

THE MAKING OF

ROLLER GIRL



Victoria Jamieson



Hello! I'm Victoria Jamieson, author and illustrator of the graphic novel **ROLLER GIRL**. I wanted to make this booklet for teachers, librarians, parents, and most of all, readers, to explain how I created **ROLLER GIRL**. I hope this makes the graphic novel-making process a little more transparent... and perhaps inspires you to create comics of your own.

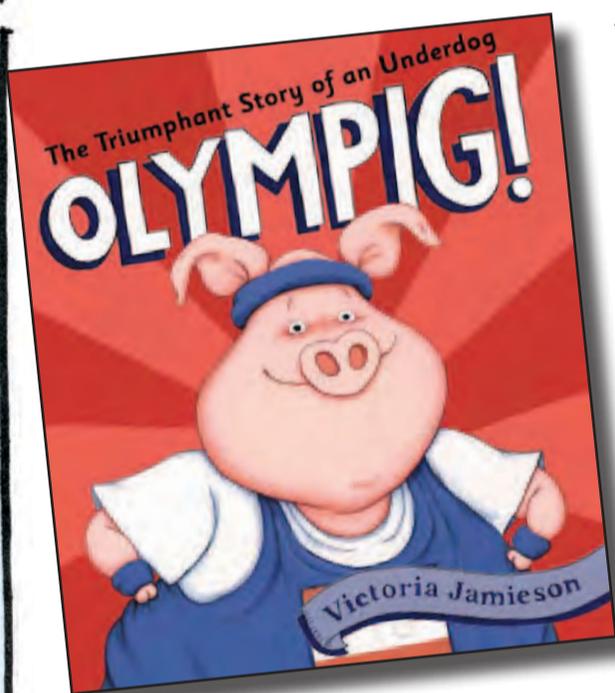
Happy reading, writing and drawing!

HOW I WRITE MY STORIES

ROLLER GIRL is my first graphic novel, but I have written and illustrated several picture books for younger readers. Although these books are for different audiences, they all got their start the same way- from a subject matter I love.

I first got the idea for my picture book OLYMPIG!, for example, because I adore watching the Olympics on T.V.

Ask my husband—I barely leave the couch during those weeks. Once I have the germ of an idea (like the Olympics), I often use experiences in my own life to flesh out the story. In the case of OLYMPIG!, I drew upon my crushing defeat in the 1984 Block Party Kid Olympics to write about an athlete who loses in every event.



That's me on the bottom right, in the gymnastics leotard. I am trying to put on a brave face, despite my staggering loss in the gold medal round.

ROLLER GIRL started in much the same way- from my love of roller derby. I first learned about the sport in 2008, and I watched a home team bout of the Gotham Girls, New York's roller derby league. I was hooked, and I knew I wanted to play. I started taking skating lessons and practiced, practiced, practiced.

Photo credit: Masonite Burn



Me at Fresh Meat tryouts (I didn't make it my first time).

I moved to Portland, Oregon in 2009, and after finding an apartment, the next item on my to-do list was to join the Rose City Rollers. I worked my way up from recreational skater, to Fresh Meat, to a team skater- and eventually to a travel team skater.



Jamming for my home team, the Break Neck Betties.

Photo credit: Lisa Burke Photography



I knew I wanted to write a story about roller derby, but a picture book didn't feel right since the subject matter was slightly older. A graphic novel seemed ideal as it would still allow me to draw and write to tell the story. At the time, Portland's junior roller derby team was starting to grow, and other junior leagues were (and still are!) popping up around the world. Junior derby plus a graphic novel seemed like a perfect fit.

I was a little worried about writing and illustrating a graphic novel. After all, I had never written one before. I wasn't a huge fan of comic books growing up, either... but I did love the comics in the Sunday paper. My very favorite was a strip called For Better or For Worse, by Lynn Johnston, which chronicled the day-to-day events of a family. I was roughly the same age as Elizabeth, and the characters came to feel like real people to me. My mom and I would chat on the phone about them as if they were our next-door neighbors.



I wanted my graphic novel to have the same focus on friendship, family, and character as *For Better or For Worse*. I decided the best way to practice for a big graphic novel would be to do some smaller weekly comic strips. So, I started making some comics about my experiences as a skater with Rose City Rollers. It was a great way to experiment with the medium, and was also a good reminder that my personal experiences could be a jumping-off point for a work of fiction. You can read these comics on my website: www.VictoriaJamieson.com.



After a few months of these derby comics, I felt ready to start thinking about a graphic novel. My first step was to develop the characters.



A comic about my disastrous first Fresh Meat tryouts.

CREATING THE CHARACTERS

ASTRID

I knew the heroine of the story would be about 12 years old, and that she would have a fiery independent streak. But that was about all I knew about her! I had a lot of work to do in order to create a character who would seem real to readers.

When I'm trying to develop new characters, my first step is to make lots and lots of sketches of them. This allows me to get to know what they look like, of course... but more importantly, it allows me the time to daydream about their personalities.

As I was getting to know Astrid through drawing, I also started writing down little tidbits: things she might say, situations she might find funny, trouble she might get



into. I started thinking about the people around her: her family, her friends, her teammates. Slowly, all of these sketches and words began to stitch themselves into a story.

Sometimes I'll add stories or experiences from my life to a book. I think our life experiences, however unique, often have universal feelings behind them and can be great fodder for stories. They can add a sense of honesty and realism to a work of fiction. While Astrid is not exactly like me, there are parts of me in her. The story about touching the dead squirrel on the playground, for example... true. (Except I didn't tell anyone my fears, and spent a few days terrified that I had contracted rabies).



NICOLE

The character Nicole is another example of using experiences from my life in writing this book. Nicole is based largely upon my best friend growing up, named... Nicole. (Sometimes I am not terribly creative with names). We met in first grade, and we were thick as thieves all the way through elementary school.



Nicole's on the left, I'm on the right.

When my family moved from Pennsylvania to Florida when I was twelve, we wrote letters back and forth and had hour-long phone conversations. As middle school, and eventually high school, went on, however, it became harder and harder to maintain those close ties when we had different friends, different schools... different lives. I remember feeling very sad about our slipping friendship, and also feeling helpless to do anything about it. It was a real “growing up” experience for me, and I wanted to capture a bit of that sadness in ROLLER GIRL.

This story has a happy ending, however! Nicole and I reconnected as adults- she was even a bridesmaid in my wedding! So even friends who drift apart have the chance to come together again.

