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GLAD ABOUT A LOT TODAY

John Fergus '74

Round and round the wheels spun, the spokes flashing as they caught the sunlight. The new tires sang as they sped cross the pavement, and the gears whirred as they churned through the freshly greased teeth. A bright orange needle climbed slowly around the speedometer, passing black numbers one by one, and then dropped suddenly as the bike quickly slowed for a turn, the unworn brake-pads squeeling loudly. Then the needle rose again as the bike accelerated and climbed up through the gears, again all sounds and motion, flashing red and chrome.

Jimmy watched his shadow speeding along the pavement. He moved closer to the curb and it started jumping up over the curbs, down onto the driveways, up on the curbs, down on driveways, up and down, darkening the grass, pavement, mailboxes, trees, everything it covered. He could see the blurs where his spokes were, and the black rings that were his tires. They bent and twisted as they passed over things, so that sometimes they were round, and sometimes they weren't. He could see his sneakers stuck in the straps of the peddles and his bare legs pumping up and down, but he couldn't tell which leg was which from the shadow. His "racing" T-shirt was flapping; catching sometimes on the comb in his back pocket. He looked, but couldn't see the STP patch in the shadow. He also couldn't see his red hair or his freckles, and he was glad about that. With shadows, everything was in black and white.

Jimmy's stomach growled; it was lunch time. He turned into his driveway, swung his right leg up over the seat and coasted into the garage braking slowly, not wanting to skid. Walking across the drive towards the back door, he carefully stepped over all the black streaks he had made on his old bicycle. Somebody had told him that it would be bad luck if he stepped on any. Then, he remembered who had told him, and slapped his shoes down on them, being sure not to miss even one.

"Hey Mom I'm home!" He let the screen door slam and winced waiting for his mother to yell. There was no response. He walked over to the counter, tipped the cookie jar and lifted off the lid. It was empty. He clanked the lid back on and pushed the jar back.

"Hey Mom!" pause "Hey Mom! I'm home!" There was no answer. He scuffed over to the basement door. It squeaked as it opened.

"Hey Mom!"

"Yes."

"I'm home."

His mother's feet kept the beat of the washer as she came up the stairs.

"Hungry?" she said, and shut the door.

"I just want some cookies."

"No sandwich- no cookies. What kind do you want?"

"Baloney."

"Mayonnaise and mustard?"

"Nope. Just baloney and bread."

"And a glass of milk."

"And a glass of milk- and cookies." He ran upstairs while his mother fixed his lunch to look for his bicycle lock again. He looked in his closet, under the bed, in all his drawers and on all of his shelves. It wasn't in the room. Looking around for the last time, he remembered that he hadn't checked the closet shelf, and dragged the chair noisily from his desk to the closet.

"Jim! What are you doing!" his mother shouted, from the foot of the stairs.

He climbed up on the chair, reached one hand up, and started feeling around.

"Jim!"

"Nothing!" Baseball mit. Dirty socks. Old tennis shoes. Hat. Comic books. Dirty shirts. Finally he felt a chain. Pulling on it he saw the blue plastic covering of his bicycle lock. He yanked it out, dragging the hat, a sock, and one tennis shoe with it. He jumped off the chair and ran down the stairs, stuffing the lock into his pocket.

"Hey Mom- do you have the combination to my bicycle lock?"

"It's on the bulletin board."

"Where?"

"Under the schedule of your Scout meetings."

"One. Five. Seven. Seven. Nine. One, five, seven, seven...nine. One five seven seven nine. One five seven seven nine." he said softly, trying to memorize it again.

"Did you find it?"

"Yep. One, five, seven, seven, nine." He sat down at the table and played with the placemat until his mother placed a glass of milk and a baloney, lettuce, mayonnaise and mustard sandwich before him.

"Sandwich first, and cookies later."

Jimmy inhaled the sandwich, then gulped down the milk. In return, he was given a half dozen Oreos, which he proceeded to unscrew and scrape the centers out of, leaving the black ends on his plate.

"See you later, Mom." he said, rising from his chair.

She caught his shoulder and placed him back in his seat. "Wait a minute young man. Where are you going?"

"Out riding."

"By yourself?"

"Yep."

"Can't you find anyone to go with you?"

"Nope."

"Well- don't be late for dinner."

"Okay- bye" He ran out the door and let it slam behind him.

"Jim!"

Trouncing again on the black skid marks, he dashed across the pavement smiling, his sneakers slapping at the pavement. He kicked up the stand and swung up on the seat. The tires squirmed and squeaked on the slick concrete of the garage as he slowly turned around. He sped down the driveway and braked just in time for the

curb. On the street again, he took off.

He headed down towards the high school, which looked all empty and black. He was glad that school was out, and glad that he didn't have to go to high school for four more years. He was glad about a lot today. Glad about the weather. Glad about not going to school. Glad he wasn't in high school. Glad it was summer, and especially glad about his new bicycle. He looked at all the windows and saw his reflection as he passed by.

