

A Strange Creature

Have you heard the rumor? Of a strange creature roaming the trails of Minto Brown Island Park. It's like nothing seen before. Fortunately, it elicits smiles rather than screams.

The rumor is true, because I am that creature. A senior citizen skateboarder.

More than that: a longboard skateboarder who propels himself on flats and mild uphill by pushing with a stick, not his foot. I've gotten pretty damn good at this, a super-fun activity called land paddling.

My usual outing at Minto Brown is five to seven miles. It's a terrific core and aerobic workout.

A great side benefit is how other park visitors react to seeing a gray haired/bearded 64 year-old guy roll by on a longboard with purple and orange O-tang wheels, pushing himself with a carbon fiber Kahuna Creations Big Stick.

"That's the coolest thing I've ever seen." "Looks like fun." "Great idea."

I started longboarding about a year ago after getting into a conversation with a guy even older than me. He was 70. After mentioning that I was thinking of trying snowboarding, he said, "No, man, get a longboard!"

Turned out that he was into longboarding for four years, until he had a spill and decided he lacked the reflexes to continue. But I thought, go for it, Brian! Heck, I was a comparatively youthful 63.

The first hurdle I had to get over was hearing "You're crazy." That was the usual reaction when I told someone I was thinking of getting a skateboard.

But I'm the sort of person who looks upon craziness as a virtue.

Not the psychiatric variety; the non-crazy craziness of feeling deep in your heart that you absolutely need to do something which other people look upon as decidedly inappropriate.

Because you're too old. Or too young. Because it's too risky, too impractical, too difficult, too unusual, too unlike you. Or too...whatever.

Understand: I'm all for listening to other people's opinions and advice. Early on in my longboarding I decided to always wear a helmet and other protective gear. Arguments for this made a lot more sense than the arguments against.

Objective reality is real. Asphalt is hard. Skin is soft. Those are facts. Yet there is more to life. The subjective side. What I like to call, ineffable strangeness. Feelings and perceptions that can't be shared because they are yours alone.

I trusted myself when I had the urge to become a longboard land paddler. I'm glad I did. I'm in much better shape than I was before.

So much so, I'm waiting for the call to pose shirtless for the Senior Citizen Skateboarders Calendar (sadly, this doesn't seem to exist). I rarely fall on my longboard anymore. If I ever have a semi-serious accident, I hope it is after I turn 65 in a few months.

I envision becoming a solitary Medicare statistic: "Skateboarding accidents among men 65 and over -- 1."

Be strange. Be unique. There's only one you.

Strange Up Salem seeks to lift our city's Blah Curse. Brian Hines blogs at hinesblog.com