



TRANSPARENCY

BY DARA PERALES



I wanted my own bike with a cool banana seat and maybe something sparkly hanging off the handlebars; instead I got the hand-me-down bike: an ugly boys' bike with airless tires...a new marvel of the modern age. When I think about that bike now, I don't

understand from whom it was handed down. I had two older sisters, and they both had their own cute girl bikes, so it couldn't have been from them. Later, I developed the theory it was most certainly Satan's bike, which had miraculously found its way to my front porch.

I had been practicing riding for a couple of days. My grandma took me to a parking lot, which was empty evenings and weekends; unlike today people there worked a mere five days/forty hours a week. During those hours of practice, I became a master of turning, staying upright, and looking like a biker. One piece was missing from the lessons, and my forthcoming circumstances would highlight that deficiency in painfully obvious ways.

On my street stood an entrance to a city park. This sloped gravel driveway was bordered on the left by a row of apartment houses. On the right stood a mammoth fence, impenetrable and mythic in nature. We neighborhood kids knew only two things about the other side of the fence; we smelled smoke and we heard disco. Since that park entrance pretty much halved our street—Italian families on one side, Puerto Rican and African-American families on the other—there was no way for me to guess what mysterious, frightening, and thrilling events occurred there. Unfortunately, this was a time of nervous racism in my town; I lived in the only integrated neighborhood, and each side of the divide thought it had the market cornered on righteous living. For us on "our" side, jumping a neighbor's fence was common. Sneaking in Mr. and Mrs. Casino's above-ground pool was not out of the question. But this behemoth blockade, the playground border, induced ignorance-fueled fear in us, and we never dared to climb and spy.

Though I can't remember why walking down the park entrance was not an option, one day I decided to venture down the driveway on my bicycle: danger be damned. As I turned into the driveway, I immediately picked up speed. My airless tires swerved uncontrollably

in the loose gravel, and I found myself unable to control my speed, its non-banana seat rumbling underneath. The one lesson I failed to learn, braking, stabbed at me, mocking my confidence, getting ready to laugh at the outcome. As I sped down what seemed to be an Alp, my arms gave way to the downward pressure of the rest of the bike, and I spun out, hitting the curb and finally sliding to a stop on my face and stomach.

When the surprise wore off, and when I successfully made sure I was still alive, I realized an audience gathered just above the very barrier that had once captured my awe. Four men, senior citizens, had not witnessed the actual calamity of the fall, but they were enjoying the spectacle laid out in front of their fence.

Embedded in my bloody wounds were large chunks of gravel, sand, and even little pieces of foliage. I rested there a second, at the foot of that fence, taking in all the pain and embarrassment before getting up. The men, so entertained by the sheer clumsiness, desperation, and stupidity of my accident, seemed almost impressed with the level of disaster I achieved. However, that amazement soon gave way to chastisement. After the men ended their laughter, they took a second to make sure I could walk then resumed their conversation and cigar smoking. As their radio sang "Disco Inferno," my bike and I began the short, yet long-seeming, shameful dance home.

Transparency means different things to different people. When some think of transparency, they think of government, out in the open, accountable and responsible. Others think of transparency as a truth, in relationships, a glimpse into your loved one's "soul." Still, transparency can bring to mind clear, quiet seas where you snorkeled with turtles for the first time. Transparency can be the introspection you obtain through peaceful meditation, a soothing comfort. Transparency has some negative connotations also. When it's clear you've been lied to, that's the sort of transparency that causes pain, and when someone is obviously transparent in his or her inability to understand you or your perspective, friendships can end. Luckily, transparency can also represent clarity, and that is a transparency to which we can all relate at some point in our lives.