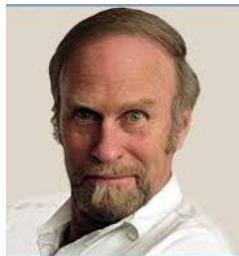


Arrested for Having Too Much Fun

By Frosty Wooldridge



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"When something becomes too much fun, the government will move swiftly to tax it. Disgruntled Taxpayer

Outside Vicksburg, Mississippi on Route 80, my brother Howard and I cranked east through the midday heat. He was spending two weeks of his vacation to travel with me.

Heat waves rippled off the summer pavement while the blazing sun baked the land. Trees lined the highway, with crows and sparrows flying in all directions, but nowhere in particular. One crow was having a difficult time as four sparrows darted in on him, pecking at his feathers. Each time they attacked, he dove away from them.

"Those guys are giving that big fella' a hard time," Howard said.

"I never have figured out why they attack a crow like that," I said.

"Maybe it gets down to territorial turf," Howard said. "Hey, we should make Vicksburg pretty soon. You want to stop at a salad bar place and clean them out?"

"Good idea."

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ing the summer cooked bicyclists with heat and humidity. It was so hot we looked like one of those commercials where they fry an egg on the hood of a car. We were the eggs. And, like the Michael Jordan Gatorade advertisement, we were sweating colors. Howard and I left a trail of splashes from our sweat-soaked bodies. No matter. We looked forward to the Civil War monuments in Vicksburg. We smiled and waved at passing cars. The Deep South was laid back and moved at a snail's pace. People seemed to get a kick out of our riding cross-country through their state. They took pictures of us, sometimes having their family crowd around our bikes.

With so much attention, we had a lot to talk about after leaving a photo session. People said the darnedest things about long distance touring riders. They kept us laughing because they thought we were courageous or crazy.

We were talking about the comments from a family that had

stopped their car to take our pictures when a black and white police cruiser passed us traveling west. We waved at him. He waved back but had a stern, redneck look on his face.

I wave to policemen out of respect or fear—I'm not sure which. I know they can give me a ticket for speeding. On a bicycle, they can't, so I never give them much thought. I watched him go by in my rear view mirror, when he flipped the car around and turned on his flashing red lights.

"That cop turned around," Howard said.

"Must be he got a call for an emergency back down the road," I said.

I expected the cruiser to fly past us. But it didn't. The police officer pulled in behind us.

"That cop is pulling us over," I said.

"Probably for speeding," Howard joked. "Maybe he's going to give us a ticket for going too slow. Now wouldn't that be a good one? No, I've got it, he's going to give us tickets for not having a license to drive a bicycle."

We pulled our bikes to a stop. A rotund, middle-aged officer in a blue uniform got out of his cruiser. We stood astride our bikes, looking back, not sure why he had stopped us.

"Afternoon boys," he said, walking up to us.

"How are you, sir?" I said.

"I'm fine," he said. "When I passed you boys, I noticed you were smiling and laughing."

"Yes, sir," Howard said. "We're having a great day. We just love it here in Louisiana. In fact, we're hoping to meet Huckleberry Finn when we cross the Mississippi."

"How far ya'll goin'?" the officer asked in a brusque voice.

"We're on our way from coast to coast," I said. "Pacific to the Atlantic."

"You boys ever had your heads examined for mental righteousness?"

"Our Mom told us we were crazy to ride our bikes across America," Howard said. "But, so far, the craziness hasn't killed us."

The officer looked over our packs as if he might be looking for drugs.

Right then, I didn't like this guy's demeanor. My Dad always told us to be polite and keep smiling at a policeman. We should always say "Yes sir" or "No sir," to a man with a badge. This was one of those times to be extra polite.

"Have you had a good time in Louisiana?" he asked in a stern voice.

"Yes, sir," I said. "We've had a real fine time and we're looking forward to Mississippi."

"Right now, you're in my jurisdiction," he said. "When I drove by you, it looked like you were having a lot of fun."

