

Jacqueline (Jackie) Brown

Feb. 12, 1986 - Feb. 1, 2021

Jacqueline Brown, later given the moniker "Downtown Jackie Brown," took to skis at 18 months and never looked back. Skiing was the family sport.

Born in Chatham, Ontario, her family (father Peter and mother Donna)—she has two brothers, Jonathan and Jeffrey—relocated to Ontario from Quebec and then to Cambridge.

"She went to Chicopee Ski Club," said Donna. The same ski hill where Canadian Olympic downhiller and fellow Cambridge Sports Hall of Famer Luke Sauder got his start.

At the same time she was introduced to figure skating at the Preston Figure Skating Club, where Becky Gough was a coach. Becky is also being inducted in the same class as Jackie. Jackie's main coach was Linda Purdy, the former Linda Ward, who was an early inductee into the Cambridge Sports Hall of Fame. Linda coached Jacqueline until she was 14.

"She took to both sports quite well. One complemented the other."

She met lifelong friend Mollie Gray during skating lessons at Galt Arena when they were three. Later they would become classmates at St. Andrew's and Southwood. "Jackie was a very competitive skater as well," said Mollie.

She was eager, but she had to wait until she grew before she could take ski lessons as she was too short to take the ski lift up the hill.

When that time arrived she was far beyond what Chicopee could offer in terms of a challenge, so they got a place in Holiday Valley, at Ellicottville, N.Y. She was seven. That was when the weekend commute—about two hours each way—to Ellicottville began, and it would continue for nearly a quarter century. She grew a love for freestyle skiing, and displayed obvious talent.

"From that point on she was coached by the freestyle team coach at Holiday Valley." At a championship in New Hampshire, they were told she had an "X" beside her name and that she couldn't go any further because she was a Canadian competing on the American circuit.

So they got her started with Freestyle Ontario at 14, before moving up to Freestyle Canada's development team. She loved freestyle—the aerial training, the moguls and inverted jumps (either backwards or forwards)—which included speed.

Canada has one of the best freestyle teams in the world, and Jackie loved the competition in her favoured sport. She won four medals, including gold, at the Canadian National Junior Freestyle event at Apex Mountain in B.C. in 2002. Many other successes followed, including a fourth overall in moguls at a World Cup event at Deer Valley in Utah in 2009.

Around the time she was entering high school (Southwood) she was making trips with the Canadian team all over the world for training and competitions. Yet her grades remained consistently high (always A's) throughout the decade she competed on the Ontario Moguls team and the Canadian National Freestyle team. At 16 she was training at Lake Placid on her own. She always had drive and discipline.

Summers she would train with the Canadian freestyle team at Whistler, Zermatt, Switzerland, Chile. She competed across Canada, and in Japan, Russia, Sweden, Finland, Norway, Switzerland, and Argentina among other places.

She played high school field hockey in her "off season."

As Mollie notes, Jacqueline would bring back medals from all over the world but her schoolmates at Southwood would have to pry things out of her. She was not one to brag. "She was very humble," said Mollie.

"She would roll her eyes if we ever complimented her," said Donna. "She would feel bad for her friends if she won and they didn't win."

She had three World Cup top 10 finishes and an arm's length of other medals. She was a member of Canada's national team for six years.

She believed her height—she was 4'11"—gave her an advantage on the hills, making it easier for backflips. "I'm closer to the snow," she said.

As the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics approached, there were six skiers on the national women's team who were vying for one of three spots on the Olympic squad. Jackie was one of them. Her face appeared on a breakfast cereal box. That's when she suffered her first major injury.

Competing in Finland, they were going from one plane to another. There, in the unlikeliest of places, and carrying both sets of skis, she slipped on black ice and severely sprained her ankle. Favouring the injured ankle, she sprained the other.

Shortly after she was to compete in a critical pre-Olympic competition at Calgary. Both of her feet were anesthetized so she could compete. The stakes were high. But she was unable to feel her feet and fell during competition. After years of practice, preparation, sacrifice, victory and defeat, her dream had ended. She retired shortly afterward.

"You learn more from losing than you do from winning," she had said half a dozen years earlier when she was the only woman from Ontario on the World Cup Mogul Developmental Team. Even then she was able to put things into perspective. "It's a goal of mine (the



Olympics) but it might not happen." She came oh, so close.

After her retirement in 2012, she and Crystal Lee started coaching Freestyle Ontario together in 2012 at Beaver Valley in Caledon, cementing a close friendship and sisterhood. Jacqueline coached moguls and Crystal, freestyle.

She also graduated from the Institute of Holistic Nutrition and received her bachelor's degree at the University of Guelph.

While coaching and going to school, she also worked part-time at Fiddleheads Health Store, where she met the love of her life, Scott Brenton.

After a cancer diagnosis in February 2019, she continued to live gracefully, "the most incredible spouse and life partner."

Messages of support came in from around the globe. Cancer finally claimed her on February 1, 2021, but it never claimed her spirit.

In the early winter of 2024 Scott ventured to Mexico to stay with Jackie's parents on Jackie's birthday.

Then something extraordinary happened.

At 4:30 that morning Scott couldn't sleep, so he got up and went down to the hotel gym, a gym that would normally be locked at that time. He saw a hummingbird flying around in the gym.

Jacqueline favoured hummingbirds, and since her death, Scott has been reminded of Jacqueline many times when hummingbirds crossed his path, whether in unlikely places like the Yukon, or elsewhere, such as at the gym in Mexico. After it flew around in circles, he opened the door to release it, and it flew out.

"There have been quite a few hummingbird stories," said Donna.

In early 2024 the Freestyle Canada Woman in Coaching Bursary was named in loving memory of Jackie Brown by Freestyle Skiing Canada. She made a lasting impact as a skier and coach, but more importantly, as that rare individual who inspires others.

Inducted 2024