

# A Bicycle with a Basket



Judith Kidd

*As 8-year-old Sunshine explores the outdoors on bicycle rides with her nanna Gee-Ma as a guide, it creates a special bond between a wise down-to-earth grandmother and her curious, wishful granddaughter.*

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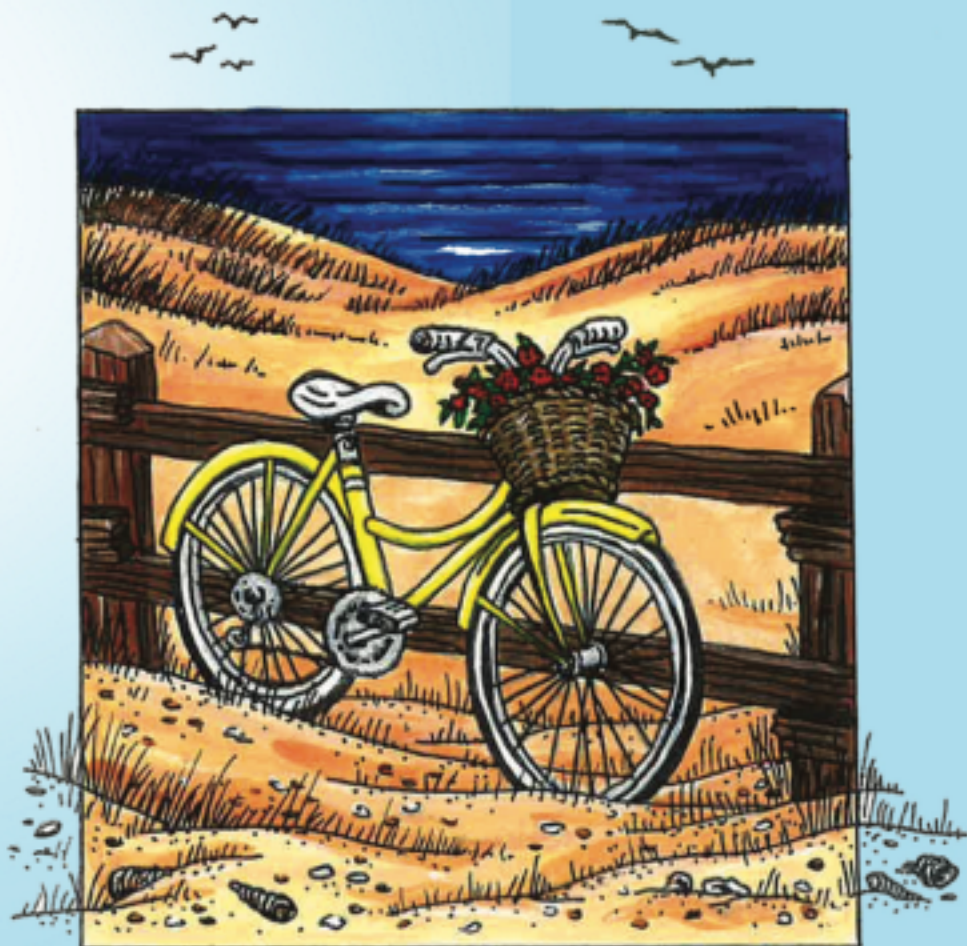
By Judith Kidd

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## Chapter 3

In almost no time it seemed, the yellow bicycle had become Sunshine's best friend. Not in the way that real friends are, familiar and similar, but more in the way that it was something reliable that she could use every day and know that no one else could use it unless they asked.

Even though most of her friends also had bicycles of some sort, none of them were as eager to ride as she herself, and surely none of them had a bicycle

with a wicker basket and shiny yellow paint. That didn't bother the girl or stop her from having friends, or sharing other stuff, such as sport and homework. More and more often she found that she was taking bike rides on her own and, to her surprise, with Gee-ma.

At first it was a bit awkward, to tell her friends that she was going bike-riding with her nanna instead of doing after-school activities, but they didn't seem to think anything about it. Girls that age haven't yet acquired the habit of judging what friends may or may not do. It was just the way it was, that a friend had something else to do.

Secretly though, Sunshine looked forward to those afternoons when she knew that Gee-ma would join her for a ride, which they now referred to as going on a 'ride-about'. More often than not, Gee-ma would have a planned route already in mind. What's more, it usually included something new and different that involved some kind of game or search for who could find it first, whatever it was.

They began with trips to the nearby beaches, which her nanna loved and went walking on every morning at sun rise. It seemed to Sunshine that the beaches went for ages, which is true, but each one had a point of access from the cycle and walking path that meant they could choose any one they desired, depending upon the tides.

