



# SPOKE 'N' WORD

OCTOBER 2009



*"Life is motion."*  
-Aristotle

## Void closed with a partner

### VELO GEARS

WRITTEN BY TIM COBLE

### Sometimes a ride is more than just a ride

I imagine it was a warm summer evening, probably just after dinner in those golden hours before the coolness of the evening sets in.

Out to the high school and back, or, if we were feeling adventurous, up to the top of the hill to take the big loop around our corner of town, with maybe a stop at the park on our way back home.

I don't remember the details

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of the last bike ride that I took with my big sister, because when you're ten or eleven you don't think in terms of anything being the last time you'll get to do something.

You just dive in, with the assumption of perpetual opportunity that is the great indulgence of childhood.

Then, seemingly overnight, everything is different. Siblings grow up, go to

college, get married, move away, have kids of their own and send those kids off to college.

Maybe someday I'll look back and appreciate the symmetry of how life plays out from one generation to the next, but at this moment I'm still looking back, trying to figure out where all of those years went and how there came to be this void that separated me from the very first riding partner that I ever had.

Ironically, cycling has been largely responsible for narrowing that gap. What began two years ago as a summer project to build a bike for my nephew

eventually grew into helping my sister to train for an MS ride – that is, as much as I could help from nearly 800 miles away.

I spent the summer offering training tips and encouragement via e-mail, vicariously enjoying watching her ability as a rider and her confidence grow, even as the busyness and complexity of life ate into my own riding. By the time the big event came and went, she was hooked on cycling and I had rediscovered my sister as a wise, funny, determined and amazing person.

Suddenly, riding with her again was something that I needed to do again. In part because we now shared a common love for the sport, but even more significantly, because riding with my sister had somehow become symbolic of the new connection that we had been building over the last few years.

As a late-summer trip to visit the East Coast branch of my family began to take shape, so did plans for our ride.

Before itineraries were organized and hotel reservations made, the route for The Ride was laid out and both of us had begun making mental lists of long-postponed conversations

that we would have as we pedaled along the winding, hilly roads of Amish farm

### **Bike Rodeo set**

The annual Hermitage District Bike Rodeo has been scheduled for Oct. 31 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Donelson Christian Academy.

The Bike Rodeo is open to Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, Brownies and Girl Scouts and their siblings.

The concept of the rodeo is to teach young riders the importance of safe riding techniques, minimum safety equipment and proper operations of bicycles.

By providing a few short classes along with practical riding experience, young riders will gain confidence in the application of riding techniques. Scouts also can work on merit badges.

The event will begin with a bicycle inspection and will include stations in safe cycling techniques, proper use of helmets and equipment and an obstacle/bike handling course.

A 10-mile ride will follow at 1 p.m. to assist Boy Scouts in earning their merit badges. For additional information, contact Meg Hodge at [meghodge@comcast.net](mailto:meghodge@comcast.net).

country in southeastern Pennsylvania.

“That’ll be something to talk about on our ride”

became shorthand for both casual catching up and weightier, more personal topics that couldn’t be relegated to e-mails. Though we’ve never discussed it openly, I think we each had a lot invested in that ride, and the anticipation of it got us through some difficult days.

We were unusually subdued as we rolled out of the driveway.

It took several miles to find the rhythm of both our pedaling and our conversation. But as the serene beauty of that Sunday afternoon played out and those pent-up conversations ticked off with the miles, something special and unexpected happened.

All of the sudden I was riding my bicycle with my big sister and, after thirty-some odd years, it was once again the most natural thing to be enjoying on a summer evening.

We had grown up into very different people, with lives that are as full and complicated as adult lives are. We each had cares and concerns that were too deeply felt to share even after all of those months of anticipation.

But for those few hours, none of that mattered. We

were kids, and grown-ups, and friends, and siblings, and cyclists; and no matter what else life happened to be throwing at us at the time, this one thing – this bike ride – was the shared, childlike pleasure that we both needed it to be.

