

Fractures and Expansion

Skateboarding and the Shift to
Inclusive Community in BC and Beyond



Rose Archie of Nation Skate Youth
at the plaza skatepark, Vancouver,
BC, 2021

Photo: Norma Ibarra

Natalie Porter

The challenge with presenting a record of any historical movement is that it rarely reflects the whole picture. History tends to favour dominant voices—those deemed to be authorities by their peers—and skateboarding has been no different for decades.

Celebrated events in the history of skateboarding in British Columbia include a high-profile skateboarding championship at Expo 86 and the competition Slam City Jam, which ran from 1994 to 2006. The key players associated with these events include Monty Little,¹ who developed skateboard parks and contests starting in the 1970s, and Kevin Harris, who became Canada's first professional skateboarder in 1982 and established the Richmond Skate Ranch.² Peter Ducommun of P.D.'s Hot Shop and his long-standing Skull Skates company,³ and the legendary Red Dragons crew of North Vancouver launched by Colin McKay, Rob "Sluggo" Boyce, and Moses Itkonen, also represent a significant part of BC skate history.⁴ The impact of pro skateboarder Rick McCrank locally and beyond, with his contributions to the series *Abandoned* (2016) and *Post Radical* (2018) for Viceland, is certainly worthy of note.

The efforts of these individuals continue, and these milestone events are valid, but we need to channel McCrank's level of curiosity to go deeper, to acknowledge those who have been marginalized and to elevate their presence in our collective history. While there has been a dramatic shift in attitudes today, and a wider range of skateboarding pioneers are receiving recognition, this progress has come slowly and has been the result of individuals and grassroots collectives fracturing and expanding skateboard culture.

Even with the ever-growing abundance of information on the Internet, there are other histories of skateboarding, primarily female, non-binary, and people of colour (BIPOC), that are lost or dismissed, and this needs to change. Too often it has been the leading skateboard companies and the sponsored pros and their boards that have been revered, collected, and promoted by popular skateboarding media outlets, and these heroes have been predominately white, heterosexual men.

To pursue and share alternative stories has great urgency today, because it provides more complete historical context and honours diversity. Skateboarding is sustained through community building, and this means all communities. Understanding context also helps to situate the efforts of local skateboarders Michelle Pezel, Rose Archie, Rhianon Bader, and Norma Ibarra—their motivation to move beyond misconceptions regarding the authentic skateboarder and to improve access for all.

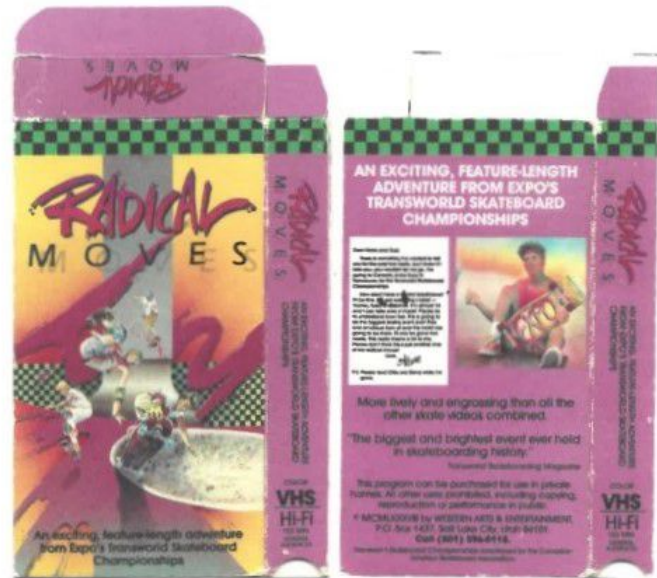


The early 1980s were a bleak time for skateboarding, marked by the closure of many skateparks (due to operators' perceived liability costs), which forced skateboarders underground, onto the streets, and into unique locations such as abandoned pools. As a result, the participants redefined skateboarding as a hardcore activity and proof of masculinity, similar to the dynamics in the history of punk culture.⁵ Don Bostick, president of World Cup Skateboarding, explains how hostile the situation became for women: "The guys heckled them ... A girl had to be pretty ballsy to drop into a pool. The

guys sort of machoed them out of the way.”⁶ While these men thought they were being anti-establishment, they ironically turned skateboarding into a toxic activity, perpetuating the worst traits of mainstream society, such as misogyny, racism, and homophobia.⁷

We see a dramatic decline in participation of female skateboarders during the 1980s compared to the sixties and seventies. Pro skateboarders of the seventies, such as Cindy Whitehead, who rode for Sims, Powell-Peralta, Z-Flex, and Pepsi,⁸ and Pattie Hoffman, who was the freestyle world champion in 1980, both moved on to other activities. Only a handful of women, including Cara-Beth Burnside, Lori Rigsby, Michelle Kolar, Cyndy Pendergast, Debbie McAdoo, Anita Tessensohn, Leaf Treinen, Lori Rigsby, Saecha Clarke, and Wendy Zaks, forged on in street, vert, and bowl.⁹

By 1986, skateboarding had made a comeback as a trending youth activity, as witnessed at Expo 86 in Vancouver, the site of the Transworld Skateboarding Championship in August that year. This event was a critical turning point in the popularity of skateboarding in this province, but the contest and spectacle also perpetuated a homogenous identity that has taken decades to dismantle, one exemplified by a film produced by Transworld in conjunction with the championship, *Radical Moves*. The film follows a young skateboarder named Kim Blackett as he makes his way to Vancouver for Expo, witnesses the contests, and dreams of sponsorship. The film is laced with degrading banter directed toward the female participants and sadly stands as a reflection of the times and the attitudes that have persisted.



