

Skurfing 1965

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During my childhood/teenage years I had presented my dad with some weird requests, but one in particular took the cake. “Dad, would you buy me a skurfboard? Or could we make one?” I knew my chances of buying one were nil.

Dad was doing some kind of car repair in the laneway. “A what?” His voice floated out from under the car, sounding midway between annoyance and puzzlement.

“A skurfboard. It's like a surfboard with wheels. All we need is a piece of board, and my old roller skates. You just take one apart, attach one set of wheels to the front of the board and the other set to the back. Then I'll paint it. Simple.” I leaned under the car with a dazzling smile.

The next afternoon found us in Dad's basement workshop sawing and sanding a piece of board. He took apart a roller skate, and fastened the wheels to each end. With some leftover paint I gave my new board two coats of green and when it dried I was ready to go.

Starting at the garage I trundled down the laneway picking up speed before I lost my balance and jumped off. After a few practice runs, my friend Judy appeared, casting a disapproving glance at my homemade board.

Unlike the rest of my friends, Judy always had the best of everything and loved showing off. Our bikes were either hand-me-downs or came from Neighbourhood Services on Wellington at Garland. Her bike was a brand new CCM from Canadian Tire just west of Island Park Drive. Of course she had a cool store-bought skurfboard with wide nylon wheels. She even had desert boots.

We decided to start on a small hill just down the street. Judy sailed to the bottom, her arms flailing like a tightrope walker. I hesitated at the top.

“Come on, it's easy!” she yelled.

“No fair, you've been practising,” I answered. “You have a better board too,” I thought, feeling slightly embarrassed. Anyway, I couldn't do it. I had to walk halfway down the street before I hopped on my skurfboard and slowly rode the rest of the way.

As soon as I had mastered the small slope, we looked for a better hill. Our goal was to try out the paved ramp downtown near the train station where all the cool Yohawks hung out. There were only two “gangs” in Ottawa at the time, Yohawks in lumberjack shirts and desert boots, and Squirrels with denim jackets and greasy hair.

In the meantime we needed a steeper grade. Fortunately a grocery store a few blocks away had exactly the slope we were looking for.

Judy started off confidently and made it down the hill without falling. My turn started a little shakily. I

began to pick up speed, but halfway down the hill I hit a stone and had to jump off. We tried the hill a few more times, flying faster and farther with every run.

On the last turn, Judy pushed off from the brick wall of the store and shot down the hill at full speed. She didn't notice the small hole in the asphalt until her board stopped abruptly and sent her sailing along without it. She landed with a crunch; her ankle had bent the wrong way. When she stood up, walking was impossible.

Luckily the store was open, so I was able to use their phone to call her mom to pick us up. She helped Judy hobble to the car while I carried our boards - the brand new one full of scuff marks and with a loose wheel, and mine a simpler, homemade version, but still as good as new.

So our visit to the downtown ramp had to wait a couple of weeks. Thankfully, by then I had saved enough money to buy some desert boots.