

## 'On Thin Ice' about more than ice skating careers

### Tai Babilonia hopes movie offers encouragement

By Mary Ann Townsend  
For Tai Babilonia, making a TV movie about her heartbreaking figure skating career was a painful, yet gratifying experience.

*On Thin Ice: The Tai Babilonia Story*, airing Monday, Nov. 5, on NBC, tells how Babilonia's passion for skating eventually tore her life apart. But more importantly the drama shows how she is getting back on her feet after depression over an Olympic defeat sent her on a path of self destruction.

The film opens with 6-year-old Tai watching idol Peggy Fleming on TV and moves rapidly to her matchup with figure skating partner Randy Gardner three years later.

In just four short years, the two were setting records as the most successful pair-skaters in U.S. history. Their success continued throughout the '70s.

It seemed only natural, and perhaps even expected, that the two would walk away with a gold medal at the 1980 Olympics. However, it was then that they became known as America's "heartbreak kids." The two entered the ice ready to perform their routine at the Olympics in Lake Placid, but an earlier injury rendered Gardner unable to perform. In front of millions of fans,

they had to leave the rink without having the opportunity to live out their lifelong dream.

The incident was not only a crushing blow to the pair's dreams, but it also marked the beginning of a downward turn in Babilonia's personal life.

"I got through the worst night of my life without breaking down or exposing my true feelings, and that set the pattern of behavior I would follow for the next eight years," Babilonia said.

Her disappointments and feelings of isolation sent her on a self-destructive path that included drug and alcohol abuse, involvement in volatile relationships, and ultimately a suicide attempt in 1988.

Babilonia stressed, however, that *On Thin Ice* is not just a chronicle of the pair's career. Instead it offers a message of hope to others who believe they have hit rock bottom.

"It was very therapeutic, and it was, in a way, a healing process," she said of working on the movie.

With that healing, however, came some pain.

"Actually the more emotional scenes for me were the drinking, the alcohol parts. Some days I wouldn't go in to watch. It was just too painful," Babilonia said.

But, she admitted, it was also fun. Gardner and Babilonia reunited for the first time in a year to perform some



1980 Olympic figure skaters Tai Babilonia and Randy Gardner (from left) perform some of their own stunts in the re-enactment of their story.

of their own routines for the movie. They also worked with the three sets of actors and actresses who portray them as children, teenagers and adults.

Canadian actress Rachael Crawford and actor Charlie Stratton play the duo as adults.

"It was so funny having so many Tai and Randys running around. Not only were there actors, but there were doubles," Tai explained.

"So whenever they would call Tai, like six people would turn. It was pretty funny," Randy added.

They both laughed when I asked if it was easy to get back into the swing of their routines for the movie.

"It's never easy to just step into it. I wish it were," Randy said.



Peter Strauss plays a sociopath who kidnaps a woman and buries her alive in *83 Hours 'Til Dawn*, Sunday on CBS.

Your most valuable possession...your life...  
can be protected every hour of every day  
with just a press of a button.



**LIFECALL®**  
**EMERGENCY ALERT SYSTEMS**

Instantly summon help  
without ever reaching for your telephone  
for any medical, police or fire emergency.

Learn how you can save time that can save your life.

Contact:

**J. J. McCoy**

An Authorized Independent Lifecall® Dealer

**313-533-7857**

As Seen On Television