

### 3. Venturing Out

At dinner Al subversively mumbled, “Going to ride my bicycle to work,” as if a threat, as if he meant it, which he did without actually believing it himself. Polite veneers cracked. Hell broke loose. Everyone, especially family and friends, urged against it. “Can’t be done... Too dangerous... 12 miles is too far. Aren’t you afraid of cars?”

Was assailed like Laocoon from all sides by the snakes of apprehension. Pointlessly purchased life insurance. Mapped and rehearsed a quiet route. Bought a better bike. He went down street a few times, as if Bulgakov’s Master expecting sudden danger or demons lurking everywhere awaiting his lunacy. Built up nerve. Made all sorts of plans, half-way, once a week, one-way. Then one Spring morning, opted for not just part but the whole distance roundtrip. Took it all on. Got winded on hills, sensed indignation in unmentionable places, but made it, survived. Even repeated increasingly often, until it was the preferred mode.

Became almost a ritual. Check weather, exchange laundry on off days, pack trash bags of clean clothes, resupply toiletries as needed. Seemed like living as a homeless backpacker. Required arranging, commitment, logistics. Why bother? No wonder people opted for the lazy way; jump in car and carry around chains that bind, plastic yoke of costly comforts, steel garden of earthly delights, surely a kennel for the soul. People hate to expend energy, plan, think in advance. They’d rather carry a snazzy attaché, create an appearance, feel important, make a grand entrance, tell you whatever you’re doing is meaningless, unprofitable, a waste of time. Unless they’ve done it themselves, how do they know?

Had thought he’d meet others doing the same, perhaps youngsters or paunchy middle-agers in need of punishment, but it remained a lonely practice. Seldom noticed anyone, and fewer ever repeating. Made himself a target of ridicule, probably damaging his career, but was it a huge sacrifice? People see you out in cold and think, “What did this poor bastard do to lose his license?” Bicycling *by choice* instead of motoring was tantamount to Amish plainness, being an Alcott utopian, Mormon, Neo-Luddite radical, reactionary throwback, or terrorizing fanatic, unthinkable. But it was infinitely more pleasant than driving, a morbidly competitive and unrewarding activity viewed from a new perspective. And yet it was not so totally different, requiring that you attend to what

you're doing, initially prepare, use same roads, wonder with relief when you arrive how you've again made it, just like driving in that regard.

Unlike motoring, bicycling by yourself was aerobic, decompressing, relaxing, spiritually uplifting. No radio badgering. Felt like he was doing something meaningful: conserving resources, growing stronger, losing weight. Didn't return to his family tense from workday stress, divested himself of it in pacific pedaling. Stress spills into weak wills, stealthfully infects them with anger; best to lose it along the way, shake it off your fur. He experienced seasons again, the bitch slap of Winter, fragrant Spring blossoms raining down, golden ribbons of Summer afternoon roads, oven wafts of sun beaten asphalt, maples coloring the Fall landscape, sensations he'd been missing. Bare trees silhouetted against purple November sunsets reminded him to sort through his duffel for booties and warmer gloves. He noticed how every day was somehow different from the next. Each dawn bike commute could be pegged as completely or partially dark, or dusk bordering on night, a trip requiring lights and special clothing. Bicycling gradually supplanted half of his driven miles, many of commutes, and most short trips. He began thinking how best to bike there, began carrying detailed roadmaps marked in colored highlighters. Nighttime narcosis came quick and sound. Mornings were alert and eager.

The more remote an island, the greater your surprise when something floats ashore, and the more interesting something mundane seems. You'd cherish a condiment bottle and be thrilled by a catalog, the same one someone gluttoned on input tosses overboard as if a rude intrusion on bliss. A bicycle is an island in this way, everything becoming more interesting because it's experienced more closely in an intense sphere surrounding to which you must attend. Motoring is designed for tuning out; bicycling demands tuning in, using all your senses. It forces you to economize, then you suddenly realize this is not a choice for many others. Injustice slaps you in the face, wakes you up. It's a worrisome sign of depression when people being to notice angularity or lack thereof, how something naturally curves, pleasant forms, as if taking a close, last, long look.

