

# BACKside

VOL 25 / May 2024



**Who runs the world?**

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**SKATEBOARD**



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Natalie Porter  
Librarian & Founder  
Womxn Skateboard History

**On your IG it says: 'I'm your skater librarian! Skateboarding since 1995, nerding out since 2003.' There were not too many female skaters mid90ies. How did you get involved?**

Since I was born and raised in a small town in Ontario that received a ton of snow each winter, snowboarding was my gateway to skateboarding, as well as having big brothers who did both. I was introduced to snowboarding at age 11 in 1988. My parents were always saying I could do anything that my brothers did, and yet, for some reason they were less keen on me skateboarding and wouldn't buy me one.

Once my brother left home for college, I found his old 80s set-up in his closet and started skateboarding on the dead-end street I lived on, and because some roads were newly paved near my summer job, I would skate to work.

I soon found out that my brother's board wasn't cool, so I bought my first set-up in 1995 – a Phil Shao Think. At that time, I had that classic experience of rednecks in a truck throwing a beer can at me, and an old man trying to run me over in a church parking-lot. There was one girl at my high school who took up skateboarding, and we would go to the back parking-lot where all the "bad kids" smoked and skated together. The guys were mostly accepting of us, and when I had access to a car, I was the one driving everybody to a tennis court skate park 45 minutes away in Collingwood that had some obstacles. I blame that skatepark for my lack of skill in a mini-ramp because it was covered in rusty sheet metal. If you fell, you would either get burned from the heat radiating off it or sliced and need a tetanus shot.

Once I turned 18, I moved west to Vancouver because with its milder climate Vancouver is mecca for Canadian skaters. I also appeased my parents by going to Simon Fraser University. My mom recently apologized to me (in my forties!) about this incident I have no memory of. Apparently, when I was packing my stuff into her car, she snapped at me saying, "You're not taking your skateboard!" She thought it was juvenile and was upset that I planned to continue skateboarding. And here I am almost thirty years later!

Bringing my skateboard meant being part of an amazing group of girls in Vancouver, the most famous being Michelle Pezel of Antisocial skate shop, and establishing lifelong friendships. I'll never forget the time a gang of us cornered Ed Templeton in 1997 at Slam City Jam and told him he wasn't welcome back unless he brought Elissa Steamer! I think we frightened him. The next year we rallied for our own girls' category and had the privilege of skating with her.

**'I celebrated how women had a DIY spirit because the guys in the skateboarding industry were definitely not going to do anything for us'**



Natalie Porter • Kickflip • Ladner Park, Vancouver (Canada) • 1998

**'Nerding it out since 2003' – What do you mean by that? What has changed to when you started skateboarding?**

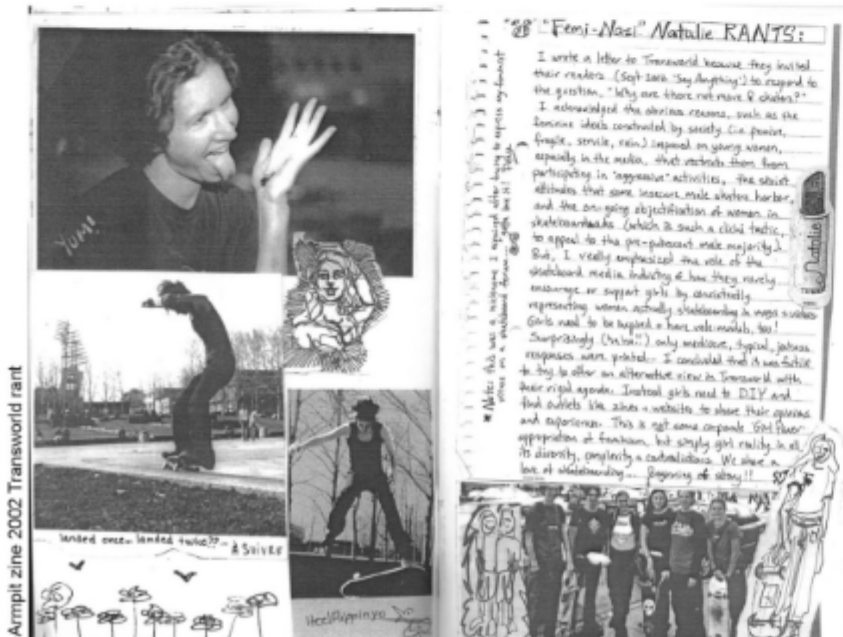
I've always been a nerd but wasn't an intentional "skate nerd" until 2003. In the late 1990s I was studying doing my undergrad while my friends were driving down to San Diego for the first All Girl Skate Jam, which breaks my heart a little bit. At the same time, being a nerd meant I got to go to Prague, Czech Republic in 1999 for a summer exchange. While none of the other Canadian students made any local friends, I bee-lined to Stalin Plaza to skate the marble, and even though there was a language barrier I found the two Czech girls who skated and made instant friends!

