

MY TRIBE

It's a Sunday morning, and I grew up Catholic, so of course I'm getting on my bike. Sundays are my holy days of cycling obligation! I'm late to everything, and I live at the northern tip of Manhattan, so it's 35 minutes of fast and sweaty pedaling to make the eight miles from home to the Boathouse in Central Park, our inevitable meeting place. And the guys are waiting for me. We exchange pleasantries, or a hug and a kiss, or all three.

"Honey, have you been snorting meth again, you're skinny as a rail!"

"I started going to Front Runners. Christ, those kids are all 22 years old. They could be my grandchildren!"

Camp is our currency. The Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert communicate with clicks. We communicate with hyperbole.

And who are we? I think of us as a tribe, my brothers and sisters. These are the people I hold close to my heart, my gay family. Family are the people who come to visit you in the hospital, and these guys have had plenty of occasion: forearm fractured when I was hit by a car, leg infection from a severe case of road rash.

And what is this tribe? My tribe is Fast and Fabulous, the queer bike club in New York. A few of us do actually ride our bikes; many more are those who show up for the monthly dinners. When folks ask about us, I tell them that we're an eating club with a cycling disorder.

And who's in the tribe? Paulette, who grew up on the island of Jamaica, is a veteran bike racer with thighs so big they have their own nicknames. She was once kicked out of a women's race because the officials thought she was a guy. Mike, a new guy in the club, sent me flowers when I was recovering from my most recent surgery. John and David, my queens from Queens, are a big help running the bike club. Mark and I used to get up early on weekdays and bike a loop in New Jersey as the rising sun turned the great gray bridge a rosy shade of pink.

Terry is an internist, Neal a dentist, and I'm a physical therapist, so we joke that the three of us could handle any medical emergency. Eric and Gerry are partners and culture vultures, but Eric is the champion punster.

"It got lost in the male? Oh, Bob, that's rich. No, I like the one about the club scene. He got lost in the maelstrom!"

Lots of our banter has to do with manly cyclists cruising by. Geez, did you see the butt on him? Oh, baby, stuff him, but check out the rear end on Miguel Indurain! *¡Dios mio, las nalgas tan amorosas de este hombre!* We repeat sprinter Marty Nothstein's indelible words to *The New York Times*: "My butt is so big that I have to buy pants two sizes too big and wear a belt." Who but gay men and bikers get to talk about how big their asses are? And we, doubly blessed? We get to talk about ass all the time!

Bob Nelson has been a member of Front Runners New York, the city's LGBT running club, for 21 years, and founded the Fast and Fabulous Cycling Club, a subgroup of Front Runners, in 1994.

BIKING IS LIKE CHRISTMAS

As an urban cyclist, I don't let cold weather deter me. I dress in layers and I'm good to go. I also like to dress up my bike. Those are two reasons I love Time's Up!'s annual "Lights in the Heights" ride, a leisurely bike ride to see the over-the-top Christmas decorations in the Dyker Heights section of Brooklyn.

The afternoon of December 14, 2006, was particularly balmy, so a big crowd turned out at the ride's first meeting place at City Hall. I cruised up on my bike, Maid Marian, with my pug dog, Olive, in the front basket. Everyone loves my bike, dolled up with a Christmas tree, wreaths, bells, tinsel, and a NOEL sign on the front basket. And everyone adores Olive too. (She's fantastically cute.)

So a feeling of joy is kicking in, even before the ride starts. To spread it further, I have brought bicycle carols for everyone to sing. In years past, we have made up lyrics to Christmas carols en route. By the end of the ride, we've come up with some good stuff, but because no one writes it down, we have to re-invent the wheel the next time around. Well, this year I'm ahead of the game. I hand out a smattering of copied lyrics.

The sun hasn't set yet, but I'm already wearing my blinking red nose à la Rudolf, Olive has her antlers, and we are READY! Don't you just LOVE the Christmas spirit! Trudy, the ride leader, discusses the ride's route and rules, and we are off over the Brooklyn Bridge.

No matter how many times I bike over the Brooklyn Bridge, I'm always amazed by the splendor and resilience of the bridge, the faces of cyclists and pedestrians sharing a center path above the automobile traffic, and the dramatic views. The struggle on the way up makes the coasting down all the more fun—as long as the tourists remember to stay out of the bike lane.