

## Spokes Summer Competition 2019

# *My Cycling Inspiration*

Q1: What inspired you to use a bike to get around? and/or  
Q2: How did you inspire someone else to start?

*Judging notes:* Judging was done anonymously as far as possible, with the judges not being told names of entrants. Judging was by 3 members of Spokes Resources Group and one external judge, Graham McQueen, a senior staff member of [Paths for All](#).

### First prize, Katharine Wake – Lifetime of inspiration

In the beginning...

- **Family** – ferried about in a child seat on the back of my mother's bike (more than half a century ago – pioneering stuff), I soon progressed to semi-autonomy on my trusty tricycle (including a feisty mile of freedom when I escaped from Sunday school early without telling anyone). My father's encouragement teaching me to ride my first two-wheeler, and the healthy and innocent pleasure of family bike rides – it all reinforced the message. Ah, the good old days!

I have a good cycling pedigree – my grandparents and parents cycled for most of their functional journeys, using bike/train combination for holidays further afield. My father's epic wartime bike rides as an evacuee from Windermere to visit his parents back home on Tyneside have long been part of family cycling legend – inspirational in many ways.

- **Independence** – growing up in a village, my best friend and I were free-range kids, using bicycles as our access to adventure, exploration – and a quick return in time for tea. No need to explain or request parental taxi services, we enjoyed the outdoors, learned to be self-sufficient in the face of bad weather and punctures, and inspired each other.

So much for the early years – now whizz on past university to the office job and urban life in Edinburgh. My cycling habit faltered as I endeavoured to dress more smartly and discovered Lothian Buses, but not for long. What inspired me to start again?

- **Cycle parking at work** (undercover in both senses – we office cyclists were a sort of secret society, entrusted with keys to a nearby lockup)
- The introduction of **changing facilities**, showers, lockers – sartorial sacrifice no longer required
- **Shorter and predictable journey time by bike** - outperforming the bus = longer in bed (exercise paradoxically facilitating sloth!)
- **Care for the environment** – I briefly owned a car but relaxed when I sold it and reverted to my bicycle as my main mode of transport, conscience clear again



Cruising on through years and career change, cycling in Edinburgh and further afield continues to accrue further points of inspiration which have kept me motivated to continue:

- **Continuing development of cycle routes** enhancing safety and enjoyment
- **Connection with nature** on off-road routes and along the canal
- **Solidarity with others** as cycling morphs from eccentric to mainstream

What will keep me inspired as the years roll on? All the above, but underpinning it all is the overwhelming **feel-good factor** – the physical joy of cycling – I think it is in the blood.

## **Second prize, Charlie Wood – Children and their future**

Like a lot of people, I've cycled since childhood albeit mostly recreationally. The inspiration to make the change to predominantly using a bike to get around, to having cycling as be a first choice, has come, as with much of the positive inspiration in my life, from my children.

Looking to my children's future, there are so many obvious good reasons – climate change, physical and mental health and air pollution for example – to choose cycling over the car, but the real inspiration for me has been perhaps a little more selfish - cycling with my kids is simply real quality time with them. It mostly takes us longer to get places, a lot longer in some cases, and we have to plan ahead more, but if you can find that time the benefits are way more than worth it. We talk more than we do in the car and, other than when forced to take the kids onto some of Edinburgh's less inspiring roads, I'm told I'm "a lot more fun to be around" (i.e. a lot less stressed) than when driving.



Even compared with the bus or train where I don't have to drive, we're so much more engaged with each other and the area we're travelling through. We stop more. We stop for shops, cafes, playgrounds, interesting looking trees, a weird minibeast or plant in the hedge, or just to admire the view, something we wouldn't do with any other mode of transport other than walking. I'm not "Dad's Taxi", taking my kids places isn't a chore, it's something I look forward to.

As range and confidence steadily increases, the kids now expect that we'll go by bike, and they look forward to it almost as much as I do. As a family, our use of bikes to get around definitely started as a practical means of transport but it is now becoming a recreation, and to me this seem much more like the right way around to approach cycling.



## Third prize, Andrew White – Climate crisis: be the change

I've been able to cycle for years now, learning when I was wee. It's the usual story of learning to bike, building from a trike, to stabilisers, to a kid pedalling free tearing up and down the streets until it was time for tea. But that's where cycling stopped for me, it was a kids thing, a summer holidays thing. It was never a mode of transport, it was a toy. I was too old for toys.

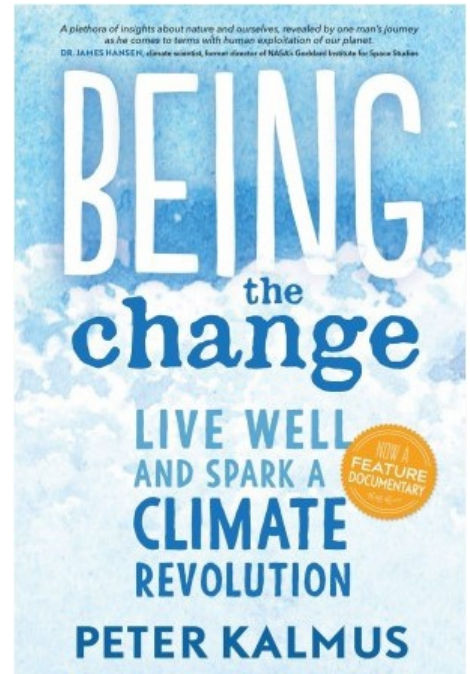
Fast forward 10 years. I'm now in a serious relationship with the woman who would become my wife, Vicki. She pushed me to get a bike and cycle to work. My office was far away and awkward to get to by bus, and cycling bought me a consistent commute time. For a time, it was great, I was getting into this cycling thing, and my body was really starting to thank me for it. Then the office moved to a more central location, one that would have me encounter a lot more traffic without a single cycle path or bike lane. My bike helmet went on a hook while I took a seat on the bus.

My mood steadily dropped, my body grew weak and flabby, and my frustration with the lack of action with the climate crisis began to boil. 'Why could the world not be different?' I kept asking myself, and my mind responded as always 'What's the point, what can you do?' One thing I could do was read. If I wasn't confident enough to get the exercise cycling to work, I could at least exercise my mind a little. This beautiful book was gifted to me titled '[\*Being the change: live well and spark a climate revolution\*](#)' by author and climate scientist [Peter Kalmus](#). I found myself motivated to do something. No, I didn't start cycling - that comes later - but I started walking.

To distance myself from fossil fuels, I committed to walking to work every day during February. Three miles out, three miles back. It wasn't a novel idea or all that taxing of one either, but it was something I could do. It was something I could control. The month flew by, and I kept walking. I kept walking, and my confidence grew. I kept walking, and I realised that there's so much more to my commute that I had never appreciated from the bus seat. As I walked, I began to notice the variety of wonder and inspiration and beauty around me. I've called Edinburgh home all my life, but now I was finally seeing Edinburgh. I was closer to it, and all I had removed was 5mm of glass. All I had changed was how I got from A to B.

I was motivated. I was on the cusp of something wondrous. I pumped up the bike tyres, dusted off the helmet, and charged up the lights. I was cycling again, and I was loving it. This cycling was different from before. It wasn't contending with traffic, or dodging potholes, or learning the light sequences. It was the purpose. I genuinely believe that there is more to be won from active travel than a workout and a consistent commute time. Active travel brings community, and experience, and a sense of belonging to somewhere that the 2-ton private tanks and rolling sardine cans can't bring anyone.

Getting on two wheels has brought an immense amount of joy these past few months, and I've done everything I can to share that joy, and inspire others to get out of the car and off the bus. The climate crisis is here and with that comes a lot of fear, and disruption, and change. That change doesn't have to be something to resent and resist, though. It can be something to celebrate. It's an opportunity to bring about a better world, a fairer world. It's a catalyst to bring about a society that lives in harmony with biodiversity and puts people first.



*Just back from my bike trailer's maiden voyage!*

## Fourth prize, Nick Connor – Seeing ordinary people on bikes

I'd always had a bike while I was younger growing up in Dundee and during summer holidays the sense of freedom which that allowed my friends and I was enormously liberating; being able to cycle off around the Industrial Estate by our houses (this was Dundee in the late 80's), go to the green spaces to play football and generally just be outside has always meant that cycling had a special place in my heart.