Saroyan, once a youthful bicycle newsboy and telegraph courier in Fresno, wrote, "A bike can be an important appurtenance of an important ritual... Out of rhythm come many things, perhaps all things... The action of the imagination brings home to the bicyclist the limitlessness of the potential in all things. Out of the action comes also music and memory. I heard many great

symphonies which no composer ever put to paper and no orchestra ever performed.... As I rode my bike music began to happen to me." Saroyan was addicted to human foibles and life's subtle poetry, so they had a lot in common.

A strange awareness gradually came over him. It was almost as if he began to mix dreaming and waking. Heavy respiration more easily allows a meditative state. Through increased sensory input, images and words came, big fluffy pillows of words, a jumble or salad, scenes from lives or screenplays, words from without and within. While meditating, a phrase or word sometimes suddenly echoed, so plainly as if someone was speaking aloud into his ear. Words consigned to maps rested easier than haunting a mind. Roads with numbers were impersonal compared to a series of named streets commemorating events and people long before your sudden awareness of them. It might seem hopelessly quaint citing intersections and villages by name. Streets had meaning. Names commemorated lives. As experience heightened, it was as if entities bound to the landscape touched his unconscious in some unearthly way. Was this insanity? Or was it all there before, hushed by inert gray matter infrequently pumped with oxygen and masked by the white racket of those steel cages most people call transportation? How had he missed all this before? How can one be so dead while alive?

Letting his mind aimlessly drift, not so much words but images came to mind, as if scenes from movies. They could take any form without context, disassociated bits of some circumstance that didn't necessarily exist, more a fragment than a scene, a single neuron firing. A awful lot of these, accurately recorded, would make a movie, but not one anyone might enjoy. Could be an impression of being frozen in snow and left to die, but didn't die, and a savior comes along to redeem. Or standing upon a flimsy scaffold of rectangular aluminum bars, nothing that resembles a safe deck, but more like the fragile support you get nowadays in everything: acquaintances, life, repose, sanitation, water, work, worship. Or cuttings and leaves spinning in a breeze, a premonition of an event in autumn. As each passes, it's difficult to recapture in words, as if such impressions exerted their own logic and sense independently. Saroyan mused, "Watching the wind work far off on eucalyptus trees was a great joy. Listening to it among the leaves of them when I reached the trees was sweet music." It's that certain something that engages in any distraction, not all details, just the chord struck that reaches your innermost soul, as with divas hovering on

high notes in arias like Handel's "Ombra ma fu, or Tears for Fears' "Women in Chains". The orgasmic passes. Chasing depictions and dioramas wears thin. Content eludes. Writer's block ensues.

Wordsmiths are tormented by strings of meaningless word fragments. Sometimes he awoke in a sweat from nothing more than persistent corporate nonsense resonating in his memories. He was once told by a know-nothing twenty-year-old, "You shouldn't think so much," for him something of a pinnacle of useless advice. How do you achieve this blissful state? Narcotics? His brain was wired for processing 24/7, worked out problems even while he slept. Took him endlessly long to solve any, since he took everything into account. With a high level paradigm, you don't need to, but it better be based upon an indelible truth or you're screwed. A mind streams to its own logic; the poor receptacle of body has to harness this deluge into an inefficient waterwheel of daily subsistence.

In the quiet is where voices came, small memories of dissociated bits of conversations overheard or otherwise spontaneously recalled. If you tell people you hear voices, they will, of course, think you're positively psychotic, unless you qualify what you mean very carefully. It takes a lot of training and utter isolation to clear your mind long enough to hear what a single neuron remembers. Writers were constantly draining pus from mental sores, so how is this any different? Or did one's hearing suddenly become so acute as to pick up a bit of unobserved live conversation at a distance? Some people so cringe from this innocuous phenomena, they forever surround themselves with bustle and clatter, white noise to drown out, "Breathing on your own," or similar phrases spoken in a voice other than the one you've always imagined as yours. Revelations spilled over him in waves of nausea, provoking him to spill it back out, only he wasn't sure who'd benefit by it, certainly not him, or whence it came, angels or demons.

