

16. Afternoon Incident

Al occasionally indulged in a search for a better commute route, always an adventure. Tried a new one, which included a long hill with no shoulder, then a big 4-lane highway with a wide shoulder, highway exits and speeding cars, but, 1 of only 3 ways across the interstate for miles. Road planners really stuck it to him with this; took it as an insult, but he reckoned it was worth probing at least once. Why was it when a transportation plan is on drawing board they never consider how someone is supposed to ride a bike there? Is it because there's no list of what constitutes bikeable byways tattooed on their foreheads? Or do they purposefully try to exclude? Inconsiderate or malicious? Maybe a little of both?

If you were to redesign roadways to also accommodate bikes, as a minimum you'd consider:

- Ban free
- Barrier breaks, fence openings
- Continuous roads
- Crevice control
- Erosion deterrents
- Flat runs
- Grates without parallel slots
- No speed bumps or wide gaps in them for bikes
- No sunken pipes or potholes
- On-demand traffic controls
- Over/under highways or railroads
- Parking on left of road, bikeways on right
- Permeable curbs, rollover islands
- Railings at steep runoffs
- Shoulders (always, not intermittently)
- Sensible sight lines
- Smooth pavement all the way to curb
- Stanchions to keep cars out, let bikes through
- Straight lanes
- Well swept

Why did he have to reiterate all 20? It's all spread out in many more words in lengthy bureaucratic FHWA, NHTSA and USDOT documents that anyone can download. Why weren't they already being implemented? Bike nazis profit off these simple points by

producing books and DVDs for sale. They don't do this for actual highway planning, just an ego boost and sense of bureaucratic belonging. Obsessed with marginalia? No, there's huge money to be made controlling roads. As lyrics in Ashley's opera *Dust* hint, "The whole thing is traffic, like a huge dance made up by the guy who decided where to put things." Nazis are determined to wrest peacetime control that leads ultimately to conflict and warfare.

Quietly plodding along well to the right bothering no one, up drove a pair of rude teens in a red Mustang. Teen angst bursts out, giddy on power, slams society, even when those they've encountered after limited experience are graciously supportive. It's a normal teen response, unsure how to act or what to do with their newfound potency. Their clash is generally not against those who are generous and kind, although there are young psychopaths who will kill nice people, easy targets, for bragging rights and raucous kicks. Perhaps these were peerless specimens of natural born killers. At what point should you begin to fear? Driver blared horn and passenger gave him a long, middle finger salute. Then they sped on childishly, ignoring the next red light. Zoom, right through, nearly causing an accident. Indifferent cruelty manifests itself in road rage. Where are police when these things happen? It was clearly intimidation intended to make him feel as if only almighty mo-ves belonged. Any action leveled at an individual or minority is discriminatory and unconstitutional. It comes from the same mentality that commits hate crimes, paints swastikas, or plants burning crosses. Never in his experience had prejudice more meant an affinity for the lazy way out.

What if he'd been an off-duty patrolman, registrar of motor vehicles or vacationing judge? Consoled himself thinking that some day they'll be sorry. Well, the subsequent red light, about a quarter mile ahead, was particularly long. With snarl blocking, Mustang was trapped, so he gradually caught up. He was much meaner and uglier up close than at a distance when being overtaking rudely from behind. Hot-rodders had rather sheepish looks as he cut in front of them, gave them a good eyeing, pretended to memorize their license plate, passed over into left lane, and turned with solo green left signal. Bikes aren't that slow after all, are they? So much for the superiority of a red sportscar, red horse of war, sword wielding destroyers. All those flashy ads are filmed out West in rare pockets where gas stations and gridlock are practically nonexistent.

A vindictive person might post their plate number for police, principals, and their parents to learn what they are doing while

supposedly driving with courtesy. But he believed he'd made his point. Even so, miscreants seldom learn their lessons until it's too late, someone's killed or maimed, and lifelong regrets destroy or haunt expectations, friendships, and peace of mind. Don't they realize their misbehavior just puts them at your mercy? All that heroic crap they show on television dramas, once applied, leaves you with nothing but longing for redemption. Spirited hijinks have a place, but not behind the wheel. When asked, patrolmen speak with bitterness of their rare high-speed chases that often lead to death. For adolescents, aggression producing sex hormones arrive along with driver licenses. Better to avoid all downward spirals. Speed in a cage is just not all that thrilling, a furious hamster going nowhere. You fly 350 miles/hour on a jetliner, but it feels just like a slow bumpy bus ride. You're subjected to more G-force on a roller coaster 1/10th as fast. Bicycling over 35 mph is more exciting.