I lost that at university, where the roads were so bad with traffic and perceived danger that it was easier and safer to get the bus to classes and I didn't cycle at all during these years. Too hazardous. After graduating I moved to Edinburgh and ended up with a one hour commute each way to Kirkcaldy for work. Years, stones and pounds piled up on me until I was very overweight and unhappy. I got made redundant from the Kirkcaldy job and eventually found another in Edinburgh, just 4 miles from where I lived.

But I was still overweight, and in the mind-set of a "commuter" so I'd take my single occupancy car to work and back each day, sit for 30 to 40 minutes in the traffic jams with the rest of the lonely drivers and get more and more frustrated by not going anywhere, held at the whim of roadworks, incidents and accidents which dictated journey times and my blood pressure. The only plus was I got to listen to Radio 4.

It was after a couple of months of this, I started noticing people on bikes. For a start, they were moving, while I was sitting still, they were definitely a lot thinner than I was, and a lot of them also didn't seem to be "proper cyclists" with shaved legs wearing lycra, but rather just "people on bikes" going about their business. I suppose it was at this point that I became "bike curious". Would it be possible for me to try this, get to work consistently, in a shorter period of time, while maybe getting a bit fitter into the bargain? So I decided I'd give it a go.

I bought a cheap second hand hybrid for £not-very-much, used online resources to work out my easiest route, and tried it on a nice sunny day. It was a revelation. My commute time shortened by 15 minutes and I arrived to work invigorated, loving being out in the sunshine and exercising in the process. I got back the feeling of freedom which I'd had as a child, with a smile on my face and actually looking forward to the ride home.

That was 10 years ago. I now commute every day by bike, rain or shine. I've become a better and faster cyclist so my commute is even quicker now. I've lost over three stone in weight. My wife and two kids now ride with me on trips at the weekends and my kids and I cycle to their school every morning. Taking the first step to try cycling has changed my life and lifestyle and I can't imagine a future where I'm not riding every day, it means that much to me. Without a doubt, cycling has made me fitter, happier and healthier.

But I do miss Radio 4 in the morning.



## Fifth prize, Jamie Thin – Joy of cycling, inspired by blind friends

I had been cycling to school as it was the easiest way to get across town. Cycling had become my daily mode of transport, but I'd lost some of the joy of whooshing down hills.

Funny how quickly you take new things for granted. When you first learn to ride a bike as a child – moving on two wheels is a thing of wonder and delicate balance, as you spin along under your own power! Then it becomes this ordinary thing you do each day.

What turned me from a grudging school boy commuter to a life-long cyclist was re-discovering the joy of cycling from my blind friends. I lived round the corner from the [Blind school](#) (the old building on the Southside). The school was looking for teenage volunteers to cycle with blind kids on tandems.

Suddenly all those tactile feelings and sounds of cycling were heightened as my new friends jumped on the back of the tandem, and gave me a running commentary of their feelings as we explored the city by bike. I was their eyes, but their other senses were more finely tuned than mine, they loved the speed, the wind in their hair, the swoop round the corners. They knew exactly where they were from the ups and the downs, the turns right and left, the clatter and smells from the shops and the pubs.

Now I'm a lot older – that feeling of freedom keeps me cycling – I don't like being trapped in a car or a bus. Jumping on a bike keeps you young, the simple joys don't change, even if I have less hair now!

For the next few weeks, I can't cycle, I'm hobbling about on crutches from a fall when the front wheel slipped beneath me in the rain. That's the flip-side of travelling light on two wheels – there is always the small risk of a fall.

But that feeling of effortless spinning along will get me back on the bike. Risk is all around us, and after every wee fall, nothing is better for the confidence than getting back on the bike!



Position	Entries in positions 6-14 [prizewinners]
<p><b>6</b> <b>Malcolm Bruce</b></p>	<p><b>Bike campaigning and environmental concern</b></p> <p>As children we learned to ride on tricycles then moved on to two wheelers. We taught ourselves how to ride them and fix them and got covered in oil.</p> <p>During secondary school in the early 70's I was no longer cycling, didn't have a bike, but was becoming deeply concerned about our environment and sorted one of my brother's old bike's so I could take part in a Friends of the Earth(?) 'Bike-In' which went from the Usher Hall along Princes St. (Anyone else remember that?) This was early campaigning for cycle provision in Edinburgh, which <a href="#">SPOKES</a> was part of. Being among other cyclists who all wanted a safer cleaner world did it for me! I was hooked on cycling as transport, but also as part of trying to live sustainably.</p> <p>When I was a bikeless student living in a bedsit in Tollcross later in the 70's. I still used to walk to lectures, but one day an old 3 speed was dumped in our close. As no one was using it I sorted it up and started riding along to uni on it. That letter in the Evening News at that time about long haired cyclists terrorising pedestrians in the Meadows wasn't about me btw!</p> <p>Soon I was using my bike to go everywhere, it was quicker and cheaper, just like now, than any other means of transport. I got really into bikes and used to buy them at auctions, do them up and sell them on. I got to know all the bike shops and their staff as I searched for spare parts and asked for advice.</p> <p>Eventually I got a job at the <a href="#">Edinburgh Bicycle Co Op</a>. This was the days before mountain bikes (!) We sold many British made bikes, also beautiful Japanese 10 speeds. I still regret leaving to go to college!</p> <p>So, next time you see a bicycle demo organised, go on it, it may change your life!</p>
<p><b>7</b> <b>Steven McClusky</b></p>	<p><b>Supporting refugees – and the kindness of a local bike shop</b></p> <p>I was inspired to set up <a href="#">Bikes for Refugees (Scotland)</a> three years ago by a young Syrian refugee called Yaman and a simple act of kindness bestowed upon Yaman by my local bike shop in Leith, <a href="#">Pedal Forth Cycles</a>.</p> <p>Yaman had newly arrived in Edinburgh having fled war and persecution back in his home country and having left behind many family members and loved ones seeking shelter and safety. Having bought an old broken bike on Gumtree to help him explore and connect with his new home I was to take Yaman and his bike shaped object to my local bike shop to see if we could get it repaired. Sadly the bike was beyond repair but a simple gesture of a gift of a bike to Yaman by the shop owner was to help inspire the setting up of a community project that has now refurbished and gifted over 800 donated bikes to New Scots giving people freedom of movement and helping families to connect with communities, essential services and to meet new people and forge new friendships.</p> <p>Many of the people who have accessed bikes have been introduced to cycling for the first time such as Violetta a 25 year old refugee who since learning to cycle 6 months ago has cycled 100 miles over three days fundraising on behalf of Freedom from Torture and is one of 16 riders signed up to Team BfR for this years Pedal for Scotland Glasgow to Edinburgh classic ride. Violetts next bike cycle challenge is 5 days cycling the Ecovia Coastal Cycle trail in Portugal in December 2019 fundraising and raising awareness on behalf of Bikes for Refugees (Scotland) as our cycle champion and ride ambassador-</p> <p><i>"As a young Syrian woman, I have not had opportunities to cycle until I came to Scotland. Getting a bike from Bikes for Refugees has made it possible for me to do this great outdoor activity. A real bonus is that I was able to take part in 'Freedom from Torture's' cycle event in July to raise funds for them and now Pedal for Scotland - I am training hard, to keep up. The bike has expanded my life!"</i></p> <div data-bbox="1018 1451 1474 2056" data-label="Image"> </div> <p><i>Steve McCluskey founder Bikes for Refugees (Scotland); Violetta BfR Ambassador; Beth Hall Trustee</i></p>

## Inspiring workplace colleagues

My entry is about inspiring other people to cycle more - from never really at all before, in one case, and in others, doing more, or starting cycling again after a break.

Back in January, I had a passing conversation at work with my chief executive about getting our organisation (with quite a car culture) more oriented towards sustainable travel. Twenty or so senior colleagues were going to an event out of town in South Queensferry, reachable via an excellent cycle path. In fact, went the conversation, why stop at that meeting - there was a very good bike route between our Glasgow and Edinburgh offices! Wintry conditions on the day of the event meant that not even I cycled to South Queensferry, but everyone did at least go by bus or car-sharing this time. And more importantly a small seed was sown, that we should launch a cycle challenge this year as a new initiative to underline our corporate commitment to sustainability and well-being, physical and mental.

After much discussion, we agreed that this would take the form of entering a workplace team for the annual Pedal for Scotland challenge on 8 September, and I took on the task of recruiting and motivating a diverse group of a dozen colleagues who'd signed up. Some were already cyclists to varying degrees, some lapsed, and one had done virtually nothing previously. So, plenty of challenge there, to get everyone to the start line, and the finish - and hopefully, continuing to cycle afterwards whether for fun or for everyday travel.



