

## Skate Key on a Blue Ribbon

*by Carole Gauntlett*

It's a race to the top of the hill in the crisp of the morning, one skate in each hand, skate key on a ribbon bumping against my chest. We're too young yet to be puffing and gasping for air but we're all three of us giggling as we go.

Reaching the top and finding a dry spot to sit, making any adjustments for skates to fit shoes. These are the same shoes and skates but part of the ritual demands adjustments. Then making sure that the clamps are centered over the sole of each shoe, skate-key finishes the job. Walk around on the grass a bit to get the feel of things before testing the cement. The highest hill in the park with a sidewalk almost smooth enough for a speedy but resistant ride down, ending at a grassy patch which can upend a novice-heartlessly. Experience has taught us to swerve from one cement edge to the other on the downward rush. It's feeling the speed and bending your knees bringing you to a daring crouch as you move. The wind in your hair and the sun on your face. It's a breath of independence.

It's Sat. so I got to wear pants instead of a skirt. My mother has threatened not to mend them again. She's given up on nursing my knees. I can, by myself, use soap and water followed my Mercurochrome or if she's really mad, Iodine. I know I won't get any sympathy so I don't bother to look for any. Besides, after the initial impact, it doesn't hurt that much.

As nervous as we are, we all still want to go first. So we decide to go by age. I'm the youngest so I get to go first. I can't linger or they'll think I'm afraid so off I go. Once I've started I begin to serpentine feeling tall and strong and on my own. I lean and dip just a bit before standing up again. I can hear them yelling for me and I can't hide my grin. On my next run I'll dip further and hold it longer but for now I'm slowing down to end just before the grass so that I can walk my skates into a stop. I'm trying not to let too much pride push through my face as I look up to see Sam start his run.

We'll play this game for most of the day getting braver and more daring, laughing harder and louder at every turn. I wonder who the genius was who invented roller skates. I'd sure like to say thanks for this day.