

Freedom Rolls

By Sheila Johnson

To this day, I can remember the sheer delight I felt when I got my first pair of roller skates for my seventh birthday. I was rather awkward and clumsy at doing anything other than walking with my feet; roller-skating was no exception. My parents were very proud to have saved up enough money to buy those red leather, strapped, four-wheeled skates. The most important advice they gave me was to not lose the key that adjusted the length of the skates to my shoes and not to forget to oil the wheels so they wouldn't squeak. I can see those skates now! The top front flaps on each skate were tied together in the center with brown leather laces on top of my tennis shoes. The leather back support extended from the arch of my foot to the heel of my shoes and were fastened by leather straps and silver buckles—Mary Jane style. Those skates had more leather on them than a full sized cow!

My knees were soon filled with red scratches and purple bruises, the palms of my hands were blistered and bloody, and I still managed to be filled with the joy of gliding down the bumpy cement sidewalk, being extra careful as I approached the downward slanted driveway which oftentimes contained gravel and dirt. I soon became skilled at my new sport, and I was able to join the neighborhood kids on the sidewalks, the street pavement, and the school playground.

My red roller skates were more than vehicles to a new and exciting form of play and exercise for me. They were my best friends when I needed to escape the hot, muggy, and chaotic indoors. They were my catalyst for meeting new neighbors, friends, and pets. They were my excuse for putting off my homework and chores until the last hours of daylight. My skates and my imagination took me to places up above the noise of the world with wings like eagles and above the clouds on floating magic carpets. There were no tears or anxiety even when the falls and scrapes and gravel and dirt came. I became a carefree spirit moving out of harm's way, singing songs of choice, moving with harmony, rolling with my own cadence, charting MY path, taking in the universe on my terms and being Me.

I can't remember when or how the eagle landed or the magic carpet touched the ground. There must have been a crowd oohing and awing at the magnificence of the large bird and the drifting of the woven mat. I don't recall. But I do remember my red skates—my red leather skates—my red leather freedom-bearing skates.