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Moms make rad riders

Skateboarding mothers do it for fun, bonding with children

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When it comes to the “my mom's cooler than your mom” argument, Christy Nunes' daughter has an edge.

While some mothers may find release in scrapbooking, shopping or going to a spa, Nunes, 30, skateboards.

“While I'm at the park, all I think about is skating,” Nunes said. “I have a perma-grin.”

Nunes, an Ocean Beach resident, admits she's a bit of an oddity in a sport that seems dominated by 13-year-old boys.

But she's hardly alone.

The International Society of Skateboarding Moms, with 400 members worldwide, has as many as 40 skaters in San Diego County. Today, to celebrate Mother's Day, the members will hit an Orange County skate park for their annual Mighty-Mama-Skate-a-Rama.

The women range in age from their 20s to 50s and in expertise from wobbly beginners to gonzo downhillers. Their reasons for skateboarding are equally varied: from stress relief to bonding with their children, or just connecting with the freedom they felt before motherhood defined them.

For Nunes, skateboarding is a way of life.

She started in her teens after her parents bought her brother a skateboard for Christmas. Nunes ended up liking the gift more than he did.

She skateboards almost daily to her job as the assistant manager of Winston's, an Ocean Beach bar, and tries to get the skate park every couple of months.

Although it's not out of the ordinary for mothers nowadays to adopt parts of the youth culture, Nunes and the other skateboard mothers hardly ever run into women their own age at the skate park. That's something they would like to change.

Nunes thinks her skateboarding will pay dividends as her 5-year-old



K.C. ALFRED / Union-Tribune
Christy Nunes has been skateboarding since her teens. The 30-year-old Ocean Beach resident, working out at Robb Field, is a member of The International Society of Skateboarding Moms, with 400 members worldwide.

daughter grows up. She has already given Leilah a skateboard.

“It makes me a better mom,” Nunes said. “It will let me understand the culture, and it’s something that we can do together.”

Isabelle Fried, an Encinitas mother of two, does everything from skating downhill with her daughter to skating ditches with her teenage son.

“It’s just good quality time,” the 40-something Fried said. “It’s always more fun to do something with your kid than watch your kid do something.”

Fried’s daughter, Marie Weber, 15, couldn’t agree more.

“She’s just fun to play with,” Marie said of her mother. While her friends’ moms talk about clothes and the social scene at school, she and her mother have little interest in those topics.

“I’m so proud of her. Me and my friends all think she is the coolest,” Marie said.

But beaming pride isn’t always the case when it comes to skater moms, said Barb Odanaka, who founded the group for them about five years ago.

Of all the members, only about half have offspring that skateboard, she estimated. And there seems to come a point when even those who have relished Mom’s hobby want a little space.

“Some of the kids definitely think it’s cool, but around the age of 14 or 15, they go from, ‘That’s so cool,’ to: ‘OK, great, Mom. Can you do it over there?’ ” Odanaka said.

Odanaka, 45, who lives in Orange County, resumed skateboarding after giving birth to her son. She was struggling as a new mom, and the counselor she was seeing told her to take 10 minutes a day to do something she loved. Odanaka hadn’t skateboarded since her youth, but she immediately decided that was what she wanted to do.

“It’s very exhilarating,” she said. “When I get back on that board, I get to feel like I’m 10 again.”

All the moms who skateboard say the sport has important life lessons as well: dealing with fear, developing tenacity and learning to get up after a fall.

“It’s mostly about fear,” said Nunes, who has taken some tough spills. “It’s all about conquering that fear. It’s very therapeutic.”

Odanaka said that when she’s driving to the skateboard park, she’s still filled with “excitement and apprehension.”



K.C. ALFRED / Union-Tribune
Isabelle Fried of Encinitas skates with her son and daughter, who consider her “the coolest.”



K.C. ALFRED / Union-Tribune
Isabelle Fried chatted with a line of young skaters at the YMCA skate park in Encinitas. She teaches women skateboard safety in monthly clinics for “Downhill Divas.” Her students range from single women in their 20s to mothers trying to connect to their kids.

Getting other women to share in the experience is also a primary goal of the skateboarding moms.

Odanaka said that when she skated as a child, it was more of an equal-opportunity sport connected to the surfing lifestyle instead of the punk/goth influences now associated with skateboarding. Whenever she sees a young girl at a skate park, Odanaka makes sure to give encouragement.

Fried, for her part, has monthly “Downhill Divas” clinics, which teach women how to skateboard safely. Her students are everyone from single women in their twenties to mothers trying to connect to their kids.

Vicki DeVries, 50, has attended several of the clinics with her teenage son. While her son got on the board quickly, DeVries said she's still a little wary, making only a few unsteady attempts.

But the Oceanside mom loves to watch the other skateboarders, many of them mother-and-daughter teams, and dreams of one day mastering the sport – her hair blowing in the wind and her identity as a middle-aged mom on hold as she speeds down the hill.

“It just seems like so much fun,” DeVries said. “It's like flying. It's freedom.”



K.C. ALFRED / Union-Tribune
Christy Nunes (left) strapped on kneepads before a skateboard session at Robb Field with her 5-year-old daughter Leilah. Nunes skateboards almost daily to her job in Ocean Beach and tries to get to the skate park every couple of months.

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