I’ve enjoyed a lot of amazing experiences as a cyclist, and the sport has been at the center of some of the closest friendships that I’ve ever had.

Cycling has taught me lessons about myself and has given me opportunities to accomplish things that I’m proud of. But even if I continue to ride until I’m old, grey and unforgivably slow – which I have every intention of doing – I doubt that I’ll ever have another ride that I’ll look back on as fondly as I do those 45 miles that I rode this summer with the person who inspired me to get on a bike for the first time all those years ago.

Thanks, sis. I can’t wait ‘til the next one.



## Those mags just keep on coming in mail

**WRITTEN BY** GENE HAWKINS

You’re sitting there, reading your favorite magazine

*Bicycling*, when into your lap falls one of those annoying cards offering a discounted trial subscription.

Before you drop that card in your mailbox, let me share with you a recent experience.

I’ve been reading *Bicycling* since I started riding in the mid-seventies. Off and on I’ve subscribed, but usually I just buy an occasional copy at the newsstand. But last year I returned one of those trial subscription cards.

Hey, it was a bargain, and the card was even postage paid. Fortunately, I sent my payment check with it – more about that later.

For the next year I received convenient monthly issues of *Bicycling*, plus bonus copies of *Mountain Bike*, just like the card promised. After a year I got a few renewal offers, but decided not to renew the trial subscription. I get too many magazines already.

Then one day I got an unpleasant surprise in my mailbox – a letter from a New York collection agency. North Shore Agency Inc. said I owed \$21.94 for a subscription to *Bicycling* magazine. This was no “friendly reminder” letter either; it was

unpleasant and intimidating and insinuated that further action would be taken unless I paid the bill immediately.

I was dumbfounded. First of all, I checked with my bank and verified that I had in fact written a check for the subscription, and that the check had been cashed. Next I phoned *Bicycling*’s subscription office in Iowa. After a lengthy wait on hold (“your call is important to us...”) I got a customer representative who explained it.

When I returned that trial subscription card last year, I had unknowingly agreed to automatic renewals. That meant my subscription was automatically renewed every year for all eternity, unless I took action to cancel it. So when I didn’t renew, they didn’t just stop sending magazines – they turned me over to a collection agency.

A bit of Googling quickly revealed that I wasn’t the only victim of this scam. I found numerous posts on internet forums by readers who like me had been suckered. Most of the complaints mentioned that same New York collection agency, and involved magazines from Rodale, the publisher of *Bicycling*.

This scam is so malicious

that the Consumer Warning Network has issued a video about it. You can view the warning video on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EnTCRbXS338>

Having wised up to the scam, I immediately canceled my “forever” subscription, both by phone and by snail mail. (Several posts said the company ignores e-mails.)

I also notified the collection agency, also by snail mail, that I disputed the bill, and demanded they furnish substantiation. I hope I’ve heard the last of them, but it’s possible I haven’t. I know that collection agencies can be persistent, and they can damage credit ratings, even when a bill is fraudulent.

I’m sharing this with you because I suspect that many of you subscribe to *Bicycling*. It’s a pretty good mag, and I’m not suggesting you stop reading it. But if you subscribe, I’d suggest a little caveat emptor with this publisher.

First of all, I’d call the subscription office (1-800-754-2907) and make certain that you’re not on that automatic renewal deal. I’d follow up the call with a letter, too.

And secondly, I’d never make payment by credit

card. Some of the posts reported that unwanted subscriptions were charged to credit card numbers which the publisher kept on file.

As for myself, I might still pick up an occasional copy of *Bicycling* on the newsstand. But as for subscribing, I’ve learned my lesson. Never again.



## **ON THE ROAD** *WRITTEN* BY NICK SULLIVAN

### **The end of two romances**

I’m sad to say that my torrid six-month romance with greenway riding is on the rocks.