Takes courage to do something constructive in response to aggression. Organizations were formed to combat hate against cyclists and protest exclusively autocentric road design. They blocked intersections, closed bridges, retaliated randomly, and won attention and condemnation by practically everyone from average individuals to state officials. They model their behaviors on how bicyclists in Beijing interrupt traffic at busy intersections, not by red lights or stop signs but by accumulating a critical mass of cyclists who can no longer be ignored. If you never ride where conditions are inimical, planners and public think you don't need to, will let you detour 10, 20, 30 miles or more just because they forgot to include you. NYC mayor Buttsprawl's backlash was a unconstitutional ordinance, which fines all bicyclists near one another for the slightest offense of any one, though mayor has since relented, even added bike lanes, after realizing bikes take up little precious space. The real culprit was everyone's evil *impatience*.

He knew all about marches—losers, posers, rabble they attract—all looking for action, but not necessarily political action for issue at hand. Made him suspicious of public demonstrations. Viet Nam protesters he marched with never really cared who lived or died half a world away, now drive BMWs, sold out. He wouldn't own a luxury car even if he could afford it. A small pickup truck was more his style, convenience and economy. Was not radicalized to a point where he hated automobiles, as do many cyclists, just preferred a pickup used judiciously. When he suggested a local protest ride, it was with great ambivalence about so-called peaceful demonstrations. Yet he knew that he'd helped change things back in the day, still felt in a subtle way, like a ripple upon still water that

goes out to all humanity. Resistance builds muscles. Because there was a counterculture 40 years ago, people now are more empowered than ever in history. The only thing that will save mankind from bureaucratic, nuclear or viral annihilation is, curiously, *consensus*. People must agree on at least something, if only to recognize and tolerate each others differences and work with them, rather than impose conformity or work against. People are entitled to worship an elephant, a frog, a rock, or an unfelt silence as long as these actual religions don't take over governance, as they have in Iran and, lately, America. Diversity is a valuable source of progress as long as everyone keeps communicating, nicely. Pluralism works when it melds. Nobody achieves satisfaction when they all go off on their own tangents, put nationalism over rationalism.

One Wednesday evening in May, forever known as a revolutionary month after Goya's paintings, he and four others circled city while sixty-four hundred others in 50 locations around North America joined the annual Ride of Silence excursion (ROSe). Since, 3 times as many participate in 300 locations on every continent. It's a slow procession aimed at raising awareness for "sharing the road" with bicyclists and meant as a flower on a grave for those who died trying. Sharing the road not only means motorists operating vehicles safer but traffic engineers remembering that bicyclists are entitled to use roads, too. Ride was widely advertised well in advance. Mayor's office and press were invited. Route covered 2 optimal inbound routes chosen to encourage bike commuting, a 16 mile loop visiting many of city's districts with an emphasis on sticking together and stopping to enjoy notable sights identified on a map developed for occasion. Inadequate publicity and public complaisance were both accountable for so few showing up in his location, but did draw a few bike clubbers and realtors.

The following Friday, some people found their way into city on Bike-to-Work day, mostly by driving to a point inside city and riding the rest of way, a few blocks. Some accomplishment! State-wide, the majority commuted in other directions, but mostly not by bike. Getting those who couldn't avoid city with its frequent reports of mayhem and shootings to actually cycle into or through with any regularity seemed like mission impossible. The more who do choose to, the safer communities become. There were only 2 badly marked routes, both of which seemed forever under construction, crisscrossed by train tracks, and bike lanes pinched closed at spots without advance warning. Completing this insult were a few actual suburban bikeways strewn with broken glass or closed midway for motorway *fabrications*—lies laid at your feet.

Who's to blame? For shame! Roads constantly under construction scare away local residents, potential business, and visitors alike. Good urban planning, quality of life, and sensible growth entice new investment; community decay, instability, or resource depletion drives it elsewhere.

