

"Origins" by Eric Muss-Barnes

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The Pipeline Skatepark in Upland, California was opened in May 1977 in an uproarious celebration of marching bands and confetti streamed parades.

Well, okay, I wasn't there. I'm making up the marching bands and the parades - I'm sure that didn't really happen. Nevertheless, it did open in 1977 and closed in November 1988.

Outside the skateboarding community, "Upland" doesn't mean anything. Within the skateboarding community, the word conjures images of a skatepark that would remain legendary for generations.

Strangely enough, speaking to skateboarders in southern California who rode at Upland, they themselves don't seem to understand how legendary their stomping grounds actually were to the rest of the world. In every interview with cantankerous codgers of skateboarders who were around back then, Upland is spoken of, but other former skateparks typically get far more attention.

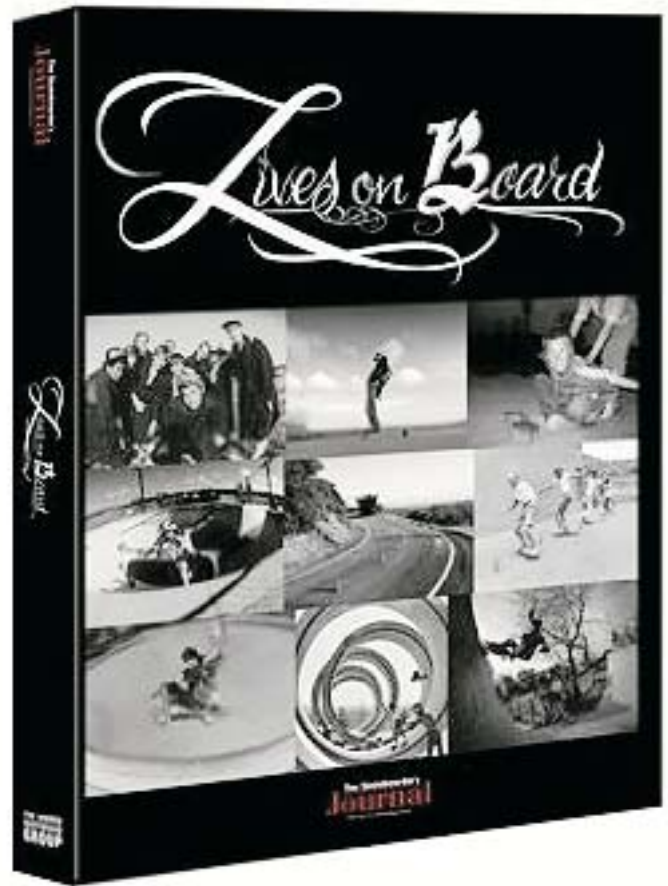
That is fine and well for the skateboarders who grew up in southern California. But for the rest of the country, The Pipeline was the ultimate domain. Nothing compared to The Pipeline. The Pipeline would get shown on television and in magazines more than any other concrete mecca. During the 1970s and 1980s, when skateboarders in the snow-encased regions of America were "California dreamin'" about skateparks - The Pipeline was the one we all dreamed about. Before we noticed Daisy Duke or Princess Ardala or that chick on *The Fall Guy*, we yearned for Upland.

Honestly, I don't remember when I first learned about skateboarding - but I will never forget the first time I learned about skateparks.

Skateparks were revealed to me by seeing someone on television soaring in a frontside air out of the bowl at the end of the Pipeline. I doubt I was even 10 years old at the time. The image completely blew me away. How was that possible? How could anyone do that? How did they build that huge swimming pool thing out of cement? My mind was racing. I was astonished and stoked and stunned. I couldn't believe what I had seen! I wanted to do that! I wanted to learn that!

Nearly 30 years later, that image is still frozen in my mind.

Not only was it the coolest thing I'd seen besides *Star Wars*, but it looked so easy! After all, they were wearing helmets and safety gear. As a naive child who never



wore safety gear in his life, I had the misguided notion that "safety gear" equalled "magical armor of invincibility"! I honestly thought if you fell wearing a helmet or kneepads, it was impossible to get hurt. I believed it literally made you impervious to harm - made it impossible to be injured.

Looking back, with that attitude, I guess it's a darned good thing I was never given the chance to skate The Pipeline!

Shortly after seeing those images of frontside airs, my friends and I all had our own skateboards. I couldn't wait to do my own epic jumps and stunts, just like I had seen on television!

My dreams shattered, I discovered skateboarding was far more difficult than I had visualized. How did you stop this thing!? How do you keep your balance!? My little plastic blue Makaha became quickly - and embarrassingly - delegated to nothing but buttboarding. Doing luge runs down parkinglot hills. That was it. Standing on it was near impossible. Finding solace in my humiliation, at least all my friends were just as awful as me. We were all terrified to stand up on our boards.

