

Calendar

Thrashers at Large

Skateboard Culture Fest

The editors of the world's first anthology of writings by skateboarders have been giving readings around the country since the book was published in May by Soft Skull Press of Brooklyn, New York. On Tuesday, the three of them — Jared Jacang Maher, Jeffrey Knutson, and Justin Hocking — will be here, at Overload Skateboarding, reading from pieces of their own that are included in *Life and Limb: Skateboarders Write from the Deep End*.

"We were going to do it as a zine," says Maher, 24, by phone from Denver where he is a freelance writer and father of a five-year-old daughter. "I've done about 20 zines in my life. It's the D.I.Y. [do-it-yourself] ethos."

Maher, whose contribution was originally issued as one of those zines, wants people, particularly skateboarders, not to worry that the book is inauthentic or exploitative. "Skateboarders have a low tolerance for the crap factor," he says. "They're so used to having everything marketed to them, from zit cream to MTV. 'Is this real or not?' They can recognize which is which. If you write, 'The feel of the board under my feet, the click-clacking,' you've already lost them." In fact, he says, only about half of the

stories are about skateboarding per se. "The other half make no mention of the word." Instead, they are about adventures, conflicts, thoughts, and feelings dramatized as plots — just like any good narrative literature is. What they have in common is what Maher calls the skateboarders' "mindset."

But how to describe that mindset? Instead of walking, you're riding on wheels. Instead of traveling main streets, you're in alleyways, where unlikely friendships are forged. "Every skateboarder has a story about a homeless person they have befriended," says Maher, who believes that, no matter how many public skate parks are built in suburbia, skateboarding will always be an urban-influenced culture. "That's because there's always going to be the kid who, to find the really good skate spot, has to go into the city."

Maher, who grew up in a Denver suburb, rode the bus downtown with friends and skated around all day, getting chased by security guards and cops. "When I was 14, 15 years old, there was nothing more exciting than those trips. You'd be skating but you'd also be exploring abandoned buildings, meeting crack heads, heroin addicts, and rival skate gangs."

Maher and another of the editors, Jeff Knutson, went to high school together and have been skateboarding friends ever since. The third, Justin Hocking, moved from Colorado to El Cajon when he was 12. He met the other two editors after he moved back to Colorado to get a master's degree and teach creative writing at Colorado State University.

"I grew up skateboarding in San Diego," says Hocking, now 30 and living in New York City. "My friends and I, on weekends, would pile onto the local bus. There was no trolley then, and no express bus. So it would take, like, two hours to get downtown." They would spend the day and stay into the night. They would meet up with an extended group of friends from different neighborhoods and backgrounds. "We were creating our own fun and our own scene," he says. "There was an incredible sense of possibility and freedom, with no one telling us what to do



From right to left: Justin Hocking, Jeffrey Knutson, and Jared Jacang Maher

or what to wear or be."

Hocking says he and his friends witnessed "crazy things" in those years, and sometimes they were involved in them. "One weekend, we got attacked by skinheads in San Diego. We were 13 years old and they were probably in their 20s. They didn't really hurt us, but they stole our skateboards, and there wasn't anything we could do."

Asked if he has returned to San Diego since graduating from high school, Hocking says yes, adding, "But I haven't set foot in El Cajon." When he returns for the reading, however, he'll make a point to go there — for research. "I'm working on a novel, and part of it is set in a representational El Cajon-like place."

