

Write Your Life

A micro memoir writing project

Write about something new that's maybe not improved.

Guts

There's a kid. It's a summer morning. The sun is out. He's wearing shorts, a t-shirt, and a baseball cap, perched on his bike in front of the grocery store. I see myself at that age.

I was there once, out for a joy ride on my bike.

Except this bicycle doesn't look like the one I rode. This is kid-bike 2.0, or 3.0. This is next-gen bike. It looks like a motorcycle, the off-road version we called a dirt bike. On the side of this kid-bike's seat, in block caps, I see GUTS. A brand name. An invitation to be bold, to grab risk by the ears and slap its face.

Sometimes a slap is called for.

One afternoon we're walking down Walnut Lake Road, on the sidewalk, when a kid on a next-gen bike comes from behind and goes flying past us. Another day we're walking up a gentle hill on the sidewalk next to Lone Pine Road, approaching a bend, when a kid on a bike rounds the curve too fast and runs us into the weeds.

"Hey!" we both yell.

Do we hear these bikes coming?

No, we do not. They're electric and they're fast.

"Sorry!" the rider doesn't say. Or if she does, it's inaudible, her words traveling at the speed of sound plus electric bike speed in the opposite direction.

"Get a bell," I say to Tizi. "Or a buzzer."

"Use your words."

In the days of bikes 1.0 there were motorized bikes. We called them mini bikes. The frame was smaller, the wheels were half the size. They came with a gasoline engine that took you for a ride. I rode one once, on a sandy road up in the north woods and in jubilant motion skidded and fell off it. I sat up in a plume of dust and examined myself. I was okay.

Yesterday, waiting in my car at a stoplight by the fire station, I watched two girls crammed on one e-bike come wheeling around a corner, going places, no need to pedal, no work to do. My grandfather used to say, on a bicycle you run your legs off to give your butt a ride. Kid on a bike, run no more.

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I would want one if I were that age. I would ride faster than my legs could take me. I would want to feel the juice, I would exalt in it.

These last few years I've spent a week in Italy, in a town on the Adriatic, in August. Every day my daughter and her kids ride their bicycles to the sea. It's a town of bikes, with two-lane bike paths. I tag along with them. The bike I ride has a bell, which I make use of, probably too much. *Coming up behind you. Ding. I see you crossing the sidewalk. Do you see me? Ding. Can I pass you? Ding.* The ding is careful, it's gentle and polite. One year I dinged and pulled out to pass, got going too fast, and cracked up. My fault. My injury—a dislocated finger—could have been much worse, maybe even fatal.

GUTS. Both riding and walking feel more dangerous. Ding won't fix it. But it would help.