ZOEY, RACHEL... AND OTHER CHARACTERS

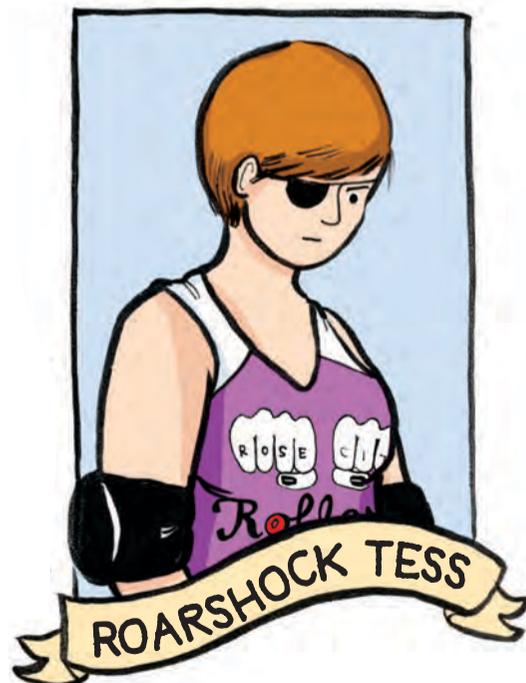
The secondary characters are mostly combinations of people I knew growing up, and kids or grownups I know now. Coaching was a great way for me to meet lots of different kids. I coached both an after-school running program called Girls on the Run, as well as our junior derby training program, the Seedlings (which feeds into the Rosebuds, the real name of the junior program). Many of the girls I met through these programs provided great inspiration for Astrid, Nicole, Zoey... and mean Rachel!



Nicole and me on a very comfy bench.

Fun Fact: one of the most fun parts of writing ROLLER GIRL was picking the derby names for all of the characters. Heidi Go Seek, for example, is a skater with Rose City Rollers. For Astrid's teammates, I wanted to use real junior derby skater names, so I reached out to leagues in Canada, England, Australia, Sweden, and all across the United States, and asked skaters if I could borrow their names. So, all of Astrid's teammates have real derby names from junior skaters around the world! You can learn more about junior skaters around the world in the "Real-Life Inspiration" section at the end of this e-book.

