

# Pole Position



*A combination of skill, focus and training helped Kathy Kreiner-Phillips achieve her childhood dream of Olympic gold. But it was only after she retired from the sport that she attained her ultimate goal* by Barbara Dickson

**I**t was 1976. Eighteen-year-old Kathy Kreiner stood on the Olympic podium at Innsbruck, Austria, and listened, along with millions of people around the world, as *O, Canada* echoed over the surrounding mountain peaks. The Timmins, Ont., resident had won the gold medal in the women's giant slalom event. "There were Canadians up in the stands waving flags," she recalls. "I felt so proud to be Canadian."

## **"Who I Was"**

The dream of Olympic gold had been planted eight years earlier when Kathy watched film footage of skier Nancy Greene's win at the 1968 Winter Olympics. Kathy's father, a physician, had served as the Canadian ski doctor at Grenoble, France, and brought home exciting stories of the Games and Nancy's victory. *Wouldn't it be great to win an Olympic gold medal*

*like Nancy?* she thought.

Kathy worked hard for her dream. By age 12, she was beating out 16-year-olds. At 14, she was competing on Canadian World Cup teams around the world.

Four years later, Kathy stood in the starting gate in the Innsbruck Olympic Games wearing number one. Four dozen competitors waited behind her, prepared to beat her time. No one did.

"I was totally in tune," Kathy says, remembering the run.

Kathy competed at Lake Placid four years later, and although she achieved her best-ever result in the downhill competition and was the top Canadian at the Games, she placed fourth in the overall combined event. She knew it was time to retire when, at 24, she found being on the road 10 months a year had become a challenge.

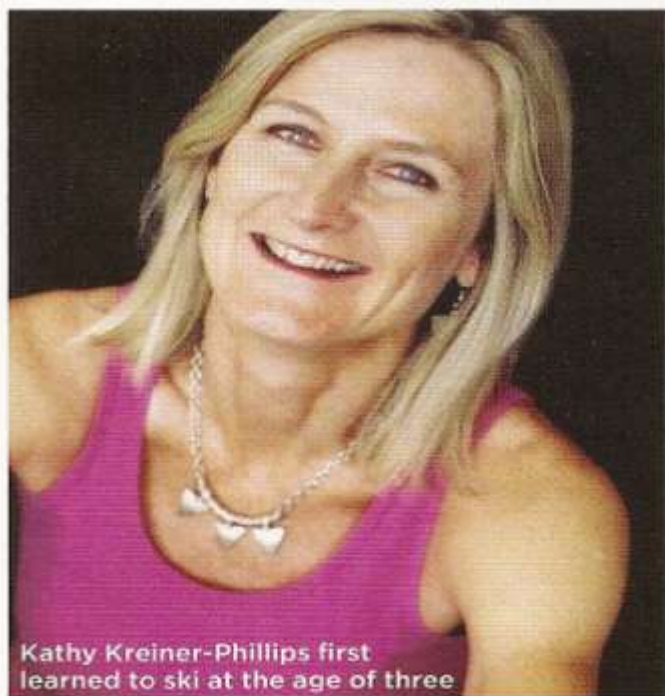
She went back to school, earning a bachelor of science degree and a mas-

ter's degree in sports psychology. She also met her future husband, David Phillips, a world-class freestyle skier. David, a practising Christian, helped Kathy focus on the most significant relationship in her life, a relationship with God.

Kathy had been a spiritual person all her life but hadn't seen the need to make God her top priority. Thinking back to that special Friday in Innsbruck, she recalls riding the chair lift up to the starting line and having a conversation with a God that she wasn't sure existed.

"You do what You want to do with me today," she prayed. "If You want me to win, then great. If You want me to be eighth, that's great, too." She knew that, despite her preparation, she needed God to turn an ordinary ski race into something extraordinary. What was even more remarkable than the win was Kathy's determination to put her future in God's hands.

"Becoming a Christian was like coming home to who I was," she says.



Kathy Kreiner-Phillips first learned to ski at the age of three

### The Best God Desires

Today, Kathy lives "a blessed life" with David and their three children, Nelson, 17, Liam, 15, and Michela, 13, in North Vancouver. She works with Youth Unlimited, a non-profit Christian organization. "They are right there in the community, meeting kids on their turf," she says. A full-time mother, she also works in Vancouver area schools, building relationships with youth through sport.

Wherever she is, Kathy teaches kids to match their passions with their abilities. "See where you're going," she counsels, "but have heart, too. Be totally focused, feeling with your feet, looking ahead to where you are going and singing with your heart."

Kathy hopes when the world comes to Vancouver, people will not only witness remarkable moments in sport but also be exposed to God's love, perhaps through a street festival or a stay in a Christian home. She recalls the Salt Lake City Olympic Games where The Salvation Army offered water to those who had made the 15-minute walk from the parking lots to the events. She understands the impact of a simple cup of cold water given in love (see page 31).

"The Olympics aren't just about the medals," she says. "They are about participating in one of the greatest events on earth that brings the world together in a peaceful way."

We may never win an Olympic medal and stand on the podium—we may not even know how to ski—but, like Kathy, we can strive for the best that God desires for us. "God sustains us," she believes. "We must trust Him, for our strength comes in our weakness." ❧