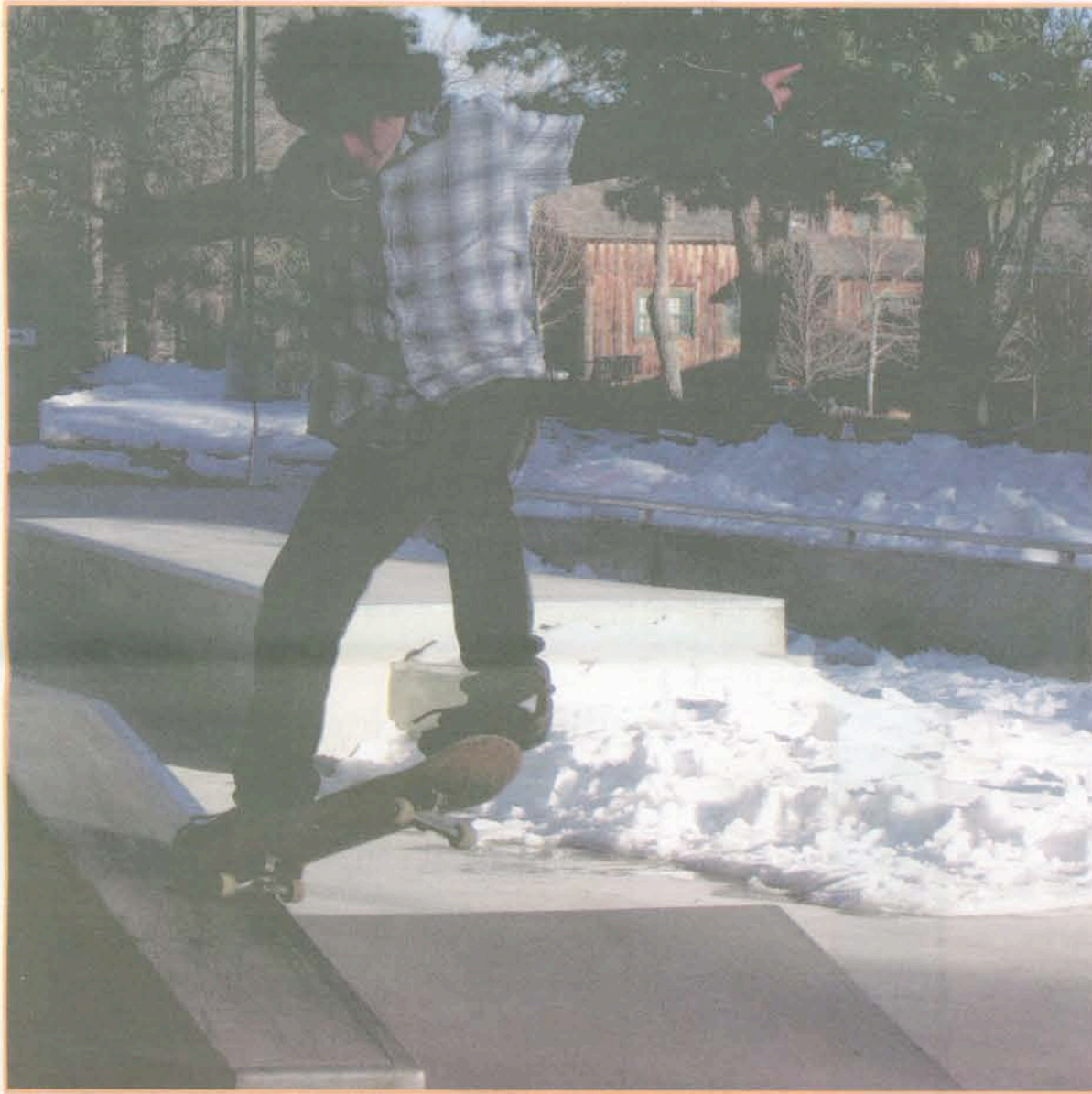


THE FROLIC

The Freedom to Skate

by Mandy Marksteiner



I recently stepped onto a skateboard for the first time, so that I could understand first hand the appeal of skating. When I watch the skaters at the new park, the skateboard appears to be an extension of their bodies, attached to their Vans with double sided tape.

