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CREATING A REAL PAGE-TURNER

STYLING FOR STRUCTURE

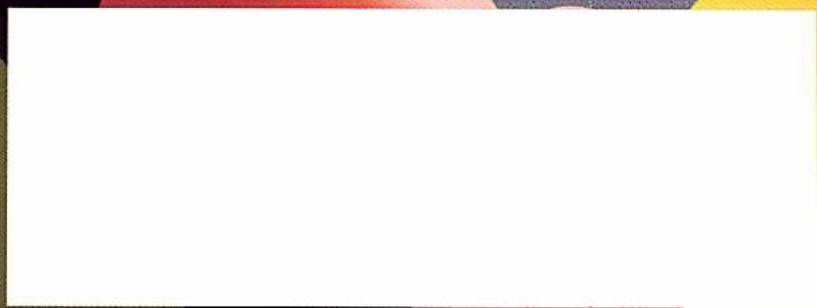
TROUBLESHOOTING  
MACROS



**Developing  
Effective  
Operations and  
Maintenance  
Manuals**

**Use**

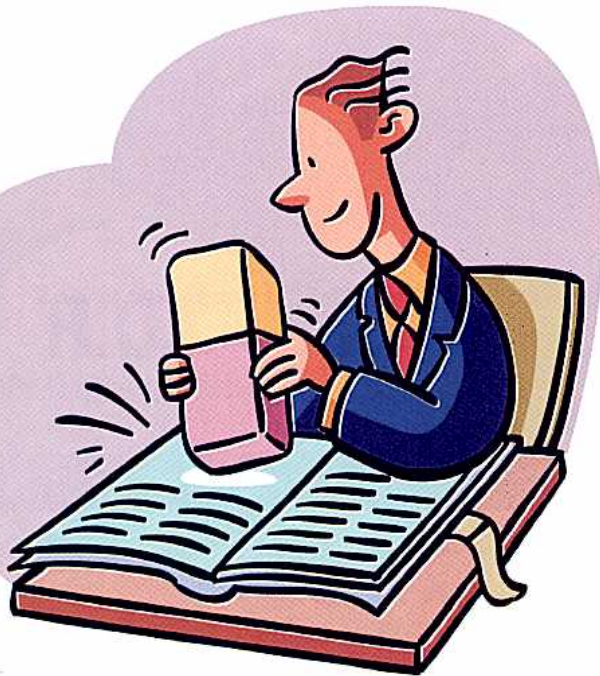
*as Directed*



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Robin Morris, a.k.a. Patsy Clothesline, in action at a recent bout.



Dana John Hill

## Crazy for Derby

By ED RUTKOWSKI, *Editor*

Robin Morris's introduction to Roller Derby came from watching TV with her older brother. A wisp of a girl, she had never participated in organized sports, but she was captivated by the aggression and theatrics of a physical competition pitting women and men against each other. This was the late 1980s, when Roller Derby had evolved into a staged entertainment similar to professional wrestling, with players zipping around a banked track like stock cars and colliding just as often. But, like wrestling, Roller Derby required skill and toughness. To Robin and her brother, the skaters on TV had both in abundance.

"We thought they were crazy tough," says Robin, an STC member and technical writer with LifeSouth Community Blood Centers in Gainesville, Florida. "What I liked most was the one petite blond who always got the best of the others—male players, too—even though she was a girl. I'm sure the outcomes were staged, but the athleticism was real."

### Fear Itself

Since December, Robin has been finding out firsthand how difficult and athletic today's incarnation of Roller

Derby can be. As a member of the Gainesville Roller Rebels, a newly formed league that plays by the rules of the Women's Flat Track Derby Association (WFTDA), she has been practicing regularly with a group of about twenty young women, most of whom, like her, had rarely, if ever, skated before. In a few short months, she and her Derby mates have come a long way.

"When I started, I was afraid to fall down or go fast," she says, and her level voice makes clear that whatever shortcomings she may have as a new skater, fear is no longer one of them. Good thing: in Derby, bumps and bruises are not only common but desirable emblems of participation. Of a recent practice Robin says with some disappointment, "I took a shoulder to the eye, but no shiner came out of it. Oh, well." For the record, elbowing, punching, and hits to the head, legs, and back are outlawed. Pretty much anything else is allowed, short of deliberate attempts to injure.

The basic rules of Derby—as it's known to participants and fans—are simple and can be learned quickly by watching Internet videos or reading materials on the WFTDA Web site ([www.wftda.com](http://www.wftda.com)). New spectators may have more difficulty understanding the culture of Derby. Vestiges of Derby's

theatrical past live on in the players' dress: many wear uniforms of pleated skirts, girlish bows, and heavy makeup, as if drawing attention to the gender stereotypes the physicality of their sport seems intent on destroying. Derby competitions are called "bouts," a word more commonly associated with boxing. Players adopt colorful "Derby names" that make team rosters sound like lineups of virtual gladiators in an online video game. Robin settled on her Derby name, "Patsy Clothesline," after discovering that her first choice, "Copperhead," was taken.

"Derby etiquette dictates that you can't have the same name as any other Derby girl in the world, ever," Robin explains. Participants register their names online.

Patsy Clothesline is a reference both to the late country singer Patsy Cline, a favorite of Robin's father, and "clotheslining," illegally striking a player in the neck. Robin's usual Derby uniform is a tribute to Cline, featuring a fringed skirt and the title of her favorite Cline song, "Crazy," on the back of her helmet. Players also create fictional backstories for their characters—"one of the more fun parts of Derby," according to Robin. You can read

the backstory Robin wrote for Patsy Clothesline on the Roller Rebels' Web site, [www.gainesvillrollerrebels.com](http://www.gainesvillrollerrebels.com).

### In the Arena

Given Derby's emphasis on character and theater, it's easy for some observers to forget that it's a sport, too. According to Robin, however, the participants have no such difficulty. "When I'm on the track, I'm first and foremost playing a sport," she says. "However, my personality does change on the rink. Words fly out of my mouth that I wouldn't normally say to a person."

And what do the people who know her best think of her participation in such a physical activity?

"My friends, family, and coworkers definitely show me their support," Robin says, "once they stop laughing. Many of them had a hard time believing I would or could play a sport this tough, since I've always been fairly thin. They see how dedicated I am, though, and they like supporting me in something that helps keep me fulfilled." ❶

*Off Hours is an occasional feature that describes the hobbies and passions of technical communicators away from the office. Send your ideas for Off Hours to [intercom@stc.org](mailto:intercom@stc.org).*