The late Ken Kifer, a long time bicycling activist killed by a drunken motorist, had asked, "What would you rather follow: me doing my usual 5 miles below speed limit in my van, or 15 mph on my bicycle, which you can easily go around?" If anything, ROSe was about discovering ways to encourage bicycling, and making more room for mo-ves by *not* driving. Silence had nothing to do with it; actions speak louder than words, spread to others until they became accepted and commonplace. Government's reaction has been covert surveillance by infiltrators who gather videotape of organizers and sometimes occasionally try to disrupt proceedings, as they do any group that gathers peaceably. "Any society that would give up a little liberty to gain a little security will deserve neither and lose both," he remembered some rebel saying, which turned out to be America's own sacrosanct patriot, Benjamin Franklin. Oh, forget those damned patriots, who are exhumed every time someone's privileges are at all impinged. Patriots can only save you from totalitarian regimes. Perhaps a revolting soup of those battling for independence must again be brought to a boil.

Sitting and thinking, nothing happens. Doing stuff makes your mind race. "The game's afoot." It's an acknowledged high, better than cocaine. "Bring on the noise!" as Björk's been known to bubble. Society and some nagging guilt tell you, "Get back to carrying your own weight." Why endanger yourself for ungrateful partisans? Don't you need to shrug off that safe self in a dead-end craft that's soon to be outsourced anyway? Anthropologists theorize that millions of years ago only those huggers who were cautious and fearful survived, whereas those who took risks might be struck down at any time by cruel chance. Yet this isn't logical, probably biased by modern interpretations of life and work habits. Humans were mostly foodstuff for more powerful predators. Risk takers who succeeded would have thrived, while those who cringed in fear would have been eaten or wasted away en masse during lean times. Wake up to a new entrepreneurial spirit! Be a real hugger. No good at scavenging? There are millions of opportunities, but they don't come calling. You have to ferret them out yourself.

He attended free rides given for similar purposes, if only to extend circle of supporters for his own. But those who offer such protest rides are ambivalent themselves. You cannot hold any group

ride without controversy and jealous infighting. Half of those assembled cower before cars, capitulate to cagers, sanctimoniously try to corral everyone into this mindset, as if they were being paid by automotive interests. A ride he attended was ostensibly a protest against greenhouse emissions. During a late break, its organizer, not used to long distances and probably sore, began rhapsodizing about how she loves being inside cars, close quarters, like living rooms, in which people can communicate, not such an appropriate comment among bike commuters supporting her *green* ride. He reminded her that mo-ves can be confining cages racing at 60, 70, 80 mph and resulting collisions were the 3rd leading cause of death. But there's a point well taken in her ill conceived blurt: people don't meet often enough to share their thoughts nicely. Aimless, distracted drivers comment on sights from insulated environments to captured audiences. Those who do are more likely to inflict harm on others rather than themselves, which serves control freaks and sadists better than freely swarming among others exercising their own privileges and rights independently.

Is civil disobedience anarchism or public service? It's a cautionary statement, to be sure: *Payback is possible*. Just as hard to tolerate crass, impatient motorists as crazed, tire slashing, traffic jamming cyclists. Why aggravate and make motorists hate you any more than they already do? A commuter acquaintance had her rack-locked bicycle vandalized several times, a disaster when arriving after dark and a long day at work in another city. Imagine if you were a law abiding car owner and returned to find a burnt shell where you parked yours? Even if it serves you right, why should anyone pay for scattered slack jawed cretins on either side provoked by automotive prejudice? Costs majority more in insurance, and does nothing to suppress bad behavior, in fact incites retaliations. Bicyclists can remove their bright jersey and revert to ninja black at night, secretly vandalize vehicles of lamebrains who cut them off or force them off roads, and stealthfully get away with it a lot easier than noisy motorists can. Somebody has to pay eventually; all business systems are designed to extract that fee from innocents. Every slashed tire and smashed bike ultimately takes food from infants' mouths and ushers society toward despair. Why not put it right back on victimizers? Let their punishment be money and time, as these are what they seem to value most.