Once people took such visions as oracles, revelations that required interpretation. One could develop elaborate self-fulfilling prophecies around a failure dream, mother image, or seasonal archetype. Dream analysts created a whole language of these, hoping to diagram the psyche, human proclivities, secret desires, when all they really reveal are undigested bits of a movie seen, novel read, or prattle overheard and unconsciously stored. Participants consciously pick up about 15% of what's exchanged, the rest a blurred memory rarely recalled. Some small details are important, but most are not.

When did everyone go from saying sentences, thinking complete thoughts, into thinking in phrases, as if a sentence demands too much of attention and time. Entire languages, French and Italian for instance, fixate upon leaps between kennings, word pairs that take on meaning beyond the words themselves. Like the American idiom, "Turn the page." No longer does it mean flip over a book leaf; now it's, "Move on with your life." Doesn't say that, but you have to have had the experience of hearing it used in context, which apparently almost every American has. Why is this? Songs they hear on radio for free every day?

He had heard, "Easy Like Sunday Morning," incessantly on a long lonely trip across upstate New York's I-90. When one local station's signal weakened, he tuned to the next. "Easy" again. Sunday may be easy, but the rest of workweek surely isn't. Neither is listening to one song that makes absolutely no sense repeated irritatingly, forcing mind into redundant loops trying to uncover some significance. "Why in the world would anybody put chains on me? I've paid my dues to make it." All the more reason: Failures are harder to exploit. The toy train man became an enemy that day for no good reason but a torture of pleasantries, like water, wonderful in so many ways, except dripping from a faucet when you're trying to doze. The real villains were disk jockeys, usually your copilot pal on a long drive, but in cahoots with record producers and paid not to deviate from playlists, which focus on light weight tunes by hair bands, sexy males with manes but not chops. They assume people don't want to hear stuff with substance. The Who's *Quadrophenia* had some fantastic tunes that got little air time, "Is it in my head," "Love, Reign O'er Me". At some late hour for insomniacs a maverick DJ might spin cuts that musicians, perhaps breaking from a gig, would listen to, from artists such as edge probing trumpeters Maynard Ferguson or Miles Davis, or fusion drummer Billy Cobham. Cobham's *Spectrum* (Atlantic 7268) drove him right out of his skin; listen to "Taurean Matador" (recorded at Electric Ladyland and featuring wah-wah to do Hendrix proud). As Cobham says from a drummer's bike throne, "Making music is about truth. An actor plays a part. Music is just what comes out of you." For actors to be heard they must incessantly repeat or scream; squeaky wheels get heard and greased, but you need not be loud and ugly.

If songs must repeat, why can't they be by Bob Dylan, Bob Marley, Jimi Hendrix, Joan Baez, Joni Mitchell, Neil Young, Peter Gabriel, Roland Kirk or Van Morrison, plenty of substance and oozing with integrity. He could listen to Robbie Robertson and The Band's "Wheels of Fire" over and over. The spirit of the living

was in Ezekiel's wheels, and their rims were high and awesome. Human, undiluted, unique voices, they bear repeating, if only to decipher what the heck their mumbled lyrics meant, something of an annoyance at times. Style sells but empathy matters. Neither Christ nor Dionysius needed logic or reason to ultimately attain eternal, international nirvana. Soft Orphic songs that caress and soothe will always be more beloved than military marches and state imposed regimens. People no longer have faith in the power of poetry, "Pen, nothing, hand me an Ouzi!" Many ditties were nothing but lazy songsmiths trying to make a buck, "Let's see, if I make it hard to decipher, people will think it brilliant, and I'm sure to sell a lot of copies." Occasionally, he'd go crazy and blast out Beethoven's strident Ninth or simply beautiful Callas singing Puccini's "O mio bobbino caro" in a parking lot to amazed consternation and angry stares as if a boom box of heavy trip hop beats. Classical stinks of civilized baggage, pop of vulgar imitation. Without depth, any attempt to be artistic appears forced, betrays its shallowness. Artists with real depth aren't widely popular, vaulting cavern cathedrals far below ground waiting to be discovered. Music that markedly suits your jaded tastes will never be widely available, so rare, in fact, you'll only hear excerpts of distant live performances on underground student radio stations off pirate tapes or samples on artist websites, although the latter form of distribution generally eggs on talentless posers ignored by both major labels and miniscule indies alike for lack of commercial appeal.