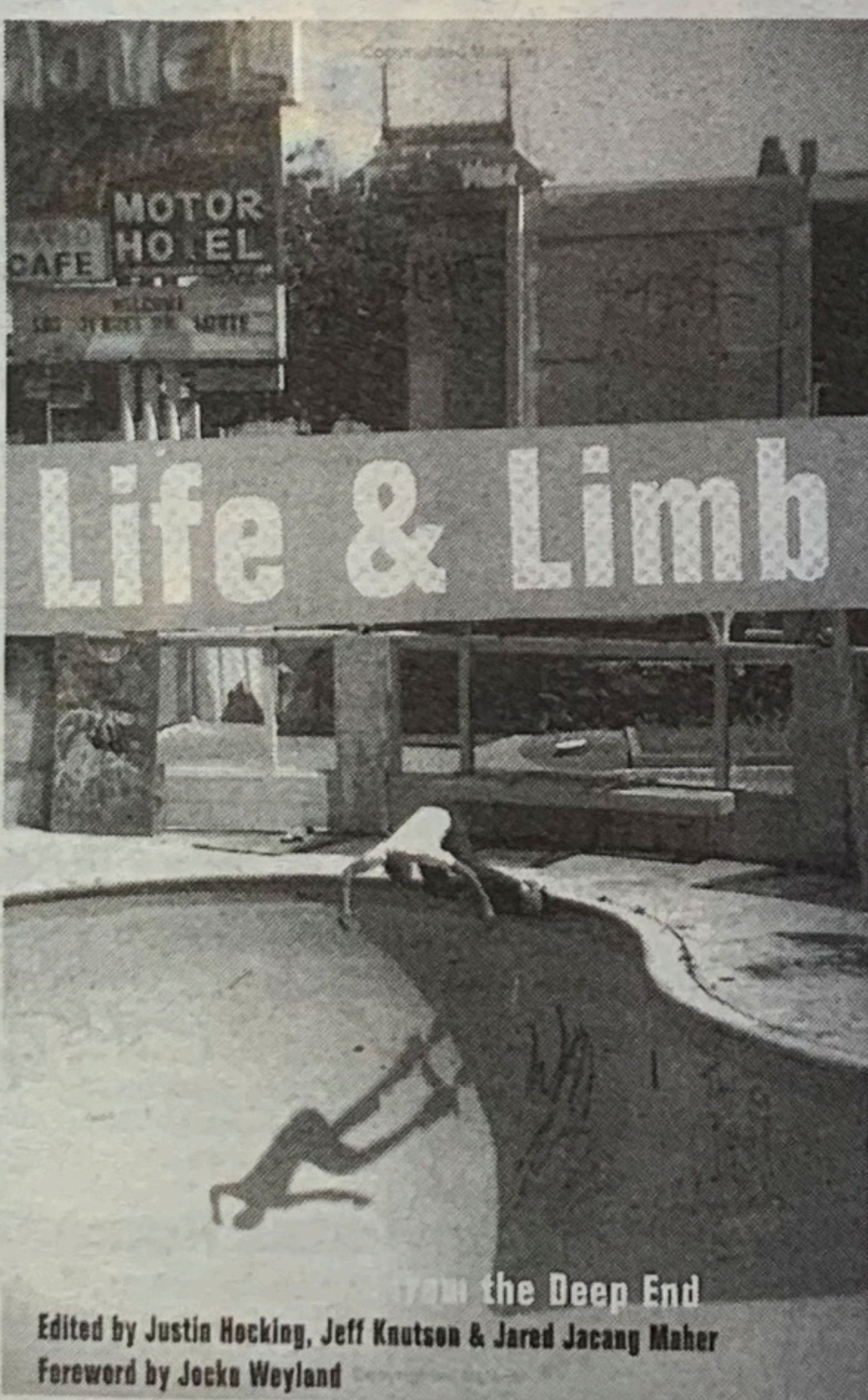
Contributor Michael Burnett of Cardiff will be at the reading, along with the editors. A Texan, Burnett moved to Southern California six years ago, when he got a job as editor-at-large at *Thrasher* skateboard magazine. His anthology piece is called "Get Radical." It's about being 15 and befriending a 12-year-old to get access

to the kid's great back yard skate ramp.

After the reading, some shorts from the UnderSkatament Film Festival will be shown on a big-screen TV. "UnderSkatament might almost be considered the film version of *Life and Limb*," says Maher. "A lot of the shorts in it aren't even about skateboarding. A lot of them, wisely, are just films by skateboarders, as opposed to being skateboard videos, which are just footage of tricks."

— Jeanne Schinto

Reading: *Life and Limb: Skateboarders Write from the Deep End*, edited by Justin Hocking, Jeffrey Knutson, and Jared Jacang Maher
Screening: shorts from UnderSkatament Film Festival
Tuesday, July 27
7:00 p.m.
Overload Skateboarding
3064 University Avenue,
North Park
Free
Info: 619-296-9018



Local Events
page 85

Classical Music
page 99

Art Museums & Galleries
page 101

Theater
page 104

Pop Music
page 111

Restaurants
page 137

Movies
page 150