

Friends — Business & Arts

One of the founders of Ice Theatre of New York, Cecily Morrow, is now at work ensuring the legacy of Gustave Lussi — perhaps this century's most influential figure in skating.

Morrow studied with Gus Lussi for a number of years in the early 1970's before turning to coaching herself. Several of Morrow's students accompanied her to Lake Placid, New York for lessons with Lussi during summer skating school (a phenomenon Lussi introduced in the 1920's).

Morrow and Lussi were collaborators when Lussi, then age 87, suggested to Morrow that she write a book detailing his teaching methods, before he retired, after sixty-five years of challenging the imaginations of young athletes.

Lussi originally conceived of a technical manual, but as Morrow transcribed a vast library of video and audiotaped lessons and interviews, it was clear that the book be more than a "how-to" manual; it had to capture the essence of a lesson itself, as much of Gustave Lussi's ability to lift a skater through a jump is embodied in the manner in which he imparts information to a skater. Morrow also felt that a video accompaniment to the book would help future generations of skaters see exactly how Gustave Lussi wanted a jump or spin performed.

A year into writing the text, Morrow had already received offers from two small publishers and had interested a television producer in her endeavors. Joanne Taylor, from PBS affiliate WCFE-TV in Plattsburgh, New York, was sufficiently enthused with the importance of Lussi's legacy to do a documentary, but was unable to start taping at that time.

As work progressed, Morrow decided that she needed to hone her writing skills in order to properly write the book. She applied for and received a scholarship to Smith College as an Ada Comstock Scholar, a program for non-traditional-age women whose college careers had been interrupted.

Upon entering Smith in the fall of 1986, Morrow retired from teaching and concentrated on writing. At the end of three years, she became one of only six student writing assistants at Smith, — an enormous compliment to a young woman who, because of her skating, had only managed time for four months of high school.

Morrow continued efforts on her book with Lussi during vacations from Smith, time squeezed in between summer studies at Oxford University, and a winter break spent volunteering at a hospice for AIDS patients in Toronto. Despite the time constraints, Morrow concentrated on her goal, and received a grant to further her writing with Lussi. Yet she never lost her vision of a video accompaniment to the text. During winter break in her sophomore year, she again contacted Taylor at WCFE. A year and a half later, Morrow and Taylor had produced *Gustave Lussi: The Man Who Changed Skating*, which aired nationwide in April 1990.

The half-hour program profiled Gustave Lussi's life and his role in the history of figure skating. Several of his most influential students, such as Dick Button and Dorothy Hamill, were interviewed for the documentary, which had evolved into a tribute to Lussi, rather than a teaching document. This acclaimed profile was further selected by PBS for international distribution and requested by the U.S. Information Agency for viewing in their embassies worldwide.

Morrow never abandoned her dream of documenting Lussi's technique. Ten chapters with preliminary illustrations were

complete, and the video project had been endorsed by the PSGA and USFSA. Then, as the PBS profile was about to air nationally, Morrow heard from an excited, ninety-one-year-old Gus Lussi that Paul Wylie, a U.S. Olympic team member and student of two former Lussi students, Evy and Mary Scotvold, would be taking lessons with him in Lake Placid. In the spirit of preserving the Lussi technique, Wylie and the Scotvolds agreed to be taped.

As producer on the video, Morrow enlisted the help of Doug Wilson at ABC Sports, who had offered his assistance as director four years earlier. Dick Button enthusiastically volunteered his support, and continues to help raise funds (which are still being accepted through Ice Theatre) to cover production costs. With the help of many individuals, the Adirondack Media Press Services, the Olympic Regional Development Authority, and Ice Theatre, Morrow was able to complete the technical footage last June in Lake Placid, and hopes that the video will be ready for release in mid-1991.

Morrow graduated from Smith College last May, and plans to continue her producing career in New York, spending the next year working part-time for Ice Theatre while she finishes the book and video.

Cecily Morrow