Some of the beaches were smooth and flat, good for gathering seashells. Others were rough and rocky, good for spotting crabs and other creatures, which could be undesirable, such as jelly fish. Sunshine liked all of the beaches, as different as they were.

One particular day, they found themselves alone on a smooth stretch of beach which Gee-ma had planned to be there just after a stormy high tide. It provided the opportunity to quiz her pretend student on what to expect. Anything could wash up under such conditions, sometimes pieces of human things, but mostly there were strange looking sea plants and broken shells.

The game, as always, was to find a shell that was completely unbroken and Sunshine became

exceptionally good at that. She soon became such a good spotter of unbroken shells that she accused Gee-ma of planting them beforehand, half-buried in the sand or grass, as she used to do with Easter eggs. In fact, that was not the case, and truly, the girl possessed a keen eye for spotting.



Within a few weeks the routine of after-school bicycle jaunts to beaches and various places had

opened a whole new world to the 8-year-old. She still played with friends, of course, and went to their birthday parties and sleepovers, but she gradually lost interest in playing games on her tablet or wishing she had the latest cool fashionwear, most of which would never hold up on a bicycle at full speed. Leggings and a hoodie worked simply fine.

Gee-ma always made sure that Sunshine was fitted with sunshades and sunscreen and a supply of plasters, just in case. Nothing seemed too hard.

It wasn't long before the keen spotter had accumulated so many baskets full of unbroken seashells that Gee-ma posed the question,

“What are we going to do with all these shells?”, as if the girl had never given it a thought.

“We could sell them,” Sunshine replied, then quickly added, “if we went somewhere that didn't have their own beaches”.

That was not practical, of course, and her conclusion stated the obvious. “I guess we should



stop collecting them for now and start collecting something else," she said with a sigh.

"And what would that be?" Gee-ma queried.

Sunshine mulled it over and could not imagine what could be more collectable. People collected all kinds of things, like fake frogs and china cups and toy trains, none of which interested her in the least. Even her own mother had said they were 'space wasters' and why would anyone want to fill up space with things that were of no use. If something is to be collected, then it should serve a purpose; that was the girl's feeling, and seashells certainly served a purpose of some kind, but she wasn't sure what.

After thinking hard for days, Sunshine confronted her grandmother.

"I know, we could start collecting flowers, and then we could sell them from your stall at the farmers' market on Sunday and whatever didn't sell we could give to the old people's home."

It seemed a worthy proposition to Gee-ma despite having her doubts about the practicality of it all.

Selling would be the easy part, as she sold pots of herbs every Sunday at the market and her granddaughter often came along. And true, flowers were something that people would buy, but they had to look perfect and healthy, and not wilted or forlorn from a trip in a bicycle basket.

Transporting flowers would be tricky and completely different to seashells that could be tossed in a plastic bag and rattled around on a bumpy road. Flowers required nurturing like a newborn infant. The flowers would need care and delicacy and water for the journey home. Still, Gee-ma did not want to dampen Sunshine's brilliant idea, and so she offered to 'look into it'.

The other problem, which the girl had not considered, was the question of where to find flowers that did not already belong to someone or somewhere, like a public park, where it is strictly forbidden to pick the flowers. Flowers that grew on roadsides would be pickable, but that posed dangers of its own. Gee-ma's own garden had a wide selection of flowers for bug control and salads, but not the sort for display in a vase at a nursing home.

Suddenly the idea seemed doomed, that is, until Gee-ma proposed to ring around to all her friends and ask if they might have spare flowers in their garden that could be used for a very worthwhile purpose.

That night Sunshine was barely awake as she beckoned her Secret Wishgiver, for the first time in over a month, and pleaded for a place to find some flowers to collect. Then she took a deep breath and drifted off to sleep with her lavender scented pillow tucked close to her nose.





## Chapter 6

One nice thing about living near beaches is that people are always walking and jogging and moving in one way or another. There are lots of playgrounds for children and cafes for grown-ups, but not a lot for kids in between, like an 8-year-old and her friends.

Whenever they went to the beaches, it seemed that Sunshine always got stuck with watching Very Clever on the playground, and the older she

got, the more she thought this was not fun, or even fair.

It was perfectly fair that her Mum could have a coffee break and that her Daddy could ride his paddle board, but it was not fair that she had to watch her little brother, just because he was her little brother. It also meant that she spent much of the time at the playground daydreaming and thinking about her future, and not actually watching him.