Instead of learning a trick or two, I learned what an incredible burden my body is. I stepped onto my own board, gingerly kicked, and moved a couple feet across the asphalt feeling pure terror.

My bones, joints and inescapable clumsiness chain me to solid ground. The possibility of munching a wrist, snapping a rib, twisting an ankle, or living the rest of my life with an elbow that clicks is all too real to me. My fear of injury is like a prison.

So I stood quietly by the garbage cans, watching Josh Martinez and Luke McMurry hurl their bodies across the strip of concrete that was clear of snow. It seemed like the most reckless and chaotic thing imaginable.

I flagged them down and to say that I want to talk to them about skating. They look down at me from the tallest ramp, perched easily on their boards, and I have no idea what to ask other than, "What is the appeal of skating?"

McMurry said, "I've been doing it for eleven years and I can't stop. It's hard." After a brief pause he added, "Its freedom."

Freedom. I liked that.

The school day was over. About ten more boys, between the ages of 10 and 18, gathered on the other side of the park with their hands in the pockets of their hooded sweatshirts, deciding what ramp to fly off, what rail to slide along, or what corner to ricochet off.

An old man with a beard walked by and asked me whether anyone had killed themselves yet. He's like me: adults need to pre-book an appointment with their chiropractor and double check their life insurance policies before going over the edge.

"Not yet," I replied, and he walked away, casting a final envious look before going out to his car. I take a closer look at the skaters too.

Two rollerbladers, Jesus Gallegos and Gerik "Twist" Przybyski, are making a movie of themselves gliding down a railing. I wonder how many hundreds of times they've done that before bringing the video camera to the park.

Gallegos said, "I've progressed a lot in this park already."

