



HONEYSUCKLE, HERON, AND HANDLEBARS

by LaGina Davis

Honeysuckle, Heron, and Handlebars

SOMETIMES THE SUN wakes you up; you feel the warmth of God's new day. These are days for grabbing your handlebars and peddling along the azalea lined paths with the ones you love. Whether you are counting the number of blooming dogwood trees or following the perfume of the sweet olive trees, bike rides always lead to fun.

My story begins in the spring of 1976. Gina was turning seven and I was her most loved gift. We spent countless summer days coasting under the shade of Southern live oaks, enjoying the smell of gardenias in the air.

As seagulls floated overhead and sparking diamonds glistened in the Gulf, Gina and I rode through the neighborhood, making our rounds visiting friends and looking for fun.

As the days rolled by, each held adventure. My basket collected shells and flowers, and sometimes the treasure was delicious- perfect blackberries. Whatever didn't go straight into Gina's mouth was for blackberry cobbler.

As all girls do, Gina eventually grew older. She spent less time peddling and more time behind the steering wheel of her first car. But eventually she returned. After a visit to a bike repair shop to knock the rust off, I sparkled with new handlebar tassels and a new white seat. I was re-painted and given new tires. A bow was placed on my front reflector, and I was lovingly passed down to Gina's little girl Georgia.

Georgia and I rode along an old railroad line, surrounded by cypress trees and swamps. We rode over bridges where alligators and herons lived. Our rides usually included treats along the way, such as visits to snowball stands and yogurt shops. Wild palms and wisteria paved our way as we headed for the lake in the sweet morning light. Many times, the whole family would ride together. As we soaked up the warm sunlight, I wondered if the smell of honeysuckle blooming along our path reminded Gina of her days of girlhood, as it did me.

As we meandered along our way, we noticed the cattails and lilies that skirted the marsh, as well as the woodpeckers and hummingbirds zipping by us. The peaceful sounds and sights nourished our souls. On most every ride, we would see a blue heron hunting or a box turtle sunning on a log.

Our favorite bike ride destination was the lake path. Once there, we made way for the many handsome dogs, proudly taking their families for walks. We visited the local Farmers Market to see what was new. Many times, my basket safely carried home fresh tomatoes or squash. I felt the confidence of a job well done.

Although a bike and its rider share a bond not easily broken, I would say goodbye to Georgia after a family visit with her younger cousin Madelyn. I was better suited to Madelyn's height and size, but I would always be just a turn away from my first girls. With every crisp morning or lazy summer afternoon, we would visit again, if only on the trail of our memories.

Madelyn lived in a much colder part of the country with many hills to climb. I had to stay in tip-top shape to make it up and down and down and up on my weekend rides. Although it took all my might to reach the top, I never knew such fun as I sailed down the hills, soaring like the red-tailed hawk overhead.

Madelyn's legs grew fast that year, so after a weekend ride in the state park, we all realized this was the perfect place for me. Many families who visit have girls just my size. I take them on quiet rides along the nature paths, making sure to take it slowly, so as not to frighten the deer or bunnies that we meet along the way.

On these quiet rides, I make sure to send a prayer of gratitude for the beauty all around us. I treasure the memories of the girls I have loved and the times we've shared. I am thankful for each sun-shiny day, and I try to make the most of it. Since our days pass quickly, make sure to enjoy the ride. Make it a beautiful bike life, hand in handlebars with the ones you love.

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