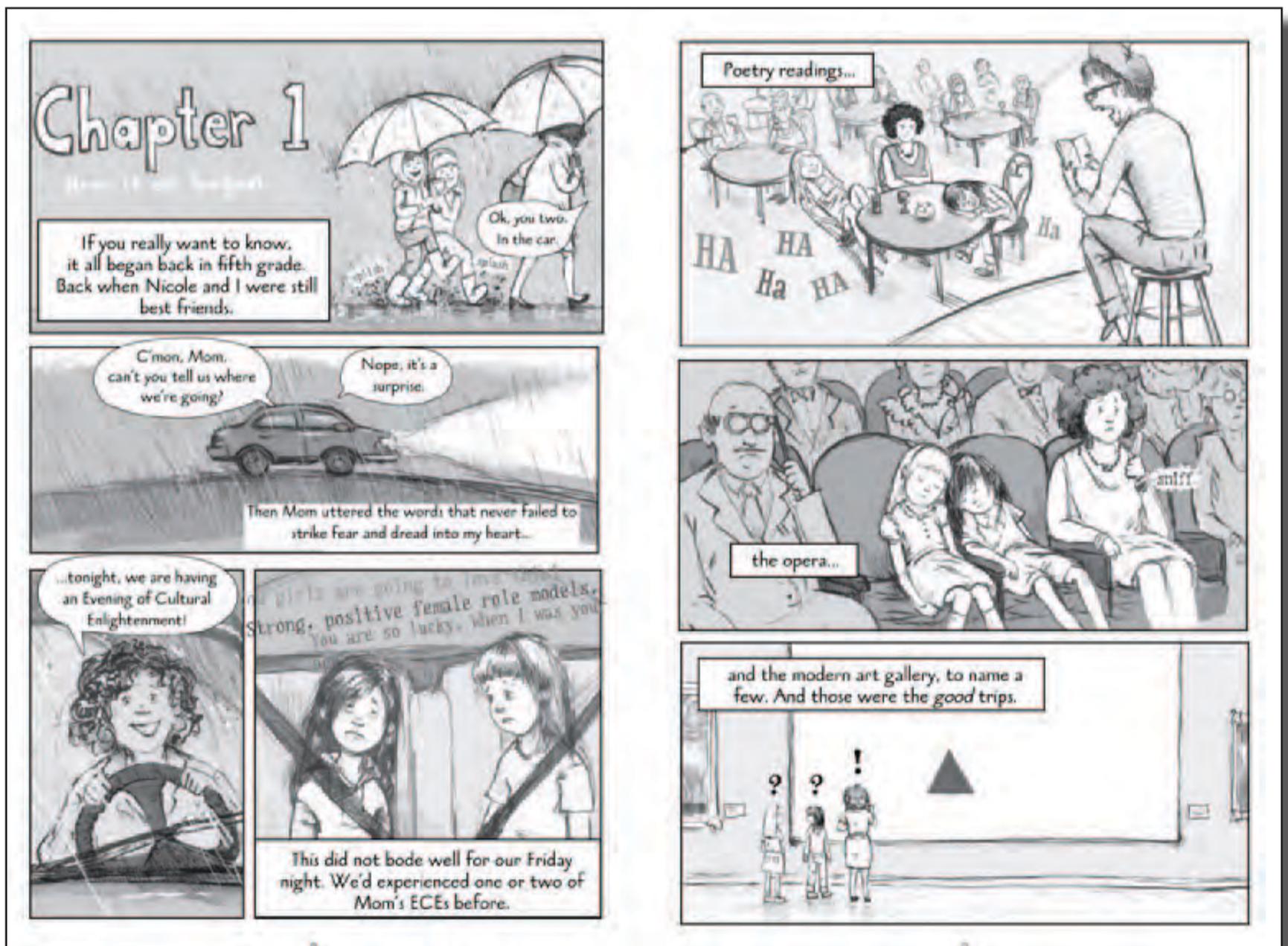
Photo credit: Your Sunday Best



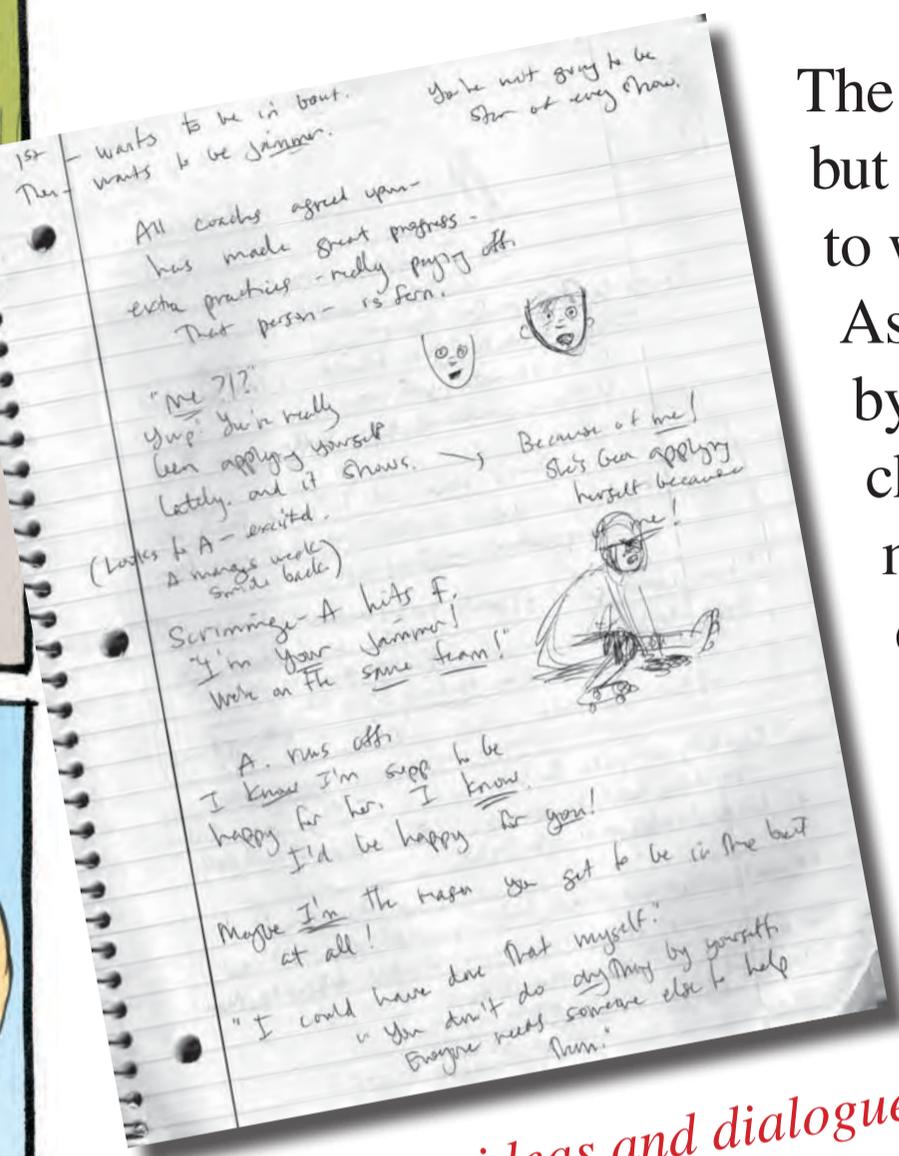
These—and many other—real skaters appear in the book.

CREATING A GRAPHIC NOVEL

Now I'm going to get into the nitty-gritty of actually creating a graphic novel. My first step was to draw a few sample pages to send to my editor, to make sure the size and the general layout looked alright. My first draft was in black and white, but my publisher decided they wanted the book in color—yay! I had been hoping for color.



The first version of ROLLER GIRL sent to my publisher.



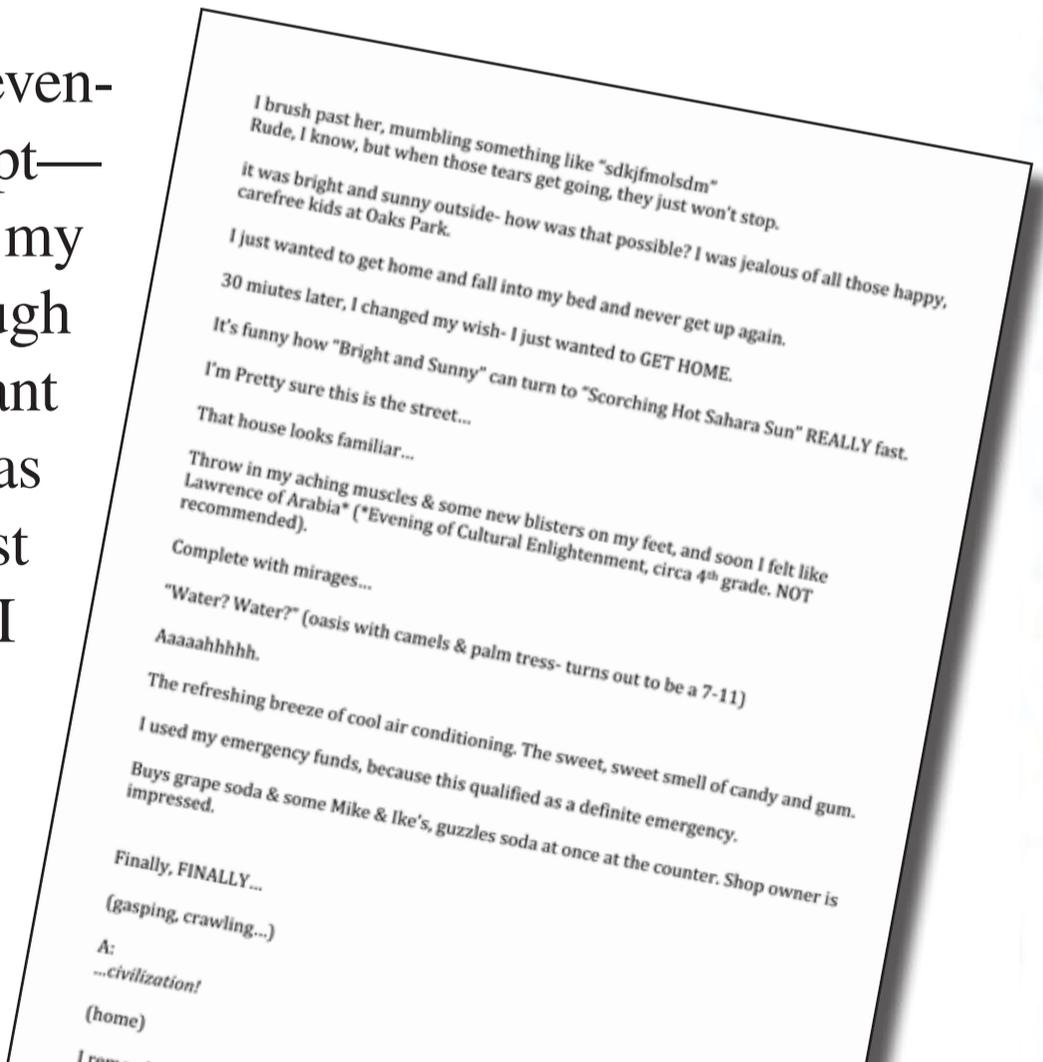
Jotting down ideas and dialogue.

