

Funny Bike Story

by Edward Keebler



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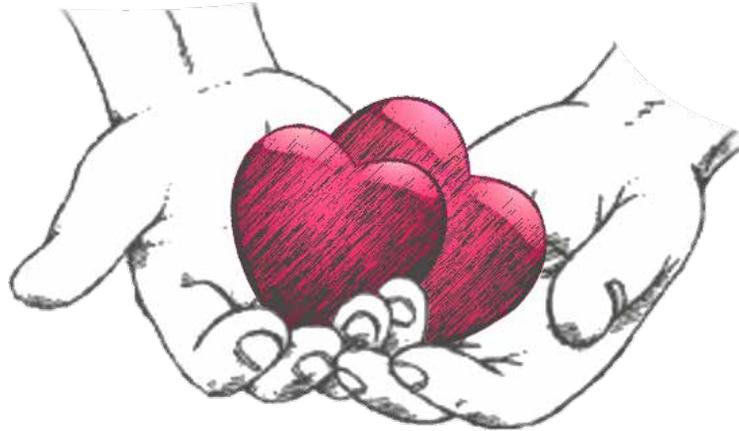


I had just become acclimated to the fact that I was middle-aged when almost out of nowhere I began to receive unsolicited correspondence from AARP and other organizations that cater to senior citizens. Senior citizen? That's a moniker for old people, isn't it? I'm not old. Well, sort of not old anyway. Admittedly, I do enjoy the discounts at the movies and at some fast food restaurants but even when I ask for the discount, secretly inside I feel like I'm scamming them. Really, I'm not that old.

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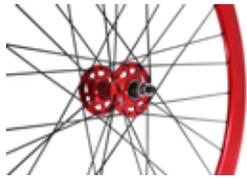
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I had just become acclimated to the fact that I was middle-aged when almost out of nowhere I began to receive unsolicited correspondence from AARP and other organizations that cater to senior citizens. Senior citizen? That's a moniker for old people, isn't it? I'm not old. Well, sort of not old anyway. Admittedly, I do enjoy the discounts at the movies and at some fast food restaurants but even when I ask for the discount, secretly inside I feel like I'm scamming them. Really, I'm not that old. There must be a way to prove to myself and the world that I'm still capable of participating in normal, non-old people events. Scientists claim that men my age only produce ten percent of the testosterone once produced in their youth. They must be wrong! My ego hasn't diminished with age so the testosterone has to be there too, right? Male logic doesn't necessarily have to be fact based, it only has to fit the scenario. Perhaps completing a long-distance bike ride is the evidence I need to deal with this nonsense of growing old.

I woke up five minutes before my morning alarm was set to go off at five, ate a very light breakfast and arrived at the Oceanside Pier as the eastern horizon began to glow with the light of a new day. By the time I lined up with over 2,000 other riders in the 50-mile, "Bike the Coast" event, visibility was excellent. Those near me in line were very chatty and notably excited. There was a racing team from Italy, another from France and me... go team Lakeside.

So as not to congest all the public roadways, we were released in waves. Waiting in line allowed me opportunity to dialog with several people. Those I spoke with were very polite but I noted their consistent downward glances. I knew my fly wasn't down because it took considerable effort to squeeze my frame into padded riding shorts. This garment comes with no plan of escape and no fly. For a guy, it's like wearing Spanx with a couple of women's hygiene products stuffed into the bottom. It's not a pretty site but fifty miles of familiarity with a bicycle seat shaped like the nose of a dolphin demands drastic measures. Not that I'm old, but I do understand that with age, anal sphincters weaken and the last thing I need to worry about is being penetrated by a bicycle seat at mile thirty-eight.

No, their downward glances had nothing to do with my fly, it was my bike. It's obviously a trail bike and judging from the rest of the crowd, only one of a handful here. They were very polite—overly polite, but looking back, I think they were trying to warn me or at least give me a heads up. One twenty-something guy spoke to me with a concerned look. "Umm, sir..." (why do they all call me 'sir'? I'm not that old) "Sir, what kind of bike do you have there? What's the gear ratio?"

I was in line for less than five minutes. The event hasn't even started and I'm already being called out as a rank novice. What else could I say or do? I came clean and confessed

like a good Catholic, "Yeah, this is my first biking event... like, ever. I don't know anything about gear ratios. Until nine months ago, I hadn't ridden a bike since about age twelve."

The young man looked at his girlfriend who jumped into the conversation, "Do you have any electrolytes or energy candy? What kind of fluid do you have?"

I thought to myself, Electrolytes? Energy candy? What are these people talking about? In desperation to correctly answer at least one question I blurted out, "I have water!" The couple looked at one another again and then looked away, almost in horror. I couldn't tell—was it because they were embarrassed for me or that they knew I was doomed and they couldn't bear to watch. That had to be it. I was a cadaver on wheels to them.

