

BICYCLE BOY

By James Collins

Bert B., a compassionate FAA manager, hired a disabled person, sight unseen, using a telephone interview. The person, Michael D., a twenty-year-old college student, was located in Washington and Bert interviewed him from Boston. The manager was quite satisfied with the verbal aspects of the interview and hired the man for a 10-week internship in Burlington, Massachusetts for the summer.

Bert met Michael at the door and observed the new arrival was an interesting young man about 5 feet 6 inches tall who had a bicycle as transportation. The intern asked if there was a place he could secure his bike. His appearance was a little unusual to say the least. He was wearing a full-length fitted powder blue jumpsuit, a blue helmet with extended side-view mirrors on both sides and a flashing yellow light on top. Further, he had bright yellow, vertical stripes on the back of the suit, and he had three bright yellow, horizontal stripes on the front. He also sported a flashing yellow light on his right arm between his elbow and his shoulder, attached by a yellow band. In addition, he secured the suit to his ankles with bicycle clips and wore bright red sneakers. Bert took this gentleman to personnel to log him in, and then walked him over to his FAA desk.

"Michael, do you have a change of clothing with you?"

"No, sir, this is my normal attire for each day."

"I'm sorry, I don't understand. Are you planning to wear the bike uniform all day? I can understand the safety reasons when you're on the bicycle, but here in the office, the environment is very different."

"I was involved in a massive car accident while I was riding my bicycle and I spent three months in the hospital. They diagnosed I have a psychosomatic problem because I will not go anywhere without all the safety gear. That is why they classified me as disabled. Everything that you see on me right now is what I wear every day. However, indoors I do take off the helmet."

About two hours later, Bert was in my office pleading with me to manage this man and hide him in my office complex. As the NISC program manager, I had over 50 contractors reporting to me supporting the FAA on a multiyear contract that covered all 50 states. I was responsible for the six New England states.

"Jim, I need you to keep this gentleman in your area and put him to work."

"Bert, I have no budget to handle this gentleman. I have no authorization to bring him into my area. I don't know how I can help you."

"Jim, I will cover all of his expenditures. I will cover his salary. I will cover every aspect of his existence as long as he stays in your area. He is a major embarrassment, but I have to honor our commitment for his internship. For any cost he incurs, you can bill my operation, and I will accept the charge. This would be a massive favor, and I would then owe you one."

It was in the best interests of my contract to assist FAA managers, especially one with as many political connections as Bert had, therefore I agreed. Then I placed 'Bicycle Boy', as he became known in the FAA region, under Jack McGowan, one of my IT supervisors. To support the IT center, we put him in a back room, and assigned him administrative tasks so he would not move around among the general population helping to repairing PCs. Bert figured hiding him in our area would cause the embarrassment to fade away. The FAA had other ideas and we had a constant stream of FAA personnel from the region and from all the outer reaches coming in to the IT area to view 'Bicycle Boy'. He sat at his desk and did his work with the yellow light continuously flashing on his arm, ignoring all around him and appearing as if he never attracted any attention.

Lunchtime was the witching hour. 'Bicycle Boy' would put on his helmet, turn on the top hat flashing light and with no accompaniment; walk out into the New England Executive Park. The lobby filled with FAA gawkers who came to verify the outlandish stories. However, the *piece de resistance* was when he entered the Burlington Mall to go to the food court for lunch. Elderly people would see the flashing yellow light and frantically look around to see if EMT, police, or fire departments were involved. Small children thought he was advertising a new game or a TV character. Wherever 'Bicycle Boy' went, he drew a crowd.

The 10 weeks eventually passed; 'Bicycle Boy' left and went back to school in Washington DC. Bert became a good friend and he was an excellent contact for new work that turned into future opportunities. The FAA personnel still remember 'Bicycle Boy' and still talk about his unusual dress. It was a nice idea to hire a handicapped person but Bert never hired another person without a face-to-face interview. Sometimes we do learn from our mistakes.

THE END