The female competitor who won the amateur freestyle event was Corina “Gogo” Spreiter of Switzerland. Blackett states, “In warm-ups, Gogo would wear girls’ skate shirts that she cut up. They barely covered the essentials. She said she didn’t do it to be sexy—it was hot in her country, and it was the only way she could get a tan like that. They were pretty interesting—it made her even more fun to watch.” Blackett’s comments imply that female skaters were a sideshow for the benefit of a male-dominated audience alone, and their appearance was more important than their performance. Meanwhile, in the men’s events, the competitors’ outfits, including crotch-clutching short-shorts, go unacknowledged.

The cringe-inducing commentary continues as Blackett smartly declares, “I think Diane Desiderio is the best-looking professional female skater in the world. Come to think of it, she’s the only pro female skater in the world.” This statement is both demeaning and false, as it dismisses Desiderio’s skill and courage for competing against the men and ignores the fact that there were female pro skateboarders who actively competed into the eighties.



It's not surprising that Blackett would be ignorant of these skateboarders—there was no media outlet consistently celebrating their accomplishments. And yet, the April 1986 issue of *Thrasher* had just featured an article titled "Sugar and Spice ...?" by Bonnie Blouin, which discusses the experiences of women in skateboarding.¹⁰ The *Thrasher* article includes photos of Blouin, Stephanie Person, April Hoffman, KZ Zapata, and Michelle Sanderson—all of whom competed at Expo.

Partway through *Radical Moves*, we shift locations from the ramp at False Creek to Seylynn Skatepark in North Vancouver for a bowl contest. Blackett introduces Michelle Sanderson's brother, Gary, who places third in the amateur bowl. "Gary Sanderson was an all-round nice guy and had a lot of friends and took his skating seriously. His sister Michelle competed in the women's freestyle. I think she got first place—for best legs." Apparently, the brother takes skateboarding seriously, while the sister is a punchline for a joke.

In the *Thrasher* article, Bonnie Blouin recalls how she knew very few female skaters, as she felt that gender stereotypes prevented most young women from participating. Blouin writes:

When I first started riding ramps, this guy in South Carolina told me, "Girls will never make it in skating cause they're too afraid of falling on their boobs." Well, I've yet to fall on my boobs ... I don't consider myself unfeminine because I pursue an aggressive sport ... I'm not out there to impress anyone.¹¹

Blouin is frustrated and believes that she should be accepted simply as a skater. "You always have these

guys that think you're 'just a girl' and they can't seem to get it through their heads that you're a skater."¹² Blouin concludes that, while she was friends with many male skaters, it was hard to measure her progress when the visibility of girl skaters was practically non-existent.

If the visibility of female skateboarders was poor, the visibility of people of colour was even worse. Stephanie Person, also included in Blouin's article, would become the first Black professional female skateboarder in 1988, with sponsorship from Santa Cruz, Thunder Trucks, DeathBox, and Swatch.¹³ In *Radical Moves*, Person is seen showcasing her freestyle routine, and then there's a glimpse of her cruising Seylynn Bowl, presumably warming up for her run. Considering Blackett's painful commentary, perhaps it was best that he stayed mute, but a word of recognition would have been appropriate.

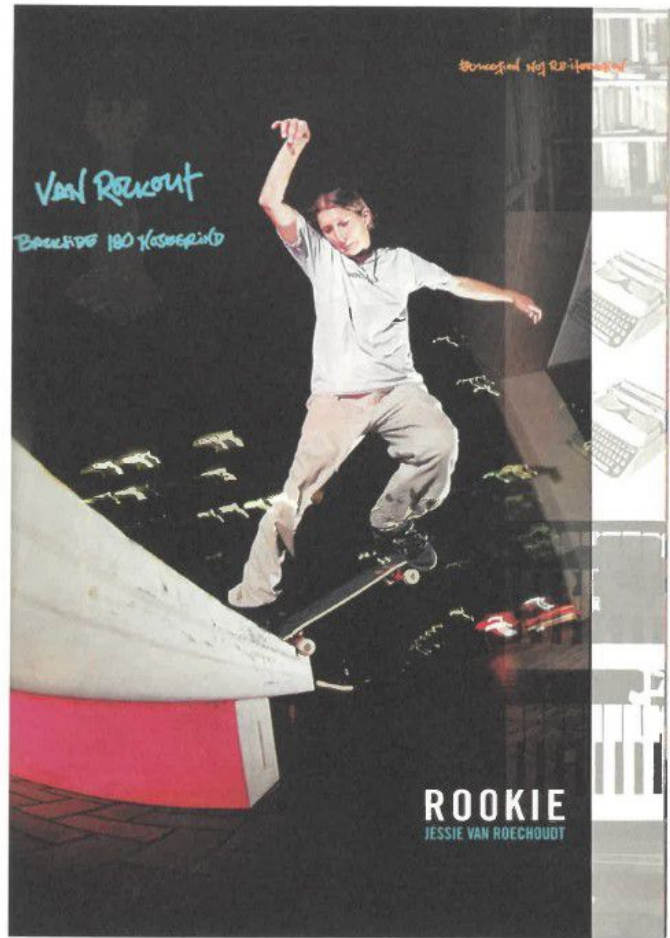
Stephanie Person forged a solo path for Black skateboarders today, including Samarra Brevard, Nika Washington, and Beatrice Domond, and she had to confront racism all along on the way. In the eighties, on her first trip to Europe, Person had her skateboard stolen moments before she was to compete in vert at Münster, Germany. She was forced to borrow an unfamiliar board with loose trucks and she injured herself.¹⁴ In an interview with Cindy Whitehead, Person shares that the Ku Klux Klan once showed up at a skatepark in the South to intimidate her, and that a well-known professional skater attempted to sexually assault her in a hotel room (afterwards, her male teammates tried to insinuate that she was at fault).¹⁵

