

The Company's Sprinkler Heads

by Sean Brown

"Mr. Brown, you've been convicted by a jury of your peers for committing the crimes of which you've been accused. Before I hand down my sentence, is there anything you wish to say to the court?" Asked The Judge, old and gray, peering down over thick glasses balanced precariously on a thick Nixon nose.

"Say? What should I say?" Brown replied, somewhat uncomfortably, glancing at his lawyer and shrugging.

"Normally this is the time where the defendant apologizes to the victims, or makes an attempt to explain his actions, his thoughts that led him to commit the crime," replied The Judge, "this is the time for the defendant to ask the court for leniency, promise redemption, salvation, something along those lines."

"But I'm not sorry."

The Judge stopped shuffling papers and removed his thick glasses. Brown had his attention.

"You understand that I have a quite a bit of latitude in deciding your sentence, sir? I would be more likely to hand down a lighter sentence should you express some degree of remorse, some explanation for your actions."

Brown and The Judge stared at each other for a moment before Brown spoke softly.

"Well Sir, I like to ride my bike to work."

"What?"

The Judge stared; Brown took a deep breath, looked up at The Judge and continued, a little stronger this time.

"I ride my bike to work year round, and in Minnesota that isn't an easy thing to do. My coworkers thought I was crazy, and when they asked me about it, I told them that I needed the exercise, or it was an easy way to save some cash, or I was doing my part for the environment. But those were all lies."

"Mr. Brown, I don't see what that has to do with anything..."

"I rode my bike year round, in the suffocating heat, in the pouring rain, the blinding snow, even the sub-zero temperatures because I was angry. Because I am angry."

Brown returned The Judge's glare with a steady gaze, confidence building, and his posture defiant. Brown continued,

"I ride my bike in the most miserable of conditions with grim satisfaction, angry because I have not received my mule, nor my 40 acres. I work hard, I play by your rules, even when they don't make sense. I ride my bike because it is miserable a lot of the time. And that keeps me hungry. It keeps me working hard and wanting more. It makes me realize that even on my worst day, I am not just a number, not just a clog in your machine. I am a flesh and blood man, I am alive."

"Sir, I don't see what that has to do with your crime, in fact..."
Brown cuts him off.

"I am alive, and I am hungry. Angry, I want more. I am not content with what you're offering me. Forty hours a week, two weeks vacation. A mortgage and car payments. Wife and kids, a dog in the

suburbs. It's all incredibly unexciting, unsatisfying. Is this what has become of the American Dream?"

The Judge appeared to mull this over as Brown pressed on.

"I ride my bike so that I don't fall into your trap. The mortgages and credit cards, the mind-numbing job that I can't quit because it pays for all this crap that you tell me I can't live without. I don't need it, but at the moment, I haven't figured out what it is that I do need. So though I am not a part of your world, and I will not buy into it, I do live in it. I ride my bike to remind myself to keep searching for more."

"All very interesting Mr. Brown, but this doesn't have any bearing on your case. You've been convicted of felony vandalism and trespass, can you explain your actions sir?"

Brown paused, and slowly looked around the courtroom. The shiny wood paneling of official public buildings had always fascinated him.

"They told me I couldn't ride my bike on company grounds anymore." Brown said quietly. More to himself, and then louder to the court,

"My company is one of the largest in the world, it is found in every country, on every continent. Thousands of workers creating a product that is harmful to millions of consumers. Management treats workers with an open disdain bordering on outright hostility. And the workers eat it up because at least they have a job. And in this country, at this time, that means something significant. And so we put up with the abuse. We slit each other's throat for a chance at overtime, to give up our personal time for a few extra dollars an hour."

Brown smiled, remembering.

"So then they told me that I couldn't ride my bike to work anymore. It was against company policy. My company has a reputation of being socially responsible, but it is all propaganda, more lies. This company spends millions on advertisements and publicity touting their virtues, while they systematically crush their worker's spirits. Every half-assed eco-friendly initiative is accompanied by a million dollar ad campaign. And for years, I'd shook my head sadly, and silently at the hypocrisy of it all. And then they went after me."

Brown's anger rising.

"They told me that employees are no longer allowed to bike on Company grounds for security and safety reasons. But the funny thing Judge, is that there were no employees, there was only me. I am the only bike riding employee at my facility. They created a rule to punish me, to take away my connection to reality. They wanted me to be just like them, to buy into their system."

"Mr. Brown, that hardly warrants what you've done, I..."

"It was raining."

"Excuse me sir?"

"I said it was raining, the day they told me I could no longer ride my bike to work, the day I committed those 'crimes' for which I've been convicted."

"Go on, Mr. Brown"

"It started to rain as I was escorted off the Company's property, one of those good, hard Midwest summer thunderstorms, Judge. I was immediately soaked through my clothes, standing next to my bike on the sidewalk at the edge of the Company's gate, looking over the Company's complex, and thinking those thoughts I've tried to explain to you today. I looked at the Executive's cars, expensive foreign cars, and at the Worker's cars, old American cars, just hanging on, same as their owners. And all those thoughts of

arrogance and hypocrisy, the Death of the American Dream, and the struggle of the common man, my own struggle. The lies."

"Its sounds as though you understood."

"I understood, Judge. I understood about the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' and what it takes to keep the masses in their place. I stood in the rain, understanding the control, the lies that fuel our existence... and then the sprinklers turned on. The Company was watering the grass during a downpour."

"And so...?"

"And so I rode my bike home in the pouring rain one last time, and thinking all these thoughts. As I put my bike in the garage, I saw my old 3-iron sitting next to the shovels and rakes and all the junk that a person keeps in his garage."

"Then what Mr. Brown?"

"Well Judge, I grabbed that 3-iron, and I rode back up to work in the pouring rain and soaked to the bone, I lined up and then knocked 37 of those sprinkler heads off before the cops used a taser on me. Perfect line drives Judge, I used to be a pretty fair golfer in my day, and after I was sitting hand cuffed in the back of a police car, soaking wet and burned from the taser, I looked out the window at those broken sprinkler heads and somehow I felt a little better."

"I smiled Judge, because there's a million more just like me."