I hate this, as at first it appeared to be a marriage made in heaven. I mean, a quick coast down Bonnabrook to Lebanon Pike, then a half-mile in the bike lane to Stones River Road and a good 20-plus mile loop without dealing with automobile traffic opened up before me.

After two or three weeks of this, I was hooked. Until a couple of weeks ago I thought I had said goodbye to the terrors of the road forever.

So, what’s happened to disrupt this cozy little arrangement?

Well, to be honest, greenway riding didn’t provide me with the



—NICK SULLIVAN Photo  
This sign really means what it says.

carefree feeling of safety and security that I thought it would. In fact, it is downright dangerous and stressful out there.

I think I recall reciting this litany once before, but I’ll say it again. You’ve got to constantly be on the lookout for pedestrians of all sorts, including groups of walkers who want to take up the entire greenway, mothers and fathers pushing kids in strollers while talking on their cell phones, adults on rollerblades and kids on skateboards and scooters. And, then there’s some of the rudest bicyclists I’ve ever encountered.

Metro Parks recently imposed a 15 mile-per-hour speed limit on bicycles on the greenways. I think this may be too liberal. You

never know when you round a blind curve what's going to be coming at you in your lane.

What led to the final breakup, however, was those darned bridges. When those signs say "slippery when wet" they mean it. I've ridden years at a time on the roads and not had an accident of any sort. And, I've never been hit by a car. Knock on carbon fiber.

But, twice this season I've gone down on a wet bridge. And, when you go down, you do it fast and hard. You don't even have to be going fast, either. Just a slight touch of the brakes will throw you.

I know the technique when you come to a wet bridge is to coast through it, but my two mishaps didn't permit that. The first was on one of those zigzag bridges, and I guess I came onto it a little too fast. Tapped the brake, and wham-o. Butt on ground. The second was on a crowded straight bridge and I had to touch the brakes to keep from hitting somebody else.

Fortunately, I wasn't hurt seriously, but I had enough bruises to keep me off the bike for a week or so.

Metro has finally decided to get to work finishing up the Stones River Greenway and

has closed Stones River Road.

This closure has forced a trial separation between me and greenway riding and put me back on the roads. I have to say, I'm enjoying it. Once I get out of the heavy traffic areas, I can ride along for miles of relaxed, carefree cycling.

I'm not saying I'll never ride on the greenways again, but when they reopen they will just another of my bicycle routes.

#### **Another romance ends:**

This edition of Spoke 'n Word will end my two-year term as its editor, a labor of love that I've truly enjoyed. But, two years of my grumblings are enough. I've groused and complained about everything from modern bicycle technology to greenways, from bicycle touring to the weather.

I've complained out, and it's time to hand the reigns over to someone who may be more in tune with the Veloteers and the state of bicycling than I am. I mean, two of the bicycles I ride are older than a lot of members of the club.

I don't know how Tim Coble does it. He has turned out lively, instructional, entertaining, philosophical, insightful, and sometimes tender columns every edition. Tim has been a

rock, and I could always count on him for good column. I hope the membership has enjoyed reading Velogears as much as I have. Tim, I thank you.

I'd also like to thank Jennifer Gholson, who has helped me out on numerous occasions with good reporting and photography, and to all the other Veloteers who have contributed material over the past 12 or 13 editions.

As for William Anderson, this newsletter would not be possible were it not for him. He helped me early on to learn the rudiments of online publishing, and has come to my rescue numerous times since as the final authority before these newsletters go to press.

Finally, perhaps an apology is in order. Well, I won't call it an apology but an explanation. It was my intention when I took over the newsletter to be at and report on a lot of club events as they happened. Alas, this didn't happen. I spend most of my weekends these days caring for my three-year-old grandson. I'll have to say that is more fun and important than bike riding (I used to think that nothing else was). And, trust me, I get a lot better workout. Hope to see you on the road, or the greenways.