Female skateboarders' experiences of alienation and assault have been largely ignored for decades, and it has

only been since the #MeToo movement and the “Consent is Rad”¹⁶ skateboard initiative, launched at the 2019 Pushing Boarders conference in Malmo, Sweden, that the topic of sexual abuse and violence within the skate community has been broached with any seriousness. Topics such as consent, sexuality, homophobia, suicide, mental illness, addiction, and overdose have slowly begun to emerge in skateboarders’ dialogue as more people speak up and challenge the stigma around these issues.¹⁷

Skateboarding journalism in the 1980s was anything but cutting edge. John Lucero, in his coverage of Expo 86 for *Thrasher* focuses mostly on the hassles of security, issues with the ramp, the hot professional skateboarders, and who he parties with.¹⁸ Lucero briefly acknowledges the results of the female participants, noting (without exploring why) the women’s freestyle event was not counted toward the team award—apparently it was irrelevant to the main action of the championship. *Thrasher* at least had the decency to include photos of British legend Sue Hazel, misspelling her name, and Sanderson during their freestyle runs.

The only observation that Kim Blackett nails in his commentary of Expo 86 is the fact that the women “stuck together.” This is an understatement, and something that remains true, as witnessed at the 2020 Summer Olympic Games in Tokyo, when the female park competitors hoisted Misugu Okamoto onto their shoulders, not for winning the gold—she had just fallen in her final run—but to show their support for someone who had performed massive 540 inverters and pushed the limits.



Rookie poster featuring Jessie Van Roechoudt, backside 180 nosegrind
Photo: Joe Brook

Rookie Skateboards, a company owned and operated by women, was founded in New York City in 1996 by Jung Kwan, Elska Sandor, and Catherine Lyons, sponsoring female riders and supplying skate gear and fashion to skateboarders regardless of gender.

So much has changed since the days of snide commentary in the 1980s, to acclamations of respect for competitive female skateboarders today, but it has been a slow ordeal.¹⁹ A little-known fact about the history of skateboarding in British Columbia is that the first skate movie to focus solely on the perspective of a female skater was filmed in West Vancouver in 1990. *Grinding to Win* (written and directed by Samantha Reynolds) centres around the story of Chris, who arrives at a new school with her skateboard and wants to connect with the local crew. They finally realize how good she is, and she helps the team win a contest set at Seylynn Bowl. The stunt double for the film was BC skateboarder Lisa Wietzke, who excelled at ramp and bowl.

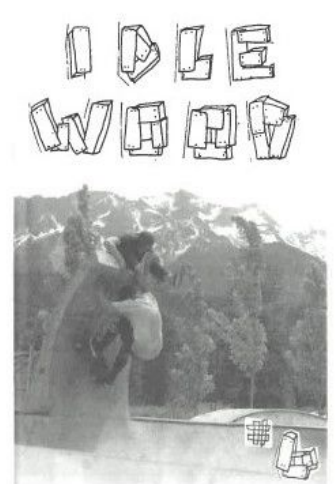
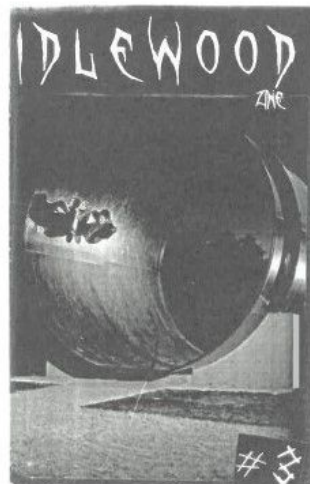
Progress was made in 1998 when the organizers of Slam City Jam agreed to include a category for women. The street contest was a jam format with twenty-six competitors divided into three heats, and then ten skaters progressing to a final.²⁰ The price for entry was reduced to twenty dollars, cheaper than a three-day pass, since only a handful of the skaters was sponsored. Vancouver amateurs still performed well, with Michelle Pezel coming in fifth place and Laura Piasta in seventh.²¹ The following year, thirty-five skaters entered; and in 2000, the organizers limited entry only to sponsored skaters as enthusiasm for the event grew.

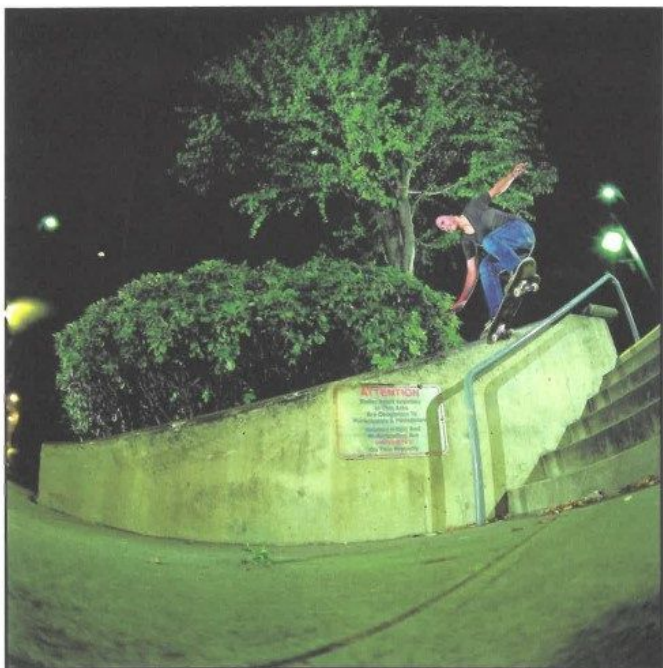
That first year, the girls' contest was relegated to the early hours of Sunday morning, when many spectators were likely hungover and missed out on witnessing legends such as Elissa Steamer, Jamie Reyes, Jen O'Brien, Lisa Whitaker, Cindy Gorset, and Jessie Van Roechoudt—the first female professional skateboarder from British Columbia. Van Roechoudt, who placed second behind