*One virtually novice cyclist, two returners and a couple of regulars. Hope to do more!*

Building a group identity was key - we're a large organisation, and people didn't necessarily know each other. We created an email list of course, to help get everyone organised for registration etc, but also to start sharing ideas for training, favourite or potential routes, and important practical information such as how best to get hold of a bike! We talked about The Bike Station and the corporate Cycle to Work (useful), and the amazing Spokes maps. These are little known it seems outside the regular cycling community, but incredibly valuable in explaining good routes around the city using the cycle network (easy to miss if you only travel by car or bus). Personal contact and encouragement of course is always invaluable, and we had a series of coffee meet-ups to chat, as well as persuading our Sustainability officer to sponsor a couple of Bike Breakfasts, to raise the profile of cycling more widely. We planned a group training ride as our final push before the big day, and a bake sale as part of our promotional efforts as well as fundraising for our chosen charities.

So what works, in getting people onto bikes? I'd say that core to success was giving people a tangible reason to cycle, and this workplace challenge provided a good focus, with many spin-off benefits. Cycling is now more on the corporate radar, important when lobbying for better facilities. Then, useful, practical support and information. Coffee and cake helps. Mostly though, encouragement, encouragement, encouragement!

We've all benefitted personally from signing up. Fitter, no doubt. We've made new friends, and have all taken our cycling to a new level - in some cases, now becoming regulars. Those who cycled to work before have done more recreational cycling. For myself, whilst I cycle everyday for local travel, I've really benefited from having a reason I can justify to my family (diverted from cycling by other sports...) to go and explore new areas or reacquaint myself with enjoyable rides I did many years previously. Those who cycled a little before have stretched themselves to be ready for the challenge, and in one case, returned to cycling after a sad experience previously. The complete-novice cyclist has been bitten by the bug and now booked a holiday cycling up the Outer Hebrides next month!



*Group training ride via Forth Bridges and Dalmeny House*



## A climate conversation and an e-bike

I've set myself a challenge to record 100 conversations\* about Climate Change. Number 60 was with Alex. His job is to inspire people to cycle, and the conversation has inspired me to get on my bike.

I learned to ride a bike when I was wee, but I have never learned to be a cyclist. I can pedal and stay balanced, but I can't stop my heart pounding when a truck overtakes me. I have collected a bunch of excuses, fears and barriers of the years which I am now going to have to address. The truth is I'm afraid of riding in the city, especially with my children in tow, but I am more afraid of the kind of world they are growing up in if we don't address our societal attitude to cars. It's also the one thing that my husband is really excited about getting involved with (he's not so enthusiastic about the vegan diet and cloth nappy washing!) So, I've been giving it a try.

We have a one and a three-year-old, and we take one on each bike. At first I was nervous about being strong enough to get the extra load up Queens Drive, but hills are a necessary part of getting around Edinburgh. Alex suggested we trial an e-bike which was great fun. Like a cooler version of a Segway or mobility scooter- it's impossible not to have a huge smile on your face zooming up the hill in one of those!

I love the cycle paths and dread the bits when the path stops. I'm not sure I will ever be able to trust other road users, but I do hope to get better at trusting myself on the road. We'll always use cycle paths, or go when roads aren't busy, take our time and be super aware. I read a Dr Bike leaflet I found with tips of how to stay safe- keeping out the way of car doors that might open and not cycling too close to the curb for example.

Sometimes my baby will chill, and sometimes she will chat to me. If she grumbles, I pull over and give her an apricot from my basket. My son loves going through the Innocent Railway tunnel and it's great to be able to stop if we see someone we know, or pick a ripe bramble if we pass one.

It also feels good to learn a new skill and push myself a bit. Once it rained, and the kids didn't seem to care at all. Nobody melted, we all survived! It's getting easier each time. The car is sulking, forgotten and unloved. Hey, maybe we could even do a cycling holiday? How many nappies could you fit in a pannier?

Shortly after our conversation, an email from Alex caught my attention. It's about a consultation to imagine an Edinburgh with decent cycling infrastructure. Wow, that's the next step. There's a lot to be done to create a cycle city but wouldn't that be amazing? So, I guess now that we're a cycling family, we better get involved.

**\*The 100 Conversations project is called CliMates**

[www.hazeldarwinclements.co.uk/climates.html](http://www.hazeldarwinclements.co.uk/climates.html)



## **Loan of an e-bike to overcome Edinburgh's hills**

My inspiration for taking up cycling again at the age of 54 after a break of over thirty-five years, was the loan of an electric bike from ELREC (the [Edinburgh and Lothians Regional Equality Council](#)).

I hadn't cycled regularly since I moved to Edinburgh in 1983, despite having cycled to school every day in the cycling heaven that is Stevenage new town. I did try cycling in Edinburgh, but the hills defeated me, increasingly the traffic scared me, and I just hate arriving at any event hot and sweaty. Recently I read about e-bikes with interest but felt I couldn't justify such an expensive purchase until I was sure I would actually use it for some of the journeys I was regularly making by car. If the traffic was still scary, would I use the bike? Would wet weather put me off? How much could I carry on the bike?

I happened to be on ELREC's emailing-list, and noticed they were advertising the chance to borrow their e-bike, an EBCO UCR20, for up to 3 weeks for only a small deposit and the completion of a travel questionnaire. I went for it! And I quickly discovered that I could not only cycle to visit my brother ¾ of the way up Kaimes Road on Corstorphine Hill, but that it was a joy to do so! I could pull away from traffic lights quickly even on a hill-start. I could carry my shopping in a pannier. I could do a round-trip visiting my brother in the morning, volunteering in Granton in the afternoon, and returning home to Marchmont feeling well-exercised but not exhausted. A bit of rain didn't put me off. Most of all, it was fun - I could overtake a lycra-clad twenty-something on the way up Arthur's Seat!

After returning ELREC's Ebco I test-rode 5 other e-bikes, courtesy of [Edinburgh Bike Co-op](#) and some e-bike riding friends and settled on the Whyte Highgate.

Six weeks after purchasing it a friend asked me what difference it had made to my life, and I answered without hesitation, 'I feel happier!'

I'd like to give a big thank you to ELREC for the opportunity to try out life as an e-cyclist. Borrowing an e-bike for a day isn't the same thing. Nor is hiring one on holiday. A week or more of your usual routine but with the use of an e-bike added is the real test, and I recommend ELREC's scheme to anyone thinking about buying an e-bike.



## Inspired by mum

I grew up in Glasgow where cycling families were uncommon. I was lucky – when we moved from London in 1947 my mother brought her bike. An early memory is sitting in a child-seat on the pre-war 3-speed Raleigh she bought before the war.

I was the youngest. At age six I got a new Fairy Cycle. I was desperate to ride like my big brother and sister, but nobody offered to help me. I got some rope, tied a slip-knot around the clothes pole in the back green, and tied the other end to the handlebars of my new bike. I promptly fell over! I worked out I should tie the rope to somewhere on the frame, and soon was cycling round the clothes pole supported by the rope. Within the hour I was cycling round the back green, very pleased with myself.

Our holidays were quite adventurous. My mother and older siblings cycled between youth hostels. I was too young, and had to walk with my Dad who was bookish and unable to cycle! I would watch the others glumly as they cycled off. But I remember being proud of walking 12 miles when I was 8. My dad always found good off-road walks, with streams to play in, and bogs to get my feet wet.

The photo shows us ready to set off from a hostel. My Mum took the photo – her bike is leaning against the house. I was 7, my sister and brother 10 and 11.



My Mum taught us road safety and bike maintenance. I remember her teaching me to mend a puncture when I was perhaps ten. I didn't know it was easier to just carry a spare inner tube and mend the puncture later. My destinations from aged 13 onwards included Balloch, Luss and Drymen, all pretty villages with quiet roads and few cars.

Finally I was deemed old enough to go on a trip with my siblings. A friend of the family lived in Lamington, about 40 miles away. I was very excited, but by the end of the day I was rather a drag on progress. We stayed the night and returned next day.

The photo from 1958 shows us all ready to leave. I seem to have little luggage, so maybe my brother was carrying it.

The inspiration from family was both from positive example; and from several years' frustration at being too young to join in.

I have never stopped cycling.

## Keeping healthy, even with babies & toddlers ... e-bike makes it possible!

One of the reasons I moved back to the UK after growing up in Florida was the prevalence of public transportation and active travel. From my student days at University of Edinburgh, living on the Royal Mile, I cycled occasionally and walked a lot, losing a lot of weight.