I decided to move to Montreal in 2001 after meeting Louise Hénault-Éthier at Slam City Jam, and again pursued my studies. We had an awesome crew of women and even though the indoor park Taz Mahal had closed, we were productive and motivated. We called ourselves The Skirtboarders and Mathilde Pigeon filmed us creating two skate videos and a website, and Erika Dube was the lead behind our zine Armpit. I decided that they would be the subject of my Master's thesis paper, 'Female Skateboarders and Their Negotiation of Space and Identity,' which I defended in 2003.

What's changed since 2003 is the growth of an academic community of skaters with conferences and events to attend, which is pretty exciting. Skateboarding feels more inclusive and with social media skaters have more autonomy in how they can represent themselves and find community.



**'I'll toot my horn here... I'm a damn good librarian.'**



Armpit zine 2002 Transworld rant

**Can you give us an executive summary of your thesis paper 'Female Skateboarders and Their Negotiation of Space and Identity'?**

My goal was to challenge sub cultural theory that traditionally positioned women as "the girlfriend" or just the sidekick, rather than active cultural producers who could shape and define a subculture. I celebrated how women had a DIY spirit because the guys in the skateboarding industry were definitely not going to do anything for us, so the importance of our own zines, websites, forums, contests and companies. I looked at gender and sexual identity, and how female skateboarders were challenging this notion that we had to be fragile and flawless. And how mainstream society, especially in sports, would use this taboo fear of being a lesbian to manipulate women. Simultaneously, I was observing a weird "girl power" commodification thing happening and the pros and cons of that movement.

This thesis was a first attempt to unearth the history of women in skateboarding, which was really buried before social media. I remember mail-ordering a CD from Russ Howell because there were scans of old Skateboarder magazines on it and the "Who's Hot" articles that included women in the 1970s, which was pretty exciting for me.



Sandy Chadbourn

**On your website it says that you wanted to make a coffee-table book called 'The Illustrated History of Womxn in Skateboarding'. Were you therefore holding off sharing the content as you only went live with the website and IG in 2022?**

Yes. After the self-published eBook, I tried to pitch the idea of a coffee table book to publishers and was frustrated by the process. I was told that "we already have a book on skateboarding" and when I've tried to secure a literary agent, I would hear that it's a great idea, but the person can't imagine themselves championing something so obscure (where the money / commission isn't obvious). I kept hoping something would change, so I kept accumulating stuff.

But even though I was still part of the skateboarding community, I technically stopped skateboarding from 2008 – 2020. In 2007, I had another #metoo experience and needed to focus on my healing. I even ran some marathons with a vengeance, immersed myself in work, and got married. Thanks to my husband, I returned to skateboarding because he bought me a complete (Vanessa Torres Meow board!!) when I was 42 and encouraged me to skate and write again. Even though neither of us were on social media, he convinced me during the pandemic to reach out and find a community through Instagram and start sharing.

As well, thanks to Pezel I was thrown back into writing when she alerted a curator at the Audain Art Museum who was looking for an essay on the history of women skaters in British Columbia. The essay was included in their book for the exhibit Out of Control: the concrete art of skateboarding in 2022.

