

Lightning

by Terry Faubert



I sat on the back steps, oblivious to the bright spring sunshine, my chin in my hands, my elbows on my knees. Only six years old, I had decided the world was not fair, or at least my parents weren't.

Why couldn't I have a horse? None of their objections made sense to me. Nowhere to live? Why not the garage? Daddy could park in the driveway. Nothing to feed it? But our suburban Toronto backyard was covered in grass. But still they refused. I thought I could never be happy again.

But then one day, I came home from school to find a shiny new bike in the driveway, waiting just for me. It was bright red with multi-coloured plastic streamers at the ends of the handlebars, and a wire basket in front to carry things. Best of all were two small training wheels so I couldn't fall.

From my first hesitant forays the length of our driveway, with my Dad beside me, to hours spent exploring the neighbourhood on my own, that bike became my dearest companion. I named him Lightning and he responded precisely to my "Whoa," when pedaling backward and my "Giddy up" when zooming forward.

My after-school routine was to run into the house, throwing my school books wherever, change at top speed from my hated school dress to my comfortable slacks and gallop away on Lightning. Standing on the pedals, using all my strength, I would struggle up to the very top of our steep street so we could coast back down, the wind blowing my curls and his streamers out behind us. At first, I wasn't able to bike all the way up and would be forced to walk Lightning part way. I took note of which house I was able to bike to and the next time I would push myself to go a bit further, until the great day arrived when I biked all the way up, past 35 pairs of houses, and could turn and head back down without stopping.

It was several months later that my father removed the training wheels, certain I no longer needed them. I reacted with horror, terrified to bike without my safety net. In the face of my stubborn tears, my Dad reluctantly reattached them. Many times my parents would broach the subject again, telling me those little wheels never touched the ground when I biked, but I was adamant in my refusal.

Then, one glorious day, after my regular ride, straining up, up, up and reveling in the cool force of the wind on my exhilarating descent, my parents casually asked how biking had been. To my innocent response, they revealed how they had tricked me by removing the training wheels while I was in school. In shocked disbelief I ran to look and slowly digest the fact that I had

biked the hill without protection. Gulping down my unease, I tried again and knew that they were right.

Lightning and I had many adventures after that. Once, he betrayed me, when I left him beside the road and he revealed to my parents that I was playing in the forbidden culvert. I loved to climb its rocky sides and thoroughly discounted my parents' fear that water might suddenly gush out of the pipe and drown me. The spanking I received that day didn't convince me not to play there, only not to leave my bike in view.

Once I offered Lightning as collateral when bullies demanded 10 cents to let me pass. I promised to run home for the money and suggested they hold my bike to ensure my return. I knew exactly how my father would react to mean boys 'taking my bike' and demanding payment. How delighted I was to watch them scatter when I returned with my father in our car. And the next time those boys stepped into the road to block my passage, their leader said, "No, let *her* go by."

As I grew older and bigger, the seat and handlebars were raised and Lightning continued on as my loyal steed. He was the best part of summer and the reason winter dragged its feet. He took me places I could never have gone without him, at a speed and with a thrill that could never be matched. Did I still long for a horse? No, because to my mind, I already had one.