



# FREEWHEELING SKATEBOARD CULTURE IS A ZIG-ZAG ZEN

By CAMILA A. GONZALEZ

**S**kateboarding is a sport, an art and a way of life. It is exercise and therapy. It inhabits an internal void in a way that can feel spiritual.

It can also skin the holy heck out of your knees, bruise your elbows and throw out your back.

Therein lies the rub.

Skating is the Zen meditation of falling down and getting back up. It is conquering fear and shaking off pain. It is a *Kaizen* quest for self-improvement. It is Jonathon Livingston Seagull for terrestrials.

Riding a skateboard is like rolling through life with a squirt of WD-40. Sometimes we confront grumpy people

and testy security guards who call us vandals. Other times we roll up on kindly people who flash an encouraging smile and a thumbs up as if to say “keep at it!”

Skating is a transcendental outlet for Jocelyn Osegueda, a four-wheeling introvert who finds expression on her deck.

“I am not the kind of person who likes to talk about my feelings, so I skate when I need to offload,” she said. “The pain from falling distracts me from my emotions and is a way for me to cope. It just cancels everything out.”

Osegueda said she began skating in the seventh grade with her younger brother. They would skate aimlessly around their neighborhood, she recalled, as a way to arrive without traveling in the best of the Taoist tradition.

Injury is a constant possibility, she admitted, but never a deterrent. Skating is a constant dare that needs to be taken. ▶



## CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

Skating legends like Tony Hawk inspire but do not intimidate recreational skaters who seek a buzz rather than bravura.

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“Thankfully I’ve never broken a bone,” she said, “but I’ve been messed up a few times.”

Once, while shooting down a ramp at a skate park, she fell in an awkward split, scraping her face and much of her body. It was a bad case of road rash, the dreaded asphalt malady of the true believers. She winced as she recounted how badly her wounds burned when she had to scrub them out in the shower. Later the scars became dermatological badges of honor.

Her favorite tricks are Ollies and 180s, she said, but she is most happy gliding the flatlands.

“I prefer to skate street, so I can just have some time to do something I enjoy alone,” she said.

Osegueda’s kid brother Rafael, 17, said he started skating in the ninth grade. As a youngster he enjoyed bombing hills, doing kick flips, vibing to his music and cruising around with his sister. Skating with Jocelyn brought him peace, he said. Still does.

Mark Ramirez, a shy 18 year old, rocked a royal Adidas mask, an oversized tee that flapped around his hips and ivory Converse that were worn out, but hanging on for another session. His shaggy brown hair bounced in wavy curls that cascaded down over his invisible ears. Ramirez started skating his freshman year of high school, he said, and was hooked.

“It’s a fun pastime,” he said. “Skating is good exercise and a way to destress after a long day. It gets me out of the house and helps me maintain a healthy state of mind.”

Ramirez said his favorite aspect of the skate community is that it supports

beginners.

Injuries loom, even for the greats. Legendary Tony Hawk recently posted photos of his broken femur with a caption expressing how recovery will be much longer due to his age.

“I am up for the challenge,” he said.

So, too, his femur.

An HBO skate documentary, “Until the Wheels Fall Off,” features Hawk at his philosophical best.

“I found my sense of purpose and shaped my identity through skating, and it nourishes my mental health like nothing else,” said the Baron of Bearings. “I’ve said many times that I won’t stop skating until I am physically unable.”

Hawk is able again and soaring on his board. So is Osegueda. Nothing can keep devoted skaters off their boards for long. The hills, ramps and roads await like the path to enlightenment...or at least endorphins.

Southwestern College has a mysterious Sunday crew that visitors can hear from a distance, but rarely glimpse. Its wiry members scatter at the sight of campus police or workaholic faculty like finches who spot a skulking cat. Guerilla skaters are to be heard but not seen.

When the heat moves on, the skaters re-enter the arena. Joyous racket resumes.

Jocelyn, Raphael, Mark and Tony are miles away and galaxies apart in ability, but connected through time and space. Skaters are bonded by their universal exhilaration and mishaps. Cool landings become good stories, spills become even better ones.

Skating is life. ■