For a while all he did, excluding a few other activities extraneous to this anecdote, was listen to music, recurrently write, ride in between for a few hours, and steer toward stores that sold CDs. [See Appendix for results of this research.] Store visits became

unsatisfactory. There were seldom places to leave bike within tolerable walking distance, no poles or racks to attach a security chain. Only 1 *underground* store he went to let him bring in his bike, so he renounced the rest. Turned out, this good store had most of the esoteric tracts he sought anyway, while others catered to highway tastes. Conventionality for them pervaded everything, inventory, parking spots only for cars, repugnant martinets hired to guard doors and keep out bicyclists. Told one clerk, "If you don't like my bike, you don't like me or my money." Answered another, "Can I move my bike? Can you put in a bike rack?" In neither case was his bike in anyone's way, no hazard, tucked inconspicuously into background. Wasn't about to leave bike outside a mall where teens were loitering on an inadequately small bike rack or confront them to move. Knew what reprisals this would bring. It'd be a wary, weary walk home in the dark past the prison. Retail was dying from repeated rudeness to cash-paying customers. In any case, you can't invite harm upon yourself.

He'd been denied service at bank drive-thrus, told insurance regulations didn't allow pedestrians, even though he was on a lawful, legitimate conveyance. Now understood why people bought items on-line or through mail order, although he'd prefer to buy retail, to lessen transportation costs and simplify corrective action. Face it, delivering a mixed case of CDs to a store was more fuel efficient than delivering single CDs via big brown truck to everyone who wanted some. Overnight impatience carries a hefty consequence. For a single network broadcast of an NFL game, trucks hauling equipment burnt 3,000 gallons of fuel, more than he'd burn himself in 10 years. The show must go on. Tried to be patient with snail mail, as it was delivered daily whether or not you want it. Junk mail wastes all sorts of energy: carrying, delivering, shredding, sorting. You can eliminate most. Send a postcard or letter to Mail Preference Service, Direct Marketing Association, PO Box 9008, Farmingdale, NY 11735-9008. Write, "Please activate the mail preference service", put your name, address, and zip code, and say, "Stop selling my name to mailing list companies." Aware it might just be another scam, he preferred calling sender directly. Never apply for rebates, enter contests, fill out forms, or reply to surveys whether on-line or by telephone, and, of course, never give your address, name, phone or social security number to anyone unless compelled by an employer, financial institution or governmental agency. You can become nearly invisible if you never charge items, go on-line, or order by email, and spend only cash. How do you think sleeper cells resist detection for decades?

After being expelled from mall, he happened upon a vintage car meet blaring 50-year-old Top 40's music. Once vital shells of humans sat around morosely in beach chairs in a remote corner of mall's parking lot. Their cars on display weren't special, just 20-year-old relics. An adult on a bike drew disapproving stares. One car buff approached him and demanded, "Walk that bike around here," as if it were a collection of peerless Rolls Royces or precious Picassos, more like cheap Chevys and Elvises on velvet. When he answered, "No,"—with a tone that suggested, "Go f**k yourself"—this self-appointed mo-ve guardian ordered him to leave this public space. Was already moving away anyway, like an entomologist backing off an insect nest. Considered holding a concurrent bike meet on the same spot, or leading a ride through there next time, just to pique their reaction. Critical Messers might seek out and target such gatherings, stage acrobatic tricks, turn fast figure-eights. After all, what was *their* message? Lovingly displaying fatigued metal dripping pollutants meant, at best, something vaguely disturbing, at worst, an exclusive club you buy your way into on cash and sweat equity with little to be gained once admitted.

If you ride a lot in traffic, you grow contemptuous. Why shouldn't you ride a bike fast through cars and crowds of crossing pedestrians? Why can't they just get out of your way? He enjoyed seeing an amateur video with a gang of bike messengers threading through NYC traffic to the strains of Axl Rose's "Welcome to the Jungle", a number often used during sports broadcasts to convey how injurious action might become for participants. Initial response to video was mixed. Many asked filmmaker, "Are you still alive?" A Humdinger driver threatened to murder anyone who tried to pass that way. Piloting big lumbering land yachts from '50's or '90's brought out the worst in people, turned them into cruel morons or homicidal maniacs. Threatening violence is as illegal as actual assault. Ironically, every year there are more actual homicides and attempts in the City of Brotherly Love than accidental bicycling fatalities nationwide. Bicycling was calmer, quicker and safer while crossing World's most populous and trafficked cities. If more did so, motorists and policy makers would be forced to accommodate them according to federal law. Wherever they don't is a justifiable venue for civil disobedience, protest rallies.