**'I'm very lucky to have connected with a guy who once worked in Thrasher's zine department'**

**There is so much content on the website already and I assume this is just the tip of the iceberg. How do you access all the material (e.g., photos, ads, articles) and the story behind them?**

I'll toot my horn here... I'm a damn good librarian. I think this is a common trait, but we tend to be relentless in our drive to find reputable sources and provide access to information. And since this is my own passion, I get to go DEEP and fuel my curiosity. I'm super organized and created a directory with publications and the contents of each issue highlighting any woman's name, their contest results, and interviews (also taking of note of spelling errors in their names, as an alternative way to search for them... For example, with Lori Rigsbee I would also search "Lori Rigsby"). I try to be meticulous.

I'm also motivated by a hint of rage. I think it's absurd that it requires a librarian to figure out who the Canadian skateboarding champions were in the 1970s and 1980s (Pam Judge and Sophie Bourgeois). As a Canadian, this should be common knowledge, but I've had to pore over newspaper databases and go super rogue, but I also get excited by the content being elusive and having that adrenaline rush of discovery.

Women over the years also have this tendency to change their surnames, and at times some of have changed their identities and pronouns, so I get to be extra savvy. Thankfully with social media I've had luck making connections. Facebook is still the realm for older skateboarders, and then Instagram is where I get the banter and feedback. I would be a bad librarian if I hoarded information, so that's why I decided to go open access with the website. And now that folks know about the IG account, they send me cool stuff like digitized zines and photos. It's becoming a communal effort!



Lori Rigsbee

© Mark Waters

**Funny you mention Lori Rigsbee. My first touchpoints with female skaters in the 80ies were through Powell Peralta's videos. I looked her up as part of this issue and this is how I ended up on your website.**

Lori is definitely iconic for the 1980s. Lauri Kuulei Wong also interviewed her as a teen in the April 1986 issue of the zine, Ladies Skateworld, which shows how feisty and funny she was. I've been scanning these zines as PDFs on the website if you wanted to check it out.

**You also cover some very cool female skate zines that date back to the 80ies/early 90ies. They must have been extra challenging to get hold off.**

I'm super grateful for old school skateboarding collectors / hoarders – like there's some awesome dudes who have really stepped up to share things with me or who have simply scanned a zine for Instagram because they thought it was cool. I'm very lucky to have connected with a guy who once worked in Thrasher's zine department (who likes to remain anonymous) and has sent some obscure stuff like the queer zine JD's (Juvenile Delinquents) from the 80s. There are even guys overseas who alert me to vintage discoveries from places like Italy, Russia and Sweden. I'm so stoked because I would never get to dig through an archive in Biarritz, France to learn about the women skating there in the 1960s. I wouldn't have known where to start.



Ladies Skateworld 1 • April 1986

National Skateboard Review • May 1977



Push Push Then Go • 1986



**There is a section on your website called 'Mystery' where you have images of female skaters, but you do not know who they are. Do you have a story to share where the actual skaters approached you?**

There was an amateur skater in the 1970s who was listed as "Bunny Price" in the National Skateboard Review (which is thankfully digitized online!) as skating for Sims. I found a few photos but no interviews or content, and even after posting on Instagram, there was silence. Months later I logged in and there was a flurry of messages from a woman named Canon. It started out as just a "hey, what's up, I also used to skate back in the day." And then the messages got more and more excited because she found herself! Canon was "Bunny" but that was just her nickname because she liked launching herself off loading-docks. Turns out she was Eric Dressen's pre-teen girlfriend when they were skate rats and had a ton of stories to share like the time Steve Van Doren made her a pair of custom Vans from her favourite shirt. I'm so glad she found my Instagram!

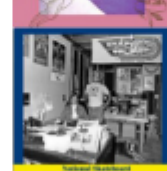
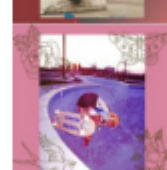
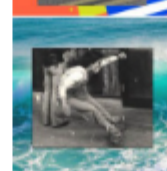
**What was it like to be a female skateboarder when you started in 1995 to today?**

The access to visual inspiration through video, social media, and even mainstream skateboarding magazines of female and non-binary skaters is mind-boggling today. Even though one can still feel isolated in a small town, there's such a shift in attitude and opportunity, and you can easily find community online. I also like this new appreciation for beginners, and how groups of people (regardless of age, ability, race, sexual orientation) create safe spaces to skate.

