

Riding the White Line© *By Peggy Badgett*

In cycling, there are many ideas that parallel everyday life. Sometimes the road is your friend, and sometimes it is the enemy. There are times you feel good enough to be the lead out person, strong and confident, but sometimes life wears you down, and you get left in the dust by the pack. On some days, the hills seem insurmountable, while on others they are just bumps in the road to play on. Often a howling wind makes it difficult to ride the white line, as difficult as it is to balance the many demands in life. When I entered my fourth decade, I chose a road allowing me to spend more time with my passions in life instead of cleaning the house. I discovered cycling which increased my energy and spirit for adventure and rediscovered my writing and art. Sure, my kids have learned to spell words in the dust on our furniture while I am pursuing my interests. But we are all happier for it.

Cycling gives you freedom to choose from many roads. Some look good on the map, but turn out to have horribly heavy traffic, or climb after steep climb, or dead end onto a gravel road and you have to back track to the same spot you started, having made no progress whatsoever. You return to your home disgusted and wondering why you ever started. But other times, the roads you choose take you down wonderful tree-lined lanes or wind through gently rolling farms and fields. Those days you end your ride happy and congratulate yourself for making great choices. Life is like cycling, choosing paths and finding our way through the years, making detours and creating moments we remember forever.

Fighting the ever-present Midwest winds on my rides mimics the different pulls I feel in my life. Some days I am buffeted by a headwind that tries to push me back where I came from or wickedly changes direction during my ride so I never get to rest with a tail wind. On other days, the side winds push me in all different directions, just like the sometimes dizzying demands of my everyday life. Between trying to support our family in this age of lawsuit-happy-I-don't-want-to-wait-five-minutes-for-my-prescription mentality, being a mom, maintaining a home, keeping a marital relationship alive, and enjoying my circle of friends, I often felt like I was caught in the whirling draft of a semi truck. Before I took up cycling, I couldn't find the time or energy to pursue anything fun. Hobbies like my writing (the computer had not seen my fingers for years), and my art (the kids had taken over my sketch books) were extremely low on the totem pole, not to mention any fitness program. That was when I decided to take the wind in my life head-on and make some changes.

The first change was my fitness, which was sadly in need of some work after three babies. It was scary to break out of my comfort zone having never been much of an athlete. But I started with a small triathlon, which led to spin classes, and now competitive cycling. When I first started, learning to ride with a group was very intimidating. I was left behind in the dust many times and still often am. There were days after a group ride that I wasn't really sure I belonged, and it was so difficult to keep up, I just wanted to quit. But with a lot of encouragement, I kept at it. I discovered that being humbled isn't a bad lesson, and I learned to not take everything personally. Hard work and long hours in the saddle paid off multiple benefits, and now, after a few years of experience, I occasionally find myself leading the pack with an incredible sense of pride. Those are the days that keep you coming back; when you feel really strong and ride headlong into the wind, challenging it to push you back.

The more my physical condition improved, the more enthusiasm I found for the cyclone that is my life. I was happier as a mom and wife. I was friendlier to my pharmacy customers. I picked up my watercolors again, and began writing short essays. I felt free to follow roads less traveled in my creative aspects as well as on my bike. When I grab a few hours and admire the land around me as I power up and down hills and along verdant fields of corn and soybeans, I find no object is insurmountable. Sure, sometimes I feel guilty about my selfish pursuits (especially when that nagging voice in my head reminds me of the

dishes in the sink, and mountain of laundry on the bed). But when I find myself not taking time to pursue my other interests, I begin to wallow in a sea of self-pity and misdirected self-sacrifice until I realize that I know what I need. I need time for me.

I do not fit the standard mold for a mom or cyclist. I am envious at times of the moms who seem so content to nurture their flock, and find all the reason for life in that realm. I'm not a mom who enjoys playing board games, planning meals for my family, or taking pride in a spotless bathroom. I like playing dodge ball in the house, dancing in the kitchen to music that is too loud while the food is burning, and reading trashy romance novels on our front porch swing. When I ride my bike, I like to wear a skirt and speed past the group in an all-out sprint just for the fun of it, even though I know it will cost me the race back home. I don't need to know how fast I am going, or what my mileage is for each day. Training plans do not inspire me; the sun on my back and the heady feeling of power in my legs do.

Cycling has opened up a whole new world of options to me; touring, racing, and commuting. Recently I have added time trialing to my juggling act. It is very challenging to focus on going as fast as you possibly can for a certain distance without mentally crumbling. Maybe it is simply the idea that you can always improve, just like everything in life. I have managed to eke out a few medals that the kids like to play with, and the temptation to train more so I might do better whispers to me often. Cycling is rather addictive, and since I recently acquired a beautiful new light racing bike, could easily become downright obsessive. But I have to ask myself, what/who will pay the price? My friends, family, or work? There has to be a way that I can do justice to the many loves of my life. My goal is to find that white line and ride it the best I can.

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