

THE BIKE RIDER

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By James Collins

Different people have different interests. People like to walk, to run, to jog. People enjoy fishing ,riding in a canoe, waterskiing, and swimming. Others like to skate, ski, dance, exercise and attend sports events ad infinitum. Owen truly loved to operate a bicycle. From the time he was a teenager in the Bronx to his days as a senior in New Jersey, he always liked to ride a bike. Owen was a free spirit, followed his own rules, and ignored those of the government and other entities who imposed upon his freedoms. For example, when he had been in New Jersey for a couple of years he was quite upset that they did not have any formal bike lanes. He complained about this for years and approached local government people to emphasize the fact that he, as a voter and homeowner, should have had the same rights using his bicycle as everyone else did using their cars. He felt that marked off lanes should exist for the riding public. Everybody listened to him, smiled, and did nothing.

Owen studied the matter carefully and decided that a bike lane did indeed exist. However, only Owen could see this. The police in HoHokus New Jersey, the next town over, found Owen early one Saturday morning riding down a major road right in the middle of traffic, between the northbound and southbound lanes. When the patrol car pulled him over to the side of the road, the officer got out to ask him what he was doing. Owen's response was unique, if nothing else,

"I've been complaining to the alderman, senators, and congressmen in this part of New Jersey for years that we need bike lanes. Nothing has ever come of it. I examined the markings on the roadway very carefully. There is a yellow line on the right, which directs northbound traffic, and everybody going northbound must be to the right of that line. Parallel to that is another yellow line, bounding the southbound traffic and everybody must stay to the left of that. In between the two yellow lines is a three-inch wide space, which neither the northbound nor the southbound traffic are allowed to enter. That is just the right amount space for my bike lane so I am using it as a bike lane."

Owen received a summons and after a hearing the local court barred him from ever again riding a bike in the town of Hohokus New Jersey. Since his wife was a court officer in Waldwick New Jersey she made sure, he observed this legal admonition.

A few years later, when Owen turned 65, his children bought him his first new bike. It was December. Growing up in the Bronx he never owned his own bike and if he wanted to go bike riding, he would rent a bike from a local bike dealer. He spoke of these times

with a great deal of nostalgia and happiness and his children decided it was time he had his own bike (as long as he stayed out of Hohokus).

Owen received the bike at a party on Friday night, and was ecstatic about his gift. The following morning at six o'clock, Owen decided to take a ride around the local neighborhood. It did not take long to get up to speed but soon he was literally flying down the empty roads. Parked cars were on both sides of the road as far as you could see but there was no traffic. Owen was in his element with the wind blowing in his face. All was well with the world. As he approached an intersection at a relatively high speed, he glanced to see if any cars were coming in from the side. There were no cars but there was an unseen pothole. At high speed, he hit the eight-inch deep pothole with the front wheel of the bike. Immediately the deformed and deflated front wheel twisted into an unrecognizable shape. Owen flew over the handlebars and luckily landed in a snow pile that helped break his fall. He never lost consciousness but was hurting all over. Owen looked at the bike and knew he could not push it or ride it. Across the street was the house of a family Owen knew. Slowly he lugged the bike over there and stood against the side of the house. Since it was so early in the morning, he didn't want to disturb anyone so he didn't knock and tell them about the bike. Owen planned to come back in a few hours with his car and get the bike. Now, sore all over, he limped back to the house to get help and to tend to his wounds.

Tom Kelly who owned the house where Owen had left the bike came out to get his newspaper and spotted the destroyed bike leaning against the house. He immediately assumed his teenage son had damaged his bike and was hiding it so that he would not hear about it. He went inside, woke this wife, told her about the event. Both of them raised their son out of his sleep and strongly berated him for having destroyed his bike. They also assigned some multi-day punishments while the young boy kept saying he didn't know what they were talking about.

Two hours later, when Owen showed up covered in bandages, the Kelly's were confused and embarrassed. Owen related the tale explaining that he was hurt and had to go home to get some medication. The hour of the morning was so early he did not feel he could disturb the Kellys and had not notified them of the abandoned bicycle. The Kellys told him about the misunderstanding and how they had blamed their son for the destruction of the bicycle. Owen went out and bought a bottle of wine for the Kelly's and a gallon of ice cream for their son to offer amends for all the troubles he had caused. When Owen's family learned of the event, they totally banned him from ever again riding a bicycle in the state of New Jersey.

THE END