Instead, mixed in with antiestablishment slogans, phony as the day they were penned, were coke snorted superficialities and polyester pabulum from the dance floor. Such is everyone's mindscape, profane and sacred equally revered, mercenary ambitions aligned with benign causes draped in national flags with appeals to people's better nature. Popular music is an easy way to get heard, push splinter stances, storm against anything without fully knowing the facts, subjugate others by overlooking key data, and thus sow malaise of the soul, all as easy as Sundays in a godless world. Mercifully, it limits your mania into a tidy package for everyone else to ignore. Jerry Garcia wrote, "What for?" across the morning sky." Hendrix knew, "What I want/but I just don't know/how to go/about getting it." Not that Donna and Lionel weren't wonderful lounge singers, it's just, "Is that all we accomplished fighting for freedom?" Singing and dancing are swell, but not much of a substitute for ensuring human rights or overthrowing tyranny.

He was sure Cuban and Vietnamese farmers thought the same after collapsed economies and sanctions by powerful nations. Sometimes in a fight to be free warriors unfortunately find freedom, what it really is, a sad, lonely deserted place with little to nourish them. “In the desert you can remember your name/there ain’t no one to give you no pain.” No pain, no gain, no sustain—dead end. At least you can see death approaching from a distance, if not an extraterrestrial paranoid delusion or mirage.

Being bombarded with rock music probably rots your brain. That rush from a sustained note in a guitar solo that vibrates all your nerves from head to toe is something like a laboratory rat that repeatedly presses a button connected to a stimulating electrode imbedded in its cerebral cortex, then forsakes normal imperatives, like eating or reproducing. Situation is stacked against rat. Naturally, it’ll stimulate itself to death. All other live processes are geared toward seeking satisfaction, and rat only has to push a button, bypassing all pain to achieve instant nirvana. Spells out why people pop pills, or punctuate books with infrequent but analogous exquisite turns of expression. Ahhhh, momentary release. You have to choose to deprive yourself and suffer for its own merits, realize it makes you stronger, results in a future. But there better well be some personal reward afterwards, or all hell will break loose. Companies use this equation, up until that last part, rewards, which they’ll promise but seldom deliver, then discharge their abused victims and hire new ones.

Whatever there is to experience ought to be, as long as it doesn’t infringe on someone else getting by. All peak experiences possess physical limits. They can be characterized as layers of an onion, an overused if apt cliché. Outer skin is dry inertia and inability to raise your head out of the muck of self absorption. Then you begin to notice what surrounds, want to understand it, hope to improve it, finally accomplish something for community’s benefit, that sweet, wet core, if you ever get that far before you’re dead. Getting at the truth is more like an artichoke; after peeling away intervening layers to get to its middle, there’s only something you can’t eat lest it gag and hurt you. All the value is in thorny layers you passed, those little stories strangers are eager to tell but you don’t want to hear. If you’d stop to listen, then achieve something because of it, you, too, become bound to landscape as a name on a sign or a hand who shaped it, imprinting a bit of yourself there, another disembodied voice that tugs in vain at subsequently unsuspecting generations hence, as unappreciated as Captain Cook or Lewis and Clark exploring the vast unknown.

All this occurs every day even though few notice. Plaques are dedicated without ceremonies. Signs embody personal histories of those named, just a carnival of dreams and waking for someone else to discover, a chain of events driving all reality, link after link flying one after the next.

He wanted to tell someone about every minute observation, from bicycling bliss to trials and tribulations: bit of gouged pavement after a downhill turn, inopportune pothole, screwed up grating, sloppy spill of concrete frozen at a tricky on-ramp. Nobody was interested. Worse, words proved futile. A clear image in the mind doesn't translate into a narrative of words. Most books are no more than inconsequential observations, scraps from daily diaries, something writers can't even get right. Indeed, this whole book is full of useless attempts to capture what anyone can experience for themselves by simply pedaling a few miles. Man's done this for millennia, these animated grunts and pointing gestures. "Over hill, food, get some!" Nobody believes you, pays attention, understands what you're saying. Everyone is curious to find out for themselves. It's a wonder mankind has survived for as long as it did, even became the dominant species. When did sharing go out of style?

