



2002 Winter Olympics at Salt Lake City, Utah;
Carlos Gonzalez/Star Tribune

AMY PETERSON

Flag Bearer

THE FAMILY AFFAIR IN THE SPORT OF SPEEDSKATING CONTINUES for Amy Peterson. Her uncle, Gene Sandvig from Minneapolis, was an Olympian (1952, 1956, and an alternate in 1960); her mother, Joan (Sandvig) Peterson, competed in speedskating and later refereed many competitions; her cousin Susan Sandvig Shobe (Gene's daughter), was a member of the US national team and has served in a variety of roles in speedskating organizations and is a certified International Skating Union (ISU) referee who was selected as a referee for the 2018 Winter Games in PyeongChang, South Korea; Amy is a five-time Olympian in short track speedskating and was a flag bearer—generally considered the greatest honor an Olympian can attain—at the 2002 Winter Games in Salt Lake, Utah; and now her niece and nephew (Sandvig Shobe's children) and Amy's sons have begun to compete in national age group races.

Speedskating took root for the Sandvig family at Powderhorn Park in Minneapolis, Minnesota. It was viewed as a healthy outlet by Gene and Joan's parents. Two generations later, it is still going strong.

Joan Sandvig married Howie Peterson, a hockey player at St. Paul Johnson High School and a friend of Herb Brooks, coach of the 1980 US Olympic "Miracle on Ice" hockey team. Brooks and Howie were in each other's wedding party. Joan was an elementary school teacher, and Howie worked at Strauss Skates and later at Aldrich Arena in Maplewood, a part of Ramsey County's Parks and Recreation Department. They had two daughters: Lynn, born in 1970, and Amy, born in 1971. They lived in St. Paul and in the 1980s—by moving a few blocks—landed in Maplewood, an oddly configured growing suburb of approximately 30,000 people at the time (now 40,000), primarily north of St. Paul with a long easterly border adjoining the capital city.

For a while, it appeared as though figure skating would be the prevailing sport for young Amy Peterson. "At age three, Amy was in an ice show. She liked to wear costumes," says Joan Peterson, smiling at the memory. A few years later, Amy was enrolled at the Maplewood Figure Skating Club and skating during the intermission of a speedskating competition.

But speedskating gained traction in the Peterson household because it was Lynn's preference and soon Amy would be wearing the long blades too. "Howie was taking the kids to Aldrich Arena for skating one night," continues Joan. "I told him, 'Don't join anything.' Well, when he came home, he had speedskating uniforms, bags, and everything!" Shortly, Amy was entering speedskating competitions on Lake Nokomis in Minneapolis.

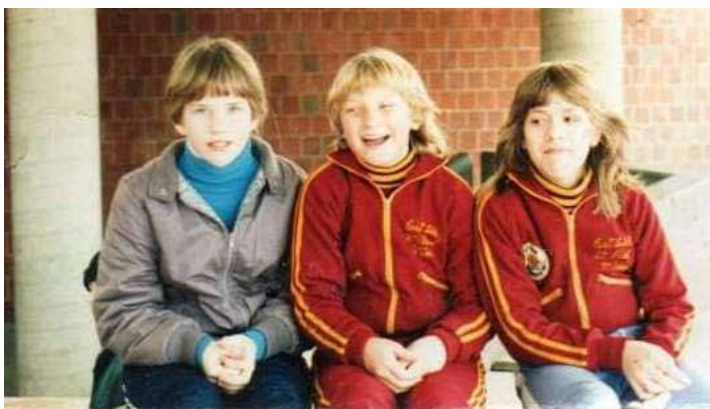
Active as a youth, Amy played volleyball, t-ball, and softball in addition to spending lots of time on the ice, but the pull of the family's strong tradition in speedskating proved to be strong. "The Sandvig family was very supportive," Amy says. "My cousin Susan Sandvig Shobe was very instrumental in helping me get to the level of World Championship and Olympic teams."

