

The summer our son learned to ride a bicycle

This weekend I watched as our younger son took off on two wheels, flying along with confidence, excitement, and joy.

Although I can ride a bicycle, I don't know much about teaching someone how to ride. As far as I can tell the key is to get a bicycle, take off the training wheels, and give your child the time and space to figure it out.

Sure, my husband and I ran along behind him a bit, trying to show him how to balance, but I never felt we made much progress—and I am not a parent who stresses about hurrying children toward milestones. They all seem to reach them in their own time.



In the end, our little boy is riding his bicycle not because I taught him or told him to, but because he decided he wanted to ride it, because falling off over and over again didn't scare him away, and because he had enough time at home this summer to practice.

Now, of course, he wants to ride all the time. He pedals and coasts and turns and flies as if he's been riding for months or years—rather than days.



As he pedals on a trail in one of our favorite parks, I try to stay near him, but I am holding him back. Pedaling slowly to keep pace with me is interfering with his balance. I don't want him to fall, so I tell him to go ahead.

He doesn't hesitate and leaves me far behind. Part of me wants to yell, "Wait! Don't go so fast. Don't pedal so hard when you don't know what's around that bend. Before you try to do so much on your own, stop and think. And, please, please stop growing up."



But I won't say any of that. I can see him, even when he's so small in the distance. He is alone, a boy with his bicycle, pedaling into the breeze, pushing up a hill, and showing no sign of slowing down. He's thrilled to be going so fast, to be so independent, so free. Just when I think he might be getting too far away, he turns to come back toward me.



He comes flying back down the hill, his face lit up in an enormous smile. Even though part of me wants to slow down time, I know I can't—and I wouldn't try. Because he's right where he should be. And so am I.