When I began working and moved into my own flat, I began to cycle most of the time. I enjoyed the speed of moving about the city, giving me the flexibility to easily carry loads of shopping on panniers from shops to work and home.

Four years ago, I moved into a bigger home in a West Lothian village in order to start a family. Our choice of home was greatly influenced by my desire to continue cycling to work. I don't have the time or patience to go to the gym, and cycling had become my main form of exercise. I was concerned I would not have a healthy balanced life if I was spending 45 minutes in a car each way. A year later, I tried an e-bike and bought one for myself.

An e-bike has transformed my cycling habits. Instead of cycling occasionally when the weather conditions were good, I was able to cycle most days. I bought a toddler seat and began taking my first child to nursery from when she was 9 months old and big enough for a bike helmet. I now have a second child and this month took my toddler on the bike to our village pre-school for her first day, before commuting to work. I'm looking into purchasing a trailer in order to take two children in all weathers to school and nursery.

I cycle because I enjoy the exercise and the time spent outside. I pass farms and pastures and a quarry, and enjoy seeing the changing seasons. Soon I'll begin stopping for a bit of blackberry picking. I like teaching and demonstrating to my daughters that being active and cycling safely is for everyone. I like reducing my carbon footprint, repaying all those times I cheated and took our toddler for a drive in the car just to get her to sleep.

I'm now an advocate for ebikes, since they have enabled me to have mild exercise most days, rather than hard exercise occasionally. They've also enabled me to get up the hills with a toddler on the back!





<p><b>13</b> <b>Stella Thomson</b></p>	<p><b>A perfect storm of inspirations!</b></p> <p>My inspiration to cycle was a perfect storm in the mid 90s</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I had two young children under 5 and a full time job. I wanted to be with them during my spare time so going to the gym wasn't on but I was desperate to keep fit somehow.</li> <li>2. Bus lanes were being installed along part of my home to work journey. I was commuting in my single occupancy car and feeling guilty about it.</li> <li>3. My employer decided to offer to a choice of taking cash instead of a company car.</li> </ol> <p>It was an easy decision. I gave up my car and commuted by bike . I never regretted it and surprisingly hardly ever needed to use the bus even in Winter.</p>
<p><b>14</b> <b>Fiona McClean</b></p>	<p><b>Inspired by the city and enabled by The Bike Station</b></p> <p>Ten years ago I relocated to Edinburgh from London. At this point, I hadn't ridden a bike for probably around 15 years or so, but as I started to get used to living in this beautiful new city, a germ of an idea started to form – could I take up cycling again?</p> <p>A good number of months down the line this thought still hadn't gone away, but could I actually envisage myself riding a bike on the roads? I was also becoming somewhat frustrated by no direct bus route to my workplace and was sure I could potentially cycle this distance.</p> <p>By now I had heard of <a href="#">the Bike Station</a> and loved the idea of an organisation that takes in old bikes, reconditions them and sells them on at a very affordable price, putting old bikes back on the road for a new lease of life and ensuring buyers are purchasing bikes that are fully road worthy. It was time to bite the bullet. I reckoned if I was able to pick up a fairly cheap bike and I didn't really take to cycling, then it wouldn't have cost me too much and I would at least have given it a go.</p> <p>So, about nine years on now from these first very tentative and somewhat hesitant forays back on to a bike and several second bikes later, I am still cycling and love it!</p> <p>I don't have a car, so it is my main form of transport. I am a great fan now of all things cycling. I love hearing about both national and local initiatives that will help the life of the cyclist.</p> <p>I particularly like being able to personally benefit from developments, whether it be the additional solar lighting on the Union canal path through to Wester Hailes a few years ago (my route to and from work) or the great shower, locker and drying cabinet facilities provided at my workplace.</p> <p>I probably hadn't much noticed the state of road surfaces before I started cycling, but now when I have the pleasure of cycling on a recently resurfaced road, especially if it is a road I use on a regular basis, it's great!!</p>
<p><b>RUNNERS UP [in random order]</b></p>	
<p><b>Inspired by a friend – and their e-bike</b></p> <p>My good friend inspired me to start using a bike to get around.</p> <p>My good friend, who I have known since school days, has been cycling for many years. I was quite happy travelling round in my car for many years. Then one day my friend came to visit me and offered me a ride on his ebike. He'd had to go from a bicycle to an ebike due to a knee replacement. The thrill I got just riding up the road and then back again was fantastic. We are both now in our seventies and I hadn't ridden a bike since - well I couldn't remember it was so long ago.</p> <p>I've now bought myself an ebike and I use it more than any other form of transport. I used to walk a lot but I now have back problems which have affected my mobility, but the problem seems to disappear when I'm riding my bike. The calmness I feel when out riding is wonderful and it has definitely improved both my mental and physical wellbeing.</p> <p>I have lived in the same house all my life and yet I have found so many roads and lanes that I either haven't been down for years, or have never been on before until I got my bike. I see things I missed when whizzing by in the car or on the bus. There is hardly a day goes by where I don't go for a ride.</p>	

## Using a bike to return to a full life after a brain tumour

In December 2012, 9 months after retiring from the Army after a rewarding 20 year career I was diagnosed with a brain tumour that we now know was triggered by a blunt force trauma sustained 15 years prior to diagnosis when I was a young officer with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion The King's Own Scottish Borderers.

I quickly developed epilepsy so had to surrender my driving licence. In my first preparatory operation I had my inner ear removed so lost all sense of balance and had to learn to walk again. In the Craniotomy they were able to remove 40% of the tumour. The remaining 60% was buried far too deep into the brain. With the confirmed diagnosis taken from the biopsy that was removed during surgery, of a Grade 3 Anaplastic Oligodendroglioma, I was given a prognosis of, 'at best 3 years preceded by a rapid decline towards becoming a cognitive and motor function vegetable.'

My two children then just 11 and 8 were clearly devastated by the news and I had discovered that diet and exercise were key to reinforcing treatment towards an improved treatment outcome. So after the craniotomy, 30 back to back sessions of brain focused radiotherapy and 12 monthly cycles of brain focused chemotherapy, I launched myself on a fundraising challenge for the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) in order to breath hope, inspiration and encouragement into the children's lives while ensuring that my final days were not for nothing but instead spent trying to save the lives and improve the life chances of as many people as I could through my fundraising for the DEC.

I was asking everybody that I met to challenge me to beat my beast of a brain tumour through my balanced daily lifestyle with their sponsorship of £1 per month for the DEC. I took to hill walking and found that some of the more remote walks were not accessible by public transport so took once again, after a 22 year break due to my service, to my bike.

With poor balance it was a hesitant and shaky start but I found that forcing myself to get back on the bike was an excellent way to help my damaged brain to recover so have started to do the food shop off my bike as well using the most excellent shared use paths that snake around Edinburgh.

Slowly but surely my balance improved and even better in July 2016 my brain tumour disappeared completely and shortly with it my epilepsy. The tumour, the treatment and each and everyone of the more severe epileptic seizures damaged my brain and left me diagnosed with Neurological Dysfunction and SMART Syndrome but slowly but surely, using the mediums of Golf (reached by bike), Dance, Drama (reached by bike), writing, Music, Juggling and the food shop (reached by bike), I have managed to grow in Neurological and Cognitive Strength to a point at which I can start to look for employment.

My bike has enabled me to grab at life with both hands while also helping me, through the physical benefits of exercise, to beat my beast of a brain tumour and the epilepsy. My treatment team are expecting my brain tumour to return at any time but I am determined that it will not so I keep cycling!

For further information see my website at [www.beatthebeastchallenge.co.uk](http://www.beatthebeastchallenge.co.uk)





## Inspiring my family – and other people

More people cycling can only be a good thing. I have tried to do my bit, running bike workshops, helping people - friends and strangers with bike maintenance, lending panniers, advising on routes. I am part of [Warmshowers](#) - a network of cyclists offering reciprocal accommodation. I have trained children and adults with Bikeability. However, above all, my family cycle.



My youngest Ben is about to start University. He will be taking a bike, an essential tool for getting around the city. He has been cycling 6 miles each way to his summer job. He's been learning to drive but he says those journeys he could be practising his driving means he misses out on cycling!

Finn commutes 4km to his work, in all weathers. He has been encouraging his girlfriend to cycle too, building her confidence.