The traffic light changed from green to red, and he shifted down through his gears before stopping. He reached down and clicked his generator so that it rested snugly against his tire. The light changed, and he slowly peddled away listening to the whine of the generator. Looking back he saw that the tail light was all bright and red. The faster he went, the brighter it got. When he stuck his hand in front of the headlamp, it reflected a white circle of light with a small dark center. He moved his hand around, but the dot stayed in the middle of the white circle. Leaning over the handlebars he saw that the "Gold Star" sticker was still on the glass. He turned down Edgemont, and headed out for Jon's house, hoping that Jon would be there, so he could speed by and not even look until called.

"Is that yours?" Jon would say.

"Yep."

"When did ya get it?"

"Yesterday."

"Geeze- it's really sharp."

Boy, would that fix Jon for all the things he'd said about Jimmy's old bike. But then, thinking again of the black streaks on the driveway, Jimmy changed direction. He'd show Jon some other day.

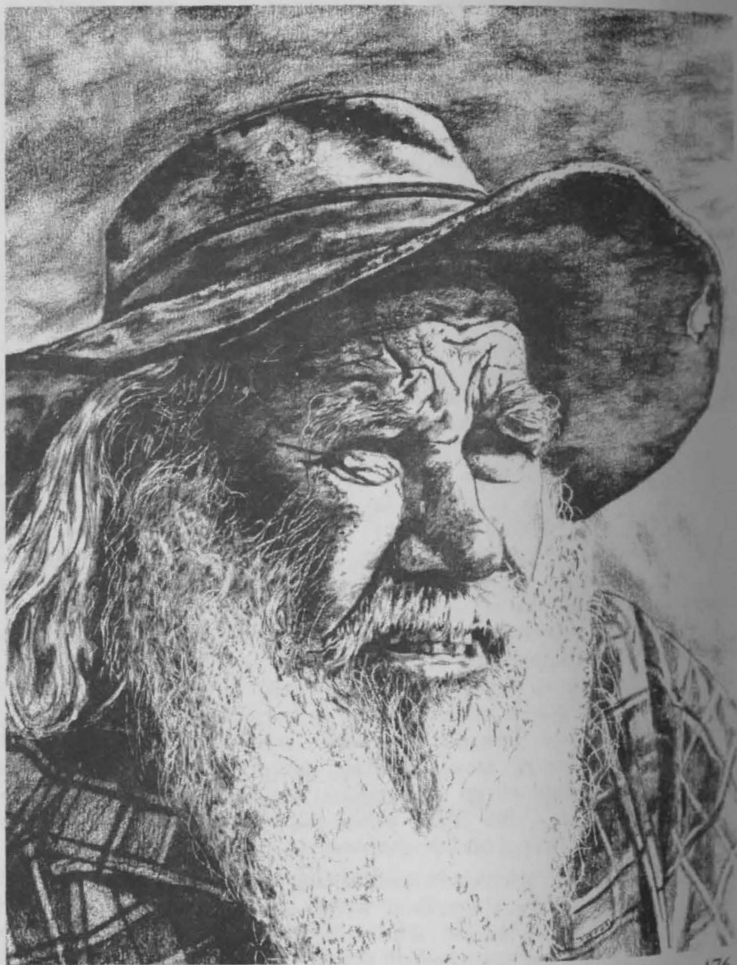
There was a brand new store in the Kingsdale Shopping Center. Jimmy dropped down off the paved parking lot onto the gravel and headed for the main doors. It was too hard to peddle through when his legs were tired, so he hopped off and pushed the bike to the building. He locked it to the rack, and checked it twice before going inside. Once in the building, Jimmy jumped on the escalator and went upstairs to look for the car models. Several cokes and several hours later, he came back out.

As Jimmy unlocked his bike, his stomach growled. Dinner time. If he didn't hurry, he'd be late. He laced the lock around his handlebars and locked it tightly in place. Then, he pulled the bike up on the sidewalk to get a running start at the gravel. Pumping quickly, he zoomed off the sidewalk and began popping through the stones. As the bike began to slow, he stood up so he could push harder on the peddles. In the effort of pumping harder, he pulled the handlebars to the right - the front wheel dug into the gravel and the bike stopped, pitching Jimmy off into the stones.

He landed on his right shoulder and rolled over once. His right arm and leg were cut up, and white streaks showed where stones had glazed his skin. Tears came to his eyes, but he fought them and did not cry. He got up slowly, looking at his bike. The front wheel had dug itself into the gravel almost up to the hub. The handlebars

had twisted in line with the tire, and the left brake cable had snapped. Carefully picking up the bicycle, Jimmy saw that the red paint had big chip marks and that the glass in the headlamp had cracked. The gears were all right, but the black grease now looked grey from the white dust. The leather seat, twisted sideways on the frame, was all gouged and scratched. The sun settled behind some trees, and the dusty chrome looked grey.

Riding home in the dark, Jimmy watched his cobwebbed light shining on the pavement. He coasted up his driveway and slipped into the garage by his father's car. He walked slowly across the pavement scuffing his feet, but was careful not to step on any skid marks. He gently opened and closed the screen door, and burst into tears in the lighted room.



Pat Victory '76