

From Henry's Desk

The Wheel and Polio

Ancient historians believe that the wheel was first utilized around 4000 to 5000 BCE. In both ancient times and in the twenty first century we all use wheels every day. Whether it is something as simple as driving one's car or rolling one's luggage, the wheel is almost taken for granted in our everyday life. As children most of us were rolled in baby carriages, strollers and rolling toys before we mastered walking. Many of us can probably remember the first tricycle or bicycle that we learned to ride. This article will be somewhat autobiographical, but often the personal parallels the universal.

I got my first bicycle when I was about seven years old at Christmas time. It was a twenty two inch Fox bicycle. It did not have training wheels and I learned later that it was not actually new. My grandfather had bought it used, took it apart, cleaned it up and painted the metal parts blue with white trim. I learned to ride that bike by trial and error. At Christmas time in December 1949 when I was ten years old, I received my first twenty-six inch bike. It was a Roadmaster bike. It had a horn and a front light. It was a one speed bike, but it could go any speed as long as I pumped the pedals harder. I loved that bike and used it almost daily in my middle class neighborhood on the north side of Richmond, VA. On September 17, 1950 I was felled by the polio virus. Three months later I left the polio rehab ward of the Medical College of Virginia Hospital wearing two long leg braces and using wooden crutches. I did not attend school at all during the school year 1950-1951, but I had a home bound teacher and kept up with my class. By summer I had been able to discard the brace on my left leg and the crutches. I could walk slowly without aid and I could climb steps one step at a time.

During the summer of 1951 I realized that I needed to learn to ride my bicycle again. I had one major problem: I had to unlock the knee joint on the brace in order to be able to pedal. This meant that if I leaned to the right while sitting still, I would fall to the right because my leg would be flaccid unless the brace was locked. After many falls I developed a technique to begin riding the bicycle again. This feeling of movement on my Roadmaster was exhilarating despite the dangers. I could ride almost anywhere in my neighborhood and even long rides out of my neighborhood. Those two wheels improved my feeling of freedom and helped my self esteem.

From the summer of 1951 to the summer of 1954 I decided to raise New Zealand White Rabbits. This enterprise involved learning about sex and breeding patterns. I had four females (does) and two males (bucks). I would schedule the breeding of the four females to birth their litters about eight weeks before

Easter. During the week of Easter I ran an ad in the newspaper and sold the rabbits as Easter bunnies during that week. I always sold all of them for five dollars each. After two years I had made enough profit to purchase a new style English bicycle. This bike had three gears, smaller tires and hand brakes for both the front wheel and rear wheel. With this bike I could climb hills with more ease because of the gears. I enjoyed the added freedom of this bike until I entered high school and learned to drive a car. When my family acquired a car with an automatic transmission I learned to drive with one foot, my left foot. I drove with that left foot until Post Polio Syndrome felled me and I stopped driving in 2002. All of us benefited from being able to drive a car and enjoy the greater freedom that four wheels provide.

I went to a small college in Lexington, VA and I did not have a car for four years. I really did not need one, but walking long distances simply took me longer. One of my three roommates did have a car my last two years and he helped me get around for longer distances.

When I entered medical school in 1962 a personal microscope was a mandatory piece of equipment throughout the first two years. The microscope was rather heavy, but could be carried in a case sort of like take-on luggage on a plane. However, I soon learned that carrying that microscope and books was overwhelming. I had an uncle who was an excellent carpenter. He extended a handle on the microscope case and added two wheels at the base of the case. These modifications made it possible to pull the microscope case on wheels, similar to an old fashioned golf cart. This was all made possible because of two small wheels.

From 1964 until Post Polio Syndrome began in 1991 I did not need any extra wheels. I began wearing out making rounds in hospitals. I found a used scooter in my respiratory therapist's office. I bought it and that little scooter saved immense energy until 1997 when I obtained a newer scooter. Also, in 1991 I had obtained a van with a hoist that made it possible to carry my scooter anywhere. For the first time in several decades I could visit any accessible store, park, historical site or hotel without expending great amounts of energy. The three wheel scooter and the scooter hoist made this possible.

In 2002 my breathing muscles began wearing out because of PPS. I had used a ventilator at night for over three decades, but after June 2002 on doctor's orders I began using a ventilator 24/7. However, because of modern computer technology I still have good mobility. I have used a power wheelchair for the last nine years and my ventilator only weighs seventeen pounds and is easily carried on my six wheel wheelchair. Any place that is accessible is still usable by me. I am blessed by modern technology, but am always mindful of the wheels that move me along. I control these wheels and they usually do what I expect.

Ezekiel 1:14-20

14 The creatures themselves darted back and forth with the speed of lightning. **15** As I was looking at the four creatures I saw four wheels touching the ground, one beside each of them. **16** All four wheels were alike; each one shone like a precious stone, and each had another wheel intersecting it at right angles, **17** so that the wheels could move in any of the four directions. **18** The rims of the wheels were covered with eyes. **19** Whenever the creatures moved, the wheels moved with them, and if the creatures rose up from the earth, so did the wheels. **20** The creatures went wherever they wished, and the wheels did exactly what the creatures did, because the creatures controlled them.