



# THAT IS NOT WHY I RIDE A BIKE

BY KYLE BOGGS

**W**e watched our cars sit in the driveway. My small silver one hardly recognizable under mounds of snow and ice, the antenna poking through like a periscope under winter's blanket. And, when winter gave way to spring, we noticed that Joe's green one was literally becoming part of the local eco-system, with bees living in the tailpipe, and something growing out of the wheel well. His battery had been dead for at least two years at that point. I killed my battery early that winter when I lost my phone charger and needed to use the juice from the car.

**It had been years since either of us drove a car regularly.** After all, living in Flagstaff, we recognize we are privileged enough to live in a city where the air is clean, and nearly everything we need to live can be found within a 5-mile radius. **Fed up with dropping over a \$100 every month for insurance and even more to keep it registered, not to mention the costs of oil changes and the occasional part replaced, just to let it sit in the driveway, I eventually sold my silver one. Joe cleared out the cobwebs and gave his green one away.**

We ride our bikes year-round in Flagstaff, and have seen many winters come and go from the view behind our handlebars. **When I meet someone that hasn't taken the time to relate to this kind of lifestyle, I'm always confronted with the same questions.**

**In no particular order, here are the answers:** two words — bike trailer. There are shuttles, buses, and trains that will take you anywhere you want. Primarily long underwear, waterproof pant covers, a good pair of gloves, and a facemask. It helps to know that during the windy season, the wind blows hardest during the afternoon. A good tarp. Your body warms up quickly, and you'd be surprised to feel how badass you actually are. Studded snow tires (you can even make them yourself). No, I don't wear spandex. I avoid riding on Milton if I can.

Snot washes right off ...

I've read many articles over the years that make various arguments to people about why they should ride a bike, however, none of the typical reasons keep me in the saddle.

Indeed, while typical benefits to riding, like feeling healthy and not trashing the environment, might get people to get on a bike, it doesn't keep them there. Generally speaking, people don't like to exercise. People like to play volleyball, go on hikes, and ride bikes, but exercising? No thanks. As soon as it is exercise, the bike becomes something folks feel like they should do, rather than want to do. **By thinking of a bike as exercise, there is a built in guilt factor that develops, having people say, for example, "oh, I know, I should ride my bike more."**

The beauty of commuting everywhere by bike is you never have to think about getting exercise, instead you're just getting to work, or going to the grocery. **Indeed, it is the exercise component that is built into the bike, not the guilt.**

And I think most people know that the ride-a-bike-to-save-the-world ploy is largely bullsh\*t. As writer and independent scholar **Kirkpatrick Sale** wrote a few years back when "going green" became such a fashion statement, rather than a political one, "The whole individualist what-you-can-do-to-save-the-earth guilt trip is a myth. We, as individuals, are not creating the crises, and we can't solve them.

"Take our crazy energy consumption. For the past 15 years the story has been the same every year: individual consumption — residential, by private car, and so on — is never more than about a quarter of all consumption; the vast majority is commercial, industrial, corporate, by agribusiness and government. So, even if we all took up cycling and wood stoves it would have a negligible impact on energy use, global warming and atmospheric pollution."

Ride a bike because it is healthy, and empowering. Ride a bike because it doesn't require destructive infrastructure, foreign resources, labor, and wars. Ride because being on one means you are never stuck in traffic and cops don't really pay attention to you.

Mr. Sale continues, **"I mean, sure, go ahead and live a responsible environmental life; recycle, compost, ride a push-bike; but do it because it is the right, moral thing to do—not because it's going to save the planet."**

Never in these articles do I see reflections explaining the reasons why I ride. **I ride because it makes me feel more honest, more alive, and more, well, human. But it's more than that.** When the weather is at it's worst; when I'm pedaling with everything I've got against biting Northern Arizona winds, battling the sting of freezing rain — eyes squinting, centered on the road ahead — I do not get jealous of drivers, cozy and dry, atop heated seats. Instead, through an intimate connection with my own mobility, I'm in my own world, reflecting on thousands upon thousands of years of human experience.

I think of a long history shaped around disease, famine, and imperial violence as well as times of great abundance. The rhythm of the crank becomes a drum and the trance is my tap into the collective unconscious of my ancestors. It is here that I contemplate the weight of millennia, of migration, of exodus, where the reality of their resilience feels more like memory than a sense of unity.

I remember navigating thrashing waters with wind-burned faces, fleeing violence under cover of dark over vast prairies, negotiating the sharp rock of deep canyons; images of calloused hands carrying babies across rivers, setting out in the desert with only a vague notion of where the next water source would be. I remember being fully exposed for great lengths of time to every natural element imaginable.

**And I know that the same wind moves through me; that when my heart beats ferociously, it is their blood flowing through my veins.**

So, yeah, I have no problem riding to the grocery store for food. In fact, when motorists who are angry, yelling, honking, and crashing into each other but still look at me like I'm the one from another planet, I actually feel quite privileged to be able to get around town so efficiently on my own steam.

Granted, not everyone can commute everywhere by bicycle. Not only are regular cyclists privileged to live in a city like Flagstaff, but we're able bodied, don't have children, and we don't have jobs that require us to haul items like large tools. **The truth is, many people, especially college-aged students, share many of these privileges but still choose to sit idle in traffic and drive, even when they know many destinations can be reached quicker by bicycle.**

I do not blame folks who do not ride because they're scared of cars. However, while automobiles kill a little over 700 cyclists a year, and an average of one or two per year in Flagstaff, it doesn't compare to an average of 40,000 people who are killed by automobiles every year. Whether you drive, or walk, or ride, the fear of a careless automobile slamming into us is a fear we all share.

When you ride a bike, being passed by cars going 40 or 50 miles an hour, the violence that surrounds every detail of car culture becomes fully illuminated. **"People aren't connected to their own violence,"** says Joe. **"When nuts hit the bolts, we're all trying to stay out of the way of cars."** 🚲

**Kyle Boggs can at times be seen delivering — by bike and trailer — the paper you hold in your hands right now.**  
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