

## **Roller Skates**

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Freedom Pennsylvania is a small town on the east side of the banks of the Beaver River, a few miles north of where that River meets the Ohio at Rochester Pa, loses its identity. The bank on both sides of the Beaver meander north, are steep. That's really so in Freedom where half the city streets are perpendicular to that stream. To accommodate recent Horse & Buggy days, these streets were paved with cobble stones, allowing animals and vehicles to gain traction. Roller skating on those streets was treacherous; sidewalks also had an unfavorable slant, gaps between pieces.

Later the family moves north to near-by New Brighton and Marion Hill adding another impediment; many neighborhood streets were dirt.

At the age of ten the relocation to Erie, Pennsylvania introduced my sister and me to roller skating. Land from Lake Erie's edge rises gently south. And streets were paved.

But skate use had changed over-night, when older boys began taking the skate apart, nail each half of one skate to a three foot piece of 2x4, nail a discarded orange crate vertically to the front of that contraption, extending a small wooden arm to the top of the box; and voila, a toy more precious than the wagon once used to pull one another everywhere. Increase mobility, the rear skate would be adjusted; remove wheels and axel, dispose the plastic piece that kept the wheels from tilting. Once gone, the operator could whisk the scooter left or right easily, gain amazing control.

Now, your own scooter-racer. Push off with either leg, coast, this speedster could reach a dangerous tempo quickly, was completely controllable, reliably steady. Its unmovable body parts, the board and crate, could be painted, decorated, named, made unique to the owner. And was gentle to the operator. In any crash, vehicle more damaged than operator.

A Win - Win treasure. I must have made four different ones in three years.

An aside, on the Macadamized streets of Erie, friction between that surface and the skate metal was ruinous to the skate cheap metal. A skate, reasonably might last half a summer, wheels worn away. Then toss those pieces, nail the other two halves of the skate pair. Cheap transport.

For youth making an orange crate-skate racer, the first hint of genuine speed, the clean Lake Shore breeze brushing the face an added thrill. And this vehicle, once propelled continued effortlessly. That, a special treat for every youth, until that first two wheel bicycle.

My sister and I, most neighbors, never became adept at roller skating. Because, any imperfection of the street or sidewalk, stopped one skate, the body above flying onto that solid surface. Mothers are great nurses, and band-aids an outward sign of adventure.

Still, Mom was never discouraged our Roller Skating,  
or Ice Skating when ponds froze fast.

In later years I have never willingly stepped upon a professional roller rink.

But cherishing all youthful days, I retain in mementoes,  
a *Skate Key*,  
the WWII Universal 300 *key to any military Jeep*,  
key to *front door front of first house*.