Roller Derby Saved My Soul
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Today I stand before you, not as your Religious Education Admin., but as The Minister of Mischief and I would guess that I am the first person to wear hot-pants in the pulpit at UUCV. If I am not, I would like to hear that story.

I am not here to share with you the history or how-to’s of Roller derby, I trust you are all capable of using Goggle and YouTube. This is your disclaimer, (Past experience has taught me I need one): My words are my own, the views I express here are not necessarily the views of the UU Church of Vancouver, the views of Storm City Roller Girls, or any other Roller Derby skater. We all travel our own path, and learn our own lessons. These are some of mine.

I am going to share with you how I came to be here, how I became a holy girl and a roller girl.

I was born the youngest daughter of the youngest daughter, in a very large family. I was born into a catholic family. I loved God, Jesus, and the blessed Virgin Mother. But I was never born sinful, that could never be my truth, so there was never communion for me.

I was raised in Unity, in New Thought Christianity. On the metaphysical Bible dictionary, on Marianne Williamson and Jonathan Livingston Segal. Let Peace begin with me; with love, within the atom smashing power of the mind.

And that was my truth, until…

Until the power of positive thinking could not heal my step-father, or my brother-in-law, or my husband.

Until I began to doubt that healing was the ideal outcome. Perhaps sometimes things happen that just suck, like people dying. And that does not mean that I did not pray correctly.

Until my 5-year-old, my oldest child at the time, told me that she did not find her truth in the existence of a God. That she did not want to go to this church that talked about that God. She wanted to be a witch.

A witch. I could do that. Now, I know she had been looking for Wizards and Hogwarts, but I loved the cycles of life and death, nature, deities that are fallible - that evolve! And the fae!

All thorough my life I had studied theology. Asking the question “What do people believe, and what did they believe before that?”

I have always felt a connection to Greek mythology. In being a witch, I had found the myths that I had always felt in my bones to feel true, could be my faith.

Throughout time, God has taken the image of whatever the people needed. Some people need him to be an old, stern, father figure. Some people need her to be a nurturing mother. Some prefer an energy force, or no image what-so-ever. Many ancient cultures gave God a face for each occasion, a way of channeling energy and intention into specific attributes and functions. I like that.

I joined Salmon and Hazelnut Family Fellowship, a child oriented coven, that welcomed me and my two small girls.

Around that time, I went to my very first roller derby bout. I moved into my new house, just the week before. Earlier that day my 1st husband, who was very ill both physically and mentally, had walked out. I was sobbing on my porch, completely broken, when I met my neighbor, Peg.

“Do you want some wine?” she asked. I nodded through my ugly cry.

“Do you want to go to roller derby?” she asked. Again, I nodded through the tears.

I walked into the Portland Expo Center emotionally raw and broken, and was blown away by the strength of these women. I watched The Rose City Rollers play in fishnets, tutus, corsets. These women took symbols of delicate girlieness, and turned them into symbols of strength and power. They had poise and grace, and fierceness. I could feel the power of the Amazons, of Athena, of Artemis, of Lilith in this place emanating from that track.

That night I tapped into the power of Lilith, she became a part of me. It was not my time to skate, not yet. But I had Lilith. She gave me strength to get out of bed, go to work, feed my children.
I rebuilt my life with Lilith, until it was time to thank her and let her go. I invited the spirit of Aphrodite into my life. Passion, beauty, self-love, and romance. I tried on a couple different covens and paths, looking for my spiritual home. In one of those paths I found my husband, Vale, who came with 3 incredible children. We jokingly tell each other, “I like you a whole lot, but I love your children.” Eventually, we move from Portland to Hockinson and felt, for a moment, that life has settled. I search for a roller derby team in Vancouver. I found a few women on a Facebook group searching for a practice space, but after a few weeks they seemed to disappear. It must not be the right time.

My youngest daughter is now seven. She tells me she believes in God, that she needs a bible. “Why don’t we go to church on Sunday? We need to go to church.” I think to myself “Where am I going to find a church that will accept my Christian child, my Pagan children, my Atheist child, my Agnostic children? There could not possibly be a place where I can love Jesus and the Goddess too!”

