

A journalist flips (over and over) for rollerskating

By BRAD NEWMAN
IR Staff Writer

It never fails.

The latest fad, hatched in some distant urban jungle, sweeps into town and a young reporter is sacrificed in pursuit of the story. The young reporter is sent to the front, usually swarming with teenagers, because he has no family to leave behind and no editor's chair to occupy in the foreseeable future.

Any thirteen-year-old worth his socks can skate, but that is because he knows no fear. He is agile and limber and likes to go fast. I am not and I don't.

I am single and usually the one sent for coffee and sandwiches, so the assignment was mine.

The new craze, another born-again 50s fad, rolled into town on wheels. The rebirth of rollerskating has generated hysteria in big-city discotheques and on small-town sidewalks alike. It has me shaking in my tennis shoes.

ROLLERSKATING HAS BEEN ADOPTED by the beautiful people this time around, so it is bigger than ever. A namedropper's list of skaters reads like the recent cover stars of People magazine. Cher skates. And Dustin Hoffman. And Dick Cavett, Robin "Mork from Ork" Williams, Olivia Newton-John and John F. Kennedy, Jr.

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This account of my afternoon adventure won't include disco lights, Saturday nights or skin-hugging skating tights. I used simple skating survival tactics in order to tell you about it.

The afternoon — I was avoiding the evening swell of skaters — was hot and slow, no use exerting yourself in this heat. I wanted to delay my skating debut as long as possible and even stopped at a yellow light at Montana and Cedar on my way to the rink.

ENTERING THE HOT WHEELS SKATING CENTER, I saw about 30 thin, graceful skaters gliding across the rink. I decided to ask owner Tino Guy some questions, another effective delaying strategy. Tino said more than 1,000 people a week have been using his rink since he opened in May.

Some quick arithmetic told me that meant another 113-odd people would soon be joining this one odd skater at rinkside. "Tino," I said, "let's hit the rink before it is too late."

I had already decided eight-wheeling across ex-



Rink rats Bonnie Mayer (left) and Lisa Guy roll on for hours

tremely hard floors was not for the faint of heart, but as I laced up my pair of skates, I began to believe it is not for the empty of pocketbook, either.

A two-hour skating session at Tino's place will extract \$2.50 from your wallet, \$1.75 admission and 75 cents skate rental. Serious skaters cut costs by purchasing discounted season tickets. And their own skates.

The only local store I could find selling the new skates was raking in \$85 to \$130 a pair for them. But most of us are always after the newest, latest and greatest equipment.

The skates are mounted on a hard plastic sole attached to a shoe that looks a lot like a jogging shoe.

The soft leather shoes came in neon color combinations: highway department orange on royal blue, sunbeam yellow on lime green and more. There was one modest pair of brown skates with dark brown stripes. It must have been for formal wear.

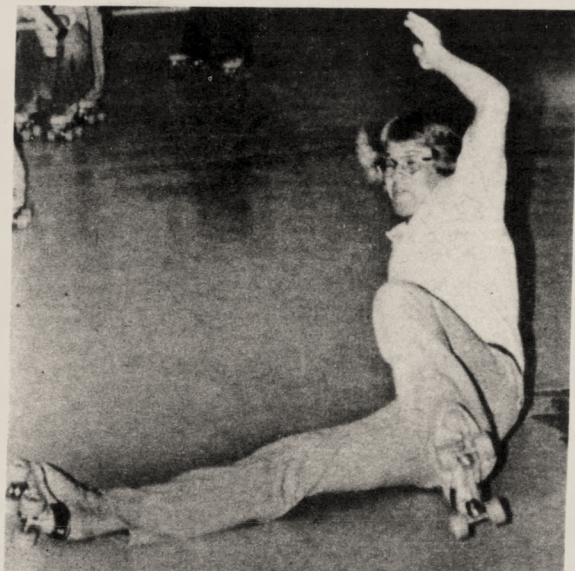
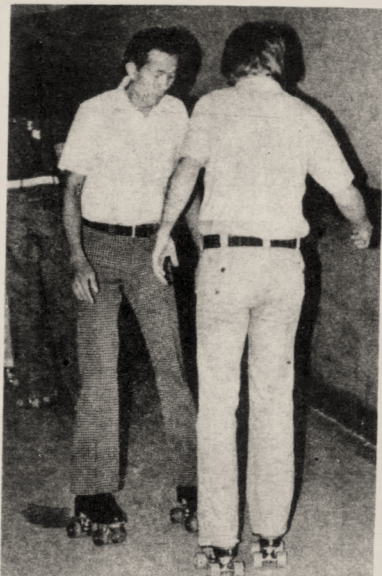
Tino asked me if I wanted to do some balance exercises on the rough, and less treacherous, carpet before I tried out the slick, apoxy rink floor.

BUT I TOSSED CAUTION TO THE WIND. "If a six-year-old can skate, I can skate," I announced. I strode across the carpet much like I would have in street shoes, hit the rink's smooth surface, and literally hit the rink. A six-year-old whizzed by.

Tino suppressed his laughter, but he could do



Afternoon skaters enjoy a near-empty rink. About 1,000 eight-wheelers use the rink each week.



Photos
by
George Lane

Tino Guy demonstrates the roll . . . But the reporter's rolling was still pretty rocky

nothing about that of the other skaters. He helped me to my feet as two rink rats came to sharp stops in front of me. The girls, Lisa Guy and Bonnie Mayer, skate between 8 and 10 hours each day. It was their job to get me around the rink in good enough shape to write in, a formidable task for even the best skaters.

With a girl on each arm, I began to inch my way across the floor. The disco singer on the rink's mood-creating sound system was wailing: "Get down, ya'll, get down." And I did, several times. I thought I had come prepared for the falls. Expecting to land on my pride, I had stuffed a wallet, checkbook and as much notebook paper as I could

find into my back pockets. But I kept missing the padding. Throughout the day my right elbow, now purple and slightly misfigured, and the rink floor became more than casual acquaintances.

A blond brother team thought my introduction to rollerskating wasn't proceeding quickly enough.

Eight-year-old Kirk Hamlin taunted me after every spill, rolling past my downed frame backwards and waving good-bye. Brother Bret, nine, studied my technique and offered the following observation: "You're just too tight, kid. Loosen up your legs and let'er rip."

HE CALLED IT PRETTY CLOSE. I loosened up my shaky legs and immediately crashed to the floor

in the splits. But no rip, my pants had been spared. My pride was another story.

Bruised, but not beaten, I rose from the floor for a final, solo whirl about the rink. I began to pick up speed, moving my feet to the steady rhythm of Milk Toast or whoever it was singing. I was looking good and skating. Forgetting myself, I began a rather snappy John Travolta hustle turn and smacked against the waist-high wall.

Well, maybe next time. I waved to the laughing people around me — Tino, Lisa, Bonnie and, of course, Kirk — and worked my way off the rink. I had some one-handed typing to do while I packed the right arm in ice.