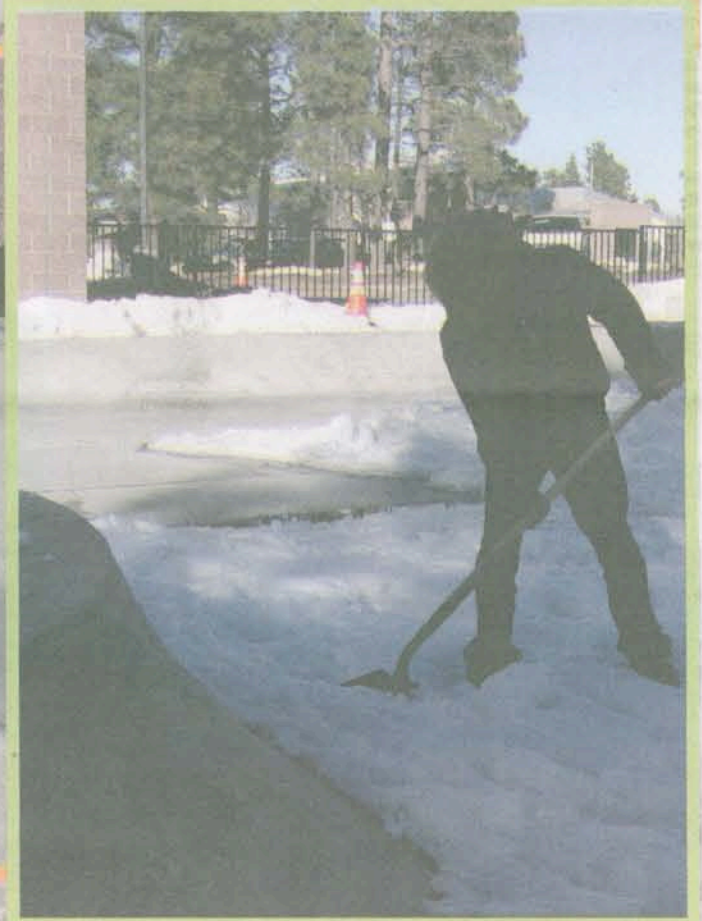
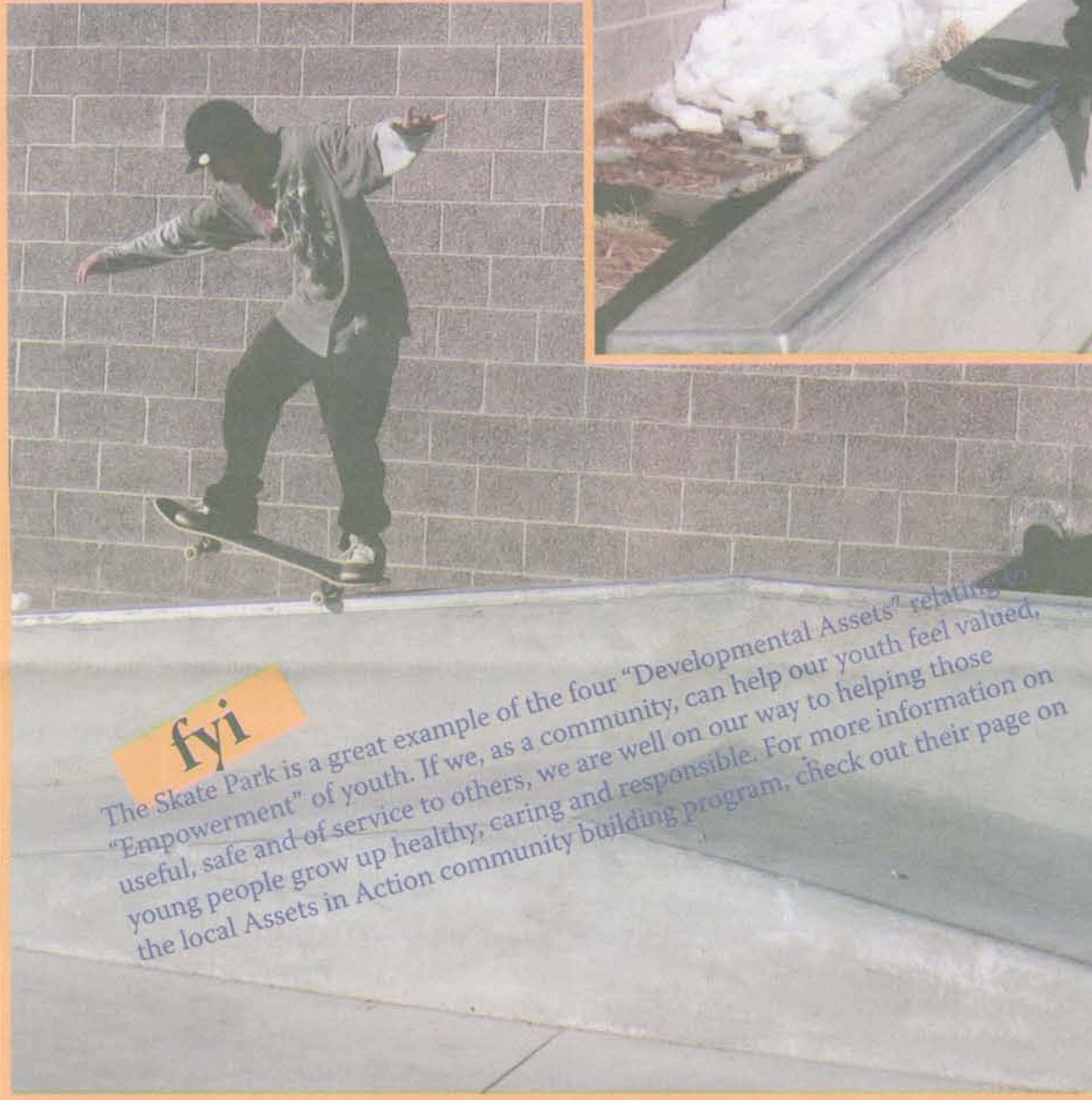
Gallegos explained that even though the park is compact, it has a lot of technical challenges. Przybyski demonstrated a move that he learned at the park, a point star.

The ones who do the wildest moves are all working hard, slowing down the moves like musicians practicing scales until they're perfect. It's a daily discipline that comes from the inside,

rather than from a coach or from a parent. They make sacrifices, like taking turns shoveling the three inches of ice that blankets the park, coaching each other and supporting each other until they reach their goals.

And that's what outsiders have the hardest time pinning down; what the goal actually is. It's simply to be natural and to be free.

*"It makes me so happy,"
said Przybyski.*



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The Skate Park is a great example of the four "Developmental Assets" relating to "Empowerment" of youth. If we, as a community, can help our youth feel valued, useful, safe and of service to others, we are well on our way to helping those young people grow up healthy, caring and responsible. For more information on the local Assets in Action community building program, check out their page on

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