

TONY HAWK

A man in a grey suit is performing a skateboard trick on a wooden ramp. He is leaning back, with one foot on the board and the other extended. The skateboard has a red logo on the bottom. The background is a dark, curved wall.

HOW
DID I
GET
HERE?

THE ASCENT OF AN UNLIKELY CEO

WITH PAT HAWK

TONY HAWK

A photograph of Tony Hawk performing a trick on a skateboard in a wooden bowl. He is wearing a dark grey suit jacket and matching trousers, which is a stark contrast to his usual skateboarding attire. He is leaning forward, with one hand on the skateboard and the other extended for balance. The background is a dark, curved wooden wall of the skate bowl.

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THE ASCENT OF AN UNLIKELY CEO

**TONY HAWK
WITH PAT HAWK**



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PREFACE

This book would not exist without my sister Pat, who has been my navigator through this uncharted territory of mixing professional skateboarding, licensing, mainstream sponsorship, event planning, film production, and philanthropy. We have learned together, but she has kept the businesses running smoothly when everything else seems to be spinning into chaos.

It's funny: As I began to embrace the idea of doing this book, she started realizing what a daunting project it would become. We complemented each other in that respect, and it is a perfect metaphor for how we work together. I throw the unreal ideas out there, and she makes them reality.

Nobody could have helped more with the actual writing than my brother Steve. He can craft disjointed facts, cryptic time lines, and nonsensical stream-of-consciousness e-mails into stories that are truthful, humorous, concise, coherent, and honest. He tackled this project with limited time and hit every deadline while still giving me a chance to have final say. We are so lucky to have an accomplished writer and editor in our family, but he would have been my first choice even if we weren't related. He gave us the best voice to explain this story.

Thank you to my sister Lenore, who has handled most of my fan communication for the last several years. It is never easy, especially with so many heartbreaking stories and pleas for help, but she approaches it with the utmost respect, dignity and patience. She is a Make-A-Wish foundation in her own right and deserves a humanitarian award of epic proportions.

Thanks to my mom, who allowed me to follow my passion and do something different even when my future in skateboarding looked bleak. She believed in me when very

few others did, and always welcomed my unique brethren with open arms. It's no wonder that all of my friends wanted to stay with me during our formative years; many of them considered her their second mom.

To everyone at Tony Hawk, Inc. (THI), 900 Films, Shred or Die, and the Tony Hawk Foundation: Thank you for your collective genius and hard work. We pave new ground almost daily, and you make it seamless. Best, you all make it so much fun that it almost never feels like work. It's almost impossible to define any one person's role, because we all do a bit of everything. I wouldn't want it any other way. I hope you agree.

Above all, I want to thank my family: Lhotse, Riley, Spencer, Keegan, and Kady. The projects, businesses, and successes detailed in this book would not have been possible without their love, support, patience, and understanding. Sometimes my life seems fantastical and other times too hectic, but they have been there for me even when my time with them is severely impacted. Thank you for allowing me to live my dream. I love you and I hope that my career helps to give you a better life than you ever expected.

—Tony Hawk

September 2010

Family Trust

I was a senior in high school when my 43-year-old mom, Nancy, announced that she was pregnant. My sister was a junior in college and my younger brother Steve was in middle school. My baby brother, Anthony Frank Hawk, was born on May 12, 1968. Thirty days later, I left for college. I lived at home with my new brother exactly one month.

Within a few years, my sister Lenore became a teacher, I went into the music business, and my brother Steve went on to college to become a writer. The Hawk siblings had all left home—everyone except our little brother. Our middle-aged parents were living an unexpected, late-life chapter of their parenthood. Soon they were spending their days carting their youngest child to skateparks and contests. Every day. The kid had talent.

Fast-forward to my own “I’m 45 and pregnant” story. In 1995, I left the music business to get off the road and raise my newborn twins, Hagen and Emily. Four months later, Tony asked me if I would help him at his fledgling skateboard company, Birdhouse Projects. My title would be “Tony Hawk Promotions.” That turned out to be an understatement. I had worked with a lot of famous musicians, so I thought it would be fun to do something new, maybe even help foster a different kind of pop star. Skateboarding felt a lot like rock ‘n’ roll to me, so it seemed like a good fit.

