

RIDING A BICYCLE

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[Assignment: Henry Adams, in his autobiography, claims that the most important things he learned in life he learned accidentally. Write a list for yourself of all the things you remember learning accidentally. Choose one interesting and important item from your list; make another list of all the details that flood into your mind as you recount that learning process. Then write a narrative essay about what happened. Your purpose is twofold: to tell the story as completely as you can, and to comment on what the process has meant to you.]

Like almost every other child in my neighborhood, learning how to ride a bicycle was a very important part of growing up for me. Along with most children, I always wanted to be with the older kids or do what they were doing. Learning how to ride a bicycle was one of the major accomplishments on the path to becoming one of the big kids. When I was in the first grade, I was fascinated with bicycles. It was almost painful to watch the older kids ride their bikes to school and around the neighborhood. Every weekday I had to suffer walking to school while the big kids rode their dirt bikes past me. They looked so happy riding their bikes. Some of the worst times had to be when I would be walking home from school and the big kids would race past me. I was jealous that they could get home in almost no time while it took me almost fifteen minutes. It was obvious that they knew how much the little kids wanted to be like them. They would laugh when they would pass by the little kids. It was during these times that I both hated and envied the big kids. It seemed that they got to do everything that I wanted but was not allowed to do. Mainly they got to ride a bicycle everywhere. I wanted to learn to ride a bike so much that it was the only thing that I could think about for months.

I finally got the chance to ride when my parents bought me a bicycle in the spring of the year that I was in the first grade. Of course, my parents started me with a bicycle that had training wheels. The presence of the training wheels did not bother me at the time. I instantly fell in love with that bicycle. It was a dirt bike made with a black frame and covered with yellow pads. It looked like the bikes I had seen people racing on the television. The bike seemed to shine since there were no scratches visible anywhere on it. I was so proud to have that bicycle. The first thing I did was to call up my friends Jason and Will to tell them of my new toy. When they came over I could see the envy in their eyes. Jason had a blue bicycle but it had been passed down to him from his older brother, so it was not in perfect condition like mine. The first thing they wanted to do was to ride it but I would not let them. It was my bicycle and I would be the only one to ride it. I could see that they were envious, which made me even happier.

As soon as my friends left I took the bike out onto the driveway and decided to ride it for the first time. The bicycle was too big for me but it was not a problem because of the training wheels. I had ridden some of the other kids' bikes so I had no problem starting to ride it. The training wheels kept the bicycle upright while I tried to climb on to it. It was

probably funny watching me try to climb onto the bike. It took some ingenuity; I had to either stand on something like a box to increase my height or I had to climb up on the bike by placing my feet in the corners created by the frame. But at the time I did not care. I was so happy to have that bicycle. All of my other toys were forgotten after I first saw the bicycle.

My desire to ride a bicycle was satisfied for a little while. I rode constantly for several months. Even if I was just going to the Jensen's house, the one next to ours, I would ride the bike. My parents found this comical since it took more time to get the bike out of the garage and ride it on the sidewalk than it would have taken to walk to the house and back. I would ride on the sidewalks around our block and pretend like I was in one of the bicycle races. Of course, I would always win by edging out my biggest enemy. This rival was always like the bad guys on television programs. He would be dressed all in black with a dark racing helmet. After I would win I could always imagine him throwing his helmet on the ground in disgust.

These were great times, but I soon realized that riding a bicycle with training wheels was just not the real thing. Riding with training wheels was too limiting. I could only ride on the sidewalks and barely ever in the street. My parents frowned upon the idea of my riding the bicycle where I might be hit by cars. There was no possibility that I could ride the bike to school because I would have to cross too many streets. I could not go anywhere that the bigger kids went because they rode through yards and on the trails in the woods behind our neighborhood. It was too tiring trying to ride through grass because of the drag that was created by the training wheels. Also, the neighbors did not like having their yards torn up by all of the tires; therefore my parents said I could not ride through the grass. Riding over the rough paths through the woods with training wheels would have been impossible. They would have gotten caught on the roots that crossed the paths. This was even more disheartening because it was because of these roots that the other kids rode on the trails. They used them to jump their bicycles. I would watch them jump and ride on one wheel and be extremely jealous.

