

Boys & Initiation Rites 2010

PICK YOUR SELF UP, DUST YOURSELF OFF ETC

He's down. He's moving. Thank God, he's moving. Is that a leg or an arm? His leg looks weird. Shit it's broken. Is it? No it's not. He's up now. It's his stomach, he's clutching at his stomach. He's getting up, scrambling to his feet ~~and~~ disentangling himself from the handlebars. I can go to him now, can't I? I've left him for sufficient time to deal with his fall on his own now haven't I? This is crazy, this pretending to good and mature parenting. All I want to do is run to him and fling my arms around his bruised and humiliated little body and give comfort. That's enough time, surely. People say, usually men, Steve Biddulph maybe? that you have to let boys fall and get up on their own and not interfere.

So I have stood and watched him travel, climb ^{Jump} and fall with my, what's that expression again? my heart in my throat for what seems like ages now. That's enough. He needs me. He needs me to pick him up and reassure him and tend to his wounded body and pride. He needs me, God damn it! Yes, yes, the symbolism and life-lesson implications of all this are not lost on ~~me~~.

My just 2 months shy of 8-year-old jumps bikes now. There is a BMX track near our house - all constructed, stony hard humps and inclines and the boys - they are all boys ^{all} - hang out there leaning and slouching, cursing and cheering. Their bikes are invariably ~~fashionably~~ ^{are} scruffy and too small (to my uninitiated eye, they are anyway) and most of the boys ~~are~~ ^{are} lanky and stiff legged as they power up and down and around the humps, hills, bends and steep ^{smooth} waves of concrete.

How old are they? ~~I reckon~~ ^{I reckon} 8 to 15 but there was one young man a couple of weeks back who had older arms and muscles with a tattoo and a face sliding into handsome, who ^{had} held his head all-determined and ^{pride} straight as he showed ~~the~~ ^{them} others how ^{it's} done. The other kids had looked on with barely disguised awe as the young man, helmet-less in his black stove-pipe jeans ^{demonstrated} and performed his extra ^{skill} strength and years.

(They have skateboards too sometimes and I'm reminded of my own history with the skateboard surfer set in the late 70's and how I wrecked my knee for good when I fell off because I was pretending to my new boyfriend and star of the skatie circuit, that I actually knew what I was doing.)

Like I didn't already know the answer to that question.
He's up now. Back on his bike. His comrades hovering.

Yeah, I'll keep doing it till I get it right. I'm not gunna leave here today till I get that jump. That last time was crap.

good on you
Wow, ~~that's amazing~~, I say.

He has a nice face. Freckles still but some premature ^{biased} knowingness about the eyes and mouth.

Yeah, well, I never give up. I've had a pretty, you know, a pretty tough life.

Tough life? But he's only a kid. Jesus, what have they done to him? Poor baby. I want him to stop all this, get off ^{his} the bike and come to the gelato shop with ^{me and my son} my us.

And how come he's telling me that stuff so easily? Councelling. It's counselling. He's been in counselling ~~and~~ so he's had lots of practice telling his life, describing it and turning it into a story (almost someone else's) the way you do when you've been talking about it with a professional for a while.

Last week my son had two falls and the second one ^{was} bad. He cried and grimaced in pain and the other boys came over ~~to him~~, picked up his bike and wheeled it to the periphery of the track for him. There is a kind of protective protocol at work here amongst this group of rag-tag boys with their over-sized sneakers, skinny legs and dented bikes. When one of them falls, the other picks him up, particularly if he's a young one, like my son.

You all right mate?

He is crying really hard now and a father - he has a couple of boys with him and he's acting like a father - jogs over and helps my son to his feet. I am scared to lift up his t-shirt. It's bad - big, red, angry and bad. The handlebars have almost punctured his abdomen.

In bed that night my son ~~says~~ half asleep, ^{says,}

He's 22 that dude, Mum.

Dude? Since when did he start saying Dude?

I'm OK; you don't have to stand there, ~~so close all the time~~

I feel like the police or a helicopter parent at least.

But I need you to be careful and focussed and remember not to ...

Yeah, yeah, go now. Please.

I'll just be over there, OK? Near that tree, on that park bench. OK?

Or I'll go for a brisk walk around the oval keeping my head in a permanent swivel position so that I don't take my eyes off him for a second.

You don't need to watch me.

This is not altogether true, of course, because sometimes he wants me to watch him more than anything else. He wants me to see him ^{calculate risks} ~~negotiate~~ the ~~danger~~ and win.

There's one boy, he's 14, my son tells me. (Age is extremely important when you are a kid. A mere 6 months can make the difference between cool and just plain young.) This 14 year old is good. He's fast ~~and~~ determined and strategic and when he falls, (and it's a beauty), I ^{carefully} ~~tentatively~~ try and connect.

You OK? Wow, you're really good at this. You must have been doing it for a long time.

My son shoots a 'don't talk to him Mum, you're embarrassing me look 'but I forge ahead because I'm interested in this kid and what makes him so tough and determined.

Yeah, I've been riding for about 3 years now.

So, Are you going to get back on the bike and try that jump again?

(He's up. Back on his bike, his comrades hovering).

I
I am never going back there, Mama. Never.

OK darling, that's OK. It's your decision.

It's not ~~his decision~~ really but I make out it is on the night because I don't want him to feel even worse about himself than he already does.

Those other boys saw me crying and that Dad driving me home and everything.

He is drifting off now.

Can you chase the bad dreams away?

What love?

You know, Daddy does it when I'm at his place. You blow in the air like this before you go to sleep to make any bad dreams go away.

So I blow and I blow and I blow.