Steamer, was sponsored by Billabong, Venture, FTC, Da Kine, Genetic, and Rookie. Rookie was based out of New York City—owned and operated by Catharine Lyons and Elska von Hatzfeldt since 1996—and their magazine ads, boards, and gear were highly coveted by female skateboarders at that time.²²

Before moving to San Francisco, Van Roechoudt began skating as a kid in Winfield, BC, when there was no Elissa Steamer to emulate.²³ She was always skating with the guys, but the thought of being different never registered. Van Roechoudt states, "I think you should be able to be as feminine as you want to be and also be considered a legitimate, ripping skateboarder."²⁴

Van Roechoudt was also a photographer, and her work was featured in the *Framed* exhibition at Antisocial Skateboard Shop in Vancouver in June 2006, and this is not surprising. Antisocial has been a welcoming space for skateboarders and artists since co-owner Michelle





Alison Matasi, noslide, 2005
Photo: Dylan Doubt



Katie Piasta, Laura Piasta, Michele Di Menna, Michelle Pezel, and Cory Nagel
at Confederation Park Skate Plaza, Burnaby, BC, 1997. Photo: Natalie Porter



Michelle Pezel, 2016. Photo: Jeff Thorburn

Pezel launched the store in 2002, in its original location at 2425 Main Street.

Antisocial has never been a typical skateshop, intent only on pushing merchandise as a retail outlet. Instead, Pezel has cultivated a community hub by breaking down barriers that might prevent participation. She always has second-hand gear to distribute, and plans regular events and projects to involve the skate community, from *Idlewood* zine-making sessions to board launch parties to her project with friend Alana Paterson—a flower bouquet and veggie-box distribution venture called Valley Buds Flower Farm.²⁵ Only Pezel would combine flowers, veggies, and skateboards and have it become a success.²⁶

In an interview with Rhianon Bader, who also worked at Antisocial for years, Pezel explains that she started skateboarding in 1996 at age fifteen, defying her mom, who suggested that only bad kids skateboarded.²⁷ Pezel embraced the freedom of skateboarding and wasn't phased when skateboarders in high school gave her attitude, claiming certain spots as their own, especially after she joined "a little crew of about six ladies."²⁸ This crew began to skate together at Confederation Park in Burnaby and went on road trips together, seeking out events such as the All Girl Skate Jam in 1997 in San Diego—the first of its kind, and which was replicated worldwide with contest series including the Gallaz Skate Jam, Girls Skate Out in Britain, and Chick Flip and Ride Like a Girl in eastern Canada.²⁹

During her travels, Pezel experienced community and imagined an alternative to the soulless extreme sporting-goods stores—she wanted to create a vibrant space for

skateboarders and at the same time support her artist friends with a gallery to show their work.³⁰ Rick McCrank invested in the idea, and the magic began. Antisocial was firstly a skateshop, but also a gallery and music venue that showcased the creativity of skateboarders and those connected to the scene. Pezel states, "I don't understand the concept of having a store where you just open and close every day ... To have none of that extra-curricular—art shows, music shows, community events—would be wild. I'm always trying to figure out a way to have something else going on."³¹

Even when the storefront had to move to 2337 Main Street in 2007 due to gentrification, and there was no longer room for a mini-ramp, the action continued with back-alley parties, film screenings, book launches, a more intimate gallery space, and fundraisers. And when Covid-19 restrictions prevented indoor gatherings, Antisocial supported initiatives via the Vancouver Skateboard Coalition, such as the Green Ramp on Granville Island, and outdoor events including CitySkate and Skate for Change, to keep the community connected.

Antisocial, like most skateshops, sponsors a team of riders and launches shop videos. At age ten in the late nineties, Alison Matasi started skateboarding and was sponsored by Antisocial five years later. In anticipation of the 2004 Slam City Jam contest, Alison was recognized in a *Vancouver Sun* article for her dominance skating Hastings Bowl and her potential to go professional.³² Alison was featured in the Villa Villa Cola (VVC) skateboard video *Getting Nowhere Faster* (2004), produced and distributed by 411 Video Productions.³³

VVC was a collaboration of friends, which began as a zine in 1997 by skateboarding sisters Tiffany and Nicole Morgan in San Diego, and influenced the launch of the legendary female-focused Meow Skateboards by VVC and Rookie skater Lisa Whitaker.³⁴

Alison always gives credit to her big brother, Lee Matasi, for introducing her to skateboarding. Lee was a kind and creative skater, and the namesake of the DIY skatespot "Leeside" located in a tunnel near the Pacific National Exhibition. He was "known as the person who single-handedly cleaned out [the] trash-infested underpass,"³⁵ filled the walls with graffiti under his tag, "Avers," and created obstacles for skateboarding on a rainy day.

