No one had made Norway as well known across the globe as she had. In the USA, she was so famous that she needed protection from the FBI. *Sonja Henie* conquered one male bastion after the other, but fraternizing with Nazi leaders and being brutally cold in business also made her known as a monster. Author Bodil Stenseth reveals the great story of the Queen on Ice.
In the winter of 1936, she sailed across the Atlantic Ocean to set up shop “over there.” In the summer of 1940, the same year she married an American and bought a home in ritzy Beverly Hills, Sonja Henie became a US citizen.

He be the monster of the icon started to evolve as soon as she had won her first gold medals as a figure skater. In those days, hard training and serious competition were reserved for men. A woman determined to encroach upon male territory was met by a wall of prejudice. But Henie did not give up. She performed a program of strength-gauging hops and exercises on the ice that only men had attempted previously. It was against the laws of nature. A woman who trained like a man, medical science claimed, lost her femininity and matron characteristics. In addition, she developed muscles, and “muscule mobs” were regarded as ugly.

Few competitive sports were open to women at the time. Figure skating had long been the only women’s event in winter sports. Apart from Henie, there was only a handful of female stars in the international sporting firmament. All the more reason for Henie to perfect the art of creating the right impression; made up like a film star and touting her elegant, short-skirted creations, she was the image of sweet, feminine charm. But her brutal winner’s instinct and temperamental demeanor instilled fear into competitors, who described her as “dressed to kill.”

Henie had become independent, tough and strong-minded at an early age. While still a young girl, she had put her father firmly in his place and taken over the reins of her own career. Behind a smiling, female facade, she took on the social role of a man of the time. She shocked people with her deep voice and could swear like a trooper. Her experiences from the world of sport made her well equipped to cope with the rough and tumble of American showbiz. In Hollywood, she used men as her stand-in on the ice and made two films a year. And besides, her mother was always in tow, somewhere in the wings.

“I was almost overwhelmed by emotion,” Henie recalls in Matt livs eventy (The Fairy-Tale of My Life, 1938), the reception
When Henie appeared as Santa at a Chicago collection of modern art owned by Niels Onstad. Together they sailed in Oslo and began building up an important collection of modern art.

In 1936, Henie’s postwar years were difficult ones. Audiences deserted the movie theaters; TV entered American homes; her star was fading; and new, dangerous competitors were moving into the arena with the domination of her ice show. With true business acumen, however, she knew how to maintain appearances, no matter how bad things were looking.

“Miss Henie, who is known to be as cold at a business conference as the ice she skates on, does not like to talk about the money she makes,” wrote Newsweek in the autumn of 1948. The following year, she married for the second time, once again to an American society lion. But otherwise it was “business as usual,” and she was soon touring again, now with her own portable rink.

“I like the stimulation of flesh-and-blood shows. I even like the headaches,” she confided to Will Connolly of the San Francisco Chronicle.

Connolly, however, found her to be “nice as pie.” For the arrival of the Henie ice circus, the San Francisco Cow Palace, usually a rodeo venue where cattle and horses skidded about in muck and sawdust, had been transformed into an ice-covered lake. When one reporter quipped about Henie’s comedown – from Bucking Horse Palace to Cow Palace – she retorted without a moment’s hesitation, “Yes, but there’s more money at the Cow Palace. And one female bastion after the other. Even so, Henie was not feted as a heroine by her contemporaries and is not feted today. Her impressive career is drowned beneath a slew of gossip, drunk- enness and rumors of romantic dalliances. Hardly anyone ever has a good word to say about Henie the collector and patron of the arts, the woman she became in the final chapter of her most extraordinary life.

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