Being both strong and clever, her brother was quite capable of climbing and jumping and taking care on rope swings and flying foxes and things that her parents would probably fret over. His big sister had become less of a watcher and more of a looker. In fact, she was beginning to think of herself as someone who was very 'observant and perceptive', as Gee-ma described her.

According to her nanna, these were two especially important and useful traits to have as one grows up. Too often people do foolish things and make silly mistakes just because they haven't taken the

time to look and listen first to what Gee-ma called her 'Little Voice'.

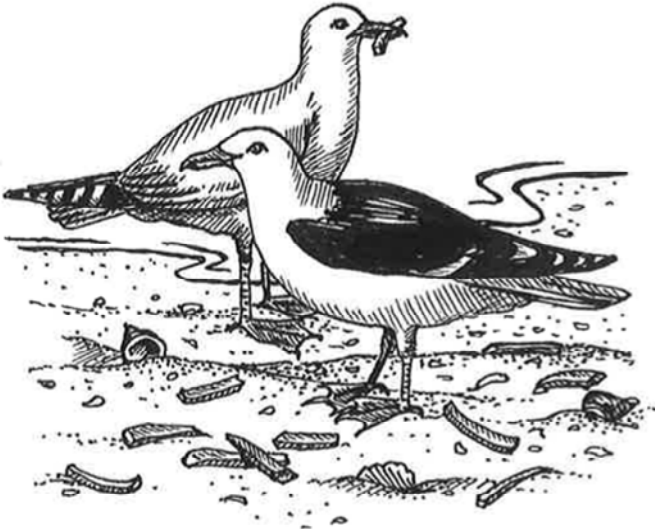
And looking is what Sunshine did best. Sometimes she would catch the flutter of a butterfly from the corner of her eye and follow it as it danced from flower to flower. Then suddenly, it would land on a flower and just stay there, slowly opening and closing its wings like it was getting a drink from a water fountain, which is sort of true. Butterflies drink nectar, not water, but she wondered if they needed water, too. She would have to ask Gee-ma who knew all about these things.

Other times the observant girl would catch sight of a sparkle of light coming from a stone on the ground or a million sparkles on the ocean when the sun hit the water at some magical moment, and the sparkles would ripple across the water like a blanket of glitter. That, to her, was pure magic. How could the sparkles be there one minute and then be gone the next? Another question for Gee-ma.

The more Sunshine looked at things outside in nature, she found more and more things that she wondered about. She thought about writing them down to ask Gee-ma, but then, like a lot of good thoughts, the idea was not very practical because then she'd have to carry a pad and a pencil and have a pocket or a tote bag and it all seemed too 'complicated'. Another word that her grandmother used a lot.

Instead, the curious looker decided it was best to just point her head very directly and focus her eyes on one thing at a time, like a laser beam in a sci-fi movie. Sometimes it was on a bird at the playground trying to get at people food, especially from little kids who are totally unaware of such mischief.



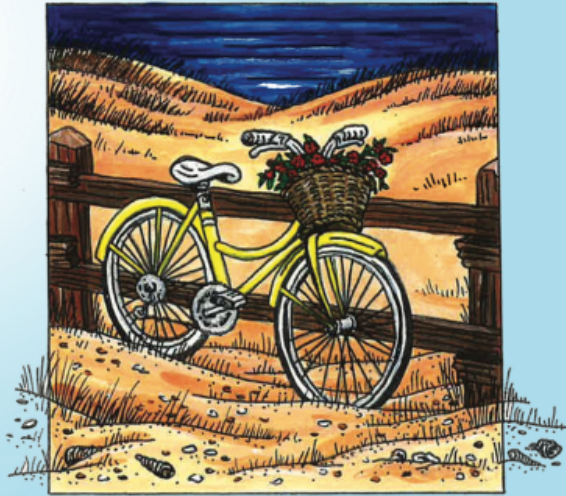


Other times she watched ants, forever going somewhere, and if she watched closely enough, she could see the tiny troopers carrying little crumbs or bits of insects back to a hole in the ground or a crack in a wall. Again, magic. How could an ant lift a crumb bigger than itself and how did it know where to go with it?

It was becoming clear to the 8-year-old nature watcher that she could probably spend all day looking and wondering, and that a bicycle with a basket was the perfect companion.

With that thought, she began to think about her next venture into collecting. It had to be something that would fit in her basket, was not too delicate or too big and floppy, and definitely not too heavy. Small, glittery stones would be ideal, like the ones that get tossed ashore by the tide, glistening in sunny splendour until the next tide drags them back to sea.

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