

The circle of life affects everything. Neighborhoods vanish overnight to be replaced by condos. Trees make way to houses. Sometimes, houses give way to parks. And the bowls at China Creek, according to the wishes of a small but vocal minority, should give way to a park. An empty park.

We have none of those in Vancouver.

As one of the oldest skateparks in Canada, China Creek has seen the rise and fall, then rise again of skateboarding's glory days. Built in the early 70's, the bowls at China Creek, situated a stones throw from one of the loudest and busiest intersections in BC, have been gathering place for skaters, bmx'rs, and anyone eager for a mellow roll within the city's limits. Easily accessible by transit and by foot, the park is usually a hive of activity in the dry months, with kids rolling alongside grizzled hoodied old schoolers, all riding together on the legendary tight transition of the keyhole bowl, or cruising in the mellow tub.

A couple of years ago, word from the City of Vancouver came down, of some proposals of what to do with China Creek, catching many skaters off guard, like anyone thought that something needed to be done with the park. The bowls had just undergone a major resurfacing not too long ago, and then suddenly, the threat loomed of the parks demise. Complaints of noise and crime came from a few residents in the area, and some people in the planning departments took this as a skater-induced problem. A park is a park, give people a place to loiter, and they will, the skaters argued. It wasn't a skater-induced problem, and, taking the one constant skater presence away from the park, and the crime would probably get worse.

Exasperated by the threats to China Creek, some people in the skateboard community did something that nobody expected them to do; fight back. With meetings, web sites, myspace accounts, radio interviews, and even a resounding show of support from outspoken radio celebrity Bruce Allen, the skaters found themselves knee deep in the fight to keep one of the proudest symbols of skateboarding in Vancouver alive.

Along with some of the most dedicated people to China Creeks' cause (Jeff Chan, Michelle Pezel, amongst others), one of the many who have fought in the trenches of this political battle is Howard Redekopp, a skater for twenty-some years, he saw the value of the park, not just for a skate spot, but a place where people could meet and youngsters could learn.

A long-term resident of the area, Howard sees the way the park is actually used. "What made me really passionate about China Creek, was seeing these kids, it could be raining, and they're there on their boards, scooters and bikes... and they're stoked," he explained, about his view and desire to keep China Creek alive, about the people who he sees using the park daily. "It's their living room... you can tell that these kids are from the apartments around there... and this is their number one activity... maybe they have no where else to go."

Skating there in 1986, or 2006, the park has seen the changes in skating. "On any given dry day," he explains, "you got this 5 year old with his helmet on rolling around, with his dad who's a working professional who used to skate... and you have these Jaks guys, just hanging out... it's this multi generational vibe. It's so good for the community..."

Multi use parks are a new concept in Vancouver. When the bowls and Italian gardens were built on the PNE site, planners feared that the whole thing would be a disaster, the elements not being able to gel into a cohesive package. But, looking in hindsight, the park

has turned out better than anyone's best dreams, with skate bowls thriving alongside bocce ball areas, basketball courts and grass areas with fountains to for people to relax in. Skateboarding has proved to be able to co-exist alongside parks and people, so when, at a park board meeting, as the public consultation process broke down, it was recommended that the park be torn down to make way for another "park", it caught everyone off guard. Blindsided, the skateboard community banded together, starting a publicity campaign through newspaper and radio interviews, and letter writing to the park board and politicians, trying to show that the park could be kept, living alongside a greener park. "I think the (planners) misread what the park meant to everybody... and that in the process, the planners overstepped their boundaries, recommending that the park be torn down..." Howard explains, "then we had a meeting with them (planners) again, and they said that *we need to work with the skaters, and figure out a way to make the park work.*"

As it stands now, China Creek has been given a reprieve, the threat of its immediate demise no longer hanging over its head, although no decision has been set in concrete. What lies now in the future is how to approach the history of the China Creek bowls, how to improve the park, the surrounding area, and yet keep the bowls that have seen time change, from sidewalk surfing to new school skating.

Excited about the possibilities, Howard says that above all, "I'm passionate about it, because of the possibility of being four blocks away from a park that's full of life... it could be so good if we did it right."