

Skate Mom

How I got my wheels | BY KIM COOPER FINDLING

Just before my 44th birthday, I took up skateboarding. Somehow, this seemed like a good idea. I was entering my 10th year of motherhood, and had reached the point at which my children were accomplishing things I'd never even attempted. In just the last few years, I'd watched my two daughters scale rock-climbing walls, sing solos on stage and do back handsprings as if they were born for it. I'm afraid of heights, have never sung outside of my car, and couldn't pull off a back handspring if a year's salary depended on it. But skateboarding was something I'd always wanted to do.

When I was a preteen, I'd hopped naively on my friend Jennifer's board, only to have the thing fly out from under me like a rocket and zoom into the curb, nearly throwing me to the pavement. Clearly harder than it looked, I thought, dumbfounded. I was the kind of child who didn't ever want to look silly. I never tried again.

But in my 40s, I didn't care about looking silly. Well, let's be honest—I did. A little. But now I had an adult perspective: Skateboarding wasn't nearly as important as successful parenting or professional achievement—who cared if I was terrible at it?

My two daughters, Libby and Maris, had recently been gifted skateboards and Rollerblades, so there were plenty of wheels to go around. The first time I tentatively put foot to board on the sidewalk in front of our house, 7-year-old Maris appeared alarmed. "Mom, be careful," she said. "We don't want to end up in the ER." (This being something I'd said to her many times over the years.)

On my second attempt, a month later, I was determined. The three of us set out for the park down the street on a sunny, breezy, beautiful day. At first, the board shot out from under me. Just like it had decades before. This time, I got back on. Soon, I started to get the hang of the balance, the kick, staying with the ride.

"Good job, Mom!" said Maris. "Here's a tip—put your feet more like here." She wobbled by on pink roller skates, pointing at the center of the board. She was right; my balance immediately improved.

"Keep your eyes on what's ahead," chimed in 9-year-old Libby.

"Not at your feet." That, too, proved to be sound advice.

We found smoother pavement; I got braver. We took turns lapping a tree on a modest hill. A woman in a zip sweatshirt and sneakers walked by and gave me a big smile. "You go, girl!" she said. After a while, I saw an acquaintance approaching, and waited for a greeting. It never came; apparently he didn't recognize me when I was wearing a helmet and Libby's butterfly sunglasses.

Then a guy appeared on a board with an outrageous paint job and serious wheels. He breezed by us and lifted from the ground in a little hop, without even removing his hands from his hoodie's kangaroo pocket—a vast contrast to my arms, which had been windmilling for an hour. "Wow, he's a lot better than me," I said, sort of to myself,

sort of to my kids and sort of to another gentleman passing by. "You're doing OK," the gentleman replied, grinning.

I was grinning, too. Skateboarding was fun—even awkwardly, even utterly without skill. The short glides I made across the pavement felt like freedom, felt like being a kid again. Plus, I was with my own kids, the three of us sharing time together in a totally new way.

On my third lesson a few days before my birthday, I got dissed by the ice cream-truck guy. The vehicle came up behind me, and the driver hollered over his tinkling music, "Don't hurt yourself!"

The directive took the wind out of my sails, and my girls could tell. "Mom," said

Libby, "I think you're way better than lots of moms on that thing."

"Just remember," added Maris, "we're all beginners here."

We skated around the park for an hour, each of us getting more confident. I didn't fall once, though the green skateboard did become a rocket several times. Finally it was time to head back to homework, baths and dinner. We (bravely, I believe) took the route that passes a hip sidewalk bar, where 20-somethings banter and sip brews in the late-afternoon sun. A young man approaching on a bike paused as he saw us coming, and I braced for his reaction. A slow smile spread on his face. "Hey, nice skate family," he said.

A skate family! The kids' faces lit up, and I couldn't suppress my happiness, either. For my 44th birthday, we'd become a skate family. Best gift ever.

Kim Cooper Findling skates in the Northwest.