Also, he knew that he could trust me to look out for his interests. And it helped that I really liked the boss.

Within a few years, I left Birdhouse and helped Tony start Hawk Clothing and Tony Hawk, Inc. He was CEO; I headed up operations. We slowly built these companies from the ground up, while Tony’s fan base continued to grow and grow and grow. I contacted several of my colleagues from the music world, and together Tony and I put together a trusted team of agents, lawyers, and accountants—along with an invaluable publicist. Most of them are still with us. We also began to build our staff at THI.

I’ve been working with Tony for 15 years now. Together with our talented team, we have created a fun, ever-expanding business. Tony’s personal passions are family, friends, and skating. He’s an extremely creative and intelligent guy, and generous to a fault. He comes up with

incredible marketing ideas, stunts, events, and a myriad of projects. My primary job is to organize funding and help coordinate the production and marketing surrounding these concepts. And many times, even if I can't help raise the money, we do it anyway.

By 1997, the company had grown to the point where we needed our own building. We'd started Hawk Clothing in my family's garage in San Juan Capistrano, California, but eventually moved to a proper warehouse in nearby San Clemente. As we added more departments, we rented more space. By 2003, we were leasing editing bays for the film production company in one building, running the Boom Boom HuckJam tour from a different space, and coordinating licensing deals from still another office. We also leased a half-acre of land for Tony's ever-weathering, pre-HuckJam vert ramp. Birdhouse skateboards, meanwhile, were being produced and shipped out of a warehouse 25 miles away. Once we launched the HuckJam tour, with its million-dollar ramp, we decided it was time to consolidate and build a facility that could house not only the massive ramp, but also the offices and studios needed for THI's growing staff.

Out of sheer necessity, Tony purchased a large lot in an industrial park near his home in northern San Diego County and built a state-of-the-art facility to house his many enterprises. The THI facility holds offices for all the departments, includes a skatepark, the HuckJam halfpipe (which required a customized roof extension), a studio for his Sirius radio show, two fully outfitted film production studios, a climate-controlled film library, and enough hard drives to store the zillion gigabytes of photos, video footage, graphics, and designs needed to run the business. Today, accounting, scheduling, production, events, brand management, fan club, product development, Birdhouse Skateboards, and the Tony Hawk Foundation staff are all housed under one roof.

Most of our employees have been with us for years. Our staff jokes that the Hawk family is like the mafia: You can get in, but you can't get out. We're all dedicated to the cause. But no one works as hard as Tony.

I never really lived at home with my youngest brother when he was growing up, and yet for the past 15 years we've communicated almost every day. When he was young, not only did he skate, but he also was a hyper overachiever who got straight As. He was a computer nerd before it was popular to have a PC at home. He could solve a Rubik's Cube in about two minutes. Tony is still a versatile guy who never stops. He answers almost every text, AIM, or e-mail that reaches him. Off the ramp, you can often find him tweeting or blogging while simultaneously being followed by a camera.

A successful business venture doesn't just happen to its creator, even if the person is famous. It takes determination, countless hours of hard work, sacrificed family time, and, in the case of a professional skateboarder, inevitable physical sacrifice. Most of all, it takes a love of what you do.

Thanks for the ride.

—Pat Hawk

September 2010

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HOW DID I GET HERE?

1

TOUCAN SAM TEACHES ME A LESSON

The day I knew it was time to take control

DEAR TONY HAWK

WE ARE YOUR BIGGEST FANS! WE EVEN EAT YOUR SERYELL. DON'T RETIRE, YOU THE BEST SKATER EVER. YOU CAN'T JUST QUIT!

FROM ■■■ AND ■■■

In 1998, I got invited to New York to help Froot Loops, the sugary cereal that my skate friends and I used to eat by the case, radicalize its image. Actually, *invited* isn't quite the right word: A marketing agency paid me to join a team of fellow "extreme" athletes at a big coming-out party where it would be announced that the cereal's mascot, Toucan Sam, was now himself also extreme. (This was before the word got banished to the Island of Misfit Slang.)