About a year after I started working in the nursery at this church, I saw a flyer for Storm City Roller Girls’ Red, White, and Bruised bout. (Roller derby games are called bouts) I knew it was there just for me. The Universe was telling me now, now is my time.

I picked up a pair of skates on eBay for $25, and borrowed safety gear. My skates could not move correctly, and I ripped them in half at my 4th practice. Skates cost money—the Cheep ones run about $100. My dream skates cost around $600. You get what you pay for. But I learned:

**The things you want to grow and cultivate, the things that are important to you, require an investment.**

After you learn to stand on skates, you are taught how to fall. Falling correctly is important. I spent my middle school years at the roller rink. I thought I could skate, but roller derby is hard. Very hard. I fell a lot. I still fall a lot. But I learned:

**Falling with control prevents injury. Life is going to knock you down. You are going to fall. Prepare for it. Fall small, and get back up quick.**

I think there were a dozen women at my orientation, maybe 3 of them were about the same skill level as I was. I watch as one of them was called up to home team tryouts within a month while I still struggled. And I moved up before some of my other friends. Some people stay in fresh meat for weeks, some people years. But I learned:

**Don’t compare your journey to someone else’s. We all have different skill sets and different obstacles. The only person you need to be better than, is the person you were yesterday.**

Roller derby is not a hobby. It is more than just a sport. It is a lifestyle, an obsession, a way of being. It’s not just money, Derby takes a huge commitment of time. Remember, Important things require investment. You cannot just come skate. Committees are required, getting along with difficult people is sometimes required. That personality that I have avoided since high school, I now have to work with on fundraising projects. No matter how abrasive this person may be, they are still my team mate. I still need to have their back on the track, and need to trust that they have mine. I learned:

**It is possible to have empathy and patience for the struggle of others, while standing up for yourself.**

What’s in a name? The Minister of Mischief is a nod to the world of Harry Potter, and Loki, I am an ordained minister, and I do tend to have a wicked sense of humor that can sometimes get me in trouble. My teammates call me Mischief, I skate with Roxie Roulette, Gnarly Babidson, Splatsy Cline, Headsecutioner, GlitterSweet, JabHer Jaw, Dollie Troublemaker, and many other fierce women. Our names give us a sense of identity beyond wife, mother or teacher. When you choose, or are given, a derby name you tend to embody it. You need to be comfortable with people yelling your derby name at you, with your children telling their friends. I learned:

**Names have power. Choose wisely**

I have been playing derby for almost two years, and I screw something up every time I play. It usually takes me making the same mistake at least a dozen times, before my body starts to listen to my mind and correct it. But if I spend the whole bout dwelling on the mistake I made in the first two minutes, I would drown in self-loathing. So I learned:

**Forgive yourself and move on. And while you’re at it, forgive your team mates too.**
When I skate, there is no room for anything else in my head. My mind is filled with foot work & positional blocking. Where is their Jammer? Where is my Jammer? Where is my partner? These women and men I skate with, we skate in covenant. They are my sisters and brothers. In being physically close, we become emotionally close. You find these people who become your “People.” Some have walked a very similar path in life, had similar heartbreaks, and joys. Some are very different. We are an intentional family.

Roller derby has grown since the first time I saw it, 9 years ago. The tutus and the corsets are all but gone, replaced by more practical athletic wear (Though you can still see fishnets) The rules are constantly being refined in an effort to make the game safer.

Bruises are a badge of honor. A symbol of “I have survived this, and I am stronger for it.” Bonnie D Stroir from the LA Derby Dames said, “we Ruin our bodies to save our souls, and for some reason that makes perfect sense.”

Roller derby saved my soul is a cliché. It is the title of countless blogs, on a thousand t-shirts, and even a song title (though it is not a church appropriate song).

Roller Derby did not Save my soul; I was not born sinful; it did not need saving.

What Roller derby did is strengthen my soul. It brought out my inner power. Made me face my own insecurities, love my body, stand up for myself, and push beyond my limits. I am an athlete. This is something that I get to say now. I AM AN ATHLETE. I am strong, and I am built for this.

Thank you.

If you are interested in becoming a Roller derby athlete, volunteer, or official, Storm City Roller Girls is having an orientation July 22nd. If you would like to see a bout, I can get you tickets to our next home game September 17th. It’s not just for women, Portland has a men’s team that is always welcoming new skaters.