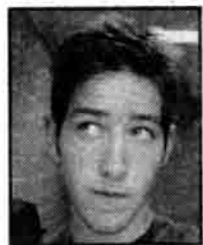


# On Uneven Soles: A Boy and His Scooter

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A&E EDITOR

I have a scooter. It's true; I've had one for about a year. At first it was for transportation, but at this point it's way beyond that. It's become a part of me, intertwined with my memories and inseparable from my person, and



WHERE THE  
HELL IS  
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I didn't even get it on purpose.

I remember the first day I brought it home. I went into a sporting goods store on Lake Ave. and asked for something with wheels. I didn't really care what, I said, I simply needed something to ferry about campus upon, you know, to and from classes and the like. In truth, I had very definite plans for my steed.

A friend of mine had a cool new skateboard, and I was hoping the clerk might look me over, size me up, and say he had just the thing out back. He'd disappear into a back room, then return with a flash and a flourish, a skateboard suspended between two outstretched arms with all the grace and confidence of a Mr. Olivander outfitting a pubescent Harry Potter with his very first wand. A skateboard, he'd say, was a perfect fit for someone like me, for someone of my stature, for someone with my abilities.

He did look me up and down, but when he'd finished, he made no mention of any skateboards, nor any of my abilities, or even of my stature. My stature went unnoticed.

"We got scooters," he replied indifferently. I pondered this sudden change of events. True, scooters weren't technically as cool as skateboards, but in all fairness, Michael J. Fox does convert one to the other in the epic film "Back to the Future." Why skate, I thought, when I could McFly. 65 bucks later, I was cruising down Broadway, Doc Hollywood style.

Scooters, for their size, are remarkably fast. Frighteningly so, actually. Several parents'

groups, child safety advocates, and world leaders tried to banish them a few years ago when a rash of scooter-related injuries plagued emergency rooms across the country, but now, having lost their popularity, scooters have by-and-large slid out of the media and into obscurity. On that first scoot home I saw not one other scooter on the road; I had the sidewalk largely to myself. I did, however, see one of my professors, to whom I managed an awkward wave hello as I fought for balance, bobbing up and down, pumping the concrete sidewalk with my left shoe. My right leg was getting really tired. It was very important at this juncture to keep my equilibrium, important not to take an embarrassing spill in front of a faculty member

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I saw on a daily basis. Of course, fifteen yards and twelve seconds later, I hit a patch of gravel and ate it. Hard.

My new scooter's microscopic front wheel buried itself in the sharp, spiky pebble, and I sailed over shiny new handlebars. Pain. Flecks of gravel interred themselves in the soft flesh of my palms, my knees burned and bled as though I'd slid across a shag carpet, and the rucksack that once rested comfortably against my lower back now hung awkwardly from the top of my head, suspended in midair at eye-level by straps snagged on the backs of my ears. I did then what I believe anyone in my position would have done.

I got up slowly and, as in disbelief, made a slow, full circle with my arms stretched wide as if to absorb the moment. Then, loudly and triumphantly, I congratulated myself on successfully completing the one handed FlabbleBlaster with a quarter twist, one of the more difficult moves in one-handed scooter technique. I chanced a quick look back to my professor; she

seemed unimpressed and a little concerned. I pulled my pack from my ears, pressed bleeding palms to my new foam handgrips and made my sore way back to campus, being cautious this time to avoid patches of dirt, gravel, sand, rocks, cracks, uneven bits of sidewalk, and even the most casual of acquaintances.

After over a year, you would think I'd become better with the scooter. Nothing, however, could be further from the truth. On almost a weekly basis, something goes horribly wrong and I injure myself. To try and combat this trend, I ride my scooter less, and my health has improved somewhat now that I'm scooting less and walking more. It wasn't always that way, though.

I used to take the scooter everywhere. I even super-glued a hood ornament to the handlebars. Seriously. I used to take so much pride in my scooter's appearance and performance, which is why it was such a huge blow when it finally fell out of that perfect working order.

It was early evening in late fall. A couple of floor-mates and I were returning from the D-hall, pockets filled with food and fruit pilfered from the unsuspecting faceless corporation that is Food Service. We were wild then; I had an apple, a banana, and one of those neat single-serving Styrofoam chocolate ice creams. Ben Kessler to my right had an apple. There were others there, too. They may have had fruit as well, but I don't remember. They were unimportant.

I was scooting ahead of the pack, as scooters tend to, and then it hit me. An apple. An apple hit me square in the back, hard, resonating with a loud THWUMP and a "tap, tappity, tap" as the apple in question dribbled to a halt. Naturally, I retaliated in kind; I let my

scooter fall to the ground and took action. Ben Kessler was laughing, but soon Ben Kessler was scared.

I hurled an apple and leaped behind a concrete square column. Ben did the same, deftly avoiding my retribution, and the apple ricocheted off Starbuck Center. Ben was running now, and I gave chase, throwing a banana at my prey with all the skill, aim, and focus of an aboriginal hunter. The banana hit a post and ruptured inches from Ben's head. Banana innards splattered through the crisp October air. Ben doubled back. I dropped an apple. It was all about the ice cream now. Ben was getting tired. He slowed and I fired, intending the frozen treat to glance painfully off Kessler's shoulder. Instead, the Styrofoam container gave way to the pressure of a now decidedly melted dairy dessert on impact, then breached, and coated the back of Ben's leather jacket, expanding in a perfect display of kinetic energy transfer, somehow not spilling a drop on the walkway below. Everything sort of stopped then.

Awestruck silence gave way to fits of hysterical laughter. Ben joined in. He didn't understand. Someone pointed to the backside of his once prized and now soiled coat. Ben suddenly understood perfectly. He stopped laughing. This is where my scooter reenters the narrative.

Ben retrieved my scooter from where it rested peacefully and set out to destroy the thing I held closest and most dear to my heart. While I watched, he pummeled, smashed, swung, and beat my prized scooter against the cement floor and columns; I stood, wincing with every blow.

Ben's coat was never the same; neither was my scooter. It used to fold up neatly into my school bag, now I carry it like an African water bucket over my shoulder. It wobbles and shakes when I ride, and my friends, concerned for my safety and well-being, keep prodding me to get another one, but I'm hesitant. I've gotten pretty attached to this one, decrepit and disabled as it may be, and I think I'll hold onto it for a while. My scooter and me, we go well together. I think I'll keep her.