



Linfield Magazine

Volume 11
Number 1 *Summer 2014*

Article 9

Summer 2014

My Olympic Experience

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Recommended Citation

Kincaid, Nadine Ingersoll '76 (2014) "My Olympic Experience," *Linfield Magazine*: Vol. 11 : No. 1 , Article 9.
Available at: https://digitalcommons.linfield.edu/linfield_magazine/vol11/iss1/9

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My Olympic



The Olympic Games became must-see TV for me as a child. To this day I can picture Peggy Fleming and other Olympic heroes who were featured on newspaper and magazine covers through the years when I hear the tympani sound out the “tum, tummmm, ta tummm, tum” of the opening ceremony music by John Williams. When a milestone birthday signaled that middle age had truly begun for me, I created a bucket list of things to accomplish and topping the list was “Attend the Olympics.”

It appeared that my dream could become a reality when Salt Lake City was announced as the host of the 2002 Olympics. However, once I recovered from the sticker shock of the ticket prices, volunteering seemed to be a better way to be a part of the Olympic experience. I applied, was interviewed, and after an excruciating wait, I received a coveted job assignment at a ski venue...only to have it revoked just prior to the Games because, “We overbooked and don’t need you.” “Why yes you do!” I quickly replied, and proceeded to call every day until they found something for me to do. My first foray into Olympic volunteering was guarding the corporate sponsors’ parking garage, but hey – I was one of the 25,000 members of Team 2002!

My next Olympic adventure was in Vancouver, B.C., in 2010 where I drove International Olympic Committee Marketing Division personnel all over the greater Vancouver area. It takes bravado and strong friendships to invite yourself for a 17- to 20-day stay years in advance! These Games felt like home turf, and my dual major in French really came in handy in communicating with my Lausanne, Switzerland-based clientele.

The 2012 London Games were just around the corner, but the cost of airfare, food and accommodations was overwhelming. I applied anyway, and after asking in a Christmas newsletter “Does anybody know anybody who would consider housing me

as a volunteer?” a lovely offer came from friends of friends to be housed in a cottage in a proper English garden. I was one of 70,000 GamesMakers. The hours were long, but how lucky I was to watch the competitions and assist Olympic gymnasts and basketball players with their press conferences and interviews with journalists. My behind-the-scenes interactions with Olympic athletes were an unbelievable privilege.

Sochi, Russia, was next, and while I love volunteering, Russia wasn’t on my bucket list of “to see” countries. However, after several of my friends applied, I went for it because in the words of Helen Keller, “Life is a daring adventure or nothing at all.” A plus for the Sochi Games was having room and board provided due to lack of pre-existing infrastructure, so airfare was my only expense. My assignment was to be the National Olympic Committee team assistant for the landlocked, co-ruled principality of Andorra. And yes, I had to Google it! It’s bordered by Spain and France and one of the tiniest nations in Europe. Their small delegation of six athletes didn’t need much assistance, but I photographed some Andorran athletes in their competitions, and contributed photographs of the sublimely gorgeous mountain and coastal venues for future use on their Olympic website.

Of all my Olympic experiences, these Games stretched me the most due to my lack of Russian language, communal apartment living (10 roommates and ONE bathroom!), and understanding virtually nothing written or spoken. I give kudos to Russia for building everything from the ground up as it has never been done before, but to be honest, it was a bit messy behind the scenes. However tough some days were, I was again grateful for my Linfield study abroad semester in France, which taught me how to thrive in another culture and to be flexible when things are done differently and communication is difficult. I was blessed to have caring roommates who took care of me – the older babushka of the apartment – instead of the other way around. Someday I might take them up on their offers to return to Russia for a visit.

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I’ve always had a love of sports, including Linfield football. And after many decades of watching the Wildcats take the field, how ironic it is that the music they run out to is called “Olympic Fanfare.” What a coincidence to have one song symbolize two passions of mine – Linfield football and the Olympic Games!

Volunteers give the Olympic Organizing Committee much-needed manpower to produce the Games, but the volunteers profit the most. Where else can you work, use your education and have the rest of the world come to you? The long workdays and extensive travel around the world are small prices to pay to be a part of such an amazing sport competition.

Applications for the Rio de Janeiro Games open in August... come join me!

–Nadine (Ingersoll) Kincaid '76

Nadine (Ingersoll) Kincaid '76 assisted the delegation from Andorra at the Olympic Games in Sochi, Russia, in February, her fourth stint as an Olympic volunteer. She earned a degree in French and home economics at Linfield and now works in security at George Fox University.

