportunity to compete at the highest levels of equestrian competition. It is a testament to the incredible bond between horses and humans and showcases the remarkable achievements that are possible when these two species work together.



Olympic Para-Dressage Hopefuls





Para Dressage Rider Genevieve Rohner.
Photography by Deborah Hickey. Art by
Genevieve Rohner.

Genevieve Rohner

Youngest U.S. and World Para-Dressage Equestrian



At just 14 years old, Genevieve Rohner is the youngest classified para-equestrian in the world. A triplet, Genevieve was born 11 weeks premature with several disabilities including cerebral palsy, sensory processing disorder, amblyopia, and misaligned right leg bones and so was in a lot of therapy. When she was four years old, Genevieve tried hippotherapy and as her mom Lexi describes it, "It was like the heavens opened and she just knew immediately what she wanted to do for the rest of her entire life." Genevieve began competing the very next year and promptly voiced her life's dream—to go to the Olympics.

Over the last decade, Genevieve has progressed from hippotherapy to therapeutic riding to para-dressage. A Grade IV para-equestrian, she started showing at rated dressage shows in 2018 and FEI grade level tests in 2019, and earned blue ribbons at the 2020 Para Dressage Championships. She has been the youngest classified para-rider in the US for six years, and since 2022, the youngest in the world. In January 2023, the qualification period for the 2024 Olympics begins, so Genevieve will

participate in several US and European competitions in hopes of becoming part of the 2024 US Paralympic team, making her the world's youngest Paralympic Equestrian competitor.

Genevieve was nine years old when she zeroed in on dressage, loving it the most because it's so peaceful. "If I go a day or more without riding, I get antsy. I always feel better after I see my horse and ride him. I can be achy or tired or stressed or not feeling well, but once I am on Kaspar, it all goes away. I can think more clearly and figure out how to manage. Bad days will always happen, but if I know I can ride, I can handle it."

Genevieve trains in Utah with her coach Annie Sweet and is mentored by Grade IV Para-dressage Olympian Kate Shoemaker. Her horse Kaspar is a big, beautiful 11 year old Oldenburg. "He likes to lick me a lot and he's silly. I try to have treats for him to eat so he'll lick me less." Genevieve solely rides Kaspar and rides him almost every day, believing in consistent training, repetition, and routine. And she tries to be as gentle as possible with him, talking to and



Lexi Rohner

Ice Skater, Writer, Public Speaker

Lexi Rohner is a legend in the adult skating world, but most of us don't even know half of the story. She has been on ice for 42 years; she skated for the first time at Rockefeller Center when she was 10. "I knew then that this was what I wanted to do in my life. I didn't know what that would mean, but I trusted my heart and followed it. I begged my parents for skates and lessons and negotiated with them that once I passed all the group classes available at my rink, they would let me take private lessons. I did it in seven months and began competing and testing. I rode my bike to the rink on weekends, arranged my early morning carpools, and worked at the rink in high school to cover my ice time and clothing discounts. Skating has connected me with the most wonderful friends and travel and is the reason I met my husband. I know that anywhere I take my skates, I will find kindred spirits."

Lexi's determination helped her overcome a huge obstacle; all her life she has had a leg length imbalance and hip dysplasia. "When I was young, not many people went to orthopedic doctors, especially a later-starting figure skater. I

muscled around it as a child and fought it as an adult. I went back to competing for a few years after I had a C-section with my triplets at age 40, and at the seventh competition, my hip gave out, requiring surgery. In the process, the doctors discovered arthritis and other anomalies in my spine. As much as I would love to jump again, I decided I could let go, as I had competed for 17 years total and coached for almost 25. In order to stay on the ice, I have begun ice dance, with a goal of passing 12 standard dances in 12 months. I have two more to go!"

As if her on-ice activities weren't inspiring enough, Lexi has unselfishly served on the USFS Adult Skating Committee (ASC) for 12 years. She says, "Leadership is always a learning experience. When I was asked to consider chairing the ASC, I was hesitant, but ultimately found that diving in headfirst to this incredible community was exactly the right thing for me. I had spent six years as ASC Vice Chair, and my triplets had just been born 11 weeks premature. They were very sick for months (two of them have Cerebral Palsy) and taking on the Chair position at that time allowed me to find much