There's still been moments when I've had to resist punching someone in the face (joke) when an older dude, or someone my age, tries to tell me that "there were no girl skaters when I grew up," and aren't interested in having their view changed, but that just keeps me going. It's also nice to go into a skate shop and support a pro female skater and buy their board.



**'I'm actually most proud of the time I figured out who the author was of the 1986 zine Ladies Skateworld!'**



**When and what was the tipping point for female skateboarding to really take off?**

There's been several waves of popularity for skateboarding in general, with external factors like recessions and trends, really devastating or blowing up the scene. I would like to give credit to the Riot Grrrl movement in the 1990s for empowering women and providing a soundtrack of dissent, combined with the arrival of the internet in the early 2000s which Lisa Whitaker and the Villa Villa Cola crew channeled with intention after the success of their zine.

Simultaneously, in the 90s we've got Rookie gear (I LOVED Rookie!), the All Girl Skate Jam, Check it Out magazine, heroes like Elissa Steamer and Jaime Reyes, the Gallaz team, and some real momentum with legends like Cara-Beth Burnside and Jen O'Brien as mentors. And once videos like Getting Nowhere Faster and AKA: Girl Skater came out, and everyone fell in love with Vanessa Torres and Amy Caron, it just hasn't let up.

**You mentioned Elissa Steamer that made street skating popular in the 90ies. Who do you think was leading the way in the 80ies?**

Even though they weren't ripping skaters, I like the vibe of The Hags down in Los Angeles and a similar crew up in Anchorage, Alaska calling themselves SkateBetty's. Stephanie Person was representing over in Europe, as the first Black American pro skater, just destroying vert. Sue Hazel in the UK was also killing it, in both freestyle and vert. For innovation in street, we've got Christy Jordahl who was boardsliding rails in 1988, Saecha Clarke, Anita Tessensohn. And then later on, all the women who were featured in Ethan Fox's documentary SK8HERS which came out in 1992 (the first all-girl skateboard movie) are major heroes! Too many to list!



George Medlock



## 'She has fought the good fight and was always killing it in ramp and pool during the bleakest periods of skate history.'

### What are some of the things where female skateboarding has still room to improve?

Obviously, my perspective is westernized and privileged as a white Cis woman, and I'm mindful that both here and abroad, there are girls, women, and non-binary people experiencing oppression, and in some places are condemned to domesticity without access to education let alone sport. So, to improve we need to support initiatives like Good Push, non-profits and community-focused groups who are at ground zero making change.

I was grateful that trans skater Terry Lawrence was stoked on his bio and my efforts, but even if my intentions are good and I want to be inclusive, there are times I need to step back and seek direction. I want to be an ally and be respectful.

### What was one of your proudest moments running your history project?

I want to say being invited by the Smithsonian to go to Washington, DC for a brainstorming advisory board with some heavy-hitting dudes (which was awesome!!) but I'm actually most proud of the time I figured out who the author was of the 1986 zine Ladies Skateworld!

All I had was the initials L.K.W. and then I found skate results with a woman named Lauri Wong amongst the men, and then I noticed some Hawaiian words in the zine, so when I went prowling on Facebook and found "Lauri Kuulei Wong." I knew I had a match! She is soooooo cool. She rode motorcycles, worked at Del Mar, was Tony Hawk's tenant in his first house, and as far as I can tell this was the first zine made specifically for and by women skaters. She then became an advocate for foster children, lives with Lupus, and received the Governor's Award in 2022 for her award-winning charity called "Future First Responders of America." Hero status!!!



Kim Adrian

### This is treasure hunting at its best. Must be pretty exciting once you uncover all those facts about those individuals. Anything that was particularly funny or embarrassing?

