



SO SKATE THE RAMP'S RIDE

We were supposed to yell “free” before entering the half-pipe, but we were too cool.

BY VINCE VAUGHN

It was a hot, humid summer day, and I was hanging out with my friends at the local skate park, riding on the half-pipe. This ramp was huge—11 feet tall, with the top 2 feet completely vertical. We’d ride back and forth between the walls, trying out tricks as we soared over the top of each side.

While we always had a lot of fun skateboarding, we knew it could be a dangerous sport and we’d have to be careful to avoid injury. The skate park enforced rules to ensure the skateboarders’ safety. We knew about the park rules, which were posted on a sign at the front gate, but we generally ignored them.

One of the rules was that only one skater was allowed on the ramp at a time. This rule was easy to obey, because no one wanted to collide with another skater while on the half-pipe. It was just common sense. Another rule, however, seemed so ridiculous that my friends and I refused to follow it. This rule stated that skaters must yell “free” before dropping onto the ramp. No way were we going to do that!

Of course, the idea behind this second rule was to get others off the ramp and out of the skater’s way. The rule existed to help us obey the first rule. Together, both of these rules nearly guaranteed skaters would never collide. But those of us who were advanced skaters considered yelling “free” to be beneath us. So we ignored the rule and created our own method of clearing the ramp.

Skaters would line up on either wall and wait for whoever was on the ramp to finish. Then, whoever was next would push his board into the “drop-in” position, glance around to make sure he was the only one going, and drop in. This wasn’t as foolproof as yelling “free,” but it was much more cool.

On this particular day, about 20 of us were taking turns on the half-pipe. Because there were so many of us on the ramp, there was very little time between the skaters who were finishing their rides and the skaters who were dropping in. Once a skater was done, three or four others would be ready to drop in. The skaters jockeyed for position, each one wanting to be next.

In spite of the crowd on the half-pipe, everything went smoothly for about an hour. Then tragedy struck.

Those of us still on top of the ramp watched in horror as two skaters, Bill and Donnie, dropped





into the half-pipe at exactly the same time from opposite walls. Neither of them had looked to ensure the ramp was empty.

Descending an 11-foot skateboard ramp can generate a lot of speed, especially if the skater knows what he's doing. Both of these skaters were sponsored by a national skateboarding company and were very talented in their sport. They both had bright futures ahead of them as professional skateboarders.

But those futures came to a sickening halt as they collided at the bottom of the ramp.

Bill, who weighed about 200 pounds, came out of the crash with only a few bruises. But Donnie was very short and thin and weighed only about 125 pounds. He lay unconscious on the ramp for several minutes, and we could tell he had been hurt quite badly. The paramedics arrived quickly, and Donnie was whisked away to the emergency room.

We found out the next day that Donnie's leg was shattered in multiple places, and it would take several surgeries and months of physical therapy before he could walk again. His skateboarding career was over.

As the paramedics and park staff helped Donnie, they asked us, "Did either of them yell 'Free?'" Only then did we realize how foolish we had been to ignore that simple rule. We thought it was ridiculous and beneath us, but if we had obeyed this rule, it would almost certainly have saved two boys from a terrible accident.

I have thought a lot about that day and the sign we ignored. It contained principles and guidelines that would both protect us and help us enjoy our skateboarding experience. But we were more concerned with looking cool than following the rules, and we put our safety at risk.

As youth, we have been given principles similar to the sign at the skate park in the *For the Strength of Youth* pamphlet. Following the guidelines in this book will keep us out of dangerous situations and bring joy and fulfillment to our lives. Disobeying the counsel in *For the Strength of Youth* can bring both physical and spiritual consequences that are much more serious than a skateboarding career cut short.

I have watched, over the years, as my friends from the skate park chose to heed or ignore the rules in *For the Strength of Youth*. Those who obeyed the rules—even the rules they thought were silly or beneath them—have gone on to lead happy lives. I can tell the Lord has blessed them for their obedience.

Unfortunately, some of those friends thought the guidelines in *For the Strength of Youth* simply didn't apply to them. By choosing to ignore these guidelines, they have stepped away from the blessings of the Lord and placed themselves in unsafe situations. For some, the consequences have ranged from powerful addictions to damaged careers to broken marriages.

Even those without obvious consequences live without the constant companionship of the Holy

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To review Church standards online, read *For the Strength of Youth* at www.lds.org (click on Gospel Library>Support Materials>Youth Support Materials).