Considering mankind's successful rise, words must not be totally inept after all, he rationalized. Made him curious about that Tower of Babel and why God destroyed it, and, to boot, made it impossible for men to communicate among themselves, a key source of hostility and strife. Why do anything to set back unity? Actions still accomplish everything, require no explanation when done well, speak louder. Had to show fresh evidence, do something. For what? To perpetuate pointless content creation? Nobody believed in him including himself. To author a book to please others means you have to understand what pleases them, want to please them, want to sell books and take advantage of them. He only wrote because this book was manifest within him; it just came out of his programming. Almost no one pays attention to this urge, because it means isolation from familiars, mental concentration, and unnecessary pain. Yet pain just shifts from one state to the next: not going to take it anymore, suffering while producing, severe reproach afterwards. Pain is pain is pain.

Unless you're in a state of sheer ignorance and isolation, there's always something to talk about, the Human Condition within which you find yourself. People endlessly seek inner peace, but don't realize they influence everything that surrounds them through failures and successes. You control best by becoming yourself the kind of person with whom you wish to deal.

His ambition was to be a sleeper awakened: alert, appreciative, making no claims, neither displaying nor defining himself, never boasting or competing, as if a Taoist ideal. After emptying oneself to become alert, power should flow through. He'd patiently await it, knowing fully that it's something one may never possess.

Suppose his words resonated across a wide audience; would they ask him to fly to some city to elaborate? Laws should require boorish aficionados to install those tiny cameras on their computers, so interviews wouldn't involve distant travel, jetting around, wasting resources. For what? A personal appearance? As if anyone wanted to meet him. Why live by example when it's easier to convince chumps to do just the opposite than you? Al Bore spouts energy conservation while personally wasting it like there's no tomorrow, both at home and by constant travel. Putting that speech onto DVD might have been a net improvement. Can't anyone come up with a constant comparing costs of dispatching defenders to speaker sessions versus shipping quantities of media?

Dreamt once that he'd become famous. Since he was invited on Late Night, he had to ask permission to break his menial routine, a stalemate. No money in fame, you see. Fame has more downside than up: additional restrictions, need for bodyguards, personal trainers, and time all tied up performing like a monkey on a chain for a cruel organ grinder. Maybe all travel should be self-propelled. This would require a strange concept of living, moving from place to place slowly, staying on for awhile, then moving on, seldom to return. Wasn't that how empires were built? Surely, a human mind can cherish an argument long enough to wait for whomever was the source to show up and revisit ideas weeks or months later? Or are attention spans too short? Rock acts generally play giant venues once, fleece fans fast, then move on to another, much like locusts. Wouldn't you welcome Einstein into your home indefinitely? Feed, pamper, shelter him? That is, if Albert wasn't long since moldering in a grave. Death is a leveler. Lucky there are books.

Moving slowly through space and time, rather than a blitzkrieg, is what ultimately prevails. Because time is money, while a rolling stone gathers no moss, does that mean moving deliberately is barbaric and anti-Christian? Motorized Nazis exterminated columns of refugees fleeing on foot and horse drawn gypsies. Their lightning attack was fast because it had to be; a first strike must be decisive and quick. It better stick, because you can't maintain it. Besides, when you're wrong, speed covers everything up. Mercy is ravaged by speed. Beware of standard setters and impatient states.

Anyway, saying things off the cuff was bad. Certain phrases were like hair triggers in a polarized society. Even fans take offense if you question what they cherish. People pressed to perform will do the very thing in their worst interest. Rehearsed lines work better, to which all politicians and other actors will attest, that is, if suddenly compelled into honesty, which seldom, if ever, takes place.

