

The Bicycle

by Jack Swenson

They were dirt poor when she was a kid, she said. They left their hardscrabble farm in Iowa after her mother's accident and moved to California. Their first home was a shotgun rental near the railroad tracks. She was just a tot. Her two brothers were a bit older.

The two boys used to help the garbage man load and unload his truck. They would proudly ride in the bed of the truck while he made his rounds, then go with him when he deposited the junk at the dump.

The dump itself was a treasure chest. The boys found all sorts of useful things. Broken furniture, magazines, discarded radios—which they took home but couldn't fix. One day they found a bicycle. Actually, the garbage man found it, but he gave it to the boys as a reward for their help.

The woman who told me the story said that bicycle stayed outside in their yard for several years. Oh what fun they had riding that bike! What adventures! They went everywhere, in town and out. The bike was fast. They could beat any of the kids on their spanking new Schwinn's. What sights they saw on their travels! Neighboring towns, farms, even the big city some miles away.

And, she said, they never had to worry about anyone stealing the bike. You see, the bike didn't have wheels. The boys stood it upright and braced it so it wouldn't fall over. Then they'd climb up on the seat, pedal like mad, and use their imaginations.

Travel is an educational experience, my friend said. She learned a lot from her outings on that bike. Two things she learned are that if you use your imagination, there are no limits to how far you can go, and on a bike with no wheels, you never had to pedal uphill.

