



Being A Beginner Again or “Not Bad for an 8-year old!”

by Kathie Hightower

I saw the looks on the kids’ faces as I skated by them and fell to the ground. What’s this adult doing rollerblading, or — to be more accurate — *trying* to rollerblade in the halls of our elementary school?

I was having one new experience, trying to learn to rollerblade, especially trying to learn how to stop. I was enjoying the added plus of rollerblading through the halls of a school, past pint-sized waterfountains.

The only certified rollerblade instructor I could find in Corvallis was an elementary school PT teacher who had arranged a grant to teach kids how to rollerblade safely. I convinced her to give me a short lesson.

As she and her six-year-old daughter skated circles around me, I was reminded of a lesson I learned many years ago.

I grew up trying things once and then giving up if they seemed too hard. I tried rollerskating once in high school. After spending that evening hanging on to the side of the ring in fear, I quit and never tried it again. I tried baking a pie, failed and gave up on future pies. I carried that fear of failure into adulthood, often keeping me from trying new things.

Then I read Henriette Klauser’s book *Writing on Both Sides of the Brain*. A writer’s book, it also addressed a lot of psychological issues. One lesson struck me then and stuck with me: “Not bad for an 8-year-old.”

As Henriette points out, when one of our 8-year-old kids tries something for the first time and doesn’t do so hot with it, what’s our response? We don’t say, “That’s terrible — you should never try doing that again.” We praise them and encourage them and help them do better.

So, why is it, that as adults, we seem to think we should be able to do things well the first time? If you have never tried baking — or changing the oil in the car — or rollerblading before, you are a beginner, no matter how old you are. As a beginner, you logically aren’t going to do it well the first time. You have to learn by doing — through trial and error — or through lessons.

Soon after I read her book, *I Baked a Blackberry Bie*. I picked the blackberries myself and rolled out the dough from scratch. It didn’t look perfect of course, but it tasted good. And I said to myself, and to my husband, “not bad for an eight year old!”

Smetime after that my husband decided to finish off a downstairs closet in our house; something we’d been thinking about doing since we’d moved in two years earlier. However, Greg had never done anything like that before which made it hard to know how to start. A few days later, he dragged me downstairs to show me the finished product, pointing out the things that could have been done better. But then he looked at me and said, “Not bad for an 8-year-old!”

I just read in *Bottom Line Personal* that Katherine Gertson, director of The Juilliard School’s evening division says that most people can master the basics of piano, flute, recorder and guitar fairly easily — at any age. Further proof that you can indeed teach an old dog new tricks.

I’m now a confirmed “life-long learner” and plan to keep trying new things the rest of my life. It makes for a full life — and keeps you young. Think of yourself as an eight year old — what new skill do you want to try? Anyone for rollerblading?

Sidebar:

Make a list of things you’ve always thought about trying — watercolor, learning a language, trying a new sport. Pick one to try out now. Get a book, take a class, ask a friend to show you how. If you are trying something new — like cooking or gardening — check out the books on the subject in the children’s section of the library. They often have the easiest instructions to start with.