

The Homecoming

By Loweta Kimball

Reuben Mott was by far the best roller skater in our elementary school. He skated all the time – up and down the street, even where there were no sidewalks, leaping over the ditch by the side of the road, over wagon wheel ruts in the road – effortlessly. He made flips and twist-arounds look easier than walking, running or jumping. He moved fast along his roller skate path yet he didn't yell and scream like the other boys did as they raced around the school yard. The principal said she really appreciated that. Man, was he fun to watch. Through his soft wide smile, the thick black dreads standing straight up on his head, shirttail flapping in the wind you knew he was headed for places unknown at zing speed. Reuben made a point never to run into anybody like many of the other boys did and we girls appreciated that.

When Reuben had time, he taught some of the younger kids how to skate and how to clean and oil their skate wheels. I couldn't take his lessons because my legs weren't strong enough to lift those heavy metal skates strapped to the sole of my shoes and roll anywhere.

I lost track of Reuben when I was sent away to high school but I heard he was drafted into the army after his high school graduation. During his army years we saw him on one of those amateur hour television shows dancing away wearing fancy lace-up roller skates. He looked fantastic gracefully performing forward and backward flips and spins like we had never seen before. What a show! One of the television announcers called his performance 'electric and magical' so we nick-named him 'magic.' He easily won the amateur contest. His family was sent a copy of the television performance that was later shown at the elementary school. Those of us who knew him as the kid who was allowed to wear roller skates in the school building were proud we knew of his beginnings.

A few years into Reuben's enlistment in the US Army, his family received word he had been wounded and was being sent home. Townspeople got together and planned a homecoming celebration for our hometown celebrity. A more exciting time none of us had ever seen! The elementary school marching band would march wearing roller skates and as many townspeople as possible would be asked to wear roller skates during the celebration. Banners were decorated with pictures of roller skates and the parade route marked with a 'roller skates only' lane.

On that designated parade day, several of us old schoolmates were assigned to greet Reuben at the airport and bring him to the parade. Reuben was one of the last passengers to exit the airplane. We waved to him, he waved back. I hadn't seen Reuben in years, but I recognized his ever present smile. He was in a wheelchair. He had one arm and no legs. We all yelled in unison, "Welcome home, Reuben."