

## **Miss Molasses, She Goes Slowly Rolling**

The people at the police station in Willows thought the old, green bicycle, superseded by narrower-wheeled bikes with gear shifts, wasn't worth much. They gave it to Laura when she asked about unclaimed bicycles.

Years later, when we moved to Willows, we got the bicycle out of Laura's mother's garage, put air in the tires, oiled the chain, and we had one bicycle. I bought a more modern, taller bicycle with three speeds, though only two of them worked, and we had transportation for both of us.

We didn't encounter much traffic on the side streets we rode, six blocks west to the Laundromat, and three blocks east to the grocery store. We carried an amazing amount of groceries or laundry on the green bicycle, with some in the child's seat in back and some in the basket over the front wheel.

Just to leave town behind for a while, we rode out to the edge of town and then along the gravel road by the big irrigation ditch. I rode around and around Laura while she pedaled steadily, and I started making up a song that stayed with us ever after; "Her name is Miss Molasses/ She goes slowly rolling/ She don't get very far/ Cause she don't go too fast/ But she gets where she's going/ When she's got someplace she's going to..."

As Laura got larger, some of our friends expressed concern that she still rode the bicycle, but we said exercise is good for mothers-to-be, and she kept pedaling. We had a good role model in the local mother who rode her bicycle everywhere, with her children close behind on their bicycles. She rode her bicycle to the hospital, and within hours, she bundled her new baby up and carried it home on her bicycle. Laura didn't duplicate that feat, because Juniper was born at home, but knowing about it helped us maintain our certainty that anyone's concern about a pregnant woman riding a bicycle should have no influence on us as long as Laura felt good riding the bike.

We soon carried Juniper in a backpack as we traveled around town on our bicycles.

We moved to Santa Fe, following a dream, a good dream while it lasted. Like many dreams, it eventually dissipated in daylight.

We bought an ancient pickup and returned to California, where the pickup went the way of all metal and wore out

beyond our ability to keep it repaired. We retrieved the bicycles from Laura's mother's garage. By then, Juniper was big enough to ride in the child's seat on the back of the green bicycle. The first few times, I rode close on the other bike to be sure she didn't do anything unpredictable. Juniper loved traveling like that. She understood the need to stay still in the seat. We carried groceries or laundry in the basket on the front.

I went to work driving tractor ten hours a day. I didn't ride with Laura and Juniper much then, but they managed groceries and laundry. With the loads she pedaled home, Laura still didn't move very fast. "Dark and sweet at night time/ Slowly rolling home..."

We did go to the hospital for Amanda's birth, two years after Juniper's birth. Laura probably could have ridden her bicycle to the hospital, but her mother was glad to loan us her car, so I rode my bicycle over, got the car, drove Laura to the hospital, and drove Laura and Amanda home when they were ready.

The Blue Mountains of Northeastern Oregon called us away from the Sacramento Valley. We left the bicycles in Laura's mother's garage.

Since that time in Willows, we've lived a long way from stores, and we've had to rely on internal combustion engines for our transporting power. But we remember the time of quiet, slow, non-polluting transportation. We might live like that again, some day, pedaling quietly, in no rush about anything, "slowly rolling home."