"I started as her East Side Speedskating Club coach when Amy was really young, eight or nine," Sandvig Shobe reminisces [Amy later transferred to the Midway Speedskating Club in St. Paul]. "She was very conscientious and worked very hard. Tara Laszlo, Lynn [Amy's sister], and Amy always skated with the boys. At age thirteen she made the Junior World Championship team. Amy did very well at the Olympic Festivals too. She believed in herself and what she was doing. She was daring—not afraid to try something new—and had the right mindset. Technically, Amy is a very efficient skater."

Laszlo, a 1992 long track speedskating Olympian, adds, "We are the same age, a month apart. We were both very competitive. It was nice that we both found a training partner with each other. We were able to push each other during training on ice and dry land. We trained together for years preparing for club, local, state, national, North American, and world competitions. We made each other stronger and hungrier for success."



Amy Peterson started figure skating at age three; photo courtesy of Joan Peterson



Future speedskating Olympians (left to right): Tricia Stennes, Amy Peterson, and Tara Laszlo; *photo courtesy of Tara Laszlo*

"I was really fortunate to have teammates like Tara and Tricia Stennes [both qualified for the 1988 and 1992 Olympics]," says Amy about her early speedskating years. "It was really fun, and we competed well."

By the time she started attending St. Paul Johnson High School, Amy had stopped participating in figure skating, but it still played a vital role in her development as a

speedskater. "Figure skating really gave me an advantage in learning to use edges," notes Amy.

The 5-foot-4 athlete played soccer for the Johnson Governors for three years and was a member of the golf team for four years while still continuing her pursuit on the ice. Again, Amy believes the variety helped her skills in speedskating. "Any sport can help you in athletics and conditioning. It was fun to have more of the all-around experience."

In 1987, Amy qualified for the World Championships in speedskating—it would mark the first of sixteen appearances. The next year, when Amy was still a sixteen-year-old high school student, she competed on the 1988 US Olympic speedskating team in short track, a demonstration sport at the Winter Games in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Demonstration sports were used to promote a sport for possible inclusion in the Olympics, but the results were not considered official.

Fast-paced with tight turns and short straightaways, short track speedskating can leave an observer watching the action dizzy. Skating takes place on an international-size hockey rink, and the oval is a mere 111.12 meters in length compared to the 400-meter long track course. It requires a different strategy as passing, slips, and crashes are commonplace. "I was probably better at short track—at least I was ranked higher—but I never really liked it better than long track," Amy explains. She continued competing on both types of track until 1990 when the World Cup short track circuit began.

"Speedskating became my focus after I graduated from high school [1990]," Amy reports. "I had some small jobs to earn money. I did lots of cross-training: weightlifting, bicycling up to five or six hours, and plyometrics. I liked speedskating because



Amy Peterson leads her sister Lynn in a 1990 race; *Joey McLeister/Star Tribune*

it was an individual sport within a team. You need to be self-directed, motivated, and determined." Training at Marquette, Michigan, headquarters for the national speedskating team, or Colorado Springs, Colorado, she generally trained five or six days per week with a two-hour workout followed by a training session three hours long later in the day.

Amy embarked on an incredible athletic career in speedskating. In the 1992 Olympics at Albertville, France, short track speedskating had been upgraded to a full-medal sport. Only twenty years old, Amy placed 21st out of 27 entrants in a time of 51.05 seconds in the 500-meter race. However, her first Olympic medal was achieved in the 3,000-meter relay. Along with teammates Darcie Dohnal, Cathy Turner (a gold medalist in the 500-meter competition), and Nikki Ziegelmeier, the team captured a silver medal in 4:37.85, nearly five seconds ahead of the bronze medal-winning Unified Team, a team consisting of twelve of the fifteen Soviet Republics, but behind Canada's triumph.

Two years later, Amy was only better. She won the 1994 national championships in all four distances: 500, 1,000, 1,500, and 3,000 meters. It coincided with the

year the Summer and Winter Games became staggered rather than be hosted in the same calendar year. Instead of a four-year gap between the Olympic Winter Games, it was only two years. The 1994 Olympics were hosted in the picturesque city of Lillehammer, Norway. The speedskaters would be racing at the Hamar Olympic Amphitheater which could seat 7,000 spectators.

