

# Tricycle

## Dreams

BY ELLEN NOTBOHM

LILLIAN WINSBERG WAS CHICAGO BORN, the youngest of six children. She arrived on 11 December 1891 and must have liked a lot of what she saw because she stuck around for 96 years. Her father “was a peddler until I was about 12 to 15 years old, traveling up into Wisconsin and Michigan,” Lil wrote her son — my dad — in a 1975 letter. “When he discontinued that, my older sisters and brothers supported the family. They all went to work after graduating grammar school. I alone graduated from high school, then contributed to the family support.”

We have a portrait of my grandmother Lil as a toddler, and a photo of her some years later, looking sweetly schoolgirl-ish on a sidewalk on Chicago’s South Side. Sometime between those two photos occurred a moment that never left her: she asked a child’s heartfelt question and received a father’s off-hand answer, two words he could never have imagined would cut so deeply that his daughter would repeat them to her granddaughter 75 years later. And 35 years after that, I am repeating them again.



She was 7 years old. She saw a tricycle in the window of a store. She trembled with yearning. She returned to the window many times. She worked up the nerve to ask her father if she could have it for her next birthday. He said:

“Oh, sure.”

She heard the words, not the inflection. Didn't hear the sarcasm, the exhaustion, the utter impossibility of her request. Didn't think of the eight mouths her father had to feed during a decade of depression that had encompassed her whole life, a decade fraught with unemployment, farm foreclosures, and labor strikes put down by federal troops. Didn't consider that two of her sisters also had birthdays, one day before and one day after hers. When the tricycle disappeared from the store window, what would a hopeful child assume but that her father had granted her wish, that she would throw open the door on 11 December, and there on the sidewalk it would be?

The piercing disappointment of that morning lives on after more than a century.

Like many teenagers, I never thought beyond my grandparents being anything but old; that's the way they had always been to me. I knew better, of course, but it took a story about a tricycle to force me to walk beside my grandmother as she was denied her child-heart's desire.

“Grandma,” I blurted when she told me the story, “I will buy you the best tricycle there is — today.”

“You're sweet,” she said, smiling at my preposterous offer. The tricycle, she mused, was her first lesson in how we sometimes must accept things we don't understand.

Oh, sure.

Lil died in 1988, several years before my preschool-aged son became enchanted with a book called *The Remarkable Riderless Runaway Tricycle*, the story of a boy's beloved tricycle that is mistakenly picked up as trash and taken to the dump. Magically, it comes to life and pedals its way across town, through danger and mayhem, making its way back to the boy.

At the time, my son was just like his great-grandmother, tone-deaf to sarcasm and improbability. He was also the devoted owner of a shiny red trike. For all he didn't understand, he most certainly would have understood a girl who longed for the adventure of owning a three-wheeler and the thrill of seeing where it would take her.

If she had asked him for a turn on his marvelous tricycle, he would have said, “Oh, sure!” and waited with uncharacteristic patience while she, a different kind of “pedaler” than her father, pedaled and dreamed. ■

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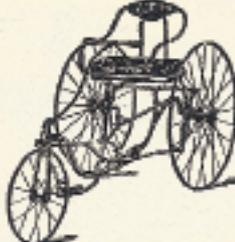
### Back Then: The Trike Lil Never Forgot

The turn-of-the-century tricycle was not merely a child's plaything. Sears Roebuck & Co. carried two models of tricycles in their 1902 catalog. The Boys' All Steel Velocipede, styled as we think of a tricycle today, with large front wheel and two smaller back wheels, was available in wheel diameters from 16 to 26 inches, with a choice of steel or rubber tires. Price: \$1.35 for 16-inch steel tires, up to \$3.95 for 26-inch rubber tires — an adult-sized vehicle.

The tricycle Lil coveted may have been a girl's version of the Velocipede, or it may have been more like the other tricycle in the catalog, which looked like a small carriage, with two large wheels in back, a much smaller wheel in front, and a wide seat with a back. “Notwithstanding the immense popularity of the bicycle,” the catalog explained, “the tricycle still remains in favor. Many parents prefer them for their children by reason of their safety.... They are constructed with special care, and will stand the abuse they very frequently receive.”

And like Henry Ford's soon-to-be-popular Model T, you could have your tricycle in any color you liked, so long as it was black.

**SEARS, ROEBUCK & CO., Cheapest Supply House on Earth, Chicago.**

Boys' All Steel Velocipedes.		Tricycles.		Parts
	Give the boy all the fun he wants at the expense of a few pennies. We show an all steel velocipede that will stand a "heap of racket" on the part of the restless youth. There are nuts or bolts in the head connections to rattle or come loose. It is adjustable and can be taken apart shipping. The coil spring in seat does not sag or get out of repair. We use the best steel made in this velocipede. The manner in which the front and back axles are secured to head adds a new method far superior to any other, makes them doubly strong. The handle is of the best steel material. The frames are made of solid iron. Made both with steel tires or rubber tires. Price as follows:		Notwithstanding the immense popularity of the bicycle, the tricycle still remains in favor. Many parents prefer them for their children by reason of their safety, convenience, and the ease with which they can be run by the little girl or boy. The tricycle which we illustrate is made for girls or boys from two to seven years. They are constructed with special care, and will stand the abuse they very frequently receive. They are very easy running and handsomely finished. The improved spring seat takes all vibration, and being upholstered in plush and furnished with back, makes riding easy and comfortable. Frame is enameled black. Equipped with iron tire wheels or C plain rubber tire wheels. The following are our special prices:	No. 11 Price, If No. 11 Price, If No. 12 tube, I No. 13 tube, I No. 14 tube, I If by mail
<b>STEEL TIRES.</b> No. 192501 Front wheel, 16 inches ..... \$1.35 No. 192502 Front wheel, 20 inches ..... 1.75 No. 192503 Front wheel, 24 inches ..... 2.15 No. 192504 Front wheel, 26 inches ..... 2.35 <b>RUBBER TIRES.</b> No. 192505 Front wheel, 16 inches ..... \$2.50 No. 192506 Front wheel, 20 inches ..... 3.00 No. 192507 Front wheel, 24 inches ..... 3.45 No. 192508 Front wheel, 26 inches ..... 3.95		<b>IRON TIRE WHEELS.</b> No. 192509 Rear wheels, 18 inches ..... \$2.25 No. 192510 Rear wheels, 20 inches ..... 3.75 No. 192511 Rear wheels, 22 inches ..... 4.45 <b>RUBBER TIRE WHEELS.</b> No. 192512 Rear wheels, 18 inches ..... \$4.45 No. 192513 Rear wheels, 20 inches ..... 5.45 No. 192514 Rear wheels, 22 inches ..... 6.95		No. 11 Price, If No. 11 Price, If No. 12 tube, I No. 13 tube, I No. 14 tube, I If by mail No. 11 complete If No. 11 Price, If No. 11 Price, If No. 11 Price, If Morgan We quote No. 11 Price,