



Am I having fun yet?

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"It's as easy as riding a bike," my instructor assured me.

Only riding a bike was never this cold. Or this wet. And the board had no training wheels. My roommate's friend Pete had volunteered to teach me windsurfing and I don't know which of us was regretting it more.

"It's really easy once you get the hang of it," he told me, as I smiled back with blue lips. "You just have to get in and try it."

The first step was to battle my way into the slimy black wet suit. After stretching and pulling for 10 minutes I got it on, confident the hard part was over. I felt like Johnny Weissmuller, ready to brave the wind, waves or possibly crocodiles. But I looked more like a seal than Tarzan.

"Now, just watch me," Pete said as he waded into knee-deep water to demonstrate.

First he crawled to a squat atop the oversized surfboard and crouched near the front. He dragged up the water-filled sail with the water-logged rope and tested the direction of the wind. A slight breeze rippled the surface before a full-scale gust tore across the lake taking the board, the sail and Pete with it.

He kept his balance effortlessly as he cut across the gray-capped wake from passing boats, pulling back against the bar to keep from capsizing. He crawled around the front,

whipped in the sail, spun the board in the opposite direction. Minutes later Pete sailed back to the shallows, nary a drop of water in his sun-bleached hair.

"Easy, huh," he said.

"No problem," I mumbled to myself as I ambled into the water, not unlike a chicken about to meet the Colonel. It's just like a bicycle, I repeated. Besides nothing that looked that easy could be that hard.

We started with the training wheels. Pete held the board upright while I got used to standing on it.

Hmm, easy enough, I thought, until Pete let go and the board flipped over and me with it.

"The key is balance," Pete said. "You just have to concentrate."

And after an hour's concentration, I'd mastered standing on a stationary board. I was ready for bigger and better things.

Out I paddled, all alone, ready to solo, training wheels off. I hauled myself up to a crouch, and inch by inch, crawled toward the front of the board. It quivered, wavered, then settled back flat in the water. Stability achieved, I recalled Pete's instructions verbatim. I hauled up the sail, crossed right hand over left, changed rope hand, crossed left over right, braced myself and waited.

And waited. And waited. But no wind. Being becalmed was

one thing Pete had told me nothing about. I looked around, checked my nail polish, looked around. The water lapped gently around my blue-toed feet. So when the big gust came, I was, to say the least, unprepared. The sail filled gloriously, if momentarily. The board left without me.

The water was as cold as it looked, but only my feet and face could feel it through the blubber-like suit.

"Get back on. It's like a bike, it takes prac...," Pete screamed from shore before I went under again.

I paddled dutifully after the board, floating forlornly a yard or two away. The mast had flopped over and the sail had filled with water.

I began again, with Pete screaming encouragement from the beach. It wasn't as easy as it looked. Eventually I got up and the sail ruffled pathetically as it caught a tiny breeze. But I never went fast enough or far enough to get the feeling of flight Pete said he felt. It was getting dark and the meager sun was setting when we finally called it quits.

"You were doing pretty good for a while there," Pete said. "If you get out here a few more times, maybe in the spring when it's warmer, you'll learn to ride it. All it takes is practice."

I only smiled. I didn't have the heart to tell Pete it'd taken me years to learn to ride a bike.