When did society lose its appreciation for a slow, luxurious pace? Czech novelist Milan Kundera asks, "Why have we given up the pleasure of slowness?" Kundera answers with a brilliant observation. Speed gives the ecstasy of annihilating time for a brief moment without feedback from nature. Presumed efficiency denies earth goddess her due. A bicyclist or runner, on the other hand, must plan, monitor muscles and stamina, modify goals, merge with external and internal nature, harder but more rewarding. Never have to hurry if you don't expect to exploit. "Haraka haraka haina baraka" is a Swahili proverb which translates, "Hurry hurry has no blessing." To avoid loss, cyclists must do everything very deliberately, pack bags, stow treasures, zip zippers. Motorists cavalierly toss stuff into back seat or trunk. Motoring may be thrilling yet it's plainly lazy and wasteful. Americans are addicted not only to laziness but pointless distraction, as if their continuous duties to property and self improvement—building public buildings, exercising daily, fixing up private homes and landscapes, transforming long abandoned rights-of-way into linear parks for recreation and transit—were just too dull and mindless to demand their attention. You rush to forget, slow down to remember. Running away is for the guilty; blamelessness is steadily earned.

People defined progress on how fast they could move, made vehicles that sped them along, realized supersonic transport. Not fast enough, they put gigaflop computers on everyone's desk; in a few moments anyone can be virtually anywhere in the World. Yet computers crash, Internet is far too popular and thus, too slow. Even the Concord was discontinued. Bouncing against barriers? So now travelers take an extra few hours to get to Europe, when a short time ago this same journey took days or months. Society isn't slowing down much, racing ever faster on interstates, as if to make up for lost time. Nobody can ease up, driven by demons, supercharged on adrenaline, antidepressants, caffeine, and stimulants. It's almost as though news exaggerates fears and fosters prevailing attitudes of stay-at-home or race-to-place consumerism from which their advertisers profit. Crack monkeys and tweakers are their ideal consumers, wired to act; burn it out, buy more, strew trash by

wayside. The wiring is reinforced time after time, “Just don’t stand there, do something.”

Saw a TV ad that wasn’t selling anything in particular, merely brand recognition that urged, “Speed is Good.” Showed things going fast: boats, bullet trains, busses, cars. Reminded viewer that a quick response is better. Speed not only kills, it personifies evil. “Speed is *not* God.” Slow may actually be holy. Pride is fast, humility slow. Aren’t sacraments bestowed as rituals consuming time in fixed space? Aren’t religions based on books that remain unchanged for millennia? When will woefully late Last Judgment ever come around? He often wrote in a style specifically chosen to confound speed reading. Take a deep breath, slowly exhale a mantra, ooooohhhhmmmmmm, relax. Try meditation and yoga. How can you convince bodies wrapped in soft, warm comfort, minds trapped in inert gray matter, souls ensnared in media stoked misapprehensions? Because terrorists strike quickly, must you?

Computer crashes destroy painstakingly assembled texts. He filled a long document, but it got chewed up by computer and lost. Yeah, a little like saying, “Dog ate my homework!” What an excuse! But how many great works were destroyed this way? It had a bunch of short articles on language and technical writing that would have been of monetary value. That’s what he hated about computers; they always screw up when you haven’t backed up your work. One article was titled “AN Article on Articles”, decrying abuses of the word “the”. *The* has only 10 very specific uses:

1. a particular one or one previously mentioned
2. an exemplary specimen
3. part of an existing idiom (“the same as”)
4. part of a proper name (“The Library of Congress”)
5. to introduce a human group (“the poor”, “the indigent”)
6. first in a list of specifics (“the good, bad, ugly”)
7. to introduce or limit a multipart nominalization or prepositional phrase (“the cross one must bear”)
8. substitute for a possessive (“How’s the/your broken leg?”)
9. introduce an abstraction, ideal, or natural phenomenon (“the Coriolis Force”, “the sublime”, “the 1930’s”)
10. archaic distributive (as in phrase, “25 cents the pound”).

Otherwise “a” or “an” should be used when an article is required or nothing when not. Novices liberally pepper their texts with many “the’s”, as if stuttering, as if getting paid by the word, or aping

literature they've already encountered but not grasped. *The* is the pawn in a chess match of literature, an important but misunderstood piece.

In another article he questioned how editors standardize textual references to values in digits, i.e., 3 instead of three; mentioned 4x4's are not four-by-fours, while constants always demand digits and humans, perhaps animals, too, always words, never dehumanizing numbers. Another endorsed action, verbs instead of nouns; do, don't just sit and smugly recognize. Another warned about parentheses, particularly a single word in parentheses. What does it mean? Is it an equivalent or synonym, higher order of the same thing, reference to something else? You've got to be careful not to confuse people while tossing around parenthetical phrases. They only communicate meaning if they specify a relationship (i.e., "and it follows", "that is to say", "therefore", etc.). Conventions are good when you aim to aid and share, not subjugate.