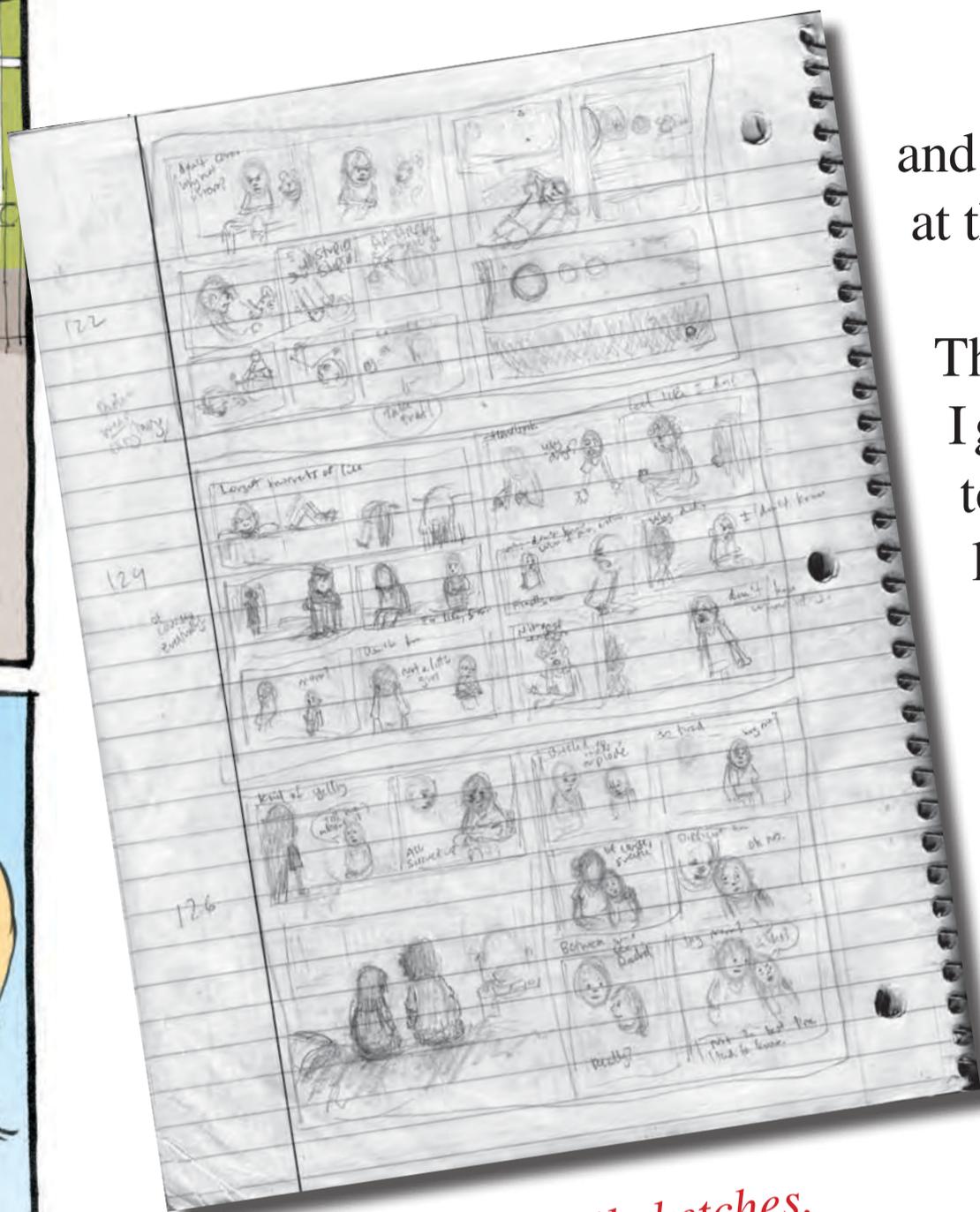
The first few chapters looked good, but then came the hard part... I had to write the rest of the story. Gulp. As I mentioned before, I started by really getting to know the characters. I also thought about my own experiences with roller derby—my favorite drills (the 50 lap killer!), my struggles, and the excitement of playing in my first bout. I knew the “grand finale” of the story would be Astrid’s first bout. I also knew I wanted Nicole and Astrid to find a bit of

a resolution to their problem by the end—even if the resolution was not perfect.

I started writing, and eventually sent a manuscript—with no pictures—to my editor. She read through it and gave me important feedback (Rachel was way too mean in the first draft, for example). I started revising the text

A page from the manuscript.





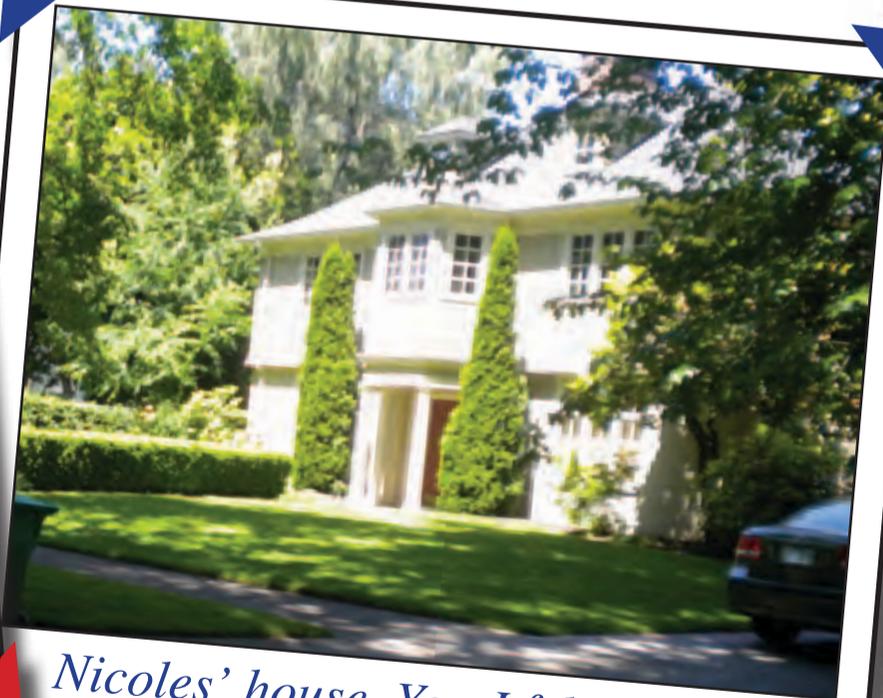
Thumbnail sketches.

and making rough sketches at the same time.

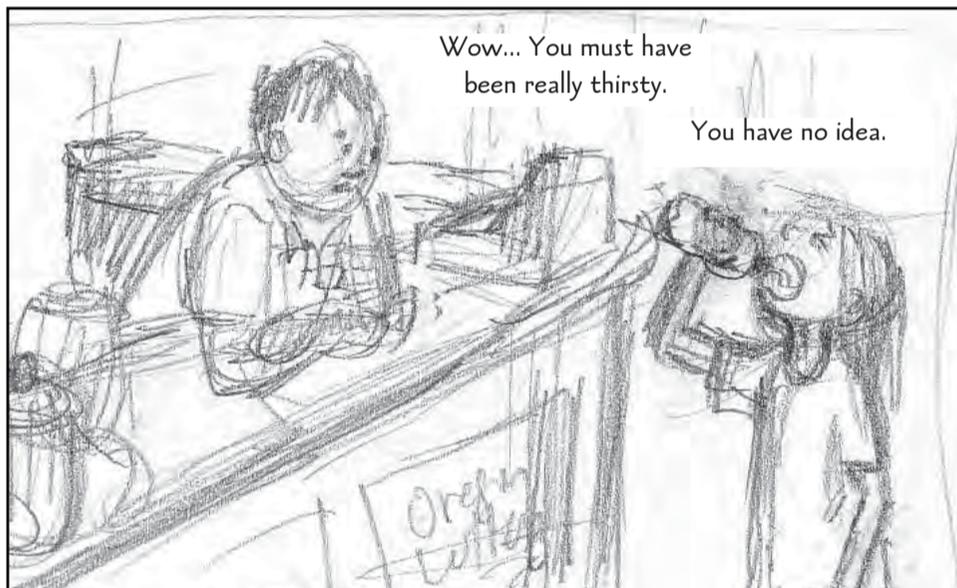
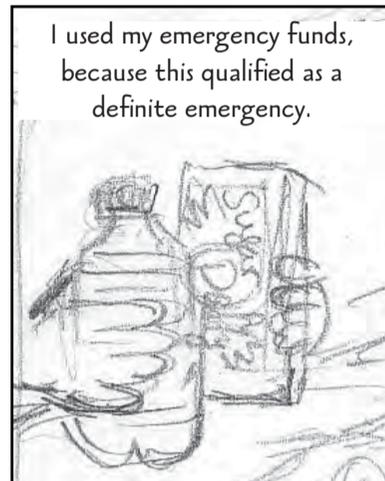
This stage is fun, because I get to do lots of research to make sure everything looks the way I want it to. I rode my scooter all around Portland, taking pictures of places I wanted in the book. I felt like a movie location scout! I even picked out the houses I imagined different characters living in.