In 2005, Lee was murdered, and the Canadian skateboarding community was devastated by this senseless loss. Collective efforts to acknowledge his memory and protect Leeside motivated many skaters to rally together, fundraise, petition, protest gun violence, and celebrate a friend and brother. Antisocial was at the heart of this protest and, in 2007, Matasi's artwork was featured in the exhibition *Until We Get Leeside*.³⁶ Today, Leeside continues to evolve with concrete obstacles and annual skate contests, and the space is a sought-out destination.

Fundraisers by a skateboard shop are not uncommon, especially when the intention is to build a new skatepark, but the tragedy of Lee Matasi's death and the efforts to preserve Leeside were a catalyst for social action. Skateboarders were especially motivated to get organized via the Vancouver Skateboard Coalition, and Pezel was at the helm of this movement. Bader explains:

[Michelle] has a natural influence that she uses as a force for good, whether it's representing the skate community at city council meetings, fighting to protect the Leaside DIY skatepark built in memory of a friend who was killed by gun violence, being the first skateshop with a float in the pride parade, or donating skateboards to youth.³⁷

While Pezel is the last person to declare herself a champion for justice, she's been described as a "powerful community builder" by the likes of skateboarding photographer Norma Ibarra.³⁸ Pezel's "force for good" has extended to hosting fundraisers and coordinating events, often in partnership, for Skateistan (an organization that supports disadvantaged youth in Afghanistan in pursuing school and skateboarding), the Stand Up for Standing Rock movement during the 2017 Dakota Access Pipeline protests, the Unist'ot'en camp and Wet'suwet'en Nation resisting unnegotiated pipeline development in 2019, safe spaces for LGBTQIA2S+ and BIPOC skateboarders, and promoting the outreach work of Nations Skate Youth, bringing access to skateboarding for and with Indigenous youth.

The impact of Antisocial and Pezel's relentless energy for hosting events, welcoming all to skateboarding no matter their background or skill set, and bringing light to issues that matter to youth is simply immeasurable.



The mission statement of Nations Skate Youth is: "Empowering Indigenous youth to embrace their right



Breana Geering, frontside boardslide, Vancouver, 2019

Photo: Norma Ibarra

to self-determination through the positive impact of skateboarding,"³⁹ and this has been the life path of program director Rose Archie. Archie is from Tsq'escemc Nation (Canim Lake, BC), known as the "People of Broken Rock," and she began skateboarding in 1992 with her older sister, often hitchhiking one to two hours from her reserve to the nearest skatepark.⁴⁰

Once settled in Vancouver, Archie met other skateboarders from diverse backgrounds. She was inspired to see the kinds of positive, inclusive skate events that are possible after travelling to attend contests outside Vancouver, including Exposure in California (founded by pro skater Amelia Brodka) and Wheels of Fortune in Seattle (founded by Kristin Ebeling of *The Skate Witches*

zine and the Skate Like a Girl non-profit).⁴¹ Archie knew that there was nothing comparable in British Columbia, so she co-founded Stop, Drop and Roll in 2015—a skate contest for women, trans, non-binary, and/or gender-non-conforming skaters. In an interview for the CBC, Archie notes how she feels supported, because the event is an “environment where you can just be yourself and be comfortable in your own skin, and I think that’s important.”⁴²

The contest has a range of categories and prizes depending on participants’ skill and age, and a high calibre of skaters; Breana Geering, Una Farrar, Maddy Balt, and Kassy Bailey have competed in the event. Antisocial hosts celebrations after the contest wraps up. Geering actually acknowledges the welcoming support of Rose Archie and Michelle Pezel in an interview that celebrates her accomplishment of becoming pro for Girl Skateboards.⁴³

Archie’s “ultimate dream is to launch a Canadian All Nations Skate Jam, modelled off of the one held annually at the Gathering of Nations Powwow in Albuquerque, New Mexico.”⁴⁴ Indigenous youth to the south have cultivated a thriving skateboarding scene, and Archie along with skateboarders Dustin Henry, Tristan Henry, Adam George, and Joe Buffalo felt inspired to do the same, launching Nations Skate Youth in December 2019.⁴⁵ Archie describes how “skateboarding has done so much for us, and we want to show the kids what’s possible.”⁴⁶

Nations Skate Youth has offered workshops and presentations to more than twenty Indigenous communities in British Columbia and the Yukon, bringing gear and ramps for kids to get started, and advocating more skatepark construction. Archie shares that it’s not just



Breana Geering, pro skateboarder celebration, 2021. Photo: Jess Sung



Michelle Pezel, Rose Archie, and Joe Buffalo, 2020. Photo: Dan Toulgoet

about skateboarding—it’s also about being accessible and allowing kids to open up about their lives. “You get to have those conversations ... listening to the struggles and what [the kids] are going through ... They open up to you, it’s amazing, it’s almost like being a counselor.”⁴⁷

The members of Nations Skate Youth are trusted, as they have personally experienced the unimaginable impacts of Canada’s systemic racism against Indigenous people. These include the residential schools, of which Joe Buffalo of the Samson Cree Nation is a survivor, suicide of friends and family members, addiction, isolation, and violence towards Indigenous women.⁴⁸ The heartbreak continues as more information about residential schools and the Sixties Scoop is exposed, but Archie and her crew want youth to combat this history, to “be proud of who they are and where they come from. To see the importance of keeping their language and their culture and their traditions alive.”⁴⁹



Photo courtesy of Rhianan Bader from Skateistan / Afghanistan during her time working in Kabul, 2010

Nations Skate members understand what Indigenous youth are struggling with, and they offer hope, opportunity, visibility, and community with a focus on mental health. Archie concludes that, “We want [youth] to be happy, active and empowered ... their voice is important.”⁵⁰ Skateboarding is a platform that gives youth a voice and has become a tool for social activism. In a panel discussion titled “SWITCH: Skaters with Intent to Change,”⁵¹ which included Rose Archie and Joe Buffalo, the topic of the positive effects of skateboarding, in terms of mental health, education, and social awareness, was discussed, and more of these kinds of conversations are emerging.



