

Another Perspective

Written by Lori Pankonin, The Imperial Republican

A kid with a new bike

It was a birthday present. It was my very own brand new green stingray bicycle with butterfly handlebars, a silver glitter banana seat and a white wicker basket to carry my beach towel on treks up that hill to the pool.

My dog sat on the seat in front of me with her paws perched on my arm that I held in front of her. That one-handed steering concept was only possible because the brakes were controlled from the pedals.

My new bike replaced the blue hand-me-down Huffy on which I had learned to ride. It had a crooked wire basket, no doubt having been crashed more than once.

I later recall riding a green boys bike in a taller version, probably my brother's. It's interesting the odd memories that pop up when you think back, but I lost my big toenail when I tried to ride the bike after the pedal fell off. I got my toe caught in the spoke and had to learn the hard way.

I begged for a new 10-speed after finishing eighth grade and dipped into my savings to buy my very own. I got it in town, seems like it was at Coast to Coast as I've grown up with that "Shop at Home" concept.

In later years, my husband got into biking and as he would do, he had to have all the gadgets. He had little rear-view mirrors that hooked onto his helmet. He went all out at a bike shop to get a quality bike for our oldest daughter, Brooke. Funny how everything changed in its performance when the young driver backed over it at the ball field.

Somehow over the years, that ended up being my bike. I had recently contemplated getting reacquainted with the two-wheeled cycle when I was inspired to establish some summer exercise habits.

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Up bright and early with a 6:45 a.m. breakfast meeting, I decided to start out the day with vigor and I hopped on the bike for my transportation mode of the morning. Whoa. I started wondering in about two blocks if I might croak. The wind was blowing which didn't help matters but I just couldn't find the right gear. I was either churning those wheels at a challenging effort or my legs spun around furiously without making much forward progress.

Grrr. Well I kept trudging on and viola . . . I made it, sweating and very THIRSTY! I've never been one to keep my thoughts real quiet so I made my not-so-pleasant experience known to the church friends who had already arrived. One of them said that she loves her new bike that has no gears. You just ride and push back on the pedals to stop.

What? Do they still really make those other than in a kids' version? Where would you find one?

It was one of those days for church meetings and I met again for lunch at the park. Amongst our chit chat was again the biking topic. I couldn't believe when one of the gals mentioned that her husband got a grandpa bike with no gears. They had ridden the style while in Florida and loved them.

Hmmm. Was it meant to be that I heard two mentions of this type of bike within a half day's time?

I was shocked to find when I went to the Internet that single-speed bikes are actually quite popular, even amongst young road warriors. There was an amazing selection. No, they wouldn't be the best bet for mountain biking, but I haven't come across too many mountains around here lately.

The thought of enjoying the surroundings, observing the flowers and listening to the birds on a ride rather than looking down at the gears to see which shift I might try next was enlightening.

But then I thought back decades when two friends and I mapped out a plan to ride bikes to

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Champion for a Girl Scout badge. Those hills were torture on our little stingrays, taking most of the morning. In later years, when I rode my 10-speed on the same venture, I couldn't believe how much less effort it required. Of course my legs were longer by then also.

I really appreciated the generous consent to have a chance to borrow the single-speed bike for a trial run. I liked it. It was so strange to brake with the feet again, rather than reaching for the hand grip but it was a pleasant ride. After all, my mission is to get some exercise so if I have to work a bit harder rather than change gears on an incline, all the better for getting in shape.

I mentioned my desire for a new bike to Josh, our new associate editor in Wauneta, Neb. who rides his bike frequently in that hilly community. When I said I was actually considering getting the old single-speed kind like I rode as a kid, he said maybe I could even put a basket on it.

Well guess what? I'm now a proud owner of a new royal blue Cruiser single-speed bike. And you'll be glad to know, Josh, I got a nifty wire basket that pops on the front. It will hold my computer on those ventures to the office. And the basket pops right off so I can take it into the grocery store for those healthy fruits and vegetables that I'll no doubt crave with better exercise habits.

My husband and I took a bike cruise over the weekend and I kept up just fine. In fact, we stopped twice so he could adjust his seat and I did just fine on the small hill.

It's like being a kid again with a brand new toy.