Astrid's apartment building.



Nicoles' house. Yes, I felt a bit like a creepy stalker taking pictures of strangers' houses.



Off to the publisher again! This time my editor and art director looked for ways to improve the writing and the drawing, and made sure both worked together to tell the story correctly. I find it really helpful to have someone look over my work and make sure it makes sense- when I work on something for a long time, it's easy to lose perspective. The criticism my editor gives me is all about making the story better.

Once the sketches and the manuscript are approved it's time for the next phase: final art! This phase is much different for me. When I'm writing and brainstorming, I do lots of walking, thinking, and... napping. It helps, really! When it's time for final art, it is time to just sit down and work, work, work. I listen to a lot of podcasts and audiobooks while I draw to keep me company. Here are some of the tools I used to create the artwork in ROLLER GIRL:



BRISTOL BOARD

This is a thick, smooth paper. I used the vellum surface, 11" x 14" size.



PENTEL BRUSH PEN

You can find this pen in art stores- it's my favorite.



PENCILS

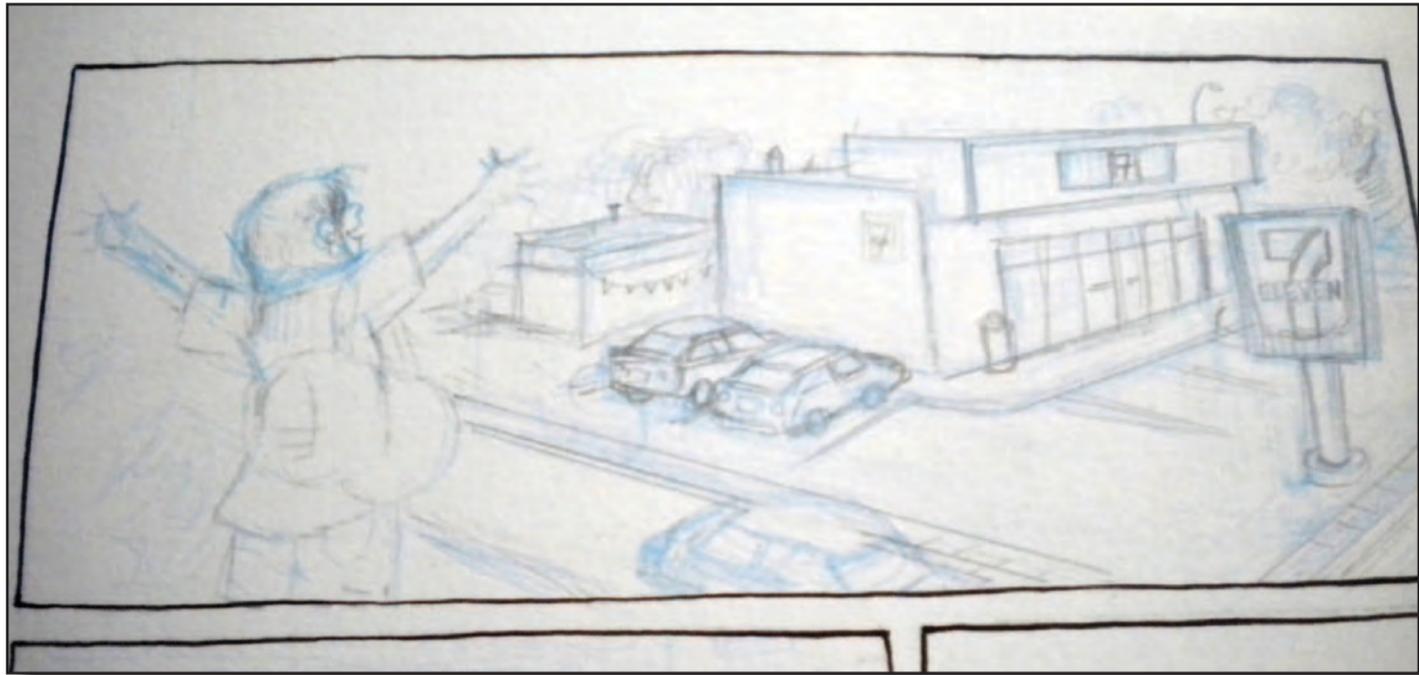
I used blue Col-Erase pencils for the first sketches- I like how they didn't smudge like normal lead pencils (although I used those, too).



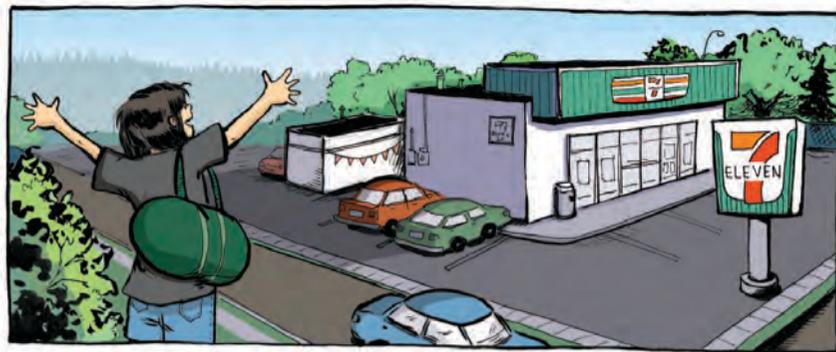
NUTELLA

Nourishment for the mind, body, and soul.

I made the drawings larger than the size of the book, but still in proportion to the page. That way, when they shrunk down, the black line work would be nice and saturated. I drew the borders around the panels, but not the speech bubbles- I would add those later digitally.



