

of richness to these relationships that you don't take for granted. And third, if you're lucky and commit to putting down roots, you eventually connect with a group of people who finally make the city feel like home, people with a shared sense of injustice and restlessness who understand where you're coming from and all the glittery baggage that makes you you. These are people you never would have encountered anywhere else on earth, because, really: How could you have? Somewhat miraculously, these people become your people. They become your heart. They become your tribe.

I was lucky enough to find my tribe here in 2014, when a friend persuaded me to join a co-ed basketball league in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, that was sponsored by a local bookstore. (Our literary team name: the Slaughterhouse Five.) The team is a beautiful mishmash of players—women who hooped in high school and college and all seem to have smooth, consistent releases on their jump shots, plus a bunch of guys my age, mostly from California, who try hard on defense. We'd often practice a few times a week, and after games on the weekends, we'd spend the rest of the day drinking beer. Having a singular goal in common—trying to squeak out a win every week—made it easy to get mixed up in one another's lives.

Looking back, I think part of the reason the pandemic had made me feel so discombobulated was that I wasn't able to hoop with that core group of friends; the weekly ritual had grounded me more than I was willing to admit to myself. For one morning, basketball, even a goofy version with the lowest possible stakes, had commanded my full attention and pushed my problems out of my field of vision. When that flow state evaporated, all that was left was to turn inward, and all those anxieties would just fold in on themselves.

I should note that what I was going through was by no means unique to me. The New York Rollin' Knicks, the city's premier wheelchair basketball team, are used to hooping all over the country, but when they were initially deprived of the ability to convene, the situation proved challenging, both mentally and physically. Zoom "wine nights" couldn't replace what they'd lost. "We're a band of brothers," says Kevin Grant, a guard who also serves as the team's manager. "And I think that we're very supportive of one another, even in our own social, personal lives, you know what I mean? All of my guys are really good people, so it's kind of like it makes playing basketball like icing on the cake."

Grant was injured in a car crash at 19 and has now been playing wheelchair basketball for over 20 years. (He saw others playing at an elite level and made it his goal to join them.) So when the pandemic hit and the Rollin' Knicks weren't able to show up for their usual twice-weekly practices, Grant was forced to find other ways to stay in competitive shape. He even bought a modified Peloton in April, which helped, but the exercise it gave him was a poor imitation of what hooping provided. "Basketball is like our therapy," he says. "You know what I mean? When we want to not think about our problems, we play ball."

Leo Baker, the legendary skater who appeared in Tony Hawk's Pro Skater video games, has a similar support network. After moving east from California, they found their tribe through the New York skate community—"this wave of people skating that are nontraditional skateboarders, like queer women, nonbinary trans," which Baker says helped them come out as transgender and nonbinary in 2020. "There's something about New York that makes something like this very possible and gives it way more life," says Baker. "Back in California, everything just felt a little bland, very spread out, kind of boring. It was hard to connect with people. New York is just like... You're just *in it*. I feel like there's a certain layer of... I don't even know what the word is. You just get the real person. No one's really bullshitting."

Along with close friends Stephen Ostrowski and Cher Strawberry, Baker cofounded their own skate company, Glue Skateboards, in early 2020. Just a few months later, the trio launched their first products in the midst of a cresting pandemic, selling shirts and skate decks. ("We just wanted to have a place for us to be able to funnel our creativity and

→  
**OPPOSITE PAGE**  
ON SAES  
his own t-shirt,  
long-sleeve shirt,  
and sneakers  
**Nike x NYC Bridge**  
**Runners**  
pants \$750  
**2 Monster 1952**  
ON FINLEY  
his own shirt  
**Tracksmith**  
pants \$1,195  
**Giorgio Armani**  
his own sneakers  
**Nike**  
his own bandana  
**Long Distance**  
ON CHOW  
his own t-shirt  
**Nike x Old Man**  
**Run Club**  
pants \$495  
**Homme Plissé**  
**Issey Miyake**  
sneakers \$148  
**ROA**  
hat \$55  
**Hat Attack**  
necklace, his own  
ON COFFEY  
his own tank top  
**DuFine New York**  
**Run Club**  
pants \$1,250  
**Gucci**  
his own sneakers  
**Nike**  
his own bracelets  
**Cubannie Links**  
armband, his own  
ON GRULLON  
jacket \$880  
**Herno**  
his own t-shirt  
**Nike x Boogie Down**  
**Bronx Runners**  
pants \$275  
**Eokhaus Latta**  
his own sneakers  
and socks  
**Nike**  
his own watch  
**Apple**

support each other and just, like, do cool shit, honestly," says Ostrowski.) The goal was to create visibility for skaters from marginalized groups, a community that fans could imagine being a part of. Baker sees Glue as a haven for "people like me or like Cher or like Stephen, who never really felt like they had a home in skating. That's where my heart is."

Getting the company up and running during the pandemic posed all sorts of challenges, from financial to logistical, but Baker was thankful to be in a position to work with the people they love, as well as for the downtime. It gave them an opportunity to hit pause, "figure my shit out," and retreat upstate, where they spent two months getting sober and healthy in order to prepare for top surgery. "The very first time of getting back on my board after surgery, everything just felt so good," says Baker. "It's like, 'I can feel the shirt flowing on my body. I'm not wearing, like, a fucking binder. I'm just free.'"

They add, "I'm just really excited for my life now that I don't have fucking tits anymore."

There was one especially magical moment for the trio that occurred during the pandemic. They were driving around upstate looking for a spot to skate, filming what would become their "Smur" video, which would be released by *Thrasher*. It had already been a grueling three-day stretch: Ostrowski had injured their neck, and they were struggling. It was the end of the day, just as the sun was setting, when Ostrowski noticed a rail outside an old church and pulled over to check it out. "And I just ended up skating the rail and getting a clip at sundown, and it was like, 'Oh, my God!'" says Ostrowski. "I bailed it and rolled away, and Leo and Cher were, like, freaking out. Cher cried, but out of happiness."

ONE EVENING IN MARCH, I had dinner at Dr. Clark, a trendy Hokkaido-style bar and restaurant located on a sleepy corner in Chinatown.



#### NYC RUN CLUB CAPTAINS

Five leaders of the clubs and crews defining the city's new running scene.

From left: Mike Saes, NYC Bridge Runners; Steve Finley, Brooklyn Track Club; Dao-Yi Chow, Old Man Run Club; Coffey, DaFine New York Run Club; and Lenny Grullon, Boogie Down Bronx Runners

"For inner-city culture, running was never a thing, and now it's a huge thing," says Grullon. "It's not only helping people physically; it's helping mentally."



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