My wave departed and I found myself riding with a gregarious IT guy from Northern California. He stayed in a hotel near Poway the night before and pronounced the name of the city with a long "o" as in police. I knew straight away he wasn't a local boy but I did enjoy his company for the first six or seven miles. About then is when we entered into the first stretch of hills and it was then that I began to reflect on why the young man was asking me about gear ratios. As I ascended the most difficult part of the hill, I tried to find a lower gear and there was none. I found myself huffing and puffing up the small incline like the character in the childhood story about a little locomotive, "I think I can, I think I can." All the while, everyone is passing me by.

"On your left... on your left," seemed to be the phrase of the day as I hugged as closely to the road's edge as possible. My fellow travelers were not just passing me, they were gracefully cutting through the wind as the nearby gulls patrolling the beach. Their fancy road bikes didn't clatter and cling during gear changes... they seemed to glide. They hummed past me, enjoying the view, no sweat—twice my speed.

The first major hill was physically demanding, the second, psychologically demoralizing. I must have reeked of desperation. The people were so kind but every other person seemed to look over and say, "Sir, are you okay?" If I had the breath, I would have told them not to call me sir, because I'm not that old. As it was, the best I could do was muster a nod that I was fine. I really wasn't fine because I was beginning to realize that I still had forty miles to go. I finally understood what females mean when they say they're fine. When it takes more energy to explain something than finish it yourself or having to admit to the obvious, being fine is the less taxing alternative.

By the third hill I must have appeared so obviously tormented that people stopped asking if I was okay. Instead, they looked at me like a physician who was forced to inform a patient of a terminal prognosis, "Sir, do you need any electrolytes? Energy candy?" I dare not admit to ignorance on top of everything else so I remained silent and dispelled my potential rescuers with a pleasant nod. At this point, I still didn't know what electrolytes were but if they provided me with some super power, I was ready to stop at the next market and pick some up.

I honestly thought I would never make it to the halfway point and rest stop. One of the local bike shops provided an array of cut bananas, orange slices, trail mix and icy sticks. I was seriously considering taking my free snacks and going home. The temperature was over ninety degrees by now and I overheard people saying the route was really fifty-two miles, not fifty. To my good fortune, while nearly passed out against a shaded wall, I met Gabby and her friend Leanne. It took Gabby all of thirty seconds before she offered me a cube of chalky substance containing electrolytes. After I consumed it she handed me a packet of energy candy and told me to take the whole pack. She and her delightful British friend watched as I downed the magic formula. I didn't immediately feel better but the duo seemed so intent on helping me that I felt obligated not to let them down. After we rested the three of us set out together. The first hill on the way back was like a slow death but the two ladies were right there with me, not giving me the opportunity to quit. I made the first hill, then the second and was finally over the most difficult part of the return route. I never saw them again after that but I know I wouldn't have made it without them.

At about the forty mile mark my stomach began to gurgle and I realized I probably needed a restroom break as soon as I crossed the finish line. I'm not sure if it was the heat, which was now pushing the mid-nineties, the snacks, electrolytes, or the bag of energy candy but something wasn't right. I was now facing a new challenge. In addition to having little strength left in my legs, each bump in the road represented a knock on a door I didn't want to open.

The directional signs pointed off the main roads and back down toward the pier. Less than two agonizing miles remained. I was confident I was going to make it at this point but I wasn't sure as to my condition. The road turned down to the beach bike path and I could see the finish line only a half mile away. I tried going faster and sprint to the finish line but I didn't have the strength. The photographers awaited us at the finish line and I had originally intended to raise my hands and smile. At the last second I concluded that the risk was too great and if I lifted my arms I would somehow relinquish what little control I had left of my sphincter. I didn't want my finish line photo to display a frantic, wide-eyed look while mouthing the word, "Oops!"

I coasted across the finish line, perhaps with a grimace on my face, but I made it. I was pretty beat up, light headed and glowing with a slight sunburn. My hands displayed an odd tan line in that my fingers, from the knuckles to the fingertips (the part of the hand tucked under the handlebars) were significantly lighter than the rest of my hand. My hair was matted to my head but even after removing my helmet, it felt as though I was wearing it for several hours after. On the drive home I found it difficult to break away from being in "bike mode." Subconsciously I sped up on the downhill portions of the freeway as a means to use the inertia for the next incline. Once home, I intended to lie down for only five minutes before taking a shower. I woke up four hours later, cleaned up and satisfied my rare craving for a chocolate shake. Would I do it again? Maybe when I get old... but not with a trail bike.



This photo was taken after a grueling 50-mile bike ride in record heat along the coast of San Diego, California. My hair is matted to my head, I'm sunburn, dirty and exhausted but it was a grand adventure and I got a good story from the experience.



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Edward Keebler Spirit Driven Author

Edward Keebler grew up in the rural community of Lakeside, California. The small unincorporated town is located in San Diego's East County. Keebler felt a call to ministry early in life and after high school, completed his undergraduate studies at Vanguard University, divinity school at Fuller Theological Seminary and doctoral studies at Boston University. He served in pastoral ministry for sixteen years, including six years as a reserve Chaplain in the U.S. Air Force and three years as an active duty Chaplain in the U.S. Army.

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