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## My Tucson: Outing at rink gives mom a lesson in roll play

**JULIA GOUSSEVA**  
 Tucson Citizen

Most of my American friends assume I can play chess and ice-skate. After all, haven't Russian figure skaters won lots of medals? Wasn't Garry Kasparov the world's youngest chess champion?

Yes, they have. Yes, he was. Me - that's another matter.

Growing up in Russia, I always loved watching ice-skating competitions on TV, but my own attempts to ice-skate inevitably resulted in me sliding on the ice on the body part to which no skates could be attached.

The only two-loop maneuver I could perform involved tying my scarf.

By fourth grade, I gave up on trying to learn to ice-skate.

I moved to Tucson in 1993 as an adult, and I felt protected - by my age. Arizona's heat and the apparent lack of ice - from the humiliation of skating.

When my son Alex reached kindergarten age, I found that one of the main social activities in Tucson elementary schools is roller-skating.

What's a mother to do? I registered us both for group roller-skating lessons.

We were both a bit nervous when we arrived to Skate Country East for our first lesson.

Gary Watkins was checking in aspiring roller-skaters.

He politely nodded to me, then addressed Alex. "Good morning. What is your name, young man?"

"I am Alex. My mom is Julia. She needs a name tag, too. She is in my class." Gary chuckled; I blushed.

Alex and I walked down an aisle lined with psychedelic purple plush carpet toward a matching bench. We put our skates on.

"Beginner class, line up, please," coach Diane Watkins, Gary's wife, said through the microphone.

The class included a dozen kids ages 3 through 6 and me. I felt a bit . . . tall.

"I am not doing this. This is a bad idea," Alex said. "I hate roller-skating. I will fall down, my head will crack open, and I will cry a lot."

"Come on, it's easy. You can do it," I said, wondering if my head would crack open.

Alex grabbed my hand. "Don't let go, mom."

Not convinced that attaching wheels to human feet was a good way to spend a Saturday morning, I limped onto the skating floor.

Holding on to the wall with my right hand and to Alex with my left, I tried to balance Alex's 40-some pounds and my own significantly more without letting one of us drag our fragile skating structure down.

Soon I realized that if I bent my knees and leaned forward, I was less likely to fall on top of Alex and squish him.

We spent the rest of the lesson crawling around the floor, learning to fall down, get up and balance.

Everyone survived. My back was killing me.

More than four years have passed since that day. Alex and I are still taking roller-skating lessons.

We don't have gold medals, and roller-skating is not an Olympic sport, but I can now proudly tell my friends I skate.

As for chess, Alex is doing the work for both of us: He is learning to play with the help of his school chess club.

Garry Kasparov, watch out!

*Julia Gousseva, a native Russian, has lived in Tucson since 1993. E-mail: [juliasmytucson@yahoo.com](mailto:juliasmytucson@yahoo.com)*

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Not convinced that attaching wheels to human feet was a good way to spend a Saturday morning, I limped onto the skating floor.

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