Joanna lives, car-free, in London and she has used the dock free Mobikes, if she was running late "It was so much quicker than walking to the station". Although interested in a Brompton folding bicycle, she currently commutes by bus.

Jenny has a young baby and she and her partner are looking forward to using a bike trailer. There are plans to have a cycling holiday next summer.



My partner's bike, when we met, had been in the shed for eighteen months. The tyres just needed inflating to get her on the road again. (She did have a very good reason for neglecting her bike).

*Key messages that I can pass on to others:*

**Getting the balance right.** Try and incorporate rewards, make it fun, destination rides (see below). Ride with other people. Having good quality bikes and trailers, we had Islabikes, really helps. We used trailers and went on trips with other folk and families that normalised cycling and made it more enjoyable. For me everyday cycling is the most important. However teenage girls are harder to keep interested in everyday cycling.

**Living in East Lothian helps.** Dunbar is well suited to cycling, with its compact size and traffic free routes. There are also attractive destinations nearby, for younger or less enthusiastic riders (around 5-6 miles); [rope swings](#), Hailes Castle, beaches, garden centres and cafes. However previously we lived in Edinburgh and my oldest children enjoyed cycling to swimming, parks, youth club etc.

**I have a fantastic partner** to thank for being an enthusiastic cyclist and especially taking them on the Edinburgh to St Andrews and Pedal for Scotland rides. It has been possible for us to share our passion for cycling.

**Being persistent that cycling is a great choice** especially because with time those experiences often will be remembered in a more positive light. Eg Finn came cycle touring in Norway aged 12. At the time it was tough, but looking back he is, somewhat surprisingly, I must admit, now very happy. A few months ago Ben complained he hated cycling, that we had made him cycle too much when he was little. However this summer he cycled the NC500. He is really into cycling.

Finally I can recommend **getting your car stolen** for making cycling more attractive option!

## Inspired to try Pedal for Scotland ... and an e-bike from Greening Gorebridge

My cycling adventure started in April this year when I joined Greening Gorebridge team whose aim was to train towards Pedal for Scotland.

As I haven't cycled in a long time I decided to borrow an e-bike from [Greening Gorebridge](#).

I couldn't believe how easy it was to get up hills and to cycle in general. E-bikes are heavy though.

In April I only did a handful of cycles, about 20 miles each.

In May I moved out of Gorebridge to more rural location but was still part of the team. I also decided to cycle to work. I'd cycle 2-3 times a week to work and then do a cycle with the team every weekend.

Beginning of June I got my own e-MTB which I loved but it didn't work very well – there was a connection fault. I sort of got fed up as I was using my bike a lot and relied on it. As it's only been 3 weeks I decided to swap the bike for a light road bike. I was brave. Where I live there's lots of hills. It's hard going getting home from work.

So I got my new road bike, weighing 8.5kg on 22<sup>nd</sup> June. I've been cycling on it work 2-3 times a week plus weekend cycles. Even managed to cycle to Innerleithen and back – I was absolutely knackered after.

Recently people have been telling me that I've been losing weight. I was at doctors appointment recently and decided to weight myself – I've lost one stone. Now I know I probably could've lost more but I have a problem with snacking in-between healthy meals! I am working on it though.

I am only 33 and weigh 13 stone. But I think getting on an e-bike to start with helped get confident and helped me believe in myself and that I can cycle miles and miles and feel like I've achieved something.

And I feel I achieved a lot since I started cycling in April. It's only been few months and I've done so much on my bike. And I've spent a fortune on the accessories! But it's worth it.

Since April I've done 1295miles – 740 miles on my road bike (end of June till end of August). I never thought I'd get so far and become a cyclist who now follows others and reads cycling magazines!

I have inspired others from the group to ditch e-bikes and start cycling on push bikes. I'm not saying e-bikes are bad – they're great to start with! But heavy as anything. And I sometimes miss my e-bike, especially when climbing hills. Some of colleagues followed and applied for a bike through the cycle scheme.

I have a supporting husband, friends and work colleagues and manager.

Cycling has definitely improved my fitness and my mental health. Nothing better than being on a bike and feeling the freedom.

It's been a great adventure so far.





## **Doctor's advice following a slipped disc**

Growing up as a young Scottish nipper in the Seventies, learning to ride a bike was a rite of passage. Everyone had to do it, first with stabilisers on the back wheel then riding solo with stabilisers removed. It was often a fraught process but one that gave enormous satisfaction and pride to both parents and child once the art of balancing on two wheels and of nervously turning the handlebars had been mastered.

My own learning process took place in the streets around my house in Perth and I loved the feeling of freedom that riding a bike brought. As time wore on and I grew in size, my bike changed too. Although they were always second-hand they were still treasured nonetheless. Particular favourites were a racing chopper (a rare hybrid of a standard chopper but with racing handlebars) and a blue and yellow BSA Tour de France racer, both of which would probably be collector's items these days if I still owned them and they were in decent nick.

For a while in my mid-teens, my bike was used to travel across South Queensferry primarily to catch up with friends outside of school or to reach the local golf course with clubs slung across my back. It was an essential mode of transport – until I learned to drive. Having access to a car curtailed my cycling somewhat to an almost non-existent level from my late-teens onwards.

This lack of cycling action continued into my mid-twenties when a back operation to repair a burst disc brought an insistence from the surgeon to ditch running and playing football in favour of exercise that would place less stress on my lumbar region. Try swimming and cycling he suggested. So, being keener on the latter rather than the former, I was inspired to visit my local bike shop and was soon wheeling away a new mountain complete with thick knobbly tyres and flat handlebars as the surgeon had recommended something more upright – stretching over a road bike wouldn't do for my lower back.

Initially, I just used it to pootle about town at the weekend but after a while I hit on the idea of commuting to work as a colleague undertook the same journey I would take every day, there and back, all year round. My initial journey across Edinburgh went well although I did feel the need to call my wife halfway home to confirm all was okay.

Gradually, my confidence grew along with my cycling skills although it took a long time for me to look and act like a cyclist. I tended to dress as if I was about to play five-a-side football (mainly because that's what I'd been buying sports clothes for before my operation) but I slowly started to introduce cycling attire – gloves, cycling shorts, a rain jacket, cycling shirts (long and short-sleeved), woolly socks and lycra longs for winter, overshoes, bib shorts, a snood, a skull cap and cycling shoes.

Over time, I increased my commuting days and started to go cycling occasionally at weekends either with friends or on my own before signing up to do organised events – Pedal for Scotland, St Andrews to Edinburgh, Pedal for Parkinson's. I then moved onto the odd audax event, weekends away and then to sportives. Kinross, Lauder, Poppyscotland, Hawick and Skye to name but a few.

More disc problems a few years ago curtailed my cycling again but I didn't turn my back on the sport completely. I've volunteered at several cycling events, I'm part of the committee for the Poppyscotland sportive and I've taken a bike mechanic course to help do most of my own repairs. This year I've been able to cycle again without pain and discomfort and I've really enjoyed regular commuting again and going on a couple of longer weekend rides.

Cycling throughout my adult life has certainly helped keep me fit and active and I've not been put off by a number of bumps and scrapes or by anything the Scottish weather has thrown at me. As it stands, I intend to keep riding well into my old age even if it means having to go electric or adding stabilisers again to help me keep the pedals turning!

## Childhood inspiration never ended

What inspired me to start getting about by bike? Well it seems destined. We did not have a car in the family so my dad commuted by bike and my mother had another bike for shopping etc. We lived in a flat area in a suburb between the main roads, built 1930s with wide pavements and often grass verges.

I was given a bike and taught to ride it when I was 7 and before long the family were going on trips, initially with my younger brother and sister sitting in home-made wooden seats behind my parents.

One favourite outing was to the river. It was only about a mile away, so the family could go to the river bank and along the towpaths to sit on its banks and swim in it in the Summer, and do foraging trips to gather blackberries when they were in season. I remember an evening return trip pedalling behind my mother who was encouraging everyone with songs and riding with one hand behind her back to support my sleeping sister. If a car was heard we shouted 'Car' and kept to single file. A huge difference between around 1950 and the present day was that there was only about a tenth of the current cars, they were doing much smaller mileages and the average car was very much slower and considerably louder.

When we had shown we could swim across the river and back we were allowed to go there on our own and when I was about 8, the RAF just abandoned a nearby airfield, so we had a whole airfield to play with, with its buildings, hangers, and a model aircraft club.

