

## A TRICKY BIKE RIDE

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*For Alan*

When I was six I went to school by city bus. I had to walk the last bit of the journey up a steep hill, which was hard work. Sometimes I would meet my teacher on the way to school and she would hold my hand as we went up the hill. When she held my hand, the hill seemed much easier to climb. She was one of the many people who helped me while I was growing up.

When I was seven, the Second World War started and everyone was afraid that our town might be bombed, so the school moved to a large old house in the country. It had lots of big rooms, but as it had been built as a house, the teachers had to make many changes so that we could use it as a school. The house was surrounded by a large lawn on which we played, and around the edge of the lawn were a number of very large, old trees, some of which had big leafy branches that reached right down to the ground. You could hide right inside these trees and not be seen. They were great places to build secret forts.

Since the school was a long way from home, we had to live in the school and could only go home during the holidays. We brought our favourite toys with us (mine was a stuffed monkey) and some of the children brought their bikes, but not me. You see, I had never learned to ride a bike, so there would not have been much point in my bringing a bike even if I had had one.

One day, my school friends thought that I ought to learn to ride, but I was afraid. Their bikes had no training wheels, and I couldn't imagine how it was possible to ride a two-wheeled bike without falling over. Two-wheeled bikes are scary, not like my tricycle at home which had three good wheels to stop me from tipping over. It wasn't that I was afraid of falling off the bike, but I was afraid of looking foolish in front of my friends when I did fall off. So when they suggested that I learn to ride I said, 'No.'

However, they kept on trying. Eventually they said they would all go away and not look if I promised to try riding on my own. Then if I did fall off, no one would see how foolish I had been. I agreed and they all disappeared.

I looked at the bike. It wasn't a large bike and it didn't look all that scary, so I sat on it. My feet could still touch the ground, so if the bike did tip over my feet might be able to stop me falling. I put one foot on a pedal and pushed. The bike started to go forward. I picked up the other foot and pushed the other pedal. The bike went forward a little faster and, surprise, it kept upright and didn't fall over! I pushed again with the first foot and the bike continued to stay upright. I was riding a bicycle!

I rode only a short distance on that first trip, but as soon as I stopped a loud cheer went up from across the lawn. My friends had all hidden in one of the big trees, and every one of them had watched my first bicycle ride! I was mad at them for breaking their promise, but I couldn't be angry for long because now I could ride a bike and I knew that I could not have done it if they had not played that trick on me.

The next time my parents came to visit me at the school they brought me my own brand-new bicycle.