In the 500-meter race, Amy set an Olympic record with a time of 46.59 seconds in the quarterfinals. That record was eclipsed in the semifinals by Zhang Yanmei of China and narrowly topped by gold medalist American Cathy Turner in the finals with a time of 45.98 seconds. Amy did advance to the finals and claimed the bronze medal with a clocking of 46.76 seconds. She was a member of the 3,000-meter relay which earned a trip to the four-team finals and bore a line-up similar to the 1992 silver medal-winning relay team: Amy, Turner, Ziegelmeyer, and Karen Cashman. They again medaled—this time capturing a bronze. Amy was now a three-time Olympic medalist—a rare feat among Minnesotan Olympians.

It was a memorable trip for Joan and Howie Peterson, too. “The local people really knew the sport,” says Joan. “We have many memories with parents of other Olympians that you spend lots of time with.” Joan would return to Norway to hike the scenic landscape with her daughters on separate occasions—with Lynn in 2006, and with Amy in 2007.

Amy proved dominant in the 1998 Olympic Trials as she again won every individual distance race in short track speedskating. Heading to the continent of Asia for the 1998 Olympics, Amy would be racing at the White Ring, an ice arena in Nagano, Japan. This time, Amy competed in the 1,000-meter race and set an Olympic record in the heats leading to the quarterfinals with a time of 1:33.530. She qualified for the semifinals but was unable to advance to the finals. Amy was awarded fourth place when one contestant in the



Amy Peterson with her three Olympic medals on the ice at Phalen Park in St. Paul, Minnesota, 1998; *Jeff Wheeler/Star Tribune*



Amy Peterson (in second place) won this 1,000-meter heat at the 1998 Olympics in Nagano, Japan; *Brian Peterson/Star Tribune*

finals was disqualified, and Amy won the Final B (consolation). The 3,000-meter relay team did not progress to the finals either, placing fifth overall when the team won the Final B. China and South Korea dominated short track speedskating in 1998.

It was Amy who dominated American short track speedskating. She was named US Speedskating Athlete of the Year in 1998 and 1999. What is amazing about this accomplishment is it happened at the same time she was diagnosed with chronic fatigue syndrome, a disorder characterized by extreme fatigue which can't be explained by any underlying medical reasons. Amy's perseverance through this challenging period is a point of pride for her cousin. "To skate at a high level and still be successful while having this condition was because she listened to physicians and coaches about when to rest," remarks Sandvig Shobe. It is easy to say to rest, but difficult for elite athletes to practice.

Salt Lake City, Utah, had been selected as the site for the 2002 Olympic Winter Games. It was a particularly emotional time for Americans, since the September 11,

2001 terrorist attack destroyed the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City and part of the Pentagon in Washington, DC. Nearly 3,000 people died. Americans rallied and supported each other emotionally, financially, and patriotically.

Five months later, Amy Peterson of Maplewood, Minnesota, now a five-time Olympian, was chosen as the flag bearer for the 2002 Winter Olympics Parade of Nations during Opening Ceremonies at this moving moment in our nation's history. Amy provides a glimpse into the process of how she was chosen to lead the American team, saying in her understated way, "The flag bearer is voted by the eight team captains. I was captain of the US Speedskating team, but when teammates indicated they wanted to nominate me, I didn't want to go to the meeting—it wouldn't be right. Rusty Smith went to nominate me. You could never have it as a goal to be flag bearer because you are chosen."

Sandvig Shobe put it honestly and simply, "I cried when she was named flag bearer. She deserved it."

Indeed, Amy was an ideal choice. Friendly, modest, a five-time Olympian, a three-time Olympic medalist, and a person who overcame the challenge of chronic fatigue syndrome, Amy had all of the character essentials to assume the position most Olympic athletes would regard the highest compliment you can receive from your teammates.

The announcement set off a scramble at the Peterson household in Minnesota. Amy's parents had attended all four of the previous Winter Olympics where Amy had qualified, but Howie was now ill. Howie and Joan had not planned to come to the Opening Ceremonies until they learned Amy would be the flag bearer. "The tickets to go to the Opening Ceremonies cost one thousand dollars—which were suddenly free!" exclaims Joan.