I used to pedal to school from when I was about 10. At around this time I was given a full size bike and was most fed up that it was basic and black. So not long afterwards I advertised in a local paper and spent my life savings on a lightweight, pale green one. Initially it had a fixed gear but as soon as possible I got 3 speed derailleur gears. I remember my mother saying [it happens to all of parents!] that she went into the bike shop with me and found that she did not understand a word of the technical discussion about gear ratios that her child was having with the shop keeper.

As soon as we were all on our own bikes we also started going on Youth Hostelling and camping holidays, initially as a family and later with school friends, but the bike still remained the normal mode of transport for any journey beyond a few hundred yards.

When I was 13 we moved house to another suburb and had further areas to explore. I also joined the local Cycle Scramble Club where we built our own off road models, largely from bikes found abandoned in ditches, and played or raced largely on existing tracks and fields. I also joined a local sailing club and commuted to it either by canoe, or by cycling along the river bank. Later on I tried to modify my scramble bike to be amphibious with the aid of some oil drums, but had the sense never to test it!

Otherwise all I can say is that I never stopped!

## SELECTED OTHER ENTRIES [in random order]

### Inspiring my daughters

The people I have inspired to start cycling are my two girls, Eilidh age 8 and Morven age 5. They were interested in cycling from a very early age as they were used to seeing me cycling off to get the train in the morning. As soon as they were old enough, I had them on bike seats for cycling round the town and also a bike trailer for taking the two of them to nursery. Eilidh was cycling by four and a half without using any stabilisers and Morven by four.

Now they are confident cyclists, cycling to school most days. We also cycle together to gymnastics and to the High Street to do the shopping and go to the library. For longer journeys, I still have a Follow Me Tandem for Morven in case she gets tired. Hopefully this will keep them as enthusiastic and confident cyclists for the rest of their lives!





## **Losing company car inspires using bike and living car-free**

I was inspired to take up cycling seriously by handing back my company car - I had to do this as I was changing jobs.

Times were changing and a “company car” was not one of the benefits of the new job. Encouraged by my partner Kate, a keen cyclist and member of Spokes, I decided to use a bicycle as my main mode of transport instead of buying a new car.

Whilst my new job involved quite a lot of travelling, fortunately it was mostly to Glasgow, Ayr, Aberdeen and Inverness, all of which are easily accessible by train. My commute to the office in Leith was also well served by a combination of the canal towpath and the north Edinburgh cycle path.

Nevertheless, I still took the decision rather nervously – how would I cope in bad weather? What about our walking weekends and holidays? How would I cope with the shopping? How often would I be late for work because of a puncture?

Had I been a betting person, I would have put money on this cycle first approach lasting only a few months before something happened which “required” a car. However, after more than 10 years, I have not replaced the car and my bicycle is still my main mode of transport .....

The key factor, which I hadn’t anticipated at the time, was that you plan differently when you don’t have a car. You don’t have the option of just “taking the car” so you plan your other options more carefully. Instead of occasional “large shops”, I went to the shops more often. I was also pleasantly surprised to find how much you can fit into two panniers and a rucksack! Rather than hill walking on an ad-hoc basis, we started booking our bicycles on the train systematically visiting each of the stations on the West Highland line. To my surprise I found that our frequency of hill walking weekends actually increased. I was fitter and healthier too.

We even managed to put a tent and a rucksack on the back rack and cycled from Aviemore station to the campsite at Loch Morlich as shown in this photograph. Making sure that heavier items were evenly distributed ensured that the bicycle remained well balanced.

Having pitched our tent we used our bicycles to explore Rothiemurchus forest, adding to our enjoyment of this wonderful location.

As far as coping with bad weather is concerned, once kitted out with wet weather gear, it turns out that it is not as bad as feared. Winter tyres have been very useful in light snow and Kevlar tyres have meant that I have had very few punctures and these never occurred at critical times. In extreme weather, I have taken the bus or worked from home depending on circumstances. On the few occasions when I needed to move something too heavy or too bulky to go on the back of my bike, I hired a van through the Edinburgh City Car club or used a taxi.



I would encourage anyone who is concerned that they might not be able to cope without a car to give it a go – you might be surprised by how easy it is to adapt to the new, healthier, cheaper and lower carbon lifestyle!

## **Inspired by a Drop the Debt campaign cycle – and a new friend**

My story of inspirations to cycle is also a story of a friendship forged through the challenges of riding:

After having not cycled for several decades, in 1999 I joined a group on a ride from Edinburgh to Cologne, to lobby the G7 leaders meeting there, asking them to "Drop the Debt" as part of the Jubilee 2000 campaign to alleviate Third World poverty.

We set off from The Mound and as we reached the city limits it was already painfully clear that I was by far the weakest cyclist in the group of twelve. As we hit the Midlothian hills I began to drop further and further behind.

At about the fourth big hill (big to me at least!) as the main group reached the summit far ahead of me, I spotted that one of the riders had turned and was coming barrelling back down the hill towards me. He appeared at my side and announced with a friendly grin: "I'm Andy, I'm going to be your Hill Buddy!". And Andy did indeed give me the moral support and inspiration that I needed to make it all the way to Cologne!

By the time we returned to Edinburgh I was a total convert to cycling. I live near the canal, at the edge of the city, and for the subsequent 20 years I've cycled along the canal path every day for work (three different jobs all reachable from the canal), for shopping and leisure. Andy and I have remained good friends for the 20 years too, and cycle along the canal for a weekly visit to the FilmHouse or Cameo.

## Inspired by father ... and inspiring others

What a difference a generation can make. Technology changes, of course, but so does common understanding. Even the understanding of something as simple as learning to ride a bike. When I was about 5 my dad taught me to ride on a farm road in East Lothian. He was ahead of his time (in the UK at least) by recognising that stabilisers taught a person NOT to balance, so I wasn't given stabilisers. However he believed that the way to teach a child was hands on - literally. His hand on the back of the saddle as he ran alongside keeping the bike balanced.

I really don't know how many hours, over how many days we did this but my memory is that it didn't come quickly. He did a lot of running until eventually his hand, unknown to me, was just hovering below my bottom providing only *psychological* support. I thought he was balancing me but in fact I was balancing myself and of course that was that - the bird could fly, and I loved it. I loved this sudden freedom to go from our farm cottage to visit my friend a mile away. It didn't take much encouragement for cycling to become my main mode of local and independent transport.

Many years later (after my father had died) this childhood love of cycling morphed into voluntary campaigning, not because *I* wanted to cycle which I was anyway, but because I started to recognise the wider environmental and health benefits of people choosing to cycle to get to places. At a Highland Cycle Campaign meeting in Inverness, a method for teaching adults to ride was explained – remove the pedals, lower the saddle and get them to scoot round as if on a hobby-horse to get their balance. Once balance is achieved, pedalling is approximately trivial. It makes sense.

Friends got to know that I was cocky about teaching someone to ride a bike. So my family had visits from friends' families, bringing us a few boys, who hadn't learnt by the age of about 9, and so who came specifically to learn to ride. We used the simple method above, with my daughter's bike, and it worked wonderfully quickly (2 hours maybe). I smile now, thinking of my dad running behind me. It was so loving and patient of him, but also so unnecessary. All 21st century parents should have this simple method explained. In this generation and future generations there is no need for fathers and mothers to run behind children, and there's no need for anyone not to learn with the greatest of ease.



*Me on (probably) my first bike, dressed up as a cowboy for Pencaitland Gala (ca July 1975)*

## Inspired by work colleague

Like a lot of my friends at the time, I had a bike and used it to cycle to school and mess around in the local woods creating tracks to ride on. Later I used it a bit at university to get around but would not have called myself a serious cyclist.

That all changed when I started work. One of my supervisors cycled to work every day after giving up using his car. When he realised that I had cycled a little in my younger years, he persuaded me to have a go at cycling to work. The first few times were quite an effort as it was around 10 miles each way with quite a hill on the way home. After a while, it became routine to cycle to work and we often rode home part of the way together. He told me that he was member of the local cycling club and wondered if I was interested in joining. I said I would think about it and after getting fitter, decided to join.

I took part in club runs and time trials with my best result being winning the club 25 mile handicap time trial event. Prizes were presented at the club's annual dinner and I was surprised and thrilled to be shaking hands with Barry Hoban, a former member of the club who had gone on to become a professional cyclist winning stages of the Tour de France amongst other results.

Around this time, family commitments grew leaving less time for cycling but I got out on my bike when I could. In more recent times, I have taken part in sportive events, ridden a couple of charity rides from Edinburgh to Iona and still enjoy cycling in the local countryside.