These articles, about things that only occur to compulsive editors plying a craft, came together fast and disappeared the same way. Wanted to use them as a basis for a lively, relevant book on precision writing, not that such a book is even necessary, since the only ones who'd appreciate it are those who already understand. Symposiums are held for such purposes. The loss dispirited him and he didn't write anything speculative for publication for several years. One might call this cowardly or craven. After all, Edward Gibbon rewrote a volume of monumental 6-volume work *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* from memory after housekeeper inadvertently threw the only manuscript into fire while tidying up. Cartier, a Georgian, had to rewrite his post-presidential memoirs from scratch after a Georgia based company's word processor failed. What could have been a down home marketing coup became a fiasco, and company's no longer in business. Oh, yes, you can fly with computers, but when they blow up and burn, everything is lost, negates speed, just as if an airline crash. But, as these examples point out, there are huge risks no matter which method you choose, and there are always alternatives including the ever popular, "Do nothing."

Speed is a relative constant. When others serving you go slowly it quickly becomes annoying. When you have to stand in line for a very long time, your feet and joints begin to ache; you suffer pain for their sake. If you're sitting restfully in a restaurant, however, it's not as inconvenient to you, but servers going too

slowly cost an establishment business in lost customers; too fast, repeat business. Hostesses go on claiming the wait will only be 25 minutes, when anyone can see an hour or more worth of patrons ahead, because restaurateurs rely on packing them in before a suspicious fire and unscrupulous insurance claim bail them out. People ambling along, enjoying sights, become targets of muggers, get run over by cars. Motorists creeping along cause massive tie-ups, rear end collisions. A reasonable pace seems the appropriate solution, a human pace, neither a hardship nor a race. As populations expand, handling transactions must accelerate. Behaviors must be adapted. Promoters were always trying to change people's behaviors, get in that one extra point they want to make, initiate another shuffle, but instead get lost in generalities and wind up arguing among themselves while decades pass and nothing useful is accomplished. Proper progress slows to a standstill.

Biking advocates face a monumental challenge. During an administration of domestic policy neglect, people become more apprehensive than ever. Red, orange and yellow alerts persist as a daily reminder. Who wants to be outside during a biological attack? As populations grow, price of everything escalates; cities and towns spread their police presence increasingly thin. This endangers not only citizens but police themselves. Large areas in cities were crumbling to economic blight. Cars came to represent rambling bunkers that shut out a disintegrating domain between suburban shelter and urban workcenter. Having shut out everything over his entire professional life, he'd grown more interested in what he'd been missing. Found it worse than he imagined. Began to think it was because so many were shutting it out by driving all the time. You'll never invest effort into that which you can conveniently ignore. One doesn't care about a city one drives hastily through. Only by biking or walking through an area does anyone get any sense of what it's all about. Then expectations are raised, improvements begin. This current administration was despoiling environment, embracing automotive consumerism, fighting for oil, and ignoring ecological and sociological disasters. You lead by example. America's fantasy is great personal wealth built on cheap, slippery oil. This is not a sustainable philosophy, but one China, India and other populous nations are eager to emulate.

Pedaling was repetitive, sometimes contemplative; it either calms one's brain or lets it chew on past pain. Actions do speak louder. Like Dubbubba's war with Iraq. Isn't this the same kind of lunacy as Afghan War that sank the Soviet Union? So, USA may be

better funded with deeper pockets and more technologically advanced, at least for awhile. That won't last once taxpayers are tapped. Would Americans want space aliens coming in and putting them in their place? All rationalizations that led to wartime involvement were just a bunch of declarations, rhetoric, slogans.

Actions shout, but words come before, during and later. Words enable, so they're damned dangerous, and are used more than necessary since all humans arrive half-baked and unproven. Telepathy would be better, especially with instant universal translation. Words are the cubic fragments of glass you find under a car seat once it's been in an accident, spilled everywhere thereby betraying lies, within vehicles not really owned and pampered by little old ladies, but you can never be sure.