Want a better way to strike back? Be nice to bicyclists. What if they're rich? Who's to say? Forestall or ignore, too, anyone driving up in an aggressive SUV, expensive import or restored classic. It's obvious they spend more time working for their own aggrandizement than attending family or serving community. They have

no desire of helping you; why bother being nice to them? Charge them twice as much, let them wait extra long, or never let them out into travel lane. Give discounts and kindness to everyone driving smaller, more modest, newer cars, whose owners have just supported a healthy cash flow yet deprived themselves through environmental concern. Chevy drivers once routinely cut off Toyoyo owners for not buying national brands, but now there are only multinational brands from which to choose. Toyoyos are now acceptable if not already ubiquitous. So the rich must own 2 cars in order to get decent treatment while slumming. Good. Conspicuous consumption shouldn't concede status or entitle special attention. Let them spend extra, share their wealth. Anyone so insensitive as to flaunt affluence when so many are suffering rates insensitivity in return. Reciprocate! Furthermore, cyclists should take plate numbers and report aggressive motoring. Some precincts have hot-lines. Here's a good use of cell phones. When police hear nothing bad, they assume everything is fine, when they should be hearing each and every complaint. Watching nauseating people complain publicly in perturbed voices reminded him that complaints need to be done calmly yet passionately, not merely in whiny reaction to mistreatment and negligence. It has to be eloquent and purposeful. But you can't simply ignore incidents, either, or you invite harm on the next victim, possibly yourself.

On the very street he turned down after Mustang incident, some weeks later a drunken woman in a Merceless returning from a 5 martini lunch ran over a little girl walking home from kindergarten. Could his complaint have saved an innocent's life? When articulate complaints mount, eventually authorities keep an eye out to catch such offenders, weed them out of their automotive dance marathon. Or they might redesign roadway where incidents occur. Complaint statistics could serve this purpose. He kept a map of the worst local intersections by town, constantly adding entries, as they tried to accommodate ever more moving vehicles by removing parking spots and adding lanes. Statistics show that adding lanes doesn't make motoring safer, actually leads to more accidents. He made his survey widely known; not one official took up his offer to pass it along. When their food rations depend upon it, people will believe any lie they're expected to.

His state's largest school complex is practically impossible to walk to. This auto-centric planning of schoolyards, with places to park cars and spots for busses to discharge riders, but no paths or racks for bicycling, can only exist by design. Parents are afraid to let kids walk to school anymore with twin fears of pedestrian

deaths from motorist negligence and sexual assault by mental defectives, both bolstered by network news. They can whip up fears, but can neither identify offenders, nor incarcerate them for felonies. Should folks start to bike and walk more, they might need extra protection. As long as adults and kids fear traveling in public, police forces can be kept to a lip-service minimum. Police react after the fact. Any taxes left after underserving public can be diverted toward whatever corruption, graft, and pocket lining politicians want and public has no ways to detect. With such schemes afoot across a wide segment of officialdom, nobody's much interested in debating alternatives, especially simple ones. Complexity increases cheatability.

Must never take laws into your own hands. Must always act responsibly. Yet he did instructive things while biking, like cutting off people who protruded past stop signs to block intersections illegally, then stopping and let them wait, so those with the right of way could ease by first. He also ran interference for trailing bicyclists, going purposefully slow so motorists had to stop and let them all pass. Why try to educate bicyclists? Hasn't worked with motorists. What sort of advocacy is this? None at all. Perhaps setting an example and getting people hot was a better teacher, although being a teacher can be dangerous, and, of course, woefully unprofitable. There's enough energy and money to fill this World with light, yet people act over and over in darkness.

On a late summer afternoon near the end of a tiresome century ride, some yahoo was deriving kicks from racing souped up hotrod engine while buzzing a straggling line of weary cyclists. As yahoo peeled out to frighten one group, suddenly drive wheel ripped off car and continued bouncing and spinning into a wooded swamp. Car screamed to a halt on its drum. Puzzled cyclists drifted by looking at this troubled soul stewing in misplaced anger. Yahoo was now going nowhere, waiting for a tow truck, while they were steadily completing a long, healthy ride, a little true justice. One couldn't help but recall all those crude radio hosts who incited this hateful behavior. From this vignette of how anger revisits the angry, bicyclists and motorists alike should recognize the need to elevate themselves above anger, get over it. Aren't you going fast enough? What's the hurry? Consider how long it would take if you had to walk everywhere. Like releasing a weight while treading water, reach instead for an object that helps you float not sink.