"Yes, sir, you could say that," Howard said.

"Would you say you're having TOO much fun?" the man asked, straight faced.

"TOO much fun?" I said. "Well, er, yes sir, we're probably having too much fun, right Howard?"

"YES SIR, that's right, we're having too much fun."

The officer stepped closer. He looked serious. Maybe I had seen too many movies with redneck cops hassling people. Nonetheless, I was concerned. He looked the part—thick neck, crew cut, short fat fingers, belly hanging over his belt and

boots that hadn't been polished in a coon's age.

"I hate to say this boys, but there's an ordinance in this county for having too much fun. People have gotten out of hand in the past from having too much fun. Because I'm an officer of the law, I'm sworn to uphold that ordinance. I'm gonna' have to write ya'll a citation. May I see some form of identification?"

"Sure officer," we replied, giving him our driver's licenses.

"A law against having too much fun?" Howard said.

"That's right boys," he said. "You wait here while I write you up. I see you're brothers."

"Yes, sir," I said.

"I'll be right back in a few minutes," he said, walking away.

"This is crazy," Howard said. "This guy is out to lunch. He's only got one oar in the water. He's 51 cards short of a full deck."

"He's got a badge and gun," I muttered.

"He can't give us a ticket for having too much fun," Howard said. "That does it! I'm going right into the county courthouse and demand a jury trial on this one. I mean, this is nuts! We can't take this lying down. I'll get the ACLU if I have to. We'll take this one all the way to the Supreme Court. Too much fun, right!"

"I thought he was kidding, but he's not kidding," I said.

While we waited, I drank a quart of water and switched my bottles on the down tube to have a full one ready. It was warm water, but quenched my thirst. Darned if I could figure out what we had done to get this cop upset. But I had learned never to argue with a police officer. They had absolute

authority. Minutes later, he walked up to us with two tickets in hand.

"I know ya'll think this is out of line," he said. "But I don't make the laws...I just enforce them. By the way, I like riding bicycles, too. How come you boys are riding mountain bikes with drop bars?"

"They're more durable and we don't get many flat tires," I said. "They ride smoother. Plus, we have three positions for our hands with drop bars. Straight bars fatigue our hands by keeping them in one position."

"I'll have to remember that," he said. "By the way, I live in Vicksburg. Are you boys hungry?"

"Yes, sir," we replied, not understanding why he was so friendly when he had given us a ticket.

"There's a nice restaurant called "Aunt Dorothy's" right after you cross the Mississippi. You can't miss it," he said, after giving us our tickets and walking away.

He drove toward Vicksburg. I stood there looking at Howard, who was just as incredulous as I was.

"What in the hell just happened to us?" I asked.

Howard looked down at his ticket and started laughing his head off.

"What's so funny?" I asked.

"Read it," Howard said, laughing and slapping his thigh.

On the ticket in long hand, it read, "This is a citation to the Wooldridge brothers for having too much fun on their bicycle trip across America. You can either pay a large fine down at the county courthouse, or you can come over to my house (directions below) and take showers, plus eat my wife's

great cooking. You're welcome to stay overnight. My kids would love to hear about some of your experiences. It would be an honor and a pleasure to have you visit us."

"I'll be damned," I said.

After riding into town that evening, we followed Officer Buford Jackson's directions to his house. We leaned our fully loaded touring bikes against the white railing on the front porch of an old-style home where a couple of rockers awaited for the evening sunset and friendly conversation.

I knocked.

When the door opened, I had never seen a wider smile, a bigger grin, a larger heart nor a face so full of mirth and mischief as I saw on Buford Jackson at that moment. Behind him, two little girls and a boy must have been told that Clint Eastwood and his brother were coming to dinner, because their faces reflected youthful expectation of something special about to happen in their lives.

That evening, we ate a dinner set for a king. Martha Jackson was the perfect hostess. We answered dozens of questions from the children—Shirley, Paula and Zac. It was truly an evening of having TOO much fun.

The next morