



BORN TO RIDE

After a serious childhood illness, Holly Pevzner was warned to stay off her bike. She followed the rules for years—until her two boys changed everything.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY FEDERICA BORDONI

When my oldest son, Theodore, rode his two-wheeler for the very first time, awash in that spectacular mix of freedom, excitement, and pride, he knocked me right back to that sweet spot in my own childhood, when riding a bike was the first real step toward independence and adventure. I was so proud of him and so completely jealous at the same time.

I don't remember exactly the last time I rode a bicycle as a child, but I do know it was the summer I was 13 years old. That's the summer I found out I had cancer, got a bone transplant, and had my right leg put back together with an assortment of screws and metal plates. I wish I had known which ride would be my last. I would have paid more attention. So instead of knowing, I simply reminisce about the many trips I took

with my big sister to Mrs. D's, the turquoise-colored mom-and-pop convenience store about a mile and a half up the road from our home. Our bikes hugged the grass, and our little purses, filled with money Mom gave us, jumped around in our plastic-daisy-adorned baskets. We'd buy Italian ices, penny candy, and grinders (New England for "hero sandwiches"). We got to go by ourselves and keep the change.

Riding to Mrs. D's was a neighborhood rite of passage that we couldn't wait to get to. So while I was always a little nervous pedaling along the sidewalk-free road, the twist-in-my-belly excitement of it all carried me through.

But after that forgotten last ride, my bike no longer represented freedom. Instead, it became a symbol of fear. I endured countless surgeries and casts and braces—not to mention the one time I actually broke my ankle—so it's no surprise that I was sternly warned to be careful. If anything else happens to your leg, we won't be able to fix it, the doctors said. I knew what their message meant, and I certainly didn't want to lose the leg that I had fought so hard to keep. And, honestly, it wasn't so hard to listen. I held on to that warning and kept my feet solidly on the ground for 26 years. But then these kids of mine came along. Seeing my son ride suddenly ignited a different and more powerful fear in me: the fear of being a sideline parent.

In the meantime, my husband was taking Theo, then 6, on special father-son rides. They were bonding and having a blast. They even talked about packing picnic lunches and doing the 3.35-mile bike loop around the local park. While they were gone, I was home with my 4-year-old, Eli, who was itching to ride too. He hated training wheels and being left out. We both simmered in aggravation that whole summer. Being left behind was the pits. But I knew Eli's suffering would soon disappear. He'd gain a bit more strength and balance and—zoom!—he'd be off like the rest of them.

By the following summer, Theo was an expert. He was showing off his hand signals and joyously speeding out of view, only to wait for me to catch up on foot. Then he'd speed away again, giggling. And Eli was stronger and more bullheaded than ever, determined to ride on his own. He'd be training wheel-free in a minute. Both were beyond excited to



“Mama! You’re doing great! Isn’t this beautiful with the ocean?”

be spending a week with family off the coast of Portland, ME, exploring an island on two wheels. They'd be hard-pressed to dream of a more idyllic place to ride. When cyclists aren't pedaling on the narrow, slow-moving coastal road that wraps the island's perimeter, they're cruising on trails through the lush woods peppered with deer and abandoned forts. It's a scene meant for childhood adventure—and conquering fears. Unlike our New York City neighborhood, there were no fast cars, no crowded bike lanes, no angry pedestrians. There was just beauty and quiet and, I hoped, enough breathing room for me to test out the theory that no one ever really forgets how to ride a bike.

When we arrived at my in-laws' house, we found that my sister-in-law had dropped a mishmash of hand-me-down bikes in the yard for us. My husband and Theo quickly found their right fit and saddled up. Eli scoured the lot and, with big eyes, picked a short, bright red one. He propelled himself forward with the kind of determination only little brothers know. He was wobbly, but

he was awesome. How I admired his blind faith that he could do it. “Are you coming, Mama?” he yelled excitedly. I hesitated. “I'm not sure yet, honey.” And then suddenly all of my boys were off, and I stood there, literally left in the dust.

I want to do this. I need to do this. Think of making the boys proud—of making myself proud. Think about losing this fear and gaining a whole new chapter filled with shared memories and escapades. Deep breath. Deep breath. I allowed myself one more doomsday vision of me tumbling down to the rocky shore, and then I let it go into the ocean breeze. I pulled out a bike that looked about my size and walked it to the dirt trail. As my guys circled back, I awkwardly threw my right leg over the side, trying to remember when, exactly, the other foot goes on the pedal. I teetered. I lurched. I gritted my teeth. Then I took a right and sailed down the sandy road. Suddenly, there were cheers. My boys chased behind me, yelling, “Mama, you're riding! You're riding!” They were tripping over themselves to get back on their own bikes to catch up. I turned and headed toward the ocean.

Soon, the four of us were coasting by the twinkling surf and the rose bushes dotting the road. My wide smile was rivaled only by the smiles of my boys. I heard Eli's telltale “woot!” behind me. Theo sped up next to me, beside himself with excitement. “Mama! You are much better than I expected! You're doing great! Isn't this beautiful? With the breeze and the ocean? Isn't it just beautiful?”

Yes, honey, this is so beautiful.

I rode a lot that summer—and the summer after that. Today, I am the proud owner of my very own royal-blue bike, complete with a bell—a gift from my husband. We've done that 3.35-mile loop back home several times. We even have a special spot by the lake where we get off to enjoy our picnic lunch. ♦