Patience is swell when granted to those in need, but not for those competent few who grant it. Consumes time. The quicker you go, the more time you hog for yourself. Those you cut off or

treat rudely have to stand by, offering up a moment of their precious life to let you act as an inconsiderate pig. While you rot in purgatory for ages, assuming you somehow redeem your sorry ass upon your final breath—every righteous person's hope—you'll have time enough, since you'll be there sooner than most, to remember all those who awaited your noxious, odious behavior. There's a look they give, a crooked smile with head cocked, generally reserved for those times they wish to convey, "I told you so," or keeping their impatience in check. Remember this look every time you see it directed at you. Hopefully, someday you'll acquire this gentle grace.

He was mindful that those who complain most are most often themselves the problem. A woman wrote a presumptuous letter to the editor delineating what people do wrong while motoring. Unfortunately, she never considered what instigates these bad behaviors. It's never just speeders, but also gutter runners, left lane settlers, and road hogs such as her. If you as a motorist witness a lot of cutoffs, hand gestures, and other discourtesies, maybe you should consider getting off highway, or stop driving altogether. Is this vituperating against victims? Not if the shoe fits. Traffic flow is a dance best left to dancers. Impatience is a 2-way street. People bring it on by being absurdly dull, dragging details out until they become boring beyond all forbearance, wasting your time. Just keep reading this book if you don't believe it. A mind charged on hi-octane fuel wants to fly. Stuff in its way creates conflict. Busy work, insurmountable piles of paperwork, mundane trivialities, or obligatory attendance begin to chaff like ill fitting shoes. On an infrequent drive to Maine on I-95 in New Hampshire, braking, creeping and sitting gave him leg cramps along with thousands of others trying to drive 3 miles slowly through a \$1 toll. During that hour he tried to estimate gasoline being wasted per minute and lives lost paying for it, then just got angry. They probably collect only 1% of resources expended. Fuel and time waste on that scale is simply deplorable. Such toll collection, totally out of touch with today's realities, should be illegal. Suffering comes in degrees, some of which can be tolerated, some which can't, often because so many sources have a cumulative effect. Too bad all this gets played out on the road, where, unlike on screen or stage, actors die for real.

Even those without decency or dogma have to agree, any absurd pursuit to be first just gets you nowhere fast, robs you of serenity, and saps a little life-force at each instance. While motoring, he often noticed a weaving blockhead later stopped at an intersection behind the next knot of drivers. Get there fast then wait. Over a trip of 15 miles, a 5 mph increase in turnpike speed

cuts only 2 minutes. For most auto trips, since 50% average less than 3.5 miles, speed has hardly any effect, except to exponentially endanger everyone on road at every 5 mile/hour increase. So much for arriving sooner. This trade isn't worth it. What's to gain? The road itself is what moves vehicles expediently. Only interstates and limited access highways, except when thick with competing travelers and tractor trailers, offered effective flow and unobstructed driving during off-peak hours. This spoils motorists for 25 mph side streets with traffic controls at every intersection. One can never make up time on secondaries, and it was foolish to try. Better to leave them to bicyclists and locals, unless you'd simply rather go very slowly. You're given a highway to speed on; do it there.

All transportation demands advanced planning and personal inconvenience. By slowing pedaling he'd already extended his own life. Studies suggest you'll decrease overall mortality factors by 40%, although that doesn't necessarily add 30 years onto a 75 year life expectancy, but does improve quality of life. Like Aesop's crawling tortoise, he was winning over the long haul, trading debilitating speed for better, more hours on earth. Bicycling also doesn't devote time to tyrannical costs of motoring. It's brisker than walking, nearly equal to motoring, all net gain. "Should've got myself some bicycle wheels," rightly sang Ugly Kid Joe. Enrages racing rabbit? Wasn't a tortoise's fault, now was it?

Relations between motored and non-motored traffic had only deteriorated since horses were startled by infernal contraptions called tin-lizzies. Those who move slowly have just as much right to do so as those in a rush, as long as they keep to right, make way, or stay within 10 mph of posted limit, no problem for a bicyclist on flat even with a 25 mph maximum. Everyone must learn to share, a lesson too many misfits didn't master in kindergarten.