Skateboarding in the 1980s claimed to be fuelled by rebellion, and while some skaters may bemoan that the integrity of skateboarding has eroded with the dawn of the Olympic era, it appears that skateboarding has actually become more socially conscious and more countercultural. Skateboarding has a broader scope than ever before, with groups rallying around social issues such as Black Lives Matter, advocating gender-inclusive safe spaces, calling for more mental health resources, and promoting equal access for all, including those with physical disabilities—and this is positive.

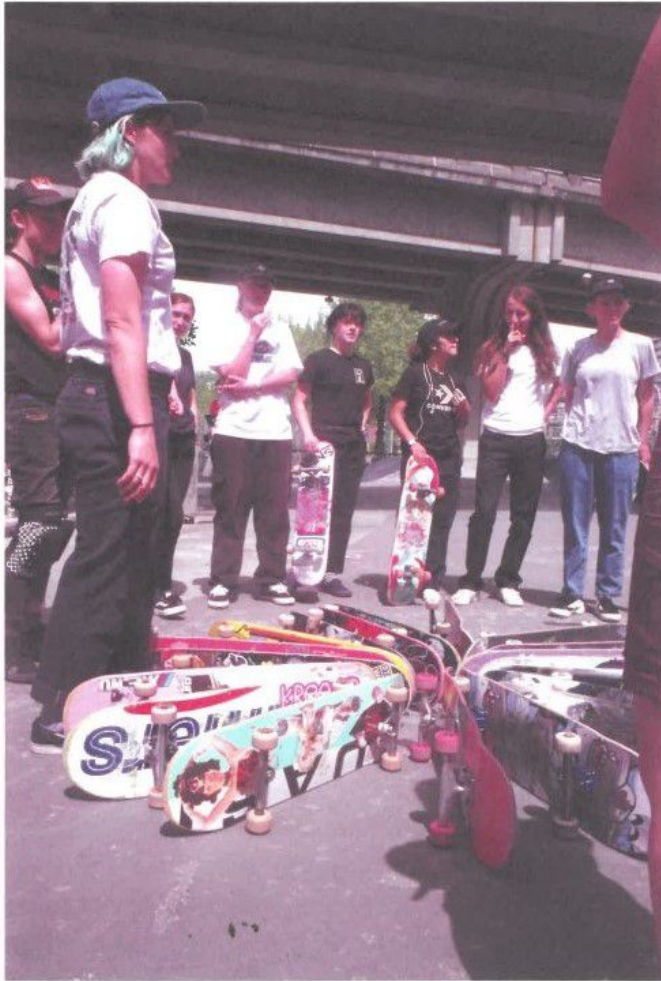
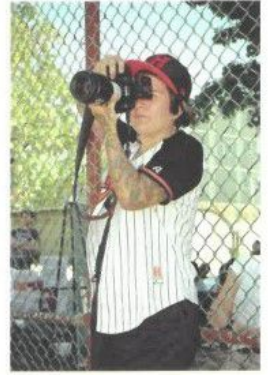
In her work with Skateistan and partner organization Goodpush Alliance, Rhianon Bader has been quietly operating at an international level to initiate change. In reflecting on this work, she says:

I don't think I ever consciously worked to build connections in the skate scene until I joined Skateistan. Up until that point I had been quite selfishly enjoying skateboarding and the many positives it had brought to my life. But when I first started to hear about organizations like Skate Like a Girl in Seattle, or Uganda Skateboard Union, I was really intrigued by this idea of sharing the gift of skateboarding with those who might not be able to easily access it, for whatever reason. Then I read an article in 2010 about the opening of Skateistan's first Skate School in Kabul that had photos of Afghan girls shredding and I felt so inspired. I went to their website and applied to volunteer immediately.⁵²

This decision to leave Vancouver for Kabul was a gamechanger for Bader and her friend Erika Kinast. The two skateboarders volunteered and then worked for Skateistan, contributing to its expansion into Cambodia, South Africa, and Jordan.

Bader began skateboarding in Calgary at age fourteen, before the city had a skatepark. After visiting Vancouver skateparks the following year, which included a positive encounter with Michelle Pezel and Laura Piasta at the Whiterock park, Bader decided to move west when she graduated from high school.⁵³ She was one of the first female skateboarders in Canada to launch her own website, called *Skate of Mind*, and to contribute to magazines such as *SBC* and *Color* as a writer, editor, and photographer.

