My first memory of riding a bicycle is when I got my first two wheeler. I can remember riding along with my dad holding on to the back.

“Don’t let go, don’t let go . . .daddy don’t let go!” I screamed.

“I’m still here, I won’t let go”

I can remember hearing his reassuring puffing behind me and then suddenly realising he was there but he was not hanging on . . . . . .

at which point I fell off.

My next memory is riding with my brothers on our paper round. We hated Mr Martin – it was a km or so to his house and he was the only one on that street who got the paper, plus he never gave us a tip or lollies at Christmas. Riding through the snow to his house I many time cursed the man . . . . . and my bike.

On the way home we went past Mr Epp’s place. All our bikes came from Mr Epp. He was strange. His son (who was in my class) was also strange . . . Mr Epp was obsessed, compulsively obsessed with bikes (and his son with digging holes, but that’s another story)

Usually he didn’t sell his bikes, but for some reason he liked my dad, who did not like things going to waste, so that’s where our bikes came from. Everyone else had new shiny new bikes, and we had rusty old clunkers from Mr Epp . . .

Lesson One YOU CAN GET OVER CHILDHOOD BIKE TRAUMA

When we moved here from Canada I lived in the hills where riding was pretty tricky, and soon I was 17 and buying my first car. Do you remember? Driving along with the window down realising you could actually go anywhere you liked?

My first real boyfriend and I bought brand new matching bikes when I was in uni. I think we went on a couple of rides around the river but I didn’t actually go anywhere on my bike.

When I first met Tim I confessed that my bike was in my shed and hadn’t been used for years. I think he was horrified. I think he even looked at that bike and said “well it’s not worth worrying about that one.”

Although we were not going out he must have wanted to see me on a bike, and one day bought me one. He was offered on a building site. I think it was stolen property. He wrapped it up in a big blue bow, then organised a key with matching blue bow to be added to my meal tray at the up markets. The accompanying note said “Come and find my match”

I was smitten, but in reality I am not too sure whether I was more impressed with Tim or the bicycle!

I worked hard to ride that bike. I lived in Hilton. I remember attempting that big hill up South Street and thinking I was going to die. I would stop for a rest, then not be able to get going again, then walk for a while, then get pissed off and get riding again, only to get too puffed . . . . . .

The neighbour who rode from the train station every day laughed and told me about an alternative route. He got out the map to show me. I measured it “But it’s twice as long that way!”

He laughed “did you enjoy that hill?”

LESSON TWO – It is better to go twice as far than go up a big hill

In the end I got to know Tim well enough to leave my bike at his house. I would drive there and ride the flat bit into Freo. One day I hopped on his bike instead. It was old and beaten up and didn’t have a cute basket like mine. But it was a revelation – it was light and fast and efficient. I learnt a really important bike lesson.

LESSON – What a bike looks like has NOTHING to do with how good it is.

But you know I was not very comfy on any bike – I got sore hands from gripping the handles in fear, I could not pedal if I was going around a corner, I needed the seat really low because wanted to be able to put both feet on the ground so I got sore knees, I always got off to cross a road. . .

But what I hated more than anything was when Tim would try to chat to me as I rode. I might be a professional multi tasker but riding and talking? I could not do.

My biggest fear however was falling off. I didn’t worry about a car hitting me, I worried about falling off onto a car!

LESSON THREE Just because you can ride, it doesn’t necessarily mean you are comfortable doing it!

About this point Tim and I started living together. Soon after he had to have major shoulder surgery and was facing not being able to ride a bike for six weeks or more. He looked into recumbents – three wheel tricycles low to the ground. He hummed and haa ed for weeks. I took one look and said “I want a red one” .This was a bike I could ride without falling off . . . .and that was it!

About the same time I watched “End of Surburbia” and the implications of peak oil really hit me. I realised that one day no one would be driving like we do now. I got inspired by a family of four with two kids under three who lived in Hilton and did not own a car. I decided driving to work was no longer an option (plus it was only 3 kms away!)

But some days I did drive and I berated myself. I remember confessing my crimes to the father of that family. I will never forget what he said - “Why are you concentrating on the trips you do by car, why not concentrate on the trips you did by bike?

LESSON FOUR Celebrate what you have done, don’t obsess about what you should have.

Time went on – I got inspired at Living Smart and sold my car. . . . . our only car was now an old ute with a broken spring that poked into my bum when I changed gears. . . . . . We put an electric engine on my recumbent so I could get up the hill to visit friends in Hilton . . . It all meant I rode more and more.

But we still couldn’t ride together very well. Tim the man who never has enough bikes, decided that a tandem could be the answer. We tried out a mate’s and rode to Cottesloe and back. I hated it. I had no control, I could not see, I was paralysed with fear, and had to pedal around corners just because Tim did!

We did not buy it.

Two months later Tim picked me up from my last ever overseas trip to visit my brother in Canada. He proudly wheeled a brand new orange tandem bicycle and a bob trailer into the airport, expecting me to totally loose it. But despite a 48 hour trip home, I had been in travel mode – you have to cope with anything, there is always an option. It was 2am but I didn’t bat an eyelid “Sure, I will just get a taxi if I get tired” As we headed to the car park Tim confessed that we didtn’t have to ride - he had brought the bike on the back of the ute.

The anticipated romantic return continued as planned . . . .

But funnily enough that tandem actually taught me how to ride. Someone commented that to ride it well you had to totally give over control to the person in front. Tim and I used to be dancing addicts – salsa and swing mostly, and I well knew the concept of “holding your frame”, but giving over the direction to someone else.

As soon as I operated like this, the recumbent was perfect. But not only that, I learnt how to lean, how to pedal as you come out of a corner. It was like having private bike riding lessons from an expert who was not even conscious of what he was doing.

A paradigm shift can happen any time.

LESSON Don’t be surprised if hard things suddenly become easier just because something shifts in your head.

Sometime after this I gave up my recumbent and hopped back on a two wheeled bike. It was more efficient and easier. I got fitter and I could ride up the Hilton hill, I pedalled around corners and could even take one hand off the handlebars to signal turns!

But Tim didn’t really consider me a rider until the day we were conversing while riding past South Beach on the way to dinner. My phone rang. I answered it, turned a corner, crossed a road, all while maintaining a conversation with him and the person on my phone. He stopped.

“What’s the matter?” I cried as I rode past him.

“You can ride a bike” he shouted!

And the next day, as I jumped on the bike without a second thought I had a blast of that feeling I got in my first car – I really am free and I can go anywhere I want.

LESSON You can go anywhere you want

Post script

I will never be a rider like Tim is. I will never be as fast as him. I will never love riding like he does. I don’t want to ride across Australia. I like having an electric bike I can use when I can’t face a hill.

But I am proud of the fact that I now see riding as a form of transport that is accessible to me. I am proud of getting to this point despite some negative childhood memories, being totally uncoordinated, and a conscience that put on pressure on me that sometimes felt too much.

But it really it all comes back to two things – Take one trip at a time and

Keep exploring until you are comfortable.

(Or get a pushy bike addicted boyfriend!)