I lost touch with my mentor after moving house and job but met him again recently and it was good to reminisce about our earlier exploits. He still tries to cycle most days as he approaches 80 years of age and I hope I am able to follow in his wheeltracks in the future.

## To be able to accompany family

I was never a cyclist. I would always prefer to walk.

Then I had 2 sons. We got them balance bikes and I walked alongside. We got them Pedal bikes and I *power-walked*. As they got bigger I couldn't keep up. Then their interest in MTB started and I realised I either got left behind or a got on a bike and joined them.

I hired bikes for trips. I borrowed my husband's bike for rides to school. Then a couple of years ago I bought my own bike. The first in 30 years!

For a long time I only biked with my sons and husband. Recently, I was amazed to realise, I now bike on my own to the train station, and for exercise ... and I enjoy it!!!



*This is a photo I took of myself to send to my brother; a keen cyclist. I knew he would be amazed that I was on a bike on my own. I did a 7-miles loop. This is me on the Union canal taking a breather at the canal basin.*

## Inspiring a colleague ... with the help of park and ride

Constant dripping wears away a stone or, more succinctly, I nagged. A lot.

I work in small office and my success has been, so far, mixed.

The success was a colleague commuting over 25 miles, each way, every day, by car. To be fair, he wasn't particularly happy with this arrangement. He cycles recreationally but suggestions like getting the train, cycling to and from the station at each end, were never going to work for him as a regular commute. Still, I kept chipping away until a breakthrough came with the realisation that he passed fairly close to a park and ride on the edge of the city on his commute and that the cycle from that park and ride to the office was around 7 miles, around half of that on shared paths. This bit of the journey is predominantly in the city so the cycle is as fast as the drive and considerably less stressful.

Since starting he's become a total convert, rarely missing a day, complaining if he can't cycle, and joining me in preaching the joys of the cycle commute. The downside, he's become a bit of a Strava obsessive, i.e. we share a part of our commuting route and he's faster than me.

The work in progress is another colleague who lives within the city, around 4 miles from the office, and who still drives to and from work. Sustained pressure (primarily the zeal of the first convert) and a session with the Edinburgh [Spokes Map](#) pointing out that most of his route would be on segregated shared path and that the cycle would take roughly the same time as the drive finally got us to the point where he bought a bike on the Cycle to Work Scheme and gave it a go. Sadly, a hill near the start of journey had the better of him on the first couple of attempts and he quickly reverted to the car. Since then the nagging has continued, but has been met with a wide range of excuses as to why the bike is left at home. Our favourite is that the bike, stored on a balcony, had become home to a pigeon's nest and nothing could be done until the chicks had fledged.

We'll keep at him - drip, drip, drip...

## The innate links of father and son

The thing that inspired me is the sense of community amongst cyclists. I wrote a poem about it.

### The Timeless Nod

A MAMIL and his son share a nod of the head

With an old man of blended back and drop handlebar.

Our frames of carbon, aluminium and Reynolds steel  
show the progress of time.

A shared signal that respects the effort of each other  
in getting to where our paths have crossed.

It links across generations to the beginning of it all.  
Like the pitch of our chain, the thread on our bottom bracket  
and the B17 saddles on which the three of us sit.



## Inspired to get fit and happier – Travels with Patsy

A few weeks ago, admittedly rather extravagantly, I bought a bike. After a 30-odd year gap, I decided to take to the highways and byways of Dunbar and surrounding areas to get fit again, lose a few pounds and boost my often-unpredictable mood. She's a grand old girl and I named her Patsy in tribute to one of my favourite country icons.

She's what they call, they being cycling aficionados apparently, a hybrid (good for both road and off), is black in colour, and to my simple eye, functional for my basic needs.

She has countless gears, I'm told, although to my husband's uncontrolled hilarity I've not actually changed gear once in the weeks I've had her. You could without doubt say I am a rather rusty cyclist (pun fully intended) and I am gradually managing to achieve a steady, straight pace without veering in a drunken fashion towards pedestrians and not braking so suddenly I nearly fly over the handlebars. You never forget how to ride a bike, I'm told, well apparently not me. ☐ ☐ ☐ However, I am ever the optimist!

This morning, feeling a wee bit down in the mouth, I decided to enjoy the sunny fresh air, and saddle up my steed. I took to the highway.

Between my birth and about the age of 11, we as a family moved house five times, always staying within Dunbar, Spott and East Linton parishes. We mostly lived in farm cottages and I loved living in the country. Since adulthood, and motherhood, we have lived in towns but I still consider myself a country girl. One day, I hope to return to my roots and find a cottage with a tranquil setting, peaceful sunny days and a proper coal fire. However, in the meantime and while the days are sunny, I plan to cycle round my former abodes and in doing so, revisit my childhood.

So, back to this morning's voyage. Determined not to veer dangerously towards incoming vehicles causing widespread alarm and danger, I took the cyclepath between Belhaven to East Linton instead and enjoyed the sun and wind in my hair and felt truly free. Passing newly-harvested fields, I was taken back in time to playing in the stubble, climbing the bales and not going indoors until the sun started to set. The summers seemed endless, and through rose-tinted spectacles, the weather always fine and warm.

I decided to venture to West Cauldside, near East Linton, and the small farm cottage where we lived when I was in primary one. When eventually I found it, down long vibrating bumpy roads, it was just as lovely as I remembered. I used to play round the cottages for hours at a time, with my sister or alone, at a very young age but there was no fear about my safety at that time and, as throughout my childhood, I revelled in my solitude because it gave me peace to enjoy my many trips into the imagination without having to explain myself to anybody. I could be anybody I wanted to be, live in any world or time, and imagine storylines both whimsical and realistic.

Wherever we lived during this formative time, I cherished my time alone and could escape into my imagination at the drop of the hat without being disturbed by anybody. I did sometimes play with other children, and later in my childhood I had friends who I enjoyed spending time with, but my whole life I have enjoyed this escape and being able to fly away from the daily drudge of adult life and responsibility. In my head, I still think of my dreams and the ambitions I never realised, sometimes with regret. I dream with endless hope that I might still achieve some of them, that I might live a bit more for me, and for my husband and I, once my little birds have flown the nest which is fast-approaching. Perhaps we as adults should try to hold on to a piece of our childhood, the part that involves dreaming, imagining and not giving up on lifelong ambitions or future plans, no matter how big or small? Even if they are never achieved, how lovely it is to dream. ☐ ☐

*Postscript:* The reader will be relieved to hear that i am now a much more confident cyclist, if still cautious. I have even changed gear, and my braking has become steadier, as I become more confident. I ventured onto quiet roads.

I have had a few mishaps, for example a Westie chasing me along a busy road and nipping my ankles. However, I kept the heid as they say, kept steady and the dog eventually gave up. Cars have been careful and courteous and it's becoming a wonderful experience.

## Freedom

The freedom of the open road, path and towpath!

## Fun

[Age 6]

It is fun. I can go fast.

## Why not cycle??

What inspired me to start getting around by bike? What inspired you to ask?

What would inspire someone to write to the British Ping Pong Board with an idea for a new animated character to support the activities of the Board and further the interests of British Ping Pong?

What would inspire someone to get up before dawn in order to screw up pieces of paper to make them more and more like perfect spheres?

What -- oh creator / compiler of the 2019 Spokes writing competition -- would inspire someone to write down the names of everyone they had ever met, print the names on a wall, and then add to it every year to make sure it never went out of date?

What would inspire someone to discover through trial and error that the reverse central cylinder of a Lego brick fits perfectly over the top of a car tyre valve should the original cap be misplaced?

To dress in 1950s tailored long trousers, brogues, and braces, and remix I Wanna Be Like You in a pouring sweat of ecstatic electro-swing?

To harvest cooking apples from the old tree with a plastic trident?

To go for a walk in the Pentlands in February, find a piece of ice the exact size and shape of a hoof on top of a stile, photograph the piece of ice, and then keep the photograph in a box, hoping that one day science would advance to a point at which the mystery would be solved of how a piece of ice ends up on top of a stile the exact size and shape of a hoof?

What -- oh editorial board of sustainable transport related issues in Edinburgh and the Lothians -- would inspire someone to name the corners of a sofa after Underground stops, causing children hitherto unfamiliar with the London Underground system to run from corner to corner in the hope of hearing the name of an as-yet unheard and exotic-sounding stop, such as 'Paddington'?

