Beth [not her real name]:

Thank you so much for taking the time to email and tell me about your involvement with skating when you were younger and how you handled that, as well as how your parents supported you in that. You are very sensitive to issues with me personally around sport involvement for Dee. I'm carrying over with her concerns that grow out of my own experience as a child. I had virtually no parental concern or direction, at least that I could detect, and got caught up with basketball and baseball to the exclusion of other activities that I've decided would have been more appropriate to the person I truly am and what I needed to become. I don't want that to happen to Dee.

Dee is very interested in movement and is very graceful and coordinated, and her mother and I feel responsibility to respond to that, we don't want to hold her back in this area. So far, it has been dance, which she loves. She watches DVDs of ballets--she has a large collection of them--and has taken classes at a ballet school, though not this year. We decided that the class for six-year-olds at the school isn't challenging enough for her, and that it would be best for her to join a ballet class next year that involves more disciplined work, including at the barre, when she is seven. Now she does ballet around the house. She has a Bob Fosse DVD she really likes, Broadway show dancing, and does that around the house too, and remarkably well and joyously. This week she and her mother are going to see a Martha Graham company modern dance performance, and she will be attending a Twyla Tharp modern dance performance a couple of weeks from now. I got her a good jump rope and she loves to do that now. In just the past few weeks she has grown and developed to the point
that she can do it with proper form. I think jump roping is
good for alignment and balance, and it can be self-expressive
and done to music. I like lifetime sports, golf, bowling (which
is beautiful done right and a wonderful social outlet), skating
(I particularly like old fashioned roller skating), and I like
squash and racquetball (good exercise and a nice social
outlet). I'm thinking of getting Dee a cut-down squash
racquet now.

But as you are talked about with reference to yourself, I
want movement or sport in whatever form it takes to be in
balance with the whole of Dee's life: Schoolwork. Reading.
She loves to draw, although she has not displayed the natural
ability in that that she shows with physical movement. She is
good with language and very imaginative, and I am hoping
she will get involved with writing, perhaps write short stories
and poetry at some point. She is somewhat shy at times, but
still she has done some remarkable theater performances
around the house, acting out stories in some of her children's
books.

I want sport and movement to be what Dee does. I
don't want it to become who she is. I don't want a game Dee
plays to get so big as to become who she is to herself and
others and become the referent she uses for deciding what to
do and how to be. I'm troubled that organized sports so often
make a claim on a youngsters' identity as a human being: they
come to see themselves, and are seen by others, as student-
athletes, or just athletes. As I mentioned to you in class, I was
taken back by my discussions with young horseback riders
this fall: it looked to me that for many of them the activity
was getting in the way of involvement and development in
other, important, areas. To me, sport to me is a wonderful
part of a life well lived, but it is just that, a part of life. I have
concern that children, so new to the world as they are, can be
taken in by media images and pitches, professional coaches
looking to fill out rosters, and schools hyping their sports
programs, and lose sight of all the good things to be
experienced in childhood and adolescence and all there is to
work through in those years to set the stage for a happy and
productive adulthood.

It's good to hear your optimism about all this, because
you've been through it as a girl growing up. Dee's mother is
far easier about this concern than I am, so I feel somewhat
alone with it. Thank you again for taking the time to write
and helping me to think this through.