

The Rider

by E.S. Kraay

The rider rode his bike in Arizona just about every day and for all the usual reasons. He was remembered for saying that riding his bike was the best exercise he had ever experienced, and that included his time as an Olympic hopeful for the 1972 games in Munich.

But for all the hoopla and jaw flapping about fitness and staying in shape, the rider just flat out enjoyed riding his bike. Rain or shine, hot or cold... it didn't matter. The rider rode just about every day, and just about every day he rode for two hours.

The rider shared with his closest friends one of the great pleasures of cycling just about every day. Over the 25 to 30 miles he would ride just about every day, he would cross paths with sometimes 100 people he did not know. The rider found great pleasure in saying, "Good morning. Hello" to every rider he passed, coming or going.

The rider also shared with his closest friends the only great disappointment of cycling just about every day. Of the 100 or so people he was apt to cross paths with and say "Good morning. Hello" to just about every day, no more than 10, and quite often not even five would return the greeting or acknowledge contact and communications with another human being.

Despite the only disappointment of cycling, the rider continued to ride his bike just about every day, and the days turned into months and years.

One morning before his daily ride, the rider rolled his cart down the aisle of his favorite market. A man of entitlement — often referred to as a member of Tom Brokaw's greatest generation — stood in the center of the aisle.

"Excuse me," the rider said. The man stared at him as if to say, 'You expect me to move out of your way?'

With a disgruntled "Hmmp!" the man took a step back and allowed the rider to pass.

Two minutes later, the rider stood in front of the fish monger placing his order for fresh salmon and swordfish.

"Excuse me," someone said behind him. The rider turned around and standing behind him was the grumpy greatest generation man with arms on his hips in a comically challenging way as if the rider should move.

"You're excused," the rider said and turned back to the fishmonger.

"Anything else, sir?" the fish monger asked as he slid the salmon across the counter.

"Yes," the rider replied, "I would like some swordfish, but this gentleman must be served first." The rider stepped aside with his hands behind his back and head bowed subserviently.

"Wise guy," the greatest generation guy said and walked away. The rider smiled as an image of the Three Stooges played across the screen in his mind.

Two hours later, the rider was riding his bike like he did just about every day.

As a biker in his biking outfit approached from the opposite direction, the rider said, "Good morning. Hello." The biker never turned his head, raised a finger, said a word or smiled. It was such a frequent occurrence that the rider concluded his T-Shirt, ratty shorts and dirty sneakers weren't worthy of the 'experienced' biker's acknowledgement.

He passed 23 other bikers, walkers and joggers and said to each, "Good morning. Hello." Only one nodded congenially in reply.

He looked up and saw the biker who wore the tight green cycling shirt with 'Ireland' he passed just about every day approaching from the other direction. Not once in two years had the guy with the 'Ireland' shirt ever responded to the rider's greeting. The rider decided to try something else to elicit a response.

As they passed, the rider said, "Fuck you." The guy with 'Ireland' on his shirt — though not as old — reminded the rider of the greatest generation guy in the market.

"What did you say?" the guy with 'Ireland' on his tight green cycling shirt shouted over his shoulder. The rider continued on his way.

Next came the severely overweight woman he passed for the last three weeks when she initiated her exercise routine. Bless her heart, the rider said to himself just about every day as he passed her, at least she's trying to get in shape. Still, for three weeks, she had never smiled, waved, said a word or in any way acknowledged his daily greeting. The rider decided to try something else to elicit a response.

As they passed, the rider said, "Hey, fatso. Move your fat ass over."

"What did you say?" the severely overweight woman shouted behind him. The rider continued on his way.

And so it went for 10 miles. As he passed bikers, hikers, walkers and joggers he would shout, "Fuck you," or some other demeaning phrase, and each time his target responded in absolute and violent astonishment.

When he reaches the end of his outbound leg, the rider turned around and followed the same course home. On his inbound leg, the rider assumed the demeanor he rode with just about every day for the previous three years. On the way home, every time he encountered those same people he passed on the way out, he offered his typical "Good morning. Hello."

Typically in the past, they gave no response, verbal, physical or otherwise. This time, for every "Good morning. Hello" that he spoke, he received a hateful "Fuck you, man," and about 34 middle fingers.

The next day, the rider rode his bike like he did just about every day. Six miles in, he spotted the guy who wore the tight green cycling shirt with 'Ireland' printed across his chest.

"Good morning. Hello," the rider cheerfully called out.

"Fuck you, man," the guy with the tight green cycling shirt with 'Ireland' printed across his chest responded as he slowed down.

Five seconds later, a gunshot echoed through the wash.

The guy with the tight green cycling shirt with 'Ireland' printed across his chest shot the rider dead.

