

The title is significant with this short story.

A Family Tradition

Focus—the key to successfully navigating the minefield he was walking through was focus, so Jason gripped his 6-year-old daughter’s hand firmly as he led them down the shining corridor. Jason wasn’t timid by nature, but something about this enigmatic place left him feeling unsettled. He hated the mall. He avoided it whenever possible, but on this sunny Saturday morning, Sears, and Sears alone would meet his needs. Jason was a man to whom history mattered. He could go to Walmart for a cheaper push mower, but he knew the mowers they sold were trash, good for two seasons of use at most before they were fit only for a landfill. He could get a high-quality push mower at Home Depot or Lowes without braving the terrors of the mall, but only Sears sold Craftsman mowers, the ones his family had used all his life and his father’s before him. So, with Maggie Lou in tow, Jason marched down the corridor, attempting to maintain a pace just fast enough to keep his daughter’s eyes from wandering to the swag on either side. All that mattered was the mission, and additional shopping was a distraction to be avoided at all cost.

He saw it before she did and stopped so suddenly that his Adidas sneakers squeaked obnoxiously on the polished floor.

They were hustling through the section of Sears with outdoor gear, camping supplies and bikes, moving just about as fast as Maggie’s little, six-year old legs could carry her, when Jason was frozen by the vision that sat on a pedestal as they approached the bikes. Maggie raised her head to look up at her father, her face a mask of confusion. Then her eyes followed his to the object on the pedestal and confusion turned to wonder.

“What’s that daddy?” her little voiced chimed.

He reached down and slowly lifted her up in his arms, never taking his gaze from the sight before him. Maggie felt excitement coupled with a tiny bit of fear. She couldn't remember ever seeing this particular expression on her daddy's face.

He spoke quietly, somberly. "Honey, this is a big wheel. Your daddy used to have one just like it." Turning his face to hers he added more cheerfully, "I didn't even know they still made them." As he stood, holding his daughter before the oddly, shaped trike on the pedestal, 40 years fell away.

RAF Chicksands was the first place about which Jason had true memories. True memories are difficult to separate from recounted stories, but Jason knew for fact his memories of RAF Chicksands were real; he knew because neither his father, who had been stationed there while serving in the US Air Force, nor his big sister had ever talked to him about the things he remembered from that place.

Well, in truth, he only had two memories, both of which centered on the hill. The base had a hill on main street which sloped down sharply to a turn at the bottom. Once, on a sunny day like today, he had gotten up the courage to brave the hill on his big wheel. He had felt like Evel Knievel as he raced down the hill, struggling to keep his little legs moving as fast as his pedals. When he couldn't keep up any longer, he had lifted his legs, letting the pedals spin madly as he lifted his head skyward, letting the wind flow through his long, brown hair.

Back in the present, Jason shifted his daughter over to his left arm, freeing his right hand to run through his hair, salt and pepper now and not nearly as long. It had been the 1970s after all. He smiled to himself as he plucked his upper, two-front-teeth with his

thumb. Six-year-old Jason had flown triumphantly down that hill, but when the road had turned right, he and his big wheel continued going straight. The big wheel had survived, but his two-front-teeth had not.

His smile deepened as he recalled his other memory of that hill. Unlike the episode with the big wheel, this memory was of the hill at night. The movie theater on the base had been showing a film that was probably too scary for Jason and his sister to watch, but the film starred Paul Newman, and Jason's mom had never denied that particular celebrity crush. Honestly, Newman's baby blues were to die for. The film, aptly named *The Towering Inferno*, had involved a giant skyscraper, a fire, and more than a few deaths. Dad had been working late that night, so it had just been mom and the kids. To brighten the mood as they walked home after the movie, they had skipped down the hill, he holding his mother's right hand, his sister holding her left.

He let out a long, deep breath, his eyes misting over a bit as he remembered the last time he and his sister had held his mother's hands that way. He had been 19, his sister 21. Their mother, coming to the end of a year-long-struggle with cancer, lie motionless between them.

In the mall parking lot, Jason put Maggie into her car seat. She was up front with him on the passenger's side. It wasn't code, but he had folded down the back seat of the Jeep Patriot to make room for the mower. As they backed out of the space, Jason looked into the back seat and smiled. The mower wasn't there. That would have to wait for another day. Instead, there sat in its place a shiny, new big wheel.