

The Ice Age

My Father just turned 60. He is not a sentimental man. He is, in some ways, so unlike a “traditional” man it is absurd. He is incredibly generous and the best political thinker I know. He is farther left than most of my peers. But in other ways, he is such a dude. It pains him to express real affection. Instead, he’ll pat you on the back and maybe say, “We’re proud of you, kid.” It has to be “we,” has to be “kid” or “punk.”

Suffice it to say he is not a fan of displays or celebrations. He refused to let my mother do anything for his birthday. But he shocked us when he played hooky the following Monday to skate Great Pond. He is a workaholic. I don’t remember the last time he took a day off. But ice has captured him, enthralled him. Encased him.



Supposedly, we went ice fishing when we were kids with this old ex-con my dad worked with. I don’t remember more than the memory of a collage of images. I imagine myself in the furry coat I wore to the Bronx Zoo, stern and stoic. I imagine my brother, his hair like it was at Jenny and

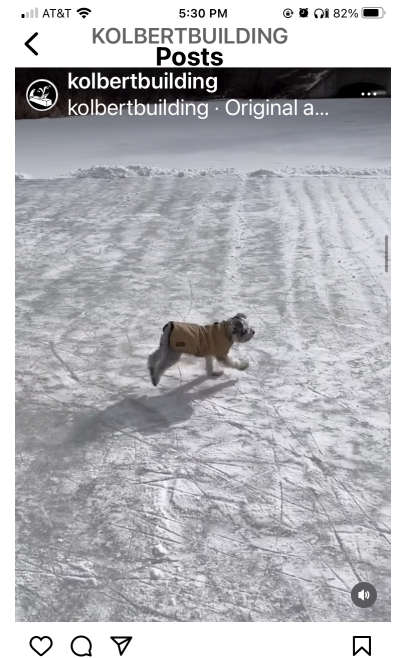


Jame's wedding. I remember the automatic recording informing us that we had a call from Cumberland County Jail when the ex-con became once again, a con.



I remember sitting in freezing cold ice rinks, being confused as to why it was so cold inside, watching my older brother play ice hockey. I remember a weekend of tournaments in 2008 where I begged my parents to buy me fried dough, and my brother got a color-changing cup with a Huskey on it that we still have but long ago picked one color to stay. I remember never being able to tell which one was my brother. I remember unthinkable boredom. I remember playing with other little sisters. I remember watching him do crossovers effortlessly, carving the ice into crescents, skating backward without even looking behind him.

I remember trying to imitate him, crashing to the ice when it wasn't all that far away still. I remember getting it and the split second of thrill, the



near fall, on every step. I remember my brother and father playing pond hockey and being frustrated at my lack of size, speed, and skill. I remember giving up, huffing off in frustration or boredom. I remember the quick passing of long adventures unsupervised, exploring paths through the reeds, making forts in the ice, putting my face to the ice to see the fish I was sure were still down there. I remember, too, the shore excursions, hurrying back to the milk crate immediately to have my dad tighten my skates, pour me hot chocolate, eat an apple, pet the dog, take off my coat, lose my mittens, greet my friends, abandon my stick pick up my stick to go beat a hole into the ice. I remember slamming my stick down over and over to no avail. I remember tiring and climbing into my Dad's truck, the tiny red one with the yellow decal and the gray-rainbow seat covers.

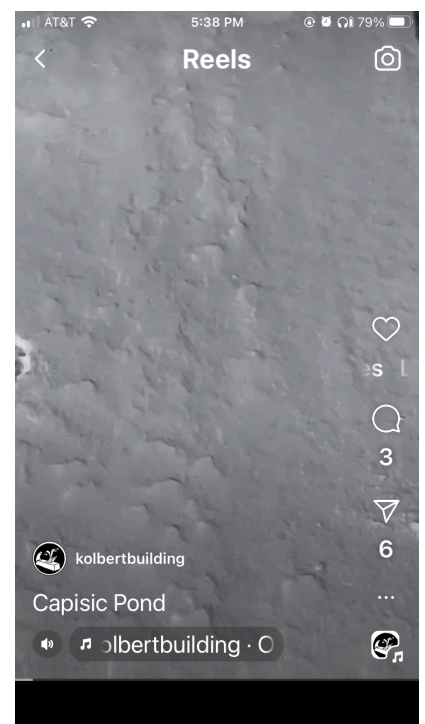
Dad still keeps a milk crate in his car in the winter, but we don't go with him anymore. My brother has become reclusive, and I a weeny. My feet ache, and so does my mind. The stretching ice doesn't interest me, nor do the reeds loom over my head. My mother never skated much, even though she bought a pair of cushy, plush figure skates. My second-hand hockey skates haven't seen much use. They may never have adjusted to my feet, or I to them. I remember wearing them for the first time. I was 13, maybe. Yes, that would be it. I gave up a lot of things at 13. When we bought them earlier that day, my dad brought his along and got them sharpened for the first time in a decade. He was so unused to properly sharp skates he



ate so much shit I briefly thought he was dead. He flew backward and hit his round, thinly covered head, like a tomato on the pavement. He didn't move for a minute, giving me plenty of time to imagine his brains splattering out underneath him, still yet hidden from our view. What would I tell my mother?

I prefer summer, it's true. I prefer water, the blinding summer sun in the sky, not the glint of far-off warmth the winter one provides. Hard surfaces are not my friend; quite the opposite. They've appeared out of nowhere, made me walk into them, taken weeks and months of my life almost more times than I can count. In the summer, everything is soft and ill-defined, melting in the heat haze off the pavement, dribbling into pools. I've been told divers can concuss themselves just from a meter or two, just from the force of their body whipping around so fast. I don't have to worry about that; I can only belly-flop.

I think Dad likes hard things. He works with steel and wood, rich idiots and annoying computer programs. And really his only discernible hobbies are Facebook and skating. I like easier stuff. I like to let water surround me, mesmerize me. I like to let it bubble around me. I'd let it consume me if I could. I'd let it seep in through my ears, if only so my head wouldn't float up and put a crick in my neck. Because, really, is there any place that feels more like home than the water, the crashing of the ocean all around you? During COVID-19, I got really into polar plunges.



Maybe that's one hard thing I'm into. But I much prefer water warm. And in some ways, I'm getting my wish. No good ice these past few years. No snow. No winter.