

Balance and Harmony



By Nate Smelle

AFTER TAKING IN THIS year's Canada Day celebration in Bancroft on two wheels, I decided to do the same for the Bancroft Business Improvement Area's annual Wheels, Water and Wings event. In years past when reflecting on these events and others of a similar nature I have commented on how such public gatherings can help us to see our community with a new set of eyes. Minus the perfectly executed faceplant that I performed trying to jump a surprise ditch along the side of Hwy. 62 N on my way back to the office after the fireworks, my experience of biking Bancroft has been a real eye-opener.

If my light would have been working properly maybe I would have seen where the concrete disappeared before I decided to take flight on my bike. Head over handlebars my shoulder hit the ground first preventing my head from hitting the pavement. Lying by the road for a moment I thought I was seeing stars, until I realized the fireworks were still going off downtown. Noticing no blood or bruises, and most of my teeth in place, I shook it off and paused to watch the Grand Finale from a distance.

Rather than the routine ride through town that usually sees me driving to and from work, the grocery store and home; my two wheels had me exploring Bancroft in a whole new way. Peddling on paths that I had not yet tread, I started to see the community differently with each turn of the crank. The most enlightening moments produced by these experiences did not however come to me while cruising on my bike. It wasn't until I traded in my two wheels for four during the Longboarding For Peace workshop at the Freedom Skate Park on Saturday that I discovered one of the most valuable, locally relevant and universally profound lessons about the community I have yet to learn.

Riding up to the park I noticed the founder of Longboarding For Peace, and publisher/editor of Untapped Magazine and Concrete Wave, Michael Brooke, talking with a handful of skaters, longboarders and a few parents on the bleachers. Approaching I could hear Brooke reminding the group of a few words of wisdom by Winston Churchill, "Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others." Sitting down on the grass after the workshop talking about his vision for peace and how it fits with his passion for longboarding, he explained how the sport teaches people about the value of living in balance and harmony with others and with the world we live in.

With more than 20 years of feeling these concepts beneath my feet while riding a variety of terrains on one type of board or another, I also recognize how a physical experience of this concept can make it easier to understand. Two decades riding boards sounds like a lot but in reality the last 10 years my board time has been less than minimal; reduced to a handful of black, blue and bloody encounters with the pavement or the snow each year. In spite of the inevitable injuries that come with these spontaneous irresistible urges to get on a board, I have great appreciation for such rare moments on many levels. Feeling the concrete or the snow slip away from beneath my feet as I lean into the ground below, takes me back to the days when a skateboard was my main source of

transportation. More important than the sense of nostalgia this feeling invokes, is the physical education it provides the rider about the importance of maintaining balance when moving forward.

A good lesson for both individuals and communities to keep in mind when defining progress and shaping their future.