I'm a huge fan of Kim Adrian who shared a funny story with me! In the late 1970s she was blasting air and grabs out of pools and bowls like Lakewood and Whittier unlike most female skaters at that time. She was skating for the love of it, and even though Kim competed and had sponsors, in her interview she had little interest in dwelling on these details or self-promotion, which I admire. But she did tell me that one company made her sign a contract vowing not to smoke weed, and how it was such a turn-off since she was a classic 70s teen and definitely enjoyed partying and her bong! I love her style.

### What are some of the things where female skateboarders have an advantage over their male colleagues?

In a weird way because female skaters have been historically ignored, we can claim that we are truly countercultural especially those badass skaters in the 80s and 90s when mainstream skateboard publications objectified and dismissed women's participation. I think that's cool.

I also think it's interesting that mainstream society sees us as a novelty. Beth Fishman enjoyed some limelight after she won the Eastern Skateboard Championships in 1977 at Asbury Park against all the boys and got to meet the legendary Patti Smith on the set of TV show "Kids are People Too" in December 1978. Patti was delighted with Beth, hanging out all day and signed handwritten poetry for her. Wow!



Lynn Kramer



George Medlock

**If you had to name the Godmother of skateboarding, who would it be and why?**

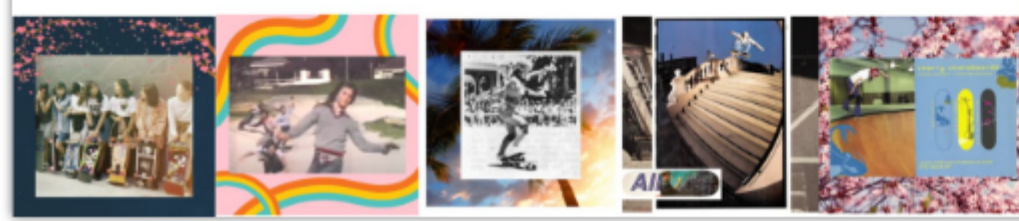
I think Lynn Kramer is awesome because she launched the zine Equal Time in the late 1980s which helped solidify the Women's Skateboard Network, counting 250 members in the early 1990s and insisted on the return of contest categories for women. Plus, she's now the 17-time world slalom champion, and continues to absolutely rip!!

Cara-Beth Burnside is probably a more traditional response considering how she has transcended the decades from the 1970s to the present. She secured that first Thrasher cover in 1989, was part of Sk8Hers video in 1992, has battled for sponsorships, and persevered for the benefit of all female skaters by rallying for equal pay and equal coverage. She has fought the good fight and was always killing it in ramp and pool during the bleakest periods of skate history. Thank you, CB!!

**'Her story and how she passed away rips my heart apart because I will never get to tell her how important she was to me.'**

**What else are you doing if not working as a librarian?**

I am so grateful to live on the traditional territory of the Tla'amin people, surrounded by lakes, forest and ocean. So, I'm kind of obsessed with mushroom foraging, canoeing, riding my XR650 motorcycle on logging roads, camping, and gardening since I never had my own garden living in Vancouver.



**What is on your wish list apart from the coffee-table book?**

Even though I've skated with girl gangs in my past, since returning to skateboarding in my 40s I have yet to skate with a gang of older women because I'm living in such an isolated place. I'm hopeful that this opportunity will happen sooner than later!

And I did just get some great news that ECW Press (the same publisher who released Cole Nowicki's book *Right, Down + Circle: Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*) will publish my book about women in skateboarding history – it'll be essays with cultural criticism / memoir / history called *Girl Gangs, Zines and Powerslides: a history of badass women in skateboarding*. Look for that in Fall 2025!

**Last question. If you could interview one person, who would it be and why?**

Bonnie Blouin was the first female columnist for Thrasher magazine in the 1980s. She was a wise and thoughtful writer, and you could tell how deep her passion for skateboarding was. Her story and how she passed away rips my heart apart because I will never get to tell her how important she was to me. Rest in peace. Thanks so much for the interview.



Bonnie Blouin

William Pickett

