

THE PROVINCE GET OUT THERE! *Adventure!*

RollerGirl

Lisa Suggitt has an aggressive take on four-wheeling fun

By Kate Zimmerman
CanWest News Service

Lisa Suggitt is often called RollerGirl. She thinks it's because people can't remember her name, but it's more likely because the most startling thing about her is that she's what's known as an "aggressive roller skater."

That means she does what skateboarders do in Vancouver's legendary boarding bowls, only on roller skates. Old-school, four-wheeled roller skates. No wonder everybody remarks on it: Suggitt, 25, is probably the only aggressive roller skater they've ever seen.

Some of the boarders she encounters are so young they have never seen a roller skater and they're curious.

"People will chase me down on my roller skates to find out where I got them," says Suggitt, who has been four-wheelin' in one way or another since she was five. But it's not her goal to be a lone roller skater carving around the bowls in Vancouver parks on her 2 x 2s, as she does most sunny days.

Rather, RollerGirl's mission, and her online business, consists of spreading the word about roller skating in general and aggressive roller skating (also known as "vert" or vertical skating) in particular.

Suggitt's brand of roller skating ain't for sissies. "Aggressive roller skating is any kind of roller skating that pushes your limits," she explains. That includes ramp, bowl, street and downhill roller skating.

In Vancouver, she's often the only female practising alongside ordinarily rivalrous male skateboarders, BMKers and inline skaters. She says they give her respect and space, possibly because no one else is doing aggressive skating.

She skateboards, too, but "roller skating demands a higher level of commitment with tricks."

— Lyle Stafford/CanWest News Service

Looking more wistful than aggressive, Lisa Suggitt, RollerGirl, takes a breather at the Hastings Bowl Skate Park.

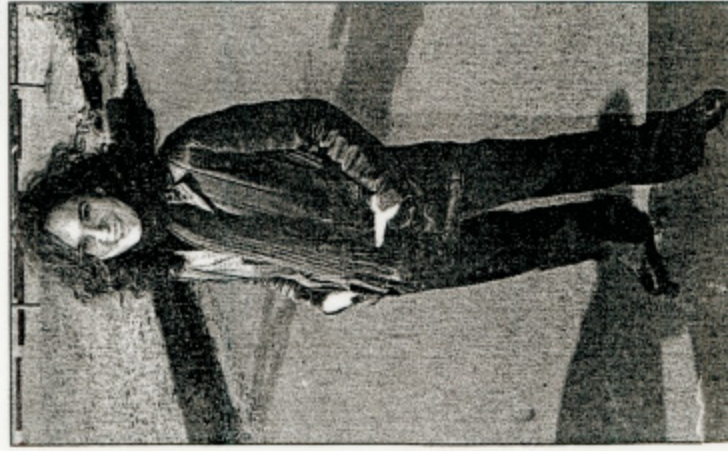
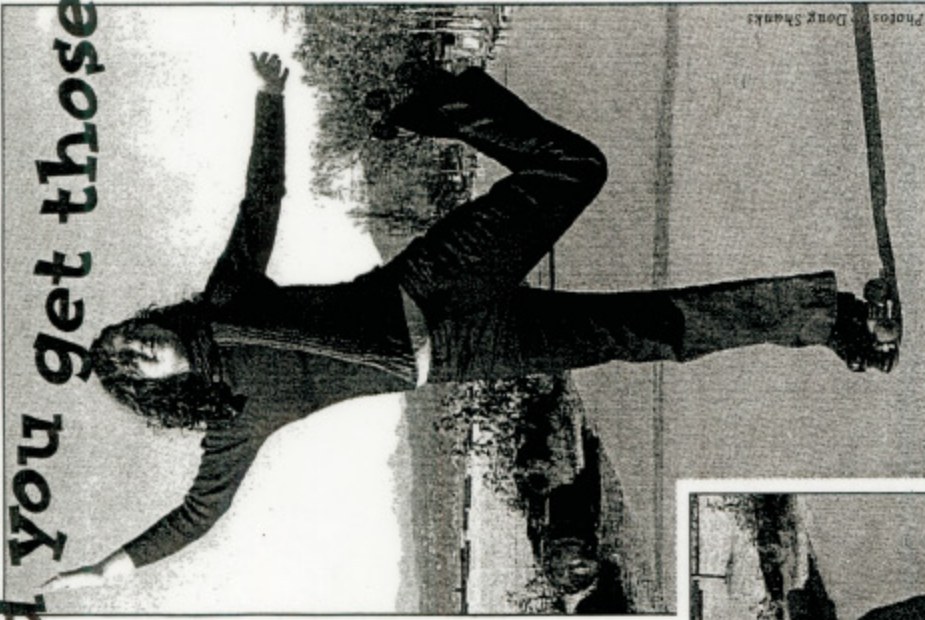
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Where'd you get those shoes? The Look

Lisa Suggitt
Rollerskater, owner
of Rollergirl roller
skates, entrepreneur

Where'd you get those shoes? "These are Urban Roller roller skates, in cherry. I got them from my own roller skate shop. I have a different pair of roller skates for every outfit. If you're wearing a little short skirt it looks cute."

