

## Truttmann's memory lives on for bicyclists

By Peter Flucke

*The following article appeared as a guest editorial in the Green Bay Press-Gazette on Nov. 26, 1999. On July 24, 2000, Lee Niles, a 42-year-old bicyclist from Glenmore, Wisconsin was struck and killed by an intoxicated motorist on Brown County road G. The motorist's blood alcohol level was 0.208 percent - more than twice the legal limit for drivers.*

Leading Jim Truttmann's funeral procession on my bicycle was a surreal experience.

The sole cyclist, I slowly rode down Webster Avenue towards Woodlawn Cemetery in Allouez, followed by the hearse carrying Jim's body and two dozen cars carrying Jim's family and friends.

Out front, I was alone with my thoughts. There was more to this ride than burying Jim - this was about honor and respect.

On Dec. 2, 1998 at 11:05 p.m., James Truttmann, 40, was riding his bicycle eastbound in the 2300 block of East Mason Street when a drunken driver struck him from behind and killed him.

I first met Jim in 1997 as a student in an Effective Cycling Course that I taught. (Effective Cycling is a nationally recognized bicyclist education program.)

When Jim first walked into the class, I was somewhat taken aback. A big man with a long, full black beard, he looked more like a guy who would ride a Harley than a Schwinn.

He sat quietly in the corner, taking in every word. He rarely spoke, but when he did it was with great deliberation.

It turned out that Jim knew far more about bicycle mechanics than I did. With saintly patience, he helped classmates work on their bicycles. A bond of mutual respect and friendship formed.

Jim's main mode of transportation was as unobtrusive as he was. He bicycled everywhere. He regularly biked the 26-mile round trip between his Finger Road home and his job as a teaching aide at Northeastern Wisconsin Technical College. He was commuting home from work the night he was killed.

Bicycles are legal vehicles in Wisconsin and bicyclists are entitled to ride on any roadway at any time as long as bicycles are not specifically prohibited and as long as the bicyclist is following the law.

Jim was a trained bicyclist and was riding legally. In fact, both Jim and his bicycle were lit up far in excess of what the law requires. A police officer told me that, "He (Jim) was so well lit up that only a drunk could have hit him." And that is exactly what happened.

Joseph Jauquet, with a blood-alcohol level almost twice the legal limit (0.185 percent), said he never saw Jim when he ran him over.

This tragedy has very little to do with the fact that Jim was a bicyclist. The drunken-driver's victim could just as easily have been a pedestrian or a family in a minivan.

Roads are not the exclusive domain of motorists. In fact, pedestrians and bicyclists were on the streets long before motor vehicles were invented. However, with increasing populations and sprawling cities, motor vehicles have taken over our roads. This makes co-existing increasingly difficult for those who cannot, or choose not to drive.

Education of all road users is part of the solution but even more important is fostering an atmosphere of mutual respect.

People standing in line for a movie give each other more respect than those "sharing" the road.

I had not planned to lead Jim's funeral procession. I rode my bicycle to Jim's funeral because I knew he would have ridden his bicycle to mine. Only after I arrived did Jim's mother, Donna Truttmann, ask me if I would take the lead. It was an honor.

*On Saturday, Dec. 2, 2000 I will be riding my bicycle to the Peace Tree near the fountain in Admiral Flatley Park on the east end of the Ray Nitschke Bridge in downtown Green Bay. And, at 11:30 a.m. I will pull off the road, lay my bicycle down and light a candle to honor Jim and Lee's memory and to the hope that we can all learn to respect each other's rights, especially the right to live.*

Come join me. Walk, roll, bicycle or drive. But even if you do not come, please show respect and courtesy to all of us making our ways there and back. Share the road and remember your actions affect the safety of those outside your car. Let us all get home alive. Do not drink and drive!

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