By the time summer vacation started, I knew that I had to learn to ride without having the extra support from the two small wheels on the back of the bicycle. In order to have the training wheels removed I had to convince my parents that I was ready. This was definitely not an easy task. My parents did not think that I was old enough to be riding a bicycle without the aid of the training wheels. Over a period of several days I used every trick in the book on my parents. I began by trying to tell them that I was ready for the challenge of riding the bicycle. I tried to tell them that I was old enough to learn to ride. I promised that I would work hard to learn. My desire to ride even compelled me to promise to never fight with my sisters again if they would teach me to ride without the training wheels. When these ideas did not work I tried to use the common saying that all of my friends are doing it. However, they were very skeptical of my claims. Finally I resorted to the favorite tactic of most children, the most dreaded by parents--I was forced to whine. After several days of constant nagging my parents realized that the only way to make me stop was to teach me how to ride the bicycle without the training wheels.

My training was to begin early on a Saturday morning. I was so excited that I could barely sleep the night before. I kept wondering what it would be like to ride without the training wheels. After getting very little sleep, I woke up at six o'clock and ran to my parents' room. I woke my dad and told him that it was time to start teaching me to ride the bicycle. He did not appreciate being awakened at such an early hour. He said he would help me after he had eaten breakfast and taken a shower, which took an unreasonably long time. Finally, my dad and I went out to the garage and he took the training wheels off of the bicycle. I was so excited that the few minutes that it actually took seemed to last for hours. Finally, he finished removing the wheels and I got on the bike for the first time without their aid. It was a weird sensation to try to balance the bicycle. In fact, it was nearly impossible. Only my toe could touch the ground since the bike was so big. At first, I had to keep my feet off of the pedals to keep my balance. My dad held the back of the bike and began pushing me down the driveway. He pushed the bike faster and faster. With every one of his steps I became more frightened. It seemed like I was going faster than I ever had with the training wheels on the bike. The increased speed made it tougher to control the bike. The bike started to weave back and forth so that my dad had to let go of the seat. As soon as he let go, I fell to the ground. I scraped my elbow and I was in quite a bit of pain. However, a change had occurred within me. Going so fast on the bike was a great feeling. Even though it was fairly scary, this new found thrill excited me.

I knew that I had to learn to ride the bike so I could go as fast as I wanted to at anytime. I got back on the bike and tried again with even more determination. It took several times but I was finally able to keep my balance fairly well. However, I had the toughest time trying to stop. When the training wheels were on the bike I had no problems stopping. All I had to do was press my feet backwards on the pedals in order to stop the wheels from turning. But without the training wheels I had to try to coordinate my efforts, using my feet on the foot brakes and putting them on the ground to keep upright. The training wheels had done the job of keeping me upright before but now I had to do this job. This was made even more difficult since only my toes could reach the ground. When I slowed down enough I tried to put my feet on the ground in order to finish stopping the bike. In order to get my foot solidly on the ground I had to tip the bike a little. This stopped the bike, but only because I would fall off of it. I spent most of the day trying to get my actions coordinated enough so I would not fall. By the end of the day, I had a large number of cuts and bruises covering my body. Even though I was in pain, I was happy. I had finally gotten to ride a bicycle without training wheels.

It was a few more days before I could start the bicycle moving by myself. Once I learned how to jump on the bike and peddle fast enough, I did not have the problem of falling off any more. I soon realized that it was easier to keep my balance while riding at higher speeds. It took me several more days to become comfortable enough to leave the driveway, but I was having the time of my life. I practiced from the time I woke up until lunch. After lunch I was right back out on that bike. My parents had to yell at me to come in when it became dark. I did not care that they were yelling. I would just keep on riding. The big kids began to notice my new riding ability. After they saw that I no longer needed the training wheels

they allowed me to ride with them. I finally knew what it felt like to be one of the big kids and it was a great feeling. Now the little kids would look at me and be jealous. I spent the rest of the summer riding that bike. I will remember that that was one of the best summers of my life.