Talk about your matching outfit. "The pants and the turtleneck (both in burgundy) I



got at Jacob. But I like to shop a little everywhere. I got these from Jacob but my vintage leather jacket I got on Main. I think it was Burcu's Angels or Barefoot Contessa or Echo. I love Main Street. It's terrific. This fantastic alpaca scarf I got at a

little Peruvian import store on Commercial Drive. I love this scarf. It makes me so happy when it's cold and humid."

Who were your biggest fashion influences when you were growing up? "I think my fashion sense has changed. Fifteen years ago I had the '80s hair and the tight pants. I'm working back toward that. I was looking in the mirror thinking, 'Hey, I could have a bit of a fan (big springy bangs) happening, work on a bit of a mullet. There was a time I really liked Madonna, the

You lived in Montreal? "For four years. I worked at a hemp clothing store called Je L'ai, which means 'I have it,' but it's also a play on words for 'stoned.'"

early Madonna, way before *Like A Prayer*. I'm thinking *Like A Virgin*. But I've always had my own style. I make my own as I go."

Montreal affects everyone's sense of fashion. And you? "It gave me a little bit of rassing thing you've worn?"

Fifteen years ago I had the '80s hair and the tight pants. I'm working back toward that.

"I used to wear that neon yellow-green, with big hair. I moved to Denman Island, where I finished my high school, so I went from trashy '80s look right to long Johns."

Do you ever see a fashion trend on the street and think, 'oh my god, lose it, and now?' "Those super super low-riding jeans—the ones that flatten your bum and stick your love handles up, and then the G-string sticks up at the back? Even if you don't have a big butt and love handles, they make you look like you do. The butt cleavage thing is not good on anyone. What is with that?"

When you're 50, will you be so styllin'? "I just hope I grow old gracefully. I don't want to be the one with the platinum blonde, bleached-from-gray hair, trying to look like a 20-year-old when I'm 60. I don't want to try to pretend to be someone that I'm not. That's not what fashion is about. It's about taking what's out there to express who you really are."

Mary Frances Hill

Nostalgia fuels hip retro skate

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While a skateboarder in flight can kick his board away if a nasty spill looms, a roller skater is firmly laced into her skates. "Aggressive skating is inherently dangerous," Suggitt admits. "I always wear [safety] gear, and I know how to fall."

But she could use a little company. That's why the former equipment-leasing broker, now full-time roller maven, is angling to give lessons at Stardust in Surrey, the Lower Mainland's only indoor roller-skating rink, and the Shred Shed, a downtown indoor boarder hangout.

She's also putting together a team of "girl" roller skaters with ambitions to cross Canada next summer, showing off at local parks and bowls and promoting her new line of aggressive roller skates.

And that should further her online business, www.rollergirl.ca. The site features a skate that Suggitt designed for vert enthusiasts as well as a new all-terrain version built to navigate the great, gnarly outdoors, that will be available in the spring.

Roller skates were once designed for smooth indoor rinks. Now, with the addition of soft urethane wheels, roller skates can go anywhere an inline skate can go. The chief difference between them and the more popular inline skates of today is that on the latter the wheels are in a rigid line, like a blade. On roller skates, the four wheels are set as a car's wheels are set, and the front and back wheels can turn independently, like a skateboard's.

"That's what gives you the ability to carve," Suggitt explains. It allows the skater to "pump through the corners." The result is more flexible movement and a safer ride because the rider's weight is planted on a sturdier base.

In the case of her new all-terrain, the wheels are even wider, like the tires on monster trucks. Because the 2 1/2-inch-wide wheels are also spaced well apart, the skater can "grind," as well.

"There's never been an all-terrain roller skate," says Suggitt, whose

new product was designed by a Seattle friend. "This is the first one." And there's demand. "I've been getting e-mails from people from the countryside in Russia. They just don't have much cement."

Roller skates have always been amenable to different modes of movement, including dance routines à la Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. So for a skateboarder and snowboarder like Suggitt, it wasn't much of a mental leap to go from regular roller skating to the aggressive style she now favours.

Skateboards, after all, were originally made by removing the rollers from skates and topping those wheels with plywood. Besides, roller skating is a skill that has been in development for more than 250 years. Roller skates were invented in 1760 by a Belgian. The skates were perfected

compliments of the German-American space scientist Wernher von Braun and his colleagues, who came up with an extraordinarily hard, shock-absorbing substance called polyurethane while developing the space program in the 1960s.

Polyurethane is now routinely used to make skate wheels. As a result, one of the more practical aspects to roller skates, which in the \$150-\$375 price range are not cheap, is that the wheels wear down, but they wear down evenly. They can therefore be used for a long time before being replaced.

It's not as though Suggitt is trying to persuade some parent to buy a pair of roller skates for his or her adolescent in hopes they will last for years. "I'm not aiming at the kid market yet," she says. "It's more the Gen X/Boomer that likes roller skates." This is the 20 to 60-year-old group that is embracing retro sneakers and banana-seat bikes, the trappings of its youth. Roller skates effect the same magic — a rush backward in the time machine.

"When people put them on they're 10 again," says Suggitt. When they also sport retro fashions like hot pants and long socks, roller skates elongate the legs, she says, "so if you wear short shorts, they're from here to the sky."

— Lyle Stafford/CanWest News Service

Lisa Suggitt, aka RollerGirl, takes flight at the Hastings Bowl Skate Park. The 25-year-old is assembling a team of 'girl' roller skaters to help promote her new line of skates.

