

Born to Be Alive

by Richard Melo

When Mount St. Helens erupted, I knew that was the end of Bigfoot. With the close proximity of Ape Canyon to the volcano, there was no chance for her survival. Where I lived in Gresham, the ash fell like rain, blanketing the neighborhood several inches deep. I poured a handful of the ash from one hand to the other. I knew with the unflinching certainty of an 11-year-old that the stuff was more than just volcanic matter. In the mix were Sasquatch smithereens. With a heavy heart and without a real, live sighting, I had to move on.

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The Hood Theater, circa 1976, was a second-run house, showing Steve McQueen auto-racing fare, Bruce Lee and *Chariots of the Gods*. In a scene from a Bigfoot documentary, hunters-slash-scientists hiked deep in the woods hot on the Sasquatch's trail. They needed to find her before nightfall, because after dark, the hunters would become the hunted. Along the point where a gravel road met the horizon, they saw truck headlights coming toward them. They thought it was the rest of their crew coming to their rescue. As the headlights came closer, they could see that they weren't headlights at all but rather Sasquatch's big eyes as she was walking toward them. Light shines from Bigfoot's eyes at night, and that's when she's most terrifying.

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When I was a kid, you would grow out of Super 62 KGW and into KGON; out of Organ Grinder pizza birthday parties and into Skate World Friday nights. After that, you would grow into the Mount Hood Community College pool (or even better, the Eastport Plaza Hydro-Tubes), and before long you would cruise 82nd Avenue in the back seat of a car driven by a neighborhood kid's older brother and think it a miracle that the other cars driving up and down that same strip had girls in them, even though all you would ever see were taillights.

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At Skate World, everyone's favorite part was the "Couple's Skate." The lights dim, a black light makes the snowy peak of a Mount Hood mural on the back wall glow fluorescent purple, and a disco ball shoots revolving stars across the rink floor. Boys and girls with hearts in their eyes would then pair up and hold hands while skating to Boston's "More Than a Feeling." My friend Eddy once met a girl and asked her to skate couples, and they did. Before the night was over, he also asked her to go with him. She accepted. She skated back to her friends, and he to his. As far as I know, that was the last time they ever spoke. It might be the best relationship either one of them has ever had.

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Mary Ann Allison was giving a report in our fifth-grade class and pointed to Baja California and called it Florida. None of the other kids knew any better, though I did, and I loved her for it. The rumor was Mary Ann went to Skate World, although I never saw her there. She wore a brown leather jacket and listened to Foreigner and Styx. During the Couple's Skate, I sat alone in the spectator area, thinking everything would be different if only Mary Ann were here. They played a Boston song that shifted from slow to fast, causing the hands of couple's skaters to come unglued from one another and an occasional wipeout. Since I had nothing else to do, I listened closely to the song. It had a line in it, ironically, about a girl named Mary Ann walking away. Before long, I would realize that I needed to take the skates off my feet if I ever wanted to catch up.