Photographer Norma Ibarra in action at the sixth annual Stop, Drop and Roll skateboard contest, organized by Rose Archie, Britannia Courts, Vancouver, 2021
Photo: Jess Sung



Participants in the fifth annual Stop, Drop and Roll skateboard contest, organized by Rose Archie, 2019. Photo: Jess Sung

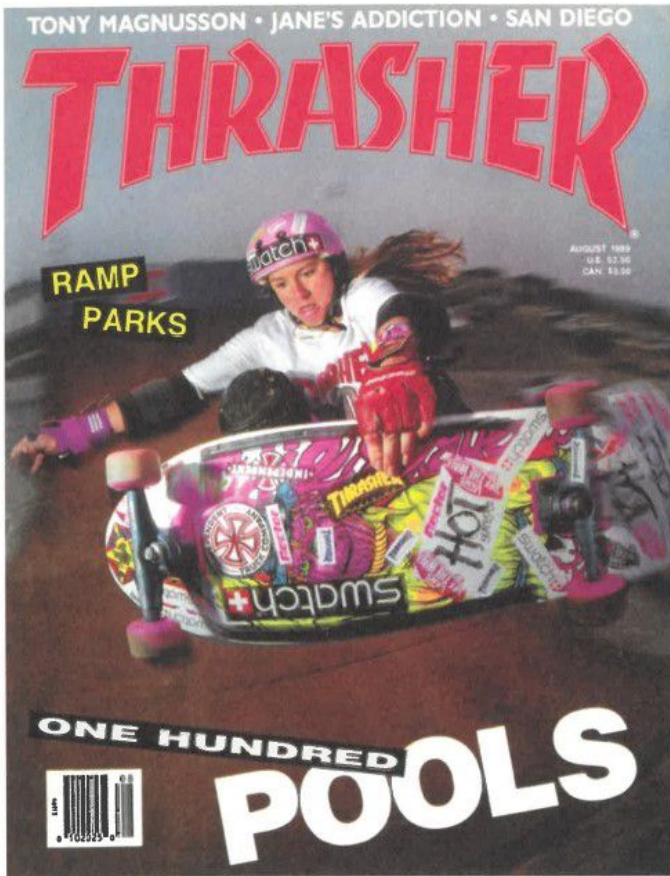
Now living in Berlin, Bader is the program manager of the Goodpush Alliance—an international knowledge-sharing network that collaborates with grassroots skateboarding initiatives in more than sixty countries, providing conferences, toolkits, resources, webinars, and funding.⁵⁴ The Goodpush Alliance also advocates

widespread change, such as the Commitment to Anti-Racism in Skateboarding project launched in May 2021—something of which Bader is especially proud. This commitment has more than eight hundred signatories, including brands, governing bodies, non-profits, and regular skaters.⁵⁵

With a global perspective, Bader recognized Vancouver as having one of the most dynamic scenes in the world, in particular the community-building work of Michelle Pezel and Rose Archie, and “the new generation of social skate projects there, like Vancouver Queer Skate, Takeover Skateboarding, and Late Bloomers Skate Club.”⁵⁶ The new generation challenges the old-school stereotype, personified by the white, heterosexual male, because it has proven to be detrimental for building community.

A major factor in the success of this new movement in skateboarding is social media and the visibility it affords—no one can dictate who is behind the camera and who is being validated. In a *New York Times* article, “The New Skaters,” Jazmine Hughes credits social media with helping to “create new versions of skate communities, bringing together women, trans and nonbinary skaters, as well as skaters of color.”⁵⁷

In British Columbia, the new generation has been well documented by Norma Ibarra, who originates from Mexico and has been showcasing diverse skaters through zines and social media. In 2009, Ibarra moved to Vancouver, just blocks from Antisocial, became obsessed with skateboarding, and “transferred her lifelong photography passion into contributions to the burgeoning *The Skate Witches* collective-turned-zine



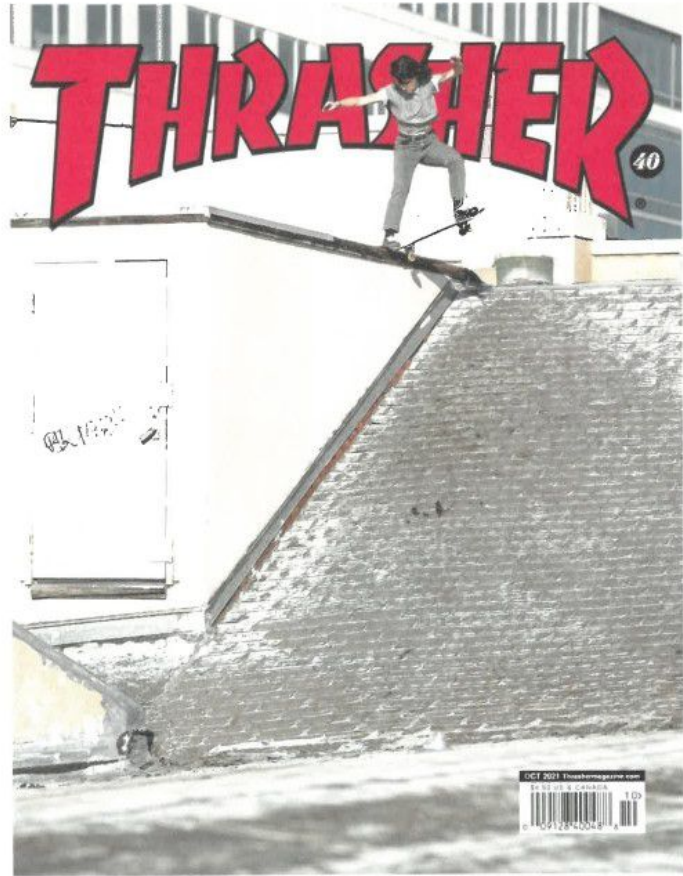
Thrasher, August 1989

Cover: Cara-Beth Burnside, frontside air. Photo: Dan Cavalheiro

and volunteering for non-profits like Skate Like a Girl.”⁵⁸ In an interview for Quarter Snacks, Ibarra shares the process of creating the zine *Credits*, which complements the all-female video for Vans alongside Shari White, and the evolution of her career, including her own book of photography, *PARA TI* (2021).⁵⁹

The existence of female-presenting skateboarders has become accepted in mainstream skateboarding media primarily because it was women like the members of the Women’s Skateboarding Alliance and Exposure Skate leading the way forward, creating their own contests, zines, websites, magazines, and contests, and protesting the inequity of contest winnings—there was no waiting around for their male counterparts to recognize their participation.