Cut to a decade later...

The summer of 1987 was one of the best of my life. All

I wanted to do was BMX Freestyle. That was my passion. My obsession. Nothing else mattered. Not even that chick on *The Fall Guy*.

My family wasn't "poor", but we were what you might call "lower middle class." Remember the house in *A Christmas Story*? I grew up about 10 blocks from there. That was my neighborhood. We had a nice house. We had a good car. We had the bills paid and food on the table. We'd take small and short vacations during the summer months. I had toys and clothes and I went to a good private school. But when it came to wanting things like a \$300 videogame system or a \$400 bicycle, like all good working class kids, I was expected to go out and earn the money myself.

Working my first job at White Castle Hamburgers fast-food-joint, I was in utter misery. I hated it. We were the first White Castle in Cleveland in something like 900 years. Our store broke every single opening-weekend-record the company had up to that point. The place was so busy, they had us outside in the parking lot directing traffic. Can you imagine that? Scrawny teenagers directing traffic at a fast-food restaurant!? I almost got mowed down several times by impatient white-trash neanderthals with more regard for hamburgers than human life.

I was determined to tough-it-out and survive. I had to buy that 1987 Haro Master and enduring this torment of teenage rites of passage was the only way my dream would manifest. Everytime I was tempted to quit, I'd go home and paruse *Freestylin' Magazine*, rekindling my determination. No. No way was I going to let these bloated bovine customers and bitter fast-food managers take this passion away from me! I would beat them. I'd earn every red cent of cash I required. I was getting that bicycle and nothing was going to stop me; Not evil customers; Not smelling like onions everynight; Not even that rotten manager who looked like a 20 year old Mickey Rooney, whom I fantasized about throwing in the deep frier. I dunno what was worse - the fact he was such a jerk or the fact he caused me to develop an aversion to someone I considered as beloved as Mickey Rooney.

After about a month at White Castle, succeed I did. I bought my 1987 Haro Master from Schnieder's Bikes on Lorain Avenue in Cleveland on 1 April 1987. Calling my bestfriend Garrett to come over and see it, he didn't believe me - he thought it was an April Fool's Joke.

And, yes, I quit that accursed job the moment I had earned enough green to buy the bike.

By the end of that summer, I discovered that I was quite frustrated with Freestyle. I was a decent rider, but not as good as my expectations wanted me to be. My friend had a quarterpipe in his backyard and I rode that thing everyday for weeks, unable to ever land a smooth 180

inside the transition, let alone catch any air. The ramp just scared me too much.

Freestylin' Magazine also featured a lot of skateboarding.

I got to thinking, "Part of the reason I'm so scared to get air on my Freestyle bike is because the idea of a 30lb. bicycle full of spinning spokes and protruding handlebars landing on top of me is really intimidating. A skateboard isn't nearly as deadly. Maybe I should try that."

Selling my Haro Master in the Fall, I returned to the same bikeshop, purchasing my 1987 Powell Peralta Per Welinder street deck (with a compass in the stock and this thing which tells time - just kidding). I still have that deck to this day, with almost all the original components on it.

Among my most vivid memories of learning to skateboard was the first night I had my deck. Eventually, all my friends skated too - but not for a couple more months. That first night, none of my friends were skateboarders. Everyone I knew was still doing Freestyle - I had no one to skate with. There were no instructional videos or Internet forums to help learn the basic skills. You got a skateboard, pointed it down the street, and went for it. That was how you learned. So, I returned to that sloped parking lot where I had done all that buttboarding luge on my old Makaha a decade earlier, determined to learn how to skate standing up this time!

Perched at the top of the hill, I'd roll down doing a long, slow carve, gradually turning back uphill to slow down. Then, I'd let gravity take me down backwards and I'd do a long carve that way. Repeating that once or twice, I'd start on the other side of the hill and carve in the opposite direction. Left. Right. Left. Right. Backwards. Forwards. Backwards. Forwards. Over and over. For hours I did that - getting more and more confident and gaining my balance. Learning to move. Shift my weight. Gain faster speeds with stability and control... Or at least feigning control and maintaining stability through pure dumb luck.

I will always remember that night.

It was so quiet and peaceful and serene. Out there all alone in the dark, under the yellow glow of a single streetlamp, just the sound of urethane wheels and crickets. I remember how happy I felt. How destined it seemed.

Obviously I wasn't very good that first night. My non-existent skills left me wobbly and sketchy and it quickly became abundantly clear that I had much to learn before I was doing anything remotely fancy on a skateboard. Nevertheless, it was an unforgettable experience.

My life changed forever that evening - because I was finally a skateboarder - and have been ever since.