

5-1-2012

## Humbled Brothers

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### Recommended Citation

Helmreich, Austin (2012) "Humbled Brothers," *Forces*: Vol. 2012 , Article 34.  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.collin.edu/forces/vol2012/iss1/34>

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## Humbled Brothers

AUSTIN HELMREICH

I could not believe what I was hearing, so I asked again, "What did you say?" My best friend of many years sighed in shame for the second time and responded, "I never learned how to ride a bike."

Ben Lovell had been my best friend since grade school. I remember patiently waiting for my second grade art class to start when quite casually, a boy who I had never seen before walked through the door, took a quick look around, and then made his way to the desk closest to me. We avoided eye contact and conversation for a few minutes until he suddenly turned to me and energetically said, "Have you seen *The Lord of the Rings*?"

**TO THIS DAY BEN AND I REMEMBER  
AND REVEL IN THAT BICYCLE BONDING  
TIME BETWEEN US.**

He seemed discouraged when I said my parents would not allow me to see it until I turned thirteen. However, he assured me that when I was of age, he would be the first to watch it with me.

From that point on Ben and I continued to grow closer together. We climbed every tree, walked every path, and slew every imaginary villain that got in our way. Defending the walls of Helm's Deep from Sauraman's ravaging Ura-khi was also one of our favorite pastimes. Though I had not seen *The Lord of the Rings*, Ben comforted me with his superior knowledge and assured me that we were playing it exactly how it had happened in the movie.

We remained friends up into middle school where we traded in our imaginary castles and goblins for video games and sports. One Saturday in our eighth grade year, Ben and I found ourselves hopelessly bored so I asked him to ride bikes to the park with me. I was horrified when I learned that he had never been taught to ride a bike. After spending a

minute or two in silent shock I offered to teach him how to ride. He accepted my offer three weeks later, I believe, after I reached a soft spot in his soul with my pure-hearted sincerity and constant badgering.

At the start, I was not completely sure how I was going to teach Ben to ride. I remembered how my dad had taught me by holding the back of the seat with one hand while steadying the handle bars with the other. He would then walk beside me and let go of the bike when I felt confident enough. Ben and I debated over teaching him the same way but decided it was altogether unnecessary since he was much older and more capable than I had been.

So, given our limited knowledge of physics and adventurous nature, we decided the best way for Ben to learn would be to push him down the neighborhood's steepest hill and let his natural instincts take over. It seemed rather obvious that if he was given the necessary speed the balance would just come to him. The result was a scraped knee and elbow along with a helmet that had slightly less paint on it than before.

Our next attempt was a slightly more conservative approach. We figured that the speed from the hill had ruined Ben's concentration and thus thrown his balance off. Therefore, we agreed that the next best thing to do was give him a solid push on a level surface. The speed that had thrown his balance off before was taken out of the equation so we expected him to learn to ride before the end of the day. After twenty odd attempts, it became apparent that Ben was not going to get any further than fifteen feet before falling over.

Three weekends passed without us getting any closer to our goal. Saturday after Saturday our motivation deteriorated until we were looking for any excuse not to spend hours of fruitless effort trying to teach Ben to ride. Fortunately an opportune excuse came our way. I had turned thirteen the previous Tuesday making me the proper age to watch *The Lord of the Rings* with Ben as he had promised me years earlier. We had a *The Lord of the Rings* marathon sleepover that weekend.

While I watched and reveled in the glories of *The Lord of the Rings*, I was suddenly struck with a new thought. I started to think about the devotion Ben had showed me over the past five years of our friendship. How he had patiently waited for me to be the right age and how he had never pressured me into watching it against my parents' will. I felt convicted that I would give up trying to teach my best friend something that he wanted to learn when he had waited for five years for something as simple as watching a movie with me.

After we finished the movie marathon I offered to try teaching him to ride again but with a slightly different approach this time. I hesitantly suggested that he learn the same way I had learned years earlier from my father. "Well I guess if you think it's the only way," he responded.

**T**hat Saturday afternoon Ben sat down on the bike, I put one hand awkwardly next to his and placed my other directly under the bike seat. Side by side we slowly lurched forward. If he began to lean to one side I would help him regain his balance. We were starting to gain speed when I saw a small smile emit from Ben's face as he confidently declared, "Let go!" Off he went performing one of the best street curb wipe outs I had ever seen. He got up with a whoop and a holler saying, "That's the furthest I've gotten this month!" We spent the rest of the day practicing and practicing until he was able to ride around the block confidently and completely by himself.

To this day Ben and I remember and revel in that bicycle bonding time between us. All along the course of teaching Ben to ride, both of us had known what needed to be done if he wanted to learn. In later years we talked about the process of teaching him. We found out that when we had debated over him learning the way my father had taught me we had both let pride get in the way. We had immediately thrown it out because our egos told us it would be too awkward. However, in actuality that process of learning deepened our relationship even further. We no longer let uncomfortable situations keep us from helping each other grow. We had moved from shallow friends to humbled brothers.

## Off the Path (Why)

KELSEY JOHNSON

I wish to drift downstream  
to forever, enveloped  
in the liquid fire of  
yesterday's leaves. Forever,  
where laughter of Hamlin's  
lost children is echoed,  
remembered, in birdsong.  
Forever, where the children  
we were smear peachy-pink  
paint clouds across a graying  
blue twilight sky. Storm-tumbled  
air whispers through damp hair,  
calling to life a joy  
that usually sleeps. For this  
moment alone, I can see  
with closed eyes. I can see  
where the vivid souls  
of the leaves go.

## New Year's, 2011

SABRINA MENDOZA

Morning sun rose like a toast to life  
and I, like a child of light

The new day yields new joys,  
and transition from whence I lived.

Armed with dreams, I smile at history,  
liberated from its grasp,  
but not its lessons.