The same evolution is happening for other marginalized groups whose activity is more hardcore and subversive than mainstream skateboarding could ever claim credit for. Like Rookie skateboards for young women in the



Thrasher, October 2021

Cover: Breana Geering, crooked grind to fakie. Photo: Taylor Ballard

nineties, Unity skateboarding and There skateboards have the same significance for LGBTQIA2S+ skaters,⁶⁰ as do Colonialism skateboards for Indigenous skaters. Behind these companies are skateboarders meeting up and doing things for themselves.

Alia Youssef, in an article for the *Globe and Mail*, poses the question, “Who belongs at skate parks?” when interviewing Ryme Lahcene, the founder of Takeover Skateboarding. Lahcene believes that everyone belongs, and with Takeover their goal to “claim space for underrepresented groups in the skateboarding community”⁶¹ is happening, with places such as Vancouver’s beloved Britannia Courts. Takeover hosts meetups, events, and workshops for women, BIPOC, and LGBTQIA2S+ skaters of all levels to make sure that they feel welcomed as skateboarders.

Skateboarding is becoming a more inclusive pursuit, and skateboarders from British Columbia can be proud that

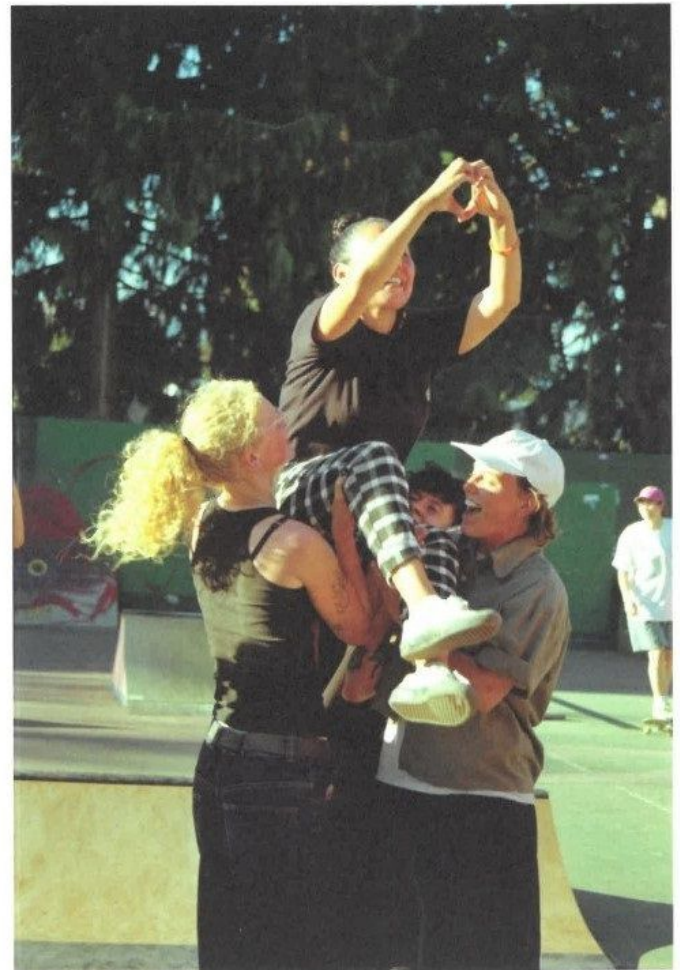
what is going on locally is part of this positive movement. Even with this progress, Norma Ibarra notes that skateboarding needs to continue evolving, as there are brands that could do more to showcase diversity, offer space to women and queer skaters, and include them in their tours and videos beyond token recognition.⁶²

When comparing the 1980s to the 2020s, one way to gauge the evolution is by examining *Thrasher*. The article by Bonnie Blouin and some follow-up commentary in her “Skater’s Edge” column appear to be the two instances, in the entire decade of the 1980s, that focus on the gendered experiences of female skateboarders. Granted, *Thrasher* did provide a cover photo featuring Cara-Beth Burnside (the first to showcase a female skateboarder) in August 1989.

In contrast, we witness Breana Geering from Kelowna, BC, on the cover of the October 2021 issue of *Thrasher* followed by an interview, as well as features on Fabiana Delfino and Una Farrar, and full- and double-page advertisements showcasing Nicole Hause, Sakura Yosozumi, Victoria Ruesga, Maité Steenhoudt, Brighton Zeuner, and Samarra Brevard. This is a much more well-rounded reflection of skateboarders with diverse genders, sexualities, and racial backgrounds.

No one should ever want to return to the eighties vision of skateboarding. Cara-Beth Burnside, a pioneering vert skater who began skating in the seventies, recalls how it was difficult for female skaters to feel part of the scene in the eighties. “Who wants to go skateboarding at 13 and get made fun of by guys?” she asks.⁶³ And this sentiment is echoed today. Who wants to go skateboarding at any

age and be harassed about their gender, sexuality, or race? If skateboarding was built on rebellion, let’s continue to fracture and expand, to build community, and never settle for ignorant and backwards thinking that suggests skateboarding is only one thing for one type of person.



left to right: Una Farrar, Breana Geering, and Shari White hoisting organizer Rose Archie at the sixth annual Stop, Drop and Roll skateboard contest, 2021. Photo: Jess Sung

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