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DAWN REISS

A QUIRK IN THE ROAD

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Oct. 9 2009 - 3:46 pm | 140 views | 0 recommendations | 1 comment

My Red Hot Love Affair

I have a new love. He is hot, sexy and likes to move fast.

When I first saw him, it was love at first sight.

I never thought it would be like this. But sometimes welcomed surprises come in the most unusual forms.



I first met Sergio at the bike shop. I was getting ready for the [Chicago Triathlon](#) and needed a bike, fast. It was close to July 4th and my triathlon was at the end of August. I had procrastinated on buying a bike, mulling over various varieties at a half dozen or so bike shops in Chicago. I was worried about my back and wanted the right fit. Prompted by my [Chicago Endurance Sports](#) training coach I went to [Get a Grip Cycles](#). The guys there knew what they were doing.

Before long they placed a \$1,600 red F75 Felt road bike in my hands. They let me try it for free for a few days, knowing that I would be hooked. It was my first road bike. My first bike, in fact, that hadn't been garbage picked and was brand spanking new. My pocketbook couldn't afford that price point, so I opted for the next step down, a **Felt Z80**. Still red, still hot and very sexy with white handle bars. (And I can pick it up with one hand.) It is more expensive than my laptop, but a great choice none the less.

Two weeks into my training with my new bike, I took a nasty fall during triathlon practice. I was out on a training ride and tried to take a tight u-turn way too fast. I toppled to the side. The end of the drop-down handle bar impaled the left side of my chest and I sliced my leg and hand on the gravel. Slightly bloodied and bruised, I got back on and finished off another 10 or so miles. A few days later, the bruises became more noticeable. People began commenting about the bruises on my legs while I strategically started wearing clothes to cover up the purplish spots.

I went out dancing a few nights later, and **a guy asked me if I had an abusive boyfriend.**

"You can tell me," he said. "It's okay. You don't have to worry."

"No," I told him. "Really, it's just from a bike accident, nothing else."

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That's when I started calling my bike Sergio. (Hey some people name their cars, I named my bike.) I started telling people that I like it fast and he likes it rough, so we make a good pair. People would laugh and it helped quickly answer any unasked questions.

Sergio opened a whole new world to me. Although I've had a chance to see Chicago via foot, car and El/Metra, riding a bike is a new experience. I'm still terrified of riding on the streets. (Getting hit by a MACK truck, while driving a car, will do that to you...)

The best part about it, is all the people I've met or gotten to know better because of "Sergio." **People joke about "starter chicks" or guys at clubs, so I guess this is mine for meeting people on the street.**

I've met a ton of great people training for the triathlon, but practicing in a group of 200 can sometimes be a bit overwhelming. The bike made me stand out and became a good conversation piece, especially during our training rides up in Libertyville and at Chicago's 31st Street Beach.

After hearing about my training rides, some of my other friends pulled out their bikes, too.

At my friend Zach's suggestion, our friend Kate and I got up for a sunrise bike ride. The view was spectacular and peaceful. Raspberry streaks over water. Charcoal buildings airbrushed against the pastel sky. It is something I probably wouldn't have done had I not had a bike (or had a friend suggest it.) It was so much fun, that Zach, (God love him) got up early again to do a 13.5 mile loop with me two weeks before the triathlon, to make sure I was prepared. By the time I actually did the sprint Chicago Triathlon in August, I finished a respectable 1 hour, 56 minutes, 28 seconds, for the 1/4 miles swim in Lake Michigan, 1/4 mile bare foot run (to the bike transition area) 13.5 mile bike on Lake Shore Drive and 3.1 mile run around the Museum Campus. (I was thrilled to finish, and to finish well at 1,577 out of several thousand, especially since I had back surgery a year earlier.)



Sergio also opened the door for a nice summer romance.



Chicago Bean, Image by James Jordan via Flickr

On a random swing night, I met a guy at [SummerDance](#) in Grant Park. I asked him to dance. He said no. A while later, I was walking towards the drinking fountain, when he stopped me and asked if I would talk to him. I told him, "only if you'll dance with me." He smiled and agreed. We stopped and talked for a while after dancing. Our talk turned to training. He informed

that he was "Turkish-Persian," aka Iranian and a cyclist/marathon runner at that. After I told him I was training for the Chicago Triathlon, **he promptly asked me "if I wanted a training partner."** A solid yes, led to us making out by the "[Bean](#)" like two teenagers at a high school dance. During our first long training ride, a 34-miler from Chicago to Highland Park and back, he serenaded me in Persian for two hours. He also convinced me to ride the streets of Chicago for the first time, guiding me through some of the more

I'm a Chicago-based journalist. I'm known for my quirky, off-beat features, but I've covered everything from the NFL to eating crickets in Cambodia to Chicago's best websites to celebrity profiles of the likes of Maya Angelou and Magic Johnson. My work has appeared in 25+ outlets including: Travel + Leisure, Chicago Tribune, Chicago magazine, American Way magazine, CNN.com, MSN.com, Restaurants & Institutions and Boys' Life. I'm the immediate past president of the Chicago Headline Club, the largest Society of Professional Journalists chapter in the country and a former St. Petersburg Times and Dallas Morning News staff writer. My co-authored book, *Armchair Reader: Chicago*, about quirky, off-beat things in the Windy City, will be released this December. Twitter @dawnreiss Email me dreiss100 AT gmail DOT com
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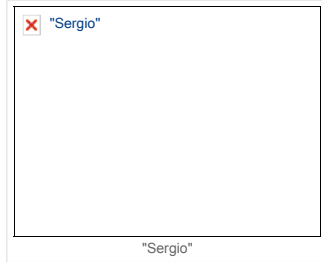
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difficult spots. Our whirlwind romance lasted briefly, but the routes he taught me to ride on the Chicago streets have stayed.

Learning how to ride also introduced me to other friends. I recently met [Windy City Social's](#) Hope Bertram and we bonded over cycling. A few days later we went out for a 25 mile training ride to Hyde Park and back, broken up in the middle by a pancake interlude.



With the chilly fall rain pummeling Chicago, I'm probably going to put my bike on an indoor trainer soon, but I'm glad for all the I have learned so far.

There is something special about riding. I will always be a rower at heart, since that was my sport in college, and my first love, first and foremost, is swimming. Now, I have a new-found appreciation for

cycling. It is social. It is physical and it is much more appealing to me than a long run. And there is something very sexy about riding a bike, even if you have to wear a helmet.

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CAITLIN KELLY
Broadside

Two of my favorite sports – fencing and sailing – tend to leave bruises, especially fencing that can leave bruises on the upper arm exactly where someone angry might have grabbed you too hard. I got used to the pitying, misunderstanding looks in the locker room.

Love the irony that doing tough sports make people think we're getting beaten up.

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