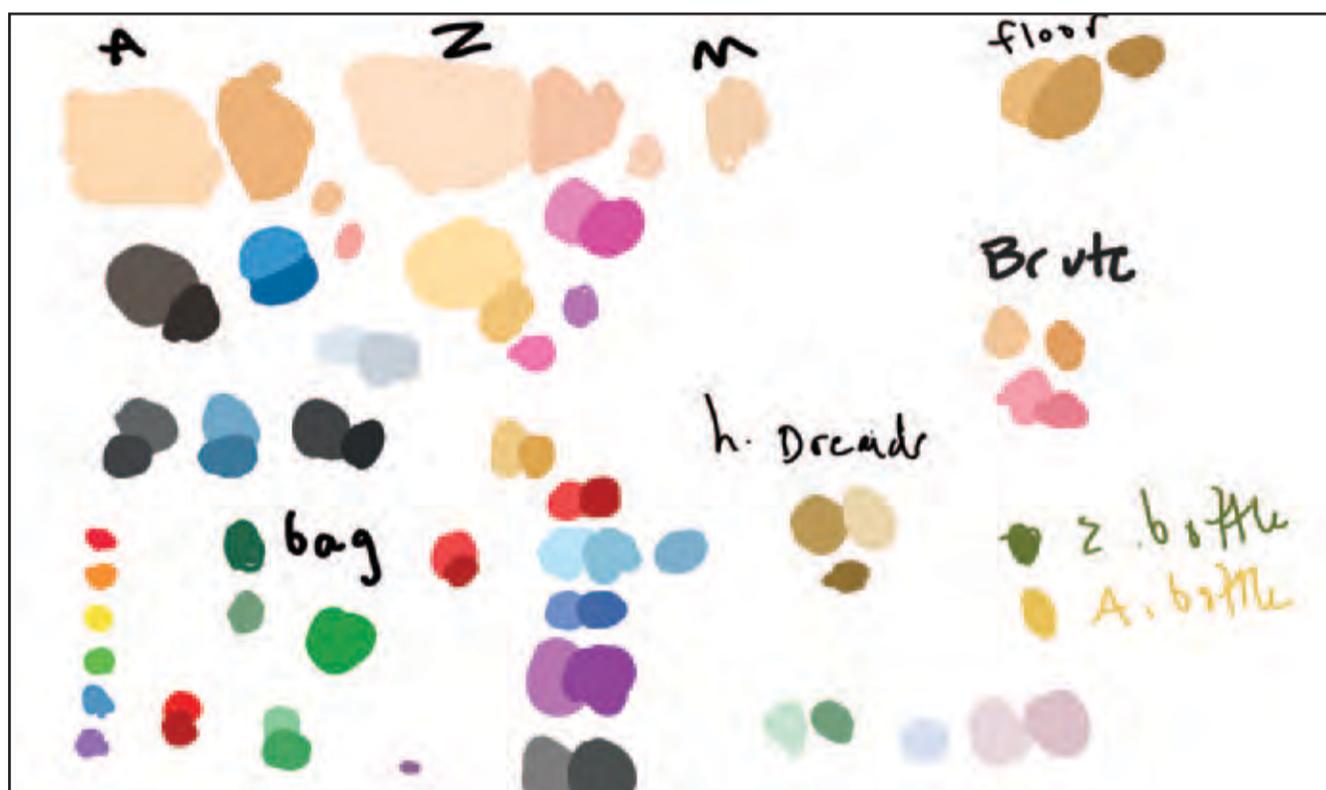
I draw the final art first in blue pencil, then I refine it with a regular pencil. Next comes the pen; I use a brush pen for the big areas and smaller, finer pens for detail work.



The page on the left has “flatted” colors; preliminary placeholder colors. On the right is the final page, after substituting the right colors and adding shadows and highlights.

The next step is adding color! I scanned all of the artwork- all 240 pages of it. Luckily, I had some help adding the color: illustrator Drew Bardana (www.drewbardana.com) helped me out over the summer. He added preliminary colors in a process known as “flating”. It’s basically like coloring in a coloring book- you just have to stay within the lines. He used the program Photoshop, which is also what I used to add the final colors.

When adding final colors, I had a “cheat sheet” to make sure I always used the same color for Astrid’s hair, for example, or Zoey’s shoes. I also added special effects like shadows or bright lights.

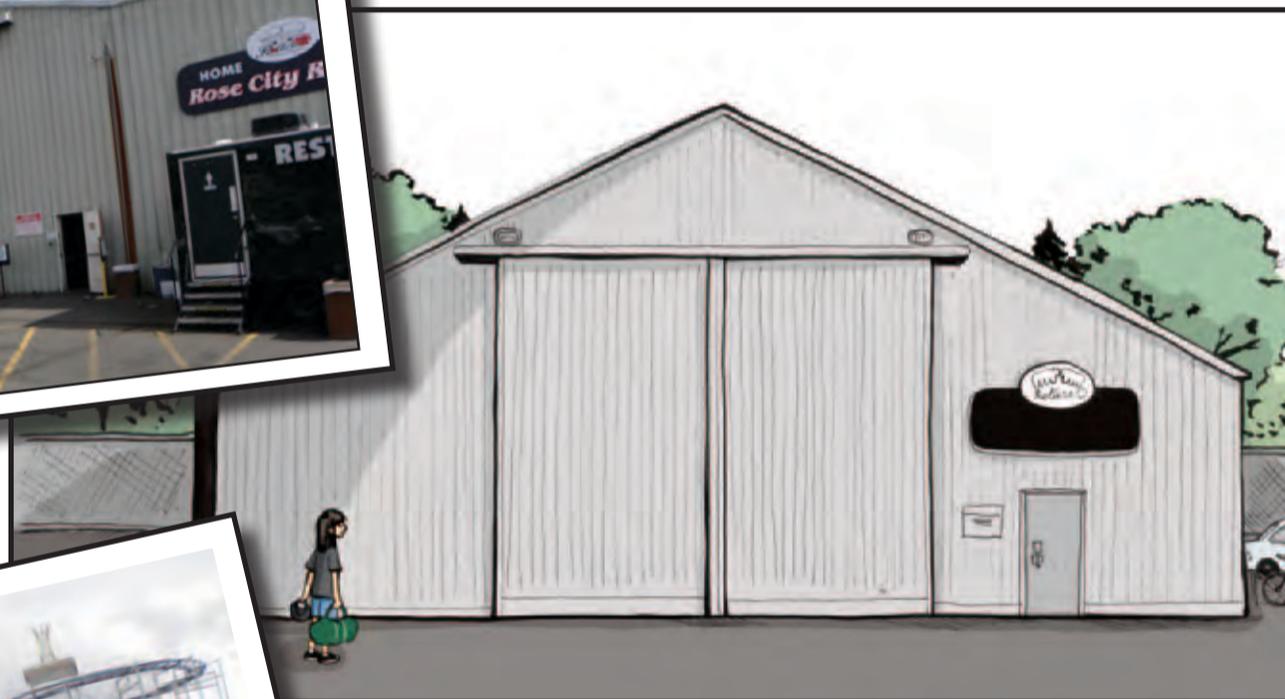


My color “cheat sheet”.

Finally, the last step was adding speech bubbles. I made them in Adobe Illustrator, and then added them to my Photoshop files. I made a font out of my handwriting (this was easy and fun- you can find lots of resources online to make your own font). My designer then added the text... and we were all set!

REAL-LIFE INSPIRATION

ROLLER GIRL is a work of fiction, but I drew inspiration from the real world of roller derby. Rose City Rollers, for example, is the real name of Portland's roller derby league. I made the practice space in the book look like our real practice space, the beloved hangar. The hangar is indeed right next to an old amusement park, so it made for a wonderful setting.