Amy led the American team delegation into Rice-Eccles Olympic Stadium on the University of Utah campus while carrying the Stars and Stripes, followed by an honor guard of athletes (including curler Stacey Liapis from Bemidji, Minnesota), firefighters, and police officers carrying an American flag rescued from the World Trade Center wreckage. It was truly a peerless event.

In competition, Amy narrowly missed qualifying for the semifinals in the 500-meter short track speedskating event and had a time of 2:26.118 in the 1,500-meter semifinals before failing to advance. The 3,000-meter relay team did not make the final four, finishing seventh overall, but setting an American record in 4:20.730 nevertheless.

Of all speedskating venues, Amy ranks Lake Placid, New York, as her favorite. "It's a reminder of the 1980 'Miracle on Ice'—it's the same rink. It's well-lit, spacious, and in the US. It's an inspiring place," says Amy.

Turning her attention to her academics and coaching, Amy, now thirty years old, returned to Minnesota and earned a degree in kinesiology with a minor in coaching at Concordia University, St. Paul. She felt she blended in as a commuting student and—returning to a sport from her past—"loved" being a member of the women's golf team. After starting her coaching career, Amy was named the US Speedskating Development Coach of the Year in 2005 and to the US Speedskating Hall of Fame in 2006—joining her uncle Gene Sandvig, who had been inducted in 1970.

Already representing the US in more Olympics than any other Minnesotan athlete, Amy's attempt to become a six-time Olympian fell short in 2006. But love overcame any disappointment.

While in upstate New York in 2005 to visit her long track speedskating friend Kristen Talbot, a three-time Olympian, and her husband, Neil Peck, Amy was introduced to Neil's brother, Willard who goes by the nickname "Bill." Thirteen months later, Amy and Bill were married.

Bill—also an attorney—and Neil own and operate Welcome Stock Farm, a 965 dairy cow farm (and total herd exceeding 2,000) near Schuylerville, New York, about fifteen miles from Saratoga Springs, a popular resort destination tucked in the foothills of the Adirondack Mountains. Amy and Bill have four sons: Hansen, Hudson, Hayden, and Henry.

"I am very grateful to have the rural life experience teaching life lessons, yet everything I may need is nearby," says Amy, explaining her transition from city life to country living as she parents four boys.

Kristen Talbot Peck reflects on her sister-in-law: "I believe Amy's personal attributes were possibly more influential than her physical ones at making her a five-time



Bill and Amy Peterson Peck with their sons (left to right) Hansen, Hudson, Henry, and Hayden at the Saratoga County Fair in 2016; photo courtesy of Amy Peterson Peck

Olympian. She has always had a real passion for the sport of speedskating, which is evidenced by her long career and now by her coaching. You don't get through all the blood, sweat, and tears, long hours in the cold, and time spent away from home without having a true love of the sport. She has also always had an ability to persevere, whether it be within a weekend meet where the first day she got knocked down and came back to win every race, or how she persevered through a couple of rough seasons where she was physically and mentally exhausted and she didn't have the skating results she was accustomed to. Others may have quit at that point, but she kept pushing through it and later found out she had been battling chronic fatigue syndrome. She has always been mentally tough, not intimidated by other competitors. There are a lot of rounds you have to make it through in short track speedskating to get to the finals. She had a great ability to put herself where she needed to be in every race and expending just enough energy to get herself to the next round, which helped her have enough saved up for the finals. Many great years of skating from a true competitor that now has led to her becoming a great coach!"

Yes, Amy is now coaching at Saratoga Winter Club with Pat Maxwell, one of her former coaches. And the family affair in speedskating continues as Bill and Amy's boys are now having success in the sport. Amy likely follows the sage advice that her wise mother illustrated with a story: "Amy was asked by a visiting pastor to speak to the congregation upon entering church, and she did an outstanding job. When she competed, I'd say a little prayer and ask not for Amy to win, but to do her best."

Amen.



2018 National Age Group Long Track Speedskating at the John Rose Oval in Roseville, Minnesota; (left to right) Joan Peterson, Gene Sandvig, Carl Shobe, Carolyn Sandvig, Ilsa Shobe, Amy Peterson Peck, and Hansen Peck; *Patrick Mader*