To give you lunch and spare clothes -- not just a t-shirt but trousers, socks, a t-shirt and a hoodie, and lunch, after you got soaked to the skin on the way there?

To make a website containing a jpeg depicting the path traced by a vector normal to the surface of a sphere rotating on its axis, skewed, and orbiting around a central distant star?

What would inspire someone to stand up in front of a room full of 16 year-olds, read out a poem, and then make sure that they each got something - something that could never be un-got?

The question -- as surely I need not tell you, oh judges of periodical bike based creative activities -- is not what, but why not.

## Inspired by my big brother

What inspired me to start using a bike to get around was a 'who' not a 'what'. It was my big brother who inspired me, though admittedly as much by inspiring rivalry in me rather than by him coaching me.

I was fortunate enough to grow up in a detached house with a path all the way round it. Before I was able to ride a bike of just about any sort, my older brother was haring round the house at an awesome rate on his tricycle. I just knew I had to be able to do what he did as as soon as possible, so it wasn't long before I was riding my own trike in endless competitions (which of course he mostly won).

It was the perfect place to learn to ride a bike, being off road. Of course we had our scraped knees as corners were taken too rapidly, but the constant need to see if I could beat my brother spurred me on.

Then he graduated to a two wheeler, and my trike seemed to be so childish in comparison. I had to be able to do what he did, so I moved on to a two-wheeler too. By this stage he was being trusted with expeditions by road to visit friends, and of course anything he did, I wanted to do too. So initial expeditions round the village to see friends soon extended to longer trips to joint friends on a farm miles away. Big brother led the way, so that I was heading out on the road under his (occasionally) watchful eye.

Before long I was confident enough (trusted by parents enough) to go off on my own. Something I would not have achieved at that age if it hadn't been for the brother who I wanted to emulate.

## A novel way to inspire a friend to cycle...

*I married her!*

## **To cycle with my sons ... then more!**

In July 2015 I bought a new bike to be able to go out on cycle rides with my three young boys.

Then, during the Christmas holidays, I started cycling to work to take advantage of the quiet roads.

I soon realised the many benefits: the door-to-door journey time was half that of the bus; a nice cycle route – see photo – took me most of the way there; I was saving a £50 a month on bus fares; and the exercise was doing me good.

I've been cycle commuting every day since!



## **The joy of cycling ... philosophically speaking**

Why is it so hard to say what inspired you to start getting around by bike?

Because nobody inspired you to start getting around by bike. You were introduced to the action, and then something happened. All you did was allow it to happen and then repeat that allowing, until there you were, day after day, so intertwined with it, so inseparable, that nothing and nobody could ever begin to begin to persuade you to do or imagine doing otherwise.

Because the question implies a kind of separation between one thing (the bike) and another (you) where there is no separation. (Not just because in tiny parts at a time thousands and thousands of muscle contractions pushed on the minerals of your bones and were themselves pushed on, causing them to take their places more strongly and less destructibly than the way they had been before, or because through this pressing you came at times to find that it is all the other states that are the abnegations - the sitting at your desk, the standing, the waiting, the lying in your bed - and that the bike is your first home, or because how you measured all things was in fact to become linked to how you felt that first thing, but because when you felt the handlebars, the frame, the tyres, the ground, and the Earth, the whole Earth, you knew that the whole Earth felt you).

Because it also implies an easy-to-define thing - getting around by bike - which is not easy to define. It's not the bike itself - the object. It is unequivocally, 100%, nothing to do with the bike itself. Or something that can be uploaded, photographed, or put on YouTube. It must be what you can sense directly and it must be what you can sense directly right at this very second, right now, when you are riding your bike, which means it is this: a left hand and a right hand, the track, the trees, a photon, autumn, your grandfather, Harlaw, Alpha Bar, Anglesea, the Merced River, the sky, a cloud, Let Down, maths, a million humming magnetic tons of molten metal rotating beneath and above the soles of your feet, the harbour, the clock he used to wind, New Field, our Sun, your last winter, this evening, Cornershop, Camasunary, Carnac, and the whole darn cosmos slung out and glittering.

And most of all because it implies that getting around by bike is good, as in contained on some kind of good-bad axis. Don't get me wrong: on that axis, cycling is good. But it is also bad (remember those times you got so cold that you cried with the pain, or when lost and lonely on a road to Ruigh Aiteachain after dark, you saw malign presences move in the shadows?). And so you are left to conclude that the thing about which we are speaking isn't on that axis at all: you conclude that that particular arrangement of air, rubber, nucleic acid, your breakfast, Deore v brakes, aluminium and pine resin can be neither good nor bad. That it is only your thinking that makes it so. You know it to be true. And yet. And yet here you are. Your heart bursting with the sheer fucking uncontainable joy of it - holding in the palms of your hands something so introvertibly wonderful, something so utterly, undeniably awesome, that it seems to be all the proof you or anyone could ever need of the very existence of goodness itself.

That is why it is so hard to say what inspired you to start getting around by bike.

## **Inadvertently inspiring a school pupil, by example**

I cycle to work every day and have done for years. A few years back (before the Innocent railway to Meadows link) I used to cycle through the Blackets and then on through town to St George's School for Girls where I worked at the time.

I was always overtaking a family of my pupils in their car and we'd wave. After a while the oldest daughter realised that if she cycled to school like me, not only would she get there faster but also she wouldn't have to wait around for her sisters at each end of the day nor rely on her parents to pick her up. So she started cycling most days and we often bumped into each other and cycled together.

She said I'd inspired her to start cycling to school. A couple of years later she went to university in Cambridge so I'd be very surprised if she hadn't kept cycling there!



## Seeing mountain bikes when they were something new

I'd had a bike as a student but it was purely to avoid paying bus fares, never for fun, and when it was stolen I couldn't afford to replace it. Then, in 1989, I was working in a caravan park and leading a pony trekking operation and a couple arrived with what turned out to be mountain bikes. I'd never seen anything like them before. Why were the tyres so thick? I borrowed one and rode it around the gravel road of the campsite and up one of the hill tracks and was hooked.

Three months later my partner and I were in Singapore buying our own pink and blue Reflex MTBs. We flew them into Australia, bought panniers and camping kit, had a practice tour for a week out of Perth, then cycled from Adelaide to Sydney, camping wild every night for three months. We went on to New Zealand and I rode that little bike everywhere until it fell apart.

I've owned a bike ever since for day to day journeys, weekends away, and have cycled over some of the highest and toughest mountain ranges in the world. Cycling has kept me fit, made me wonderful friends, and taught me how to laugh at adversity. I couldn't imagine a life without cycling and will forever be grateful to the couple whose names I have long since forgotten for their inspiration and generosity.

## Seeing colleagues bike-commuting ... and getting an e-bike

My colleagues inspired me to start using a bike to get around. I lived about four miles from my workplace and the main road I used to drive on was always very busy during the rush hour. I noticed quite a few of my local colleagues cycled to work and I thought I would give it a go.

As I wasn't all that fit I decided to buy an Ebike and I've never looked back. It meant I could go on the back roads which were very quiet and rural. I realised just how much beauty I had been missing all these years and the serenity of the countryside early in the morning. I past people walking dogs who seemed happy and calm and gave me a cheerful "good morning". The nightmare of finding a parking space was soon a thing of the past! I also looked forward to the journey home. It blew away the cobwebs of the working day.

I was very quickly hooked on cycling and I started riding in my spare time too. I am semi retired now and still cycling most days.

### Inspired by my Dad

My late dad inspired me to start using a bike to get around. From teaching me to ride a bike at a very young age, my dad then went on to encourage me to start riding a bike again years later when I was in my middle age!

My lovely dad said ditch the car  
We'll cycle, you and me.  
We'll look across the fields afar  
There's so much more to see.

It'll save on fuel and be more fun  
And calm our weary minds.  
Traffic jams will be all done  
The last of daily grinds.

I'm feeling fit and happy now  
And cycling every day.  
All I can say is wow wow wow  
This surely is the way.

My partner now is cycling mad  
And loves the hills and glen.  
Thank you Dad I am so glad  
You spurred me on back then.

### Inspired by my partner

My partner, Wendy, inspired me to start using a bike to get around.

My partner got me on a bike  
After many years aground.  
I must say I really like  
It's fun and very sound.

We go all over up and down  
And fitter we both are.  
We pop to shops and into town  
And sometimes travel far.

I love my bike and so does she  
We laugh and smile all day.  
In the country; by the sea  
Going merrily on our way.