

FIRST THINGS FIRST

CYNDY PENDERGAST

WORDS BY NATALIE PORTER

My name is Natalie Porter, founder of the Womxn Skateboard History archive and curator of the Instagram account @womxnsk8history, where I chronicle and celebrate the overlooked stories of women skaters who have shaped skateboarding in some fashion but often remain unsung. I began skating in 1995, and in 2003, I penned a thesis on female skateboarders before becoming a librarian. Although skateboarding remains predominantly male, presenting at the 2024 Slow Impact event in Tempe, where I was met with such thoughtful questions and deep attentiveness, reaffirmed my mission. It made me feel seen, appreciated, and ready to share these stories with a broader audience.

I hope the readers of this column will carry that same spirit of curiosity and respect. Keep an eye out for my upcoming book, *Girl Gangs, Zines, and Powerslides: A History of Badass Women Skateboarders*, which will be published by ECW Press in Fall 2025.

For this column, I wanted to highlight a skater whose impact on the history of skateboarding may have flown under your radar but who has left an indelible mark on me personally: Cyndy Pendergast.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CYNDY

"CYNDY FELT RESPECTED BY THE TURF CROWD, EVEN IN COMPETITIONS AGAINST THE GUYS. 'I WOULD PLACE PRETTY CONSISTENTLY IN BOWL CONTESTS THERE,' TAKING A TOP THREE SPOT, INCLUDING ONE WIN."

Part of my motivation with the Womxn Skateboard History archive is to elevate senior women whose stories have been buried and forgotten. Many of the individuals I interviewed never acquired the status of "pro skater," or witnessed their name in a magazine, but that's what makes them so admirable. They still pursued skateboarding with determination knowing that there were few opportunities to be validated on par with their male peers.

It was a challenge to choose who to open with, but I believe Cyndy Pendergast is a worthy candidate. Cyndy encapsulated that vision of defiance held by skaters in the early 1980s, persevering despite the boom and bust of the industry. Cyndy's name likely resonates with only a tight crew from the Midwest who skated The Turf skatepark in Greenfield, Wisconsin. Ironically, The Turf is currently being restored thanks to a group of volunteers who knew that the bowls could be salvaged even though they were filled with gravel, "buried and forgotten."

I'd had Cyndy's name in a list of female skaters for twenty years without a shred of evidence until I stumbled upon an issue of *EDO* zine from 1986 thanks to Brad Marx and his Ragged Edge Zine Collection. A skater / photographer named Marla Rainey had written to *EDO* explaining that there were five female skaters in the area, including Cyndy. On June 1st, 1985, at the first Midwest Amateur Ramp Series at Tory Boettcher's ramp in Cary, Illinois, Cyndy placed 7th competing against guys like John Lucero and Neil Blender in Division A. Photos of Cyndy were published in *EDO* and *The Monthly Shredder*, and even though photocopying has rendered them grainy and blurred, it was obvious that Cyndy was killing it with hand-plants, Miller flips, lip-tricks, grabs and airtime.

I was lucky that Cyndy has a unique name that she stuck to. The added challenge in tracking down these OG skaters is that their last names can change due to marriage, and on occasion someone updates their name to align with their preferred pronouns. I was also grateful that Cyndy continued to be a badass. Cyndy has no social media presence, but a photo of her crossing a river on her KLR650 motorcycle was posted to the ADV Woman Facebook page, whom I wrote to. The biker ladies were stoked on Cyndy's skateboarding history and gave me an introduction.

Cyndy took up street skating in the 70s before she became a team rider for the Rainbow Skatepark in Chicago. Cyndy sent me photos of herself and her female crew skating the Rockfords' Reservoir, one of which was published in *Thrasher* (October 1982) after she wrote to them hoping for

better representation of women. Cyndy then pursued vert at The Turf and said, "airs out of bowls were my favorite thing and after that rippin' tiles" in the clover pool. She explained that "the kids I skated with didn't care about gender. The occasional kid would look at me in wonder since I look very genderqueer and was usually seen to be male to the point people would argue with me that I must be a boy." Regardless, Cyndy felt respected by The Turf crowd, even in competitions against the guys. "I would place pretty consistently in bowl contests there," taking a top three spot, including one win.

When pro skater Pattie Hoffman visited The Turf on her tour with Variflex in 1980, Cyndy was pumped. Unfortunately, Variflex refused to release a signature board for Pattie saying that a girl's board wouldn't sell. Pattie cut her losses but would re-emerge in 1992 with a video part in *SK8HERS* [dir. Ethan Fo]. Meanwhile, Cyndy faced her own sponsorship bullshit. Her talent was recognized by two California-based companies, but then the shaming began because she refused to grow out her cropped haircut and appear "feminine." Forty years later, Cyndy was still irritated. "I'm beating guys in pool contests, and they are worried about my hair length... 'Sponsors' really suck and can kiss my ass is pretty much how I feel." I sensed that not only were the rejections infuriating, but they were deeply hurtful, and this was compounded by other experiences coming out as gay.

Cyndy forged on thanks to her local scene being so inclusive but would spray-paint over her boards' graphics to show zero allegiance to any company. She also preferred zines. "The underground skate-rags were way cooler than the mainstream so that's where other female skaters and I would learn of each other." Cyndy had penpals from Florida and Scotland, and they would trade photos of each other skating. Today, Cyndy still gets out for a rip on her motorcycle or snowboard, and she was very excited about the prospect of skating The Turf as a 60-year-old.

Even when the dominant skateboarding industry only catered to a male demographic, it's stories like Cyndy's that remind us that there were always women and non-binary skaters disrupting the narrative and they tend to be pretty damn awesome. Skateboarding has entered a stage of maturity because many of us are old enough and capable enough to restore the past and create opportunities for future generations. Whether it's rejuvenating old skateparks or shining a light on game-changing skateboarders, these efforts are collaborative and I'm grateful for everyone who has helped by sharing photos, memories, and zines, even the simple act of reading these bios means so much. Thank you!

CYNDY PENDERGAST OF CHICAGO
 RIPPIN AT THE TURF.....
 I WOULD LIKE TO SEE MORE GIRLS
 IN THE SHREDDER SO KEEP IT UP.
 Stay away From That
 Tylenol!!!!!!



Layback Air
BLAZZ
 "Wild Hair" Grind

"I've T
Thrash
 Layed "Da" Back



THE SHREDDER
 OCT. '82

This Girl
 Shreds.
 Ed...