

Women's Cycling e-zine

How to ditch the mean girl

It was stinking hot, it was humid, it was summer in Ontario. I was out riding with a group I don't normally ride with. For starters I'm more of a trail rider and these nice people were hardcore roadies. They had planned on riding 80 or 90K, a short stretch on account that it was so stinking hot. Did I mention they were hardcore roadies?

Remember that movie a couple of years ago it was called, "There will be blood," you kind of knew what you were getting into right from the start? This ride on this particular day, would have been called, "There would be hills...followed by a great deal of whining."

I know, hills are hard, that's why they call them hills and everyone suffers climbing a steep one, but I'm not a fan, not even a little bit. So, not to put too fine a point on it, as we rounded this one particular corner, I felt like a horse rearing on it's hind legs. Not too far in the distance the yellow centre line just shot straight up, right up into the sky.

I looked for another option, a side street that would miraculously circle around to the main road so I could bail, but there was nothing, I was trapped.

"What were you thinking?" She said. "Huh?" I said.

"I mean, what were you thinking riding with these guys?"

"Ya, I know, I was doing so well now this."

"You know you'll never make it up."

"I'll just gear down and take my time."

"It won't work, you suck at hills. Besides it's so hot and humid. Aren't you thirsty? You're going to have to get off the bike and walk it up. How embarrassing. You don't have the legs for it, may as well start walking now. They'll drop you right here and you won't know your way home."

Wow, I thought. Who invited her?

You're probably thinking, "Who is that? If someone talked to me like that I'd kick them to the curb." But guess what? You've got a friend just like that.

Meet Matilda. The mean girl that lives inside my head. What's your mean girl's name?

Naming your mean girl gives you a little distance from her nasty remarks. It's true she doesn't mean to be nasty, she can't help it, she's just trying to save you from Sabre-tooth tigers. Yes, I know, we don't see many of those in these parts, but Matilda is my primal brain, the lizard brain, if you will. Her job is to keep me safe. Since there aren't any real Sabre-toothed size threats in most of our lives today, she

overreacts on smaller stuff. In fact, she overreacts on anything that even remotely smells of change, achievement or risk.

What's really important to remember is that Matilda isn't you. I know, it sure sounds like you because the voice is inside 'your' head, but here's how you know it's her and not you. She's bonkers. She's irrational, and if not kept in perspective, she gets out of control.

How many times has 'that voice' activated fear in your body that was completely disproportionate to what you were about to do? For example, tackling a hill on your bike, your heart starts beating faster, you sweat, you hyperventilate, feels like a flight or fight response doesn't it? Is that disproportionate? You bet. The hill isn't going to kill you, but your primal brain sensing a hesitancy sends your fear response into orbit.

Seth Godin says that, "The resistance grows in strength as we get closer to shipping, as we get closer to an insight, as we get closer to the truth of what we really want."

The truth is that you will never be rid of Matilda. That's just a fact. So rather than spending time trying to exorcise her, learn to ignore her, especially when reality is telling you that you're not in the crisis that Matilda is trying to convince you you're in. Interestingly, when you ignore her, when you climb that hill anyway and feel exhilarated for doing so, Matilda is on a lunch break, nowhere to be found.

The good news is that by pushing ahead, by keeping Matilda's rantings in perspective and being aware of the fear but moving forward anyway, you're building 'courage muscles.'

Don't worry, 'courage muscles' won't make you look like a bodybuilder, well maybe not on the outside. But how cool would it be to exercise those courage muscles so often and so affectively that you wouldn't think twice about ditching that mean girl and climbing that hill, riding the extra clicks, signing up for that time trial? Very cool indeed, I would say. To the curb you go, Matilda!