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Daryl Bell: Ex-roller derby queen Judy Arnold preaches to save souls

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Judy Arnold was once regarded as a roller derby queen.



Judy Arnold during her days with the Philadelphia Warriors. — Submitted photos

Once upon a time, “Pretty” Judy Arnold was the unquestioned queen of roller derby. She had the looks. She had the wealth. She had the fame. She was on top.

But something didn't feel right. Arnold should've been enjoying life and she wasn't. She was unhappy and lonely.

"I didn't enjoy where I was with my life," said Arnold, who was captain and one of the stars of the Philadelphia Warriors roller derby team. "I had it all but I would drive home feeling extremely sad and lonely. The fame, the travel, appearing before more than 16,000 people, it didn't feel right to me."

Arnold served as a stunt double for Raquel Welch in the 1972 movie "Kansas City Bomber." The experience changed her.

"I saw Raquel Welch, this beautiful, famous, talented movie star, someone who had it all, and yet she wasn't happy," said Arnold. "I couldn't get over that. I saw in Raquel this very successful woman who just wasn't fulfilled."

A fellow skater and friend, Sally Vega, told Arnold that she needed God. In 1975, Arnold found herself praying, took off the skates, and gave her life to the Lord.

"It was something that I needed to do," she said. "And I haven't looked back."

Arnold, who lives in California, will be speaking Sunday at Mt. Zion Church, 4 Concord Drive in Williamstown, N.J. Service begins at 11 a.m. She said she will skate to the pulpit.

"I love giving my testimony," said Arnold, who is now an evangelist. "You never know who you may reach. It can make a difference in their life."

Arnold said she recalls getting two letters from people who contemplated suicide but didn't because of her.

"They wanted to see me skate," she said. "They didn't want to do it because it would cause them to miss seeing me. I'm glad that I made a difference in their lives, that they didn't commit suicide."

It's not unusual for Arnold, now 74, to get peppered with questions about her former teammates. She's used to it and definitely doesn't mind answering the questions.

Very briefly, here is a rundown on a few stars. Little Richard Brown is now living in Texas. Jim "The King" Trotter, who once had a store on 52nd Street near Market, now resides in Florida. Also residing in the Sunshine State is Buddy Atkinson and his wife, Dru Scott.

“Everyone is doing pretty well,” said Arnold. “We usually have a reunion in [Las] Vegas.”

Arnold said Ronnie “Psycho” Raines, who was a foil and one of the Warriors’ best antagonists, is residing in Washington state. Another antagonist who later became a teammate of Arnold, Judy Sowenski, has died.

“Looking back, there were some very good times,” said Arnold. “I remember the crowds we used to get at The Arena. They were really into it. I still can recall the horns that people would blow. I think skating before those big crowds prepared me for where I am now. I’m happy.”

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(1) comments



A Fan Sep 9, 2018 7:09am

Growing up as a kid I loved and looked up to Judy Arnold - the star and Captain of the then Philadelphia Warriors - she was a source of hope and inspiration to a young sad girl and having her to look forward to watching on the TV every week helped me through a difficult time in my life. Many years later I remembered Judy Arnold the skater and felt compelled to let her know how much she meant to a young girl so I "googled" her and to my surprise I found her! After a few emails and calls Judy shared her story with me - how she found God and the greatest love she has ever known and I wanted to know that kind of love too! Judy eventually led me straight to God over the phone all the way from California (I'm in NJ) and knowing Jesus has changed my life forever I thank God for how he used Judy in my life all those years ago for just such a time as this. God bless Judy!