

Let me share this with you. This Hockey Journey began when Dayna Ruzicka's Mom who was 9 at the time. At an arena in Holden AB, amidst the excitement and cheering at her brothers' hockey game, Jenine turned to me and asked "Can I play hockey?"

My response was "I can't see why not". And so it began.

There were many challenges, however I found great resources in Mel Davidson who was from Byemore, Alberta at the time, playing ladies hockey and coaching girls hockey, Mel, who later became head coach to the Canadian Women's team, who won Gold in the 2006 Winter Olympics and 2010 Winter Olympics Canadian. She was a great mentor.

Also ... Marilyn Wickenheiser, who is mom to Haley Wickenheiser, whom at the time was our Provincial Female Hockey Alberta President, and became a constant contact for me.

Lorretta Normandeau was also a huge part of the evolution of female hockey in Alberta with several decades of commitment to developing the female program and players, she was another willing and respected resource for assisting in the developing of our East Central Alberta Female Hockey program.

These women were extraordinary leaders, and their guidance in the Grass Roots era of the development of a female program were pillars of knowledge and their support was unwavering.

This was before the internet, and conference calling, so there was a lot of time spent on the road to Alberta Minor Hockey Association meetings. During that time this association became Hockey Alberta, and Female Hockey became a part of the Alberta Winter Games.

In the late 90's I had organized a provincial peewee female tournament in Sedgewick. We presented the gold medals, and I had proceeded to express appreciation and recognition to Players, Parents and Sponsors for supporting that tournament.

I remember saying these words with conviction,

"FEMALE HOCKEY IS HERE TO STAY, WE ARE NOT GOING AWAY."

Perhaps that was a BOLD statement then, however those that followed me continued to promote and develop female players.

It fills my heart to see those whom I have coached, continue to be involved in the female, minor hockey.....and that includes both of my daughters Jenine and Jillian, who continue to play Ladies Hockey and who are involved in recruiting girls and building strong female programs and making a difference in their own communities.

I am so very proud of them, and what they contribute. I am thrilled that 3 of my 4 grand daughters are suited up every week, to play this game. Their brothers like to critique the girl's games, however they support them wholly. Such a joy to watch and cheer for all of them. Today I only walk into the arena and enjoy. The days of finding refs, filling out game sheets, carrying jerseys, water bottles and pucks, and selling 50/50 have gone by.

To all the parents and administrators of female hockey in this province, we are here to develop and nurture our girls to be the best hockey players they can be. Some will move on to become elite athletes

in the sport, Alberta Winter Games participants, College Teams and possibly a shot at an Olympic dream. Today that is all our sport has to offer.

Currently there is a huge movement coming, to have a National League for Females. To be eligible for funding and status for developing elite players in Canada. The USA has had a bit more of an advantage for many years in this area. The Olympics have been great exposure for female hockey, but that means a showcase only every four years. The 3 on 3 game, Canada and the US women played during the NHL skills competition in St. Louis just a few weeks ago, will be instrumental in promoting females in this game. Perhaps in the near future, there will be our own "Stanley Cup" so to speak.

In the curling world recently, we have witnessed the women attain a level of pay, equal to their male counterparts. This speaks to a new level of equality for females in sport.

Support the girls and women in your community to keep moving forward. There is so much great talent locally and in the East Central Alberta Female Hockey League.

They too are here to make a difference in your community.