Junior derby is also a real, and growing, sport. Rose City Rollers has FOUR junior teams, and they are all extremely popular! The Rosebuds is for girls aged 13-18, and the Seedlings is for the same age range, but for girls just learning the basics of skating and derby. Newer junior teams include the Petals, for girls aged 7-12, and their training program, the Butterflies.

Junior derby teams are popping up all over the world. There are junior teams in Sweden, Japan, Australia, Canada, the UK, to name a few... as well as all across the United States. The following pages highlight a few junior skaters from around the world.

Photo credit: Steven L. Price



The two home teams of the Portland Rose Petals: the Daughters of Doom (left), and the Voodoo Dolls (right).



DERBY NAME:

Mega Death, #12

AGE: 11

LEAGUE: Greater Edmonton Junior Roller Derby Association, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

POSITIONS (PIVOT, BLOCKER, JAMMER): PBJ.

Roller derby isn't just blocking or just jamming so I want to have experience at everything. My favourite is jamming though.

HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED IN ROLLER DERBY?

My mom tried it out and was hooked. I was too young to join the junior league so my mom was the only derby girl in our house until I was old enough. Now we both play. One day we hope that we can play together.

HOW DID YOU CHOOSE YOUR DERBY NAME?

We looked online for ideas. I wanted a name with a musical reference and I we saw the band Megadeth I loved it and it fits with my real name, Meg. My number is twelve because it's my favourite number.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE PLAYING IN YOUR FIRST BOUT?

It was awesome. I was awarded MVP in my very first bout. I got a 25 point power jam and loved helping my team mates as a blocker. I even gave my jammer a pushing assist to get her through the pack. It was a door opening on a new and important part of my life.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE PART ABOUT ROLLER DERBY?

My favourite part is working together as a team and developing new skills. I also love dressing up for bouts and putting on my bout makeup.

WHAT'S THE HARDEST PART?

In my league there are not enough young skaters at my level and I am not old enough to skate with the advanced skaters. I have been skating with new skaters for a long time and it's hard to stay challenged. But I spend any free time at practice working on the things that I need to improve on. I also go to the skate park whenever I can or skate in my neighbourhood.

ANYTHING ELSE WE SHOULD KNOW?

Before roller derby I had tried all sorts of things. Gymnastics, horseback riding and ballroom dancing but nothing was a good fit until I tried roller derby. I have just started my third year and I can't see myself doing anything else. When I have a bad day roller derby helps me cool off. We practice two times a week and those are my favourite days. I have met some amazing friends and had some amazing adventures including travelling to Seattle to meet my derby penpal and skating with the Seattle derby brats at a practice. Lyka Livewire and I still maintain a long distance derby wife relationship.





DERBY NAME:

Miss Conduct, #1407

AGE: 12

LEAGUE: Canberra Roller Derby League, Canberra, ACT, Australia

POSITIONS (PIVOT, BLOCKER, JAMMER):

I prefer blocker and pivot to jammer but I have only just started.

HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED IN ROLLER DERBY?

My mum and I went to our first bout a couple of years ago and I really wanted some of that action, but it looked like I would have to wait until I was 18 because the junior league was only for children of derby ladies. Then in 2014 they opened it to everyone and in September I joined up.

HOW DID YOU CHOOSE YOUR DERBY NAME?

My mum and I were trying to figure out what my name was going to be. Everything from zombies to skulls. Then I was reading up about the rules and I came to the small paragraph about misconduct, and it hit me. Miss Conduct. I chose my number because it is my birthday: 1407 (14th of July).

WHAT WAS IT LIKE PLAYING IN YOUR FIRST BOUT?

My first mini bout was awesome. To start off with I was a bit nervous, but I got over it SUPER fast.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE PART ABOUT ROLLER DERBY?

My favourite part of derby is.....well everything. I just love watching it, let alone playing it.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE DRILL OR GAME DURING PRACTICE?

My favourite game in training is scrimmage. Scrimmage is where all of us juniors have a mini bout against each other to help us develop our skills and to get a better concept of the game of derby.

TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOUR TEAM AND WHERE YOU PRACTICE.

My team is a mix of boys and girls in ages ranging from 10-16 years and we all get along really well. Some of us love to go to skate parks almost every day and practice going up and down all the ramps and trying new tricks as much as we can. Our team practices in an old indoor basketball court/gym and thank goodness it is air conditioned because we all get so hot and sweaty.





DERBY NAME:

Bald to the Bone, #999

AGE: 8

LEAGUE: Tootsie Rollers,
Des Moines, Iowa, USA

POSITIONS (PIVOT,
BLOCKER, JAMMER):

Blocker & Jammer

HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED IN ROLLER DERBY?

My mom won VIP tickets to the Des Moines Derby Dames bout. The Dames were so awesome, they took pictures with me and signed my program.

HOW DID YOU CHOOSE YOUR DERBY NAME?

I have alopecia universalis which means I have no hair. So “bald” had to be in the name. Bald to the Bone was just perfect.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE PLAYING IN YOUR FIRST BOUT?

I was nervous, but it was really fun.

DO YOUR FRIENDS AT SCHOOL KNOW YOU PLAY? WHAT DO THEY THINK?

Yes, they do know, and they think it's pretty cool.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE PART ABOUT ROLLER DERBY?

Being a jammer.

WHAT'S THE HARDEST PART?

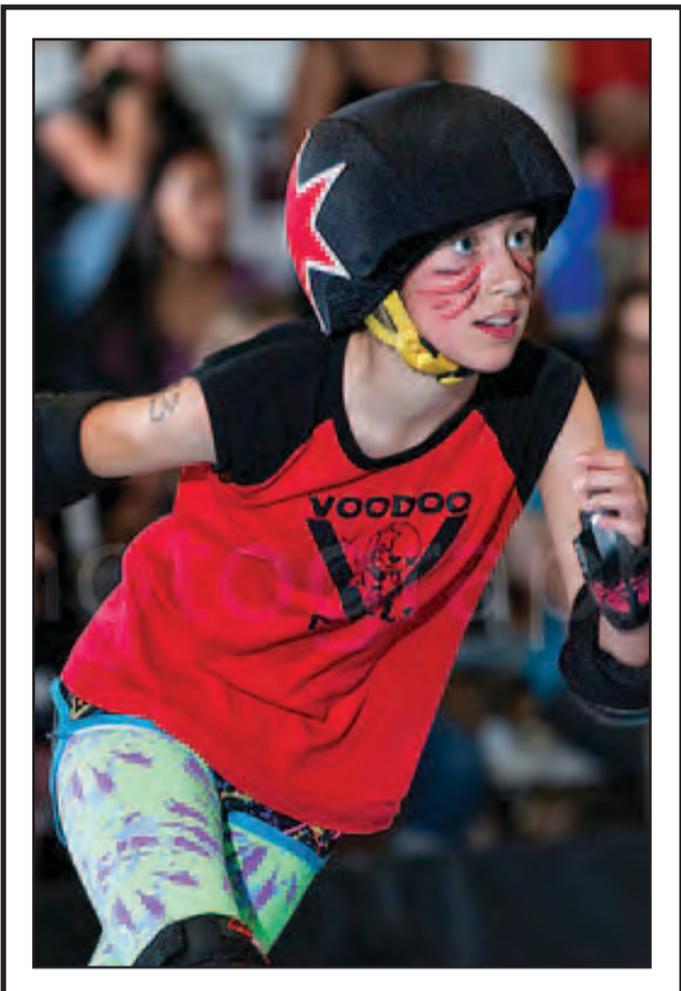
T-stops.