The night before the event, I joined BMX hero Dave Mirra and lunatic Olympic ski racer Johnny Moseley at a media-training session with agency execs. They told us that they wanted us to stay in character during press interviews, meaning we were to talk about Toucan Sam as if he were real, and as if he ripped. "You should see that feathered freak's McTwists," that sort of thing. Unfortunately, they failed to caution against inadvertent shout-outs to competitors.

The whole thing would last only a couple of hours, and they were paying \$50,000, a *lot* of money for me at the time. The skateboarding industry was just starting to emerge from the fiscal doldrums of the early 1990s, and I was a young father barely scraping by as a pro skater and co-owner of a struggling skate company. So I figured the money was worth two or three goofy hours.

When we got to Chelsea Piers the next morning, the place was mobbed—with media people and about 100 middle-school kids. The kids, dressed in Froot Loops T-shirts, weren't skaters or even, apparently, fans of the sport; someone had bussed them in, figuring their presence would inject youthful energy to the proceedings.

We did a few interviews, mostly sticking to the script, talking about Toucan Sam as if he were a legitimate action-sports hero. We mused on how he was a true crossover athlete, ripping the streets, snow, and halfpipes. No pads, just fearlessness and feathers.

Dear Tony Hawk,
If I offered you a million dollars, would you endorse my new dildo?
I bet you would.

Chelsea Piers had a big halfpipe at the time, and Dave and I did a demo for the crowd, with Johnny as emcee. One problem: Skateboard and BMX tricks have strange names (stale fish, Madonna, slob air, can-can, tailwhip) and Johnny didn't know any of them. So he improvised, figuring it would be clever to name them after random cereals: "There's Tony with a huge Cheerio!" And "Dave sticks a perfect Grape-Nut." Like that. One problem: Cheerios and Grape-Nuts are made by Froot Loops' competitors. That didn't go over so well with the marketing execs.

I'm not sure what the whole thing did for Toucan Sam's image, but I know for certain it didn't help mine. On the flight back to California, I decided that the Froot Loops

episode would be the last time I'd relinquish control to any company that wants to use my name or image to help sell its product. That decision turned out to be a good idea, on many levels.

Stuck Between Coach and First Class

Skateboarding is a strange profession, probably because it was never supposed to *be* a profession. Decades after the sport's birth, mainstream America still dismissed it as a fad, a kid's game, a joke. That condescension pushed serious skaters even deeper underground, where they thrived, happy to be seen as counterculture punks. They knew how hard it was to master, and how satisfying; they didn't need affirmation from above. Hard-core skaters were (still are) artists of the purist sort. They do it because they love it, not because they crave recognition or need money.

Me, riding on my very first skateboard, given to me by my brother Steve.



All of which has placed me in a treacherous middle space—balanced on a tightrope stretched between opposing forces, both of them skeptical. For many years, few adults took my career seriously. Even now, businessmen on airplanes frown when they see me carry a skateboard into first class. At the same time, there will always be a certain segment of skaters who write me off me as a sellout. On the same airplane, they'd give me shit for not riding with them back in coach. But I don't stress about the haters as much as I used to. Most of them have never met me and have no idea how much I love to skate, or how much time I still spend doing it, or how essential it is to my sense of self.

At its heart, that's what this book is about, or at least what I hope it's about: how to sell celebrity and promote skateboarding without selling out. For me, it starts and ends with my skateboard, and with the many friends the sport has brought into my life. When I'm torn between business

deals, I always seem to pick the one that offers the best chance for my friends and me to skate.

I am acutely aware that I became famous, and make good money, not just because I excelled at my particular sport, but also because I've been extraordinarily lucky. Several times in my professional life I've just happened to be in the right place at the right time. I got into skating when the fad was dead, and turned pro just as it started to benefit from a mid-1980s boom. I ended up on the most famous skate team of the era, Powell Peralta's Bones Brigade, and by the time I was 16, I was making more money than my high school teachers.

When the skateboard industry slipped into a coma in the early 1990s, I still rode my vert ramp almost every day, which enabled me to keep progressing. So when ESPN created the X Games in 1995 and gave skateboarding its first legitimate coast-to-coast TV exposure, there were only a handful of vert skaters still on their game, and I was one of them. The show's producers devoted a disproportionate percentage of airtime to me that first year, and I came away as the "face" of the X Games.

Indy air at one of our Secret Skatepark Tour demos in Missoula, Montana.