

Ground In

Category: Coping

written by Julie A. Dickson | September 25, 2022

I lay on the pavement weeping, my bicycle on its side. I'd received the blue Schwinn on my 9th birthday, and it was still too big for me—a small-built girl with weak legs, just recovered from mono after a year spent sitting out most activities. No jump-rope, hopscotch, or bicycle, the pediatrician said. For months, I just sat on the patio (for fresh air, mother said) reading or drawing.

Once released for play again, I overdid it. I walked to school, stopping when I got tired (I'd sit down, pretending to tie a shoelace, so the other kids wouldn't notice my fatigue). I was excused from gym class, though, which was a relief, as I was always the last one chosen for any team.

So here I was, days after my 9th birthday, trying to ride a bicycle that was too big for me. I already missed my old red bike, which had sat idle in the garage while I was banned from riding it. My heart fell when I was told my brother needed the red bike, the removable crossbar already remounted; I watched him sail down the block, hands outstretched, as I looked at the huge blue bicycle. It seemed as daunting as a mountain.

I managed to mount it and pedaled down the block away from the direction my brother had gone. Perhaps I could do it, I thought ... just a little further, and he wouldn't be able to see me. Then down I went.

Bicycle mostly on top of me, I tried to drag myself out from under it. I was crying, but not loudly, hoping not to attract attention. Suddenly I saw blood and winced with pain as I lifted up my right leg, the weaker one, to examine it. The gravel that had caused me to skid was ground into my knee, which was a mess of bleeding scratches. For a few moments, I just sat on the edge of the road, cradling my sore knee and wiping my tears with blood-streaked hands, for I'd also landed on my hand and elbow.

A woman came running out of a nearby house, calling to me to stay still. Her husband approached, too, and picked up the blue bike—seemingly unscathed, unlike its rider. The woman was a neighbor, one who waved when kids went by. She scooped me up and hustled me to their porch, then went inside to call my mother.

In the emergency room, under bright lights, the attendant spoke soothingly as he picked bits of gravel from my knee with tweezers. After he cleaned the wound, applied Betadine, and inserted 10 stitches, I was finally driven home.

Discouraged and sad, the blue bike sat in the garage and I sat again on the patio, book in hand but not really reading.

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