

Accidents Happen



Krankenhaus (Hospital), Maria Lassnig, 2005

It was time to go out for a ride with my pal again, we've been riding together now for over 30 years.

We don't do anything dangerous any more. The days of skirting along cliffs in Moab with a 300ft drop just feet away, are small specks in the rear-view mirror and we feel we have earned the right to a more benign experience.

So we stick to gravel paths on the top of dykes, we stay away from treacherous surfaces and conditions, like a 74 year old and a 76 year old should do.

Because there's very little traffic out his way it's best that I toss the bike in the back of the car and drive out from Vancouver. In about 30 minutes you're on the edge of the wilderness, right about [here](#).

Lovely day, sun is shining, we stop after an hour to get lunch at an old drinking haunt we used to frequent and where we used to end many of our epic Sunday rides into the mountains.

It's called "The Gillnetter" pub and many's the time I've left that place with too many beers inside me to face a very difficult ride home on my bike, with absolutely nothing left in my legs ... but I digress.

Fatefully the pub is closed for inhouse dining because of Covid and so we decide to plough on, we can get lunch once the ride is over.

This is as good a time as any to tell the reader about my crash history with my pal Mike.

It seems, over the years that, statistically, a ride with Mike means there's a good chance that I'll end up with blood all over me, his or mine doesn't really matter. Although, to be honest, I crash just as much when I'm out on my own.

We had a saying "If there's no blood, then it doesn't qualify as a ride" I crashed in Moab, smashed my saddle in two, I crashed in Bend Oregon and split my helmet in two and pretty much every ride we went on had some sort of wound or bruise.

Yes we lived dangerously, very dangerously in retrospect and we're both lucky to be alive and able to walk. The third member of our tribune actually died on a ride with Mike and that harrowing story is [told](#) in "My Friend Les" in an earlier article I wrote for this site

So there we are, fully matured and now responsible cyclists choosing the safe way to get our enjoyment. I should mention that the last time I was out with Mike just some 7 months earlier did result in yet another crash but this only resulted in minor (but painful) damage, skin off my elbow and ankle with a six-week healing period.

I hadn't yet figured out that clipless pedals don't allow you time to get your foot out onto the ground and therefore when you go over you hit the deck with nothing to break the fall.

Let me tell you, I've figured that out now.

Back to the chase, we're on the dyke chatting to the people as we passed, talking about how it's so much better that we don't take risks. Somebody told us that there was a Momma bear and her cub about a kilometer up the dyke but that it was on the other side of the slough, so nothing to worry about. You couldn't paint a more idyllic scene, mountains and wilderness in the background, totally unspoiled river flowing slowly by and then ...

BANG!

Our handlebars somehow got enmeshed and we both went down onto the gravel like two sacks of spuds, Mike to the left, me to the right and that, my friends, is the end of our day! I'm writhing in agony having snapped the ball joint at the hip end of my femur and Mike's writhing in agony 'cos he's taken most of the skin off his leg from waist to ankle.

Fortunately, there's a lot of people around, one of whom is a nurse. She immediately does a triage on us and finds that Mike has suffered no breaks but that I have a broken hip and I'm one step away from the knackers yard.

The good news was that I could feel both of my legs and wiggle my toes, the bad news is that I couldn't stand up and the pain was excruciating.

The ambulance was called but the ambulance service was on a "go slow" because they reckon they're overworked.

So, I was lying prostrate on the dyke for an hour and a half before they arrived, the sun beating down and the anxiety building all of the time because the bystanders reported that

the Momma bear and her cub were getting closer. Good job it was a warm sunny day and they were busy feeding on blueberries, otherwise I might have looked like a promising meal.

Next thing I know I'm in Meadow Ridge hospital in front of a wonderful surgeon named Dr Patel. He shows me the X Ray and sure enough it's broken just like the nurse said it was.

Now it comes flooding back to me that just 2½ years earlier I'd gone down in a similar crash in my own back yard, the bike went out from under me and, locked into the pedals, I landed on my left hip, cracked my pelvis in three places, my left femur and the socket joint were cracked also.

This one was on the opposite, right, side and was much, much worse. Dr Patel had to put in a rod with a new ball joint at the end, surprisingly, after all the abuse it's had, the socket part was clean as a whistle.

Out of surgery, I came to and was panicked because I couldn't feel either of my legs ... but after an hour or so the feeling returned. What does a stupid person like me try to do when that happened? Well he tries to get up doesn't he ... and falls straight over onto the hip that had just been repaired .

They rushed me to the X ray room again and miraculously the rod hadn't shifted, if it had I would have been in that place for months.

As it was they discharged me after 5 days and I was never so happy as to get out of the ICU ward, not a moment too soon. The other patients were all geriatrics like me but in much worse stages of pain and decay, it was night after night of them crying out in agony and discomfort.

One thing you learn very quickly in the ICU ward is that it's only an emergency for you, for the medical staff every day is another day at the office. (Not that they weren't

inexhaustibly caring to me.)

One of the patients, who was 89 years old (I overheard his medical details) had fractured a vertebrae in his neck. The poor guy was in so much pain that he repeatedly asked them to give him a pill that would end it all, I wasn't quite at that stage but believe me, there were moments when I would have gratefully swallowed one.

Now here I am in my 5th week of recovery, shooting pains down my leg, shuffling around the bottom floor of the house, not yet allowed to drive and certainly not allowed do anything strenuous. It's a slow and haphazard process, this getting back to normal and it's not the easiest thing to do to sit down and do nothing all day for a person like myself. But I've learned that doing nothing means JUST that, and straying from the mantra means debilitating setbacks.

But there is plenty to be optimistic about, Mike's wife herself had a double hip transplant some 18 months ago and today she trips around like a young girl. Maybe I can trip around like a young girl too if I heal as well as she did.

Mike is luckier, although he still had a very painful road rash filled with bits of gravel that take months to flush out. But he's a tough guy, shaves with a chainsaw, cuts his hair with a hedge trimmer, does his nails with an industrial grinder and sleeps on a barbed wire mattress.

The last recovery took about 5 weeks but this one's gonna take maybe three or four weeks longer although today it's remarkably improved. If only I can find the key to the lock that my wife's chained me to the chair with I think I could get out and do a few laps.

I have cleaned my bike and discovered that I've got four broken spokes in the rear wheel, I've dug out some old fashioned pedals with toeclips so I'll be swapping them over once I get moving properly again. There's hurdles to overcome

but the alternative is sitting in the easy chair and watching reruns of the Kardashians.