

Nov30

Bicycle

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There were always several bicycles around the yard when I was growing up. I don't think any of them were new, but they worked just fine. I was late in learning how to ride, but once I figured it out, I loved it. We rarely took the bikes out of the yard. There was too much traffic and too many curves on our narrow road. When we did, we were firmly advised to ride facing the traffic, just as a pedestrian would. We were to pull over to the side, stop, and get off the bike when a car came along. I was surprised, as an adult, to learn that bicycles are supposed to ride with traffic, not against it. It still feels unnatural and unsafe to me.

Mostly, though, I rode in the yard. I started by learning to ride between our house and the house next door. There was a skinny foot path there, so I landed in grass when the bike tipped over, and a slight slope that helped to build momentum. Once I got the pattern down, I bicycled laps around the yard.

From our front yard down the path, then a sharp right turn into the grass, a bump into the driveway, where the cinders made a satisfying sound under the wheels. Over the driveway and a curve to the left into the little orchard. If I was feeling daring, I'd slalom around the apple tree, apple tree, pear tree and apple tree while ducking to avoid the low-hanging branches, Around the garage to the back yard that joined our back yard. I'd stand up to pedal, then, imagining being a circus performer as I dodged children and objects in my path. On the far side of the yard, I'd sit down and coast along the edge of the garden, then chatter bump over the driveway into the front yard, and start again.

By the time we were teen-agers, even running was not acceptable, except in the most "lady-like" (thighs together, the only forward movement came from the movement of the legs from the knees down) way. Bicycles were out of the question. until we could drive, we would accept a ride from a friend, or walk. I don't know if this was a general pattern, or just the way it was among my family and friends. It seemed acceptable – even desirable – to be a cheerleader, but other sports for girls were not extremely popular, from what I saw, in the sixties.

It wasn't too many years later, though, when attitudes changed about girls and exercise. I got a pair of running shoes in the early seventies, and worked to pick up that trend. We rode bicycles as a family quite a bit when my daughters were young. My sister Cheryl and I occasionally got together to ride bikes on the country roads between our homes.

In the nineties, frustrated with one car repair after another, I invested in a good quality mountain bike. I paid extra for an odometer, saddle bags to carry my stuff, and a well-padded seat. I rode it the seven and a half miles to and from work for most of the summer. I was in the best shape of my life! Sometimes, after riding to town, working hard as a waitress all day, then riding home, I'd think, "It would be nice to take a swim," and I'd get back on the bicycle and ride another eight and a half miles to Iron Ore Bay. I'd have a swim, then ride back home.

I loaned the bike, one year, to a distant relative who broke the chain. That was the beginning of the end of my bicycle. It waited for repair, then was stored, then moved, then hauled away by someone else who was going to fix it, then lost. My sister saw it a few years ago, tossed into a field, covered with rust. "You don't want to see it," she told me. Maybe next spring, I should start thinking of another bicycle.