ANYTHING ELSE WE SHOULD KNOW?

I think everyone should give roller derby a try. It will make you a team player and a better skater.



Photo credit: Sharkey



DERBY NAME:

Gamma Way, #43

AGE: 12

LEAGUE: Rose City
Rollers, Portland, Oregon,
USA

POSITIONS (PIVOT, BLOCKER, JAMMER):

All of them. I love blocking
and sometimes jam.

HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED IN ROLLER DERBY?

My mom had been playing derby for a few years and then a modified contact derby league for ages 7-12 started two years ago. So me and my friends, Anni (Ming Die-Nasty) and Abby (Pack Animal), decided to join, and we've been playing ever since.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE DRILL OR GAME DURING PRACTICE?

Capture the tail, freeze tag, wall drills, and pyramid relay race.

HOW DID YOU CHOOSE YOUR DERBY NAME?

Me, my mom, and my dad were brainstorming ideas and I liked Gamma Way best. Also, I thought it would be funny for my grandkids to call me Gamma one day. :)

WHAT WAS IT LIKE PLAYING IN YOUR FIRST BOUT?

I don't quite remember, but I know I fell a lot and that it was incredibly fun.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE PART ABOUT ROLLER DERBY?

All of it. But mostly holding a jammer back and driving the jammer out of bounds. Oh! And backward bracing.

WHAT'S THE HARDEST PART?

Figuring out what penalties you got.

DO YOUR FRIENDS AT SCHOOL KNOW YOU PLAY? WHAT DO THEY THINK?

Yes, they know I play, but I'm not sure what they think. When I talk about it at school sometimes they'll say "That's so cool!", but mostly they don't understand much of what I say.

TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOUR TEAM AND WHERE YOU PRACTICE.

We practice at the Hangar behind the Oaks Park skating rink (in Portland, OR). My team is called the Voodoo Dolls, and our colors are black and red. My mom is one of my coaches. I really like my teammates because we work well together and have fun.



Photo credit: Regularman



DERBY NAME:

Luna Eclipse, #32

AGE: 17

LEAGUE: Lil' Adelaide Rollers, Adelaide, South Australia, Australia

POSITIONS (PIVOT, BLOCKER, JAMMER):
Blocker & Jammer

HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED IN ROLLER DERBY?

I got involved in derby because my mum and brother both played.

HOW DID YOU CHOOSE YOUR DERBY NAME?

I chose my name because Luna is my favourite character in Harry Potter and my number as it's my lucky number.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE PLAYING IN YOUR FIRST BOUT?

Playing in my first bout was so scary yet fun as the bout was super hero themed!

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE DRILL OR GAME DURING PRACTICE?

My favourite drills in practise are anything involving teamwork.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE PART ABOUT ROLLER DERBY?

My favourite part about roller derby is the community, how no matter how hard you hit someone on the track they are still going to be your best friend afterwards.

WHAT'S THE HARDEST PART?

The hardest part about roller derby is that when you're so passionate about the sport it's hard to not get emotional.

DO YOUR FRIENDS AT SCHOOL KNOW YOU PLAY? WHAT DO THEY THINK?

My close friends at school know I play and often see photos on facebook and are curious about the sport. They encourage my passion.





DERBY NAME:

Dizzy Reaper, #603

AGE: 14

LEAGUE: Lil' Adelaide Rollers, Adelaide, South Australia, Australia

POSITIONS (PIVOT, BLOCKER, JAMMER):

Generally all three but depends how I'm feeling on the day for which role I do more.

HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED IN ROLLER DERBY?

I got involved in roller derby by watching an adult game in Adelaide with my best friend. I decided I really wanted to play the sport but there was no where for me to play in Adelaide, so my current coach and my mum worked together to create the Lil' Adelaide Rollers.

HOW DID YOU CHOOSE YOUR DERBY NAME?

My name originally was going to be The Grin Reaper but that was already being used by somebody else. My nickname at the time was Dizzy because of my strange personality so I just kind of put the two names together. My number is my birthday (very original).

WHAT WAS IT LIKE PLAYING IN YOUR FIRST BOUT?

Playing my first bout was crazy! I was so excited to be able to play in the very first Junior bout in Australia!

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE PART ABOUT ROLLER DERBY?

My favourite part about roller derby is the diversity within in the derby community. Roller derby teaches you to be different and to be friends with who ever you like and to do whatever it is you want to do.

WHAT'S THE HARDEST PART?

The hardest part about roller derby I feel is the discrimination by strangers that don't know the sport very well. There are only so many times you can hear "roller derby isn't a sport" before you start to go a little crazy.

TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOUR TEAM AND WHERE YOU PRACTICE.

My team is an amazing group of hardworking people based in Osborne, Adelaide. The ages range from 8 - 17 and everybody has each other's back. The team not only gets along with each other but we also get along with other teams from all around the country. We have amazing sportsmanship and they are the greatest people I have ever met.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Here are some additional resources if you'd like to learn more about making comics or roller derby.

COMICS

Scott McCloud's books on making comics are highly informative. Check out [Making Comics](#), [Understanding Comics](#), and [Reinventing Comics](#).

<http://scottmccloud.com/2-print/3-mc/index.html>

[Good Comics for Kids](#)

A blog on the School Library Journal website that highlights... well, good comics for kids.

<http://blogs.slj.com/goodcomicsforkids/>

[Kids' Comics Revolution!](#)

A podcast about comics and graphic novels for kids. I listened to this a bunch while drawing *ROLLER GIRL*.

<http://comicsaregreat.com/category/kidscomicsrevolution>

[Raising a Reader!](#)

From the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund, a resource for parents & educators about the learning benefit of comics.

<http://cbldf.org/resources/raising-a-reader/>

ROLLER DERBY

WFTDA

The Women's Flat Track Derby Association

Kind of like the NBA for roller derby.

www.wftda.com

Junior Roller Derby Association

Find a junior roller derby league near you!

<http://www.juniorrollerderby.org/home.php>

Roller Derby Worldwide

A listing of lots of roller derby teams around the world.

<http://www.derbyroster.com/>

Rose City Rollers

Learn more about Portland's roller derby team!

www.rosecityrollers.com

THE END

I hope you found this e-book informative! Please check out these websites for more information on me and my books:



Penguin Young Readers Group
<http://www.penguin.com/youngreaders/>



My website
<http://www.victoriajamieson.com>

Skate on,

Victoria Jamieson
(aka Winnie the Pow)