



From Where I'm Sitting Along for the ride

By Luke Anderson

Many entities decide to change their name, be it a band, company or person, perhaps as a result of a change in musical style, ownership or gender.

If you have read my columns in the past, you have likely noticed the new title for this one. The name may have changed, but everything else remains intact.

Like the old title, which promised a pot full of surprises, "From Where I'm Sitting" aims to shed light on the path less travelled, with hopes of stirring up feelings of wonder and the odd unanticipated realization.

I made many discoveries this year, including the best spot to go for a coffee in the city. It's in a little nook off the beaten trail near Kensington Market; a simple place with an intimate front patio separated from the rest of the world by a rickety old fence made of plumbing piping.

It hasn't got a flashy sign; in fact it hasn't got a sign at all. People know it simply as "Ideal" and on a decent day, holding a cup of freshly brewed bean and immersed in conversation with a coffee shop regular, it would be hard to imagine a more fitting name.

What makes Ideal stand out are the regular patrons. I've often found myself there nursing a caffeine buzz and skimming through a newspaper while keeping tabs on conversations with a group of regulars.

Topics cover the entire spectrum. I have heard that the length of winter can be predicted by the abundance of chestnuts on a tree, and that you can find gold in an area with a specific variety of vegetation. Unfortunately my newfound knowledge has not yet led to the discovery of precious metals, but a discussion about bicycles eventually led to a much more valuable discovery.

Bicycles were a big part of my past. For most of my life my bike and I were inseparable. I've worked in bike shops and immersed myself in cycling culture. My love affair with bikes pushed

me to test my limits in the quest for that ultimate adrenaline rush.

It was this desire which saw me biting off more than I could chew on a particular ride just over three years ago. I crashed hard on that ride and the injury I sustained means I am no longer able to physically participate in an activity that I was so passionate about.

Wheeling past a bike shop, watching others ride, or getting involved in a conversation about bicycles were things I carefully avoided for fear of getting really bummed. Like a caged lion, I had locked that part of me away.

I'll never forget how I felt when I opened that cage and threw myself into a conversation about bicycles. In the process I found a way to help two good friends, Beth and Heather, whose bikes had been stolen.

For Heather I acted as a consultant, giving advice and direction to find her a new ride. My old fears vanished as we visited bike shops and talked the talk. My idea for Beth was more complex. I orchestrated the restoration of a vintage single-speed ladies' bike, a project initiated by the donation of a decrepit jalopy from a coffee shop friend.

With no operational parts, the bike had been sitting in his basement for years. To make it roadworthy again, I directed friends to loosen a couple of bolts here and tighten a few spokes there, traded parts with an interesting character in a Kensington Market bike shop and invested in some new rubber.

The moment Beth grabbed the handlebars, slung one leg over and pushed down on the pedal of her new bike, three important things happened. Firstly, all of the parts on the bike responded to her pedal-pushing power, setting both bike and rider in motion. Secondly, a huge smile emblazoned Beth's face as she took a test ride.

And lastly, I discovered how to reconnect myself with something that I thought I would never be a part of again.

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By Kate Gilderdale

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