Lexi Rohner

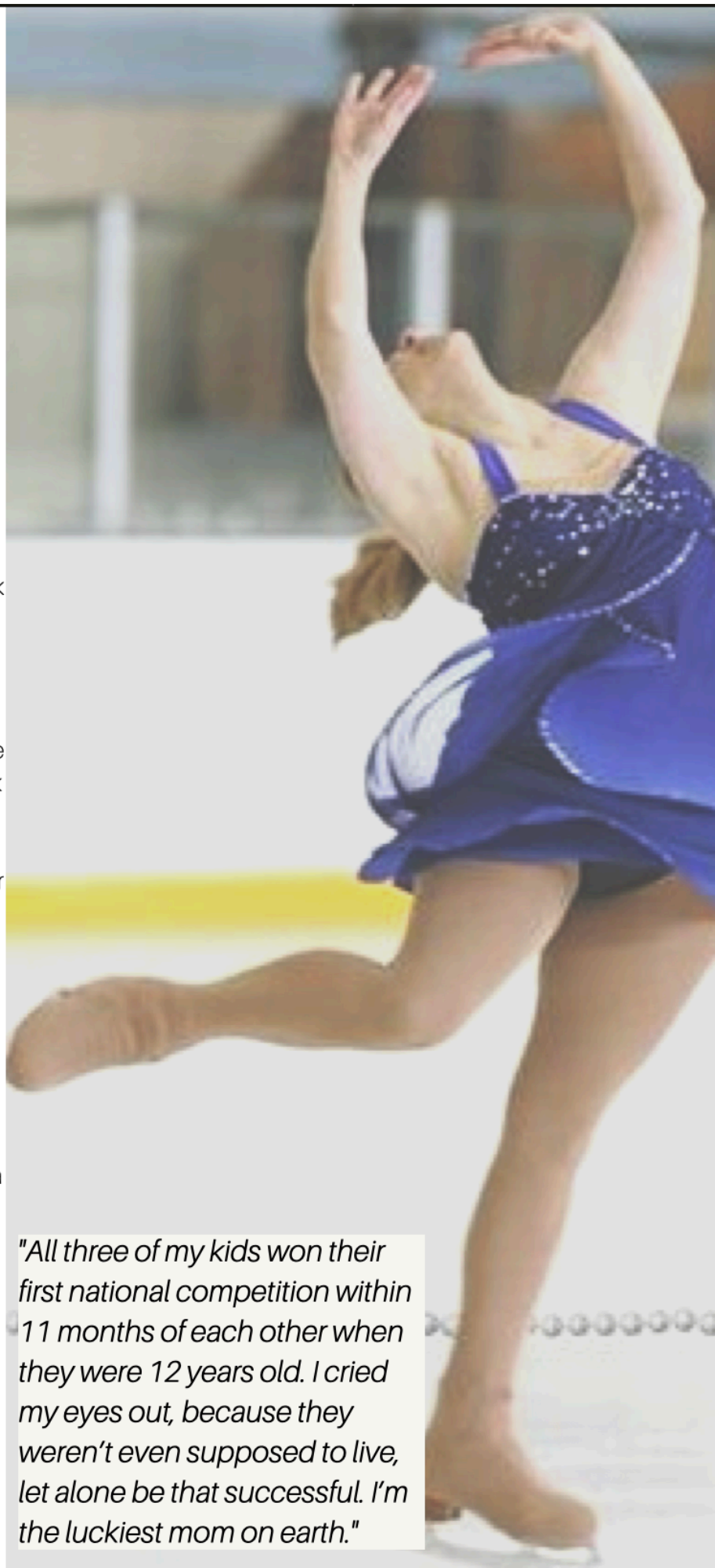
Ice Skater, Writer, Public Speaker

needed balance. I learned how much I could handle at once and more about my own strengths and weaknesses as a leader. In my 12 years on the ASC, I am most proud of creating opportunities like the "Adult Corner" column in SKATING Magazine, our initial foray into social media, and IJS at Adult Sectionals as a base for future ASC leaders to develop more prospects for the adult skating community. I have had both internal and external doors opened from my skating involvement.

Those who know me in skating might never believe I am naturally introverted. I never wanted to be in front of people as a child, and I once took a "Fail" in a college speech class because I could not get out of my seat. As an individual sport, skating has necessitated looking inward, which was easier for me. When I returned to skating as an adult and later became involved in committee leadership, I was required to speak up and speak in public. I have continued to be involved in leadership as the Membership VC for 10 years and other committee work, and as an announcer for 20+ years because they are ways in which I can continue contributing to the sport. Every opportunity pushes me to step outside of my comfort zone." There is an outward component as well. Lexi adds, "My husband and I were initially surprised that two of our children have chosen to focus on competitive sports (skating and para-dressage), until we recognized they had seen us both be active and compete (he is a 4th degree black belt in Karate). I realized the importance of not just exercising, but modeling activity, health, and goal setting for our kids."

Throughout all of these accomplishments, Lexi wields her modesty and delightful sense of humor. When asked to define who she is as a skater, she replies, "I count him braver who overcomes his desires than him who conquers his enemies, for the hardest victory is over self. - Aristotle."

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"All three of my kids won their first national competition within 11 months of each other when they were 12 years old. I cried my eyes out, because they weren't even supposed to live, let alone be that successful. I'm the luckiest mom on earth."