



THE KISS OF SPRING

It was the spring of '74, and I was a fourth-grader in elementary school. I remember it well for a couple of reasons. First, I got a Sears & Roebuck 3-speed bicycle that was fluorescent green with a sissy bar that scraped the sky. It had a banana seat long enough to hold me and five friends. Whether I was cruising in first gear or second, or riding like the wind in power third, my green and silver streamers danced in the wind—boy, was I cool!

Second, it was around this time that I started to notice a little neighbor girl named Darlene. She was one of my childhood friends, but this time it was different: I was

in love. Soon, I found out that she shared my affections, and we became inseparable at recess and after school. In fact, in just three weeks, we were engaged to be married.

At times, I did have some doubts. I couldn't help but wonder if it was me she really liked, or was she just impressed with my incredibly cool bike (you know, the one with "power third")? Who could blame her? But this fear was laid to rest when I was grounded from my bike for two whole weeks for ramming it into my big brother's bike while he was still on it. Darlene proved faithful, and nothing changed.

I remember one recess in particular. We were playing atop the monkey bars when she leaned over and kissed me on the cheek. It was spontaneous; it was spring, and I was inspired. An honest look back would have revealed a kiss as dry as an autumn leaf, but I didn't care. I was in love, or so I thought.

By the time spring flowed into summer and summer into fall, we were passing in the hallways with an ordinary "hello." That's all right. I would write several "do you like me, circle yes or no" letters before my elementary school days were done.

As I grew older and the pressures and temptations of dating relationships weighed heavily, I would think fondly of those days: days of bike rides in the sun,

stomping through mud puddles in the rain, and stories and laughter under the clouds.

Sure, I was attracted to her. How could I not be? She was a vision of loveliness in her Girl Scout outfit. But it wasn't the handholding, or even the occasional kiss that meant so much. It was the excitement of the simple. I just needed to know I was okay.
