

## Why My Son's Superhero Rides a Bike

*Read this inspirational article by member Sonya Aronowitz*

I'm helping to clear up the remains of the week strewn on my 5th grader's floor. Amongst the detritus, is an early draft of a novella Raphael (aka the self-titled Literature Boy) has been working on at school. I glance to the end of his piece and the illustration catches my eye: it's the hero on top of a bicycle, pedaling his way furiously away from the villains and into a new set of adventures in the next chapter.

Well, having a hero ride a bike does make sense. You see, both my children witnessed the huge personal leap I made in this past year, and which took me from 0 miles on a bike (and huffing and puffing up the stairs) to 300 miles in Israel in a matter of months. The ride in Israel featured inching up mountains of biblical proportions (I said a special prayer of thanks for the granny gear and for Morris who kept on my tail and made sure, even for just his sake, I didn't give up). And then there was the desert dry heat of up to 106 degrees, where a bus shelter provided an unlikely oasis, and my water supply ran dangerously low.

It was a magnificent trip. I connected in a new way with a land that I had bussed, driven and walked a little on before – for a great environmental cause. But at least as most important was the process of my conversion from non-cyclist to cyclist. I began with early morning spin classes in the winter — in the company of “Gandhi and The Spinners” – my name for the group with the lean, wise-looking bald guy who sat front and center in the class. (I have to mention that exactly on the one-year anniversary of my first spinning class – and how well I remember hobbling bow-legged into work that morning one year ago thinking that my derriere would never recover – I took one of the spin bike's pedals right off the bike attached to my shoe. Mechanical failure? Of course not...I was just spinning so damn hard!!)

My kids actually saw little of my progress through the winter and early spring last year. Other Free Wheelers, however, may remember me as the woman who decided to take on a first (borrowed) road bike and clips – all on the same day. Naturally my first fall of the day occurred before we had even left the parking lot in Cranbury. Clipless pedals or not, I didn't even know how to stop on the bike without being able to put two feet down. In fact, I really tested Norman Batho's strength when I fell into him at one red light. It doesn't bear thinking about the domino effect on the rest of the tight group if he hadn't held his own against me. I'll also never forget the kindness of all those Cranbury riders on that day who applauded me for arriving back in one piece...and (again thanks to Norman) without a search party. And I do remember with some pride, that even though I was a complete novice, I always had the right gear, thanks to my wonderful colleagues, Jane and Jerry.

My conversion to cycling was akin to a baptism of fire. My children didn't come out with me when I cycled, but what they did see, though, was the blood and the wounds from the falls that I took. And they knew that I was getting right back on the bike and working hard at those 6 am classes.

The journey to the desert and back taught me some important lessons about myself, chief amongst them that for the first time in my life, I was able to take on a physical challenge. I felt worthy of the admiration of the plane load of tourists from Las Vegas who had seen us as they crisscrossed the country on their tour bus. I discovered strength, courage and perseverance that I knew I had through other areas in my life, but had never tested myself in a purely physical way. At a low point, when I found myself quite alone in the desert, sucked into the middle groove of the group with no one visible ahead of me and no one behind me coming up, I did not give up: in fact, when the Bedouin woman crossed the desert highway on the back of her donkey, I didn't even cross my mind to think of asking her if she would consider exchanging her donkey for my bike. (Translating “your ass for mine” into bedouinese might have got me into trouble anyway.)

I've also learned locally here that cycling amidst great beauty can elevate me to a great sense of the grandeur of nature, the great scheme of things. (Of course, I'm referring to the flat and downhill versions of beauty. Who

has the extra brainpower and energy to deal with the spiritual dimension – unless sending some direct prayers upwards – on a climb?) And this philosophical level brings me back to Raphael. I'll always remember his epiphany as a 3-year old tot on his trike as I pushed him along in Village Park. "I wonder what it's all about" he said. The "it," so he revealed, was life itself.

In the meantime, I've just discovered that that his biking hero story was written before I got on my bike, so I can't claim that my own adventure influenced him putting his hero on a bike. ("I wrote that when I was young," says this 10-year-old, with the disdain of an author who knows that only his more mature works are worth a read.)

But I have a great maternal glow nonetheless. At back-to-school night this year, when I had to write down how Raphael might describe me, I reached for words such as kind, loving, empathetic. I found out later that week that I was wrong, in fact completely wrong. For according to Raphael, in his estimation, there was only one word to describe me: I was simply (and shockingly) "cool!" I was stunned. The bike ride and my training was the reason I'd entered the land of the cool.

I don't think you'll ever, even years from now, catch me on even as much as a B ride. I'll sooner dance off another half an ounce than get a carbon bottle holder. And I have my children, work and other great interests to keep me from getting in the saddle consistently enough to call myself a cycling nut (oops, I mean enthusiast.) But I'll happily cycle on my own "cool" pathway in life, by showing my kids that getting up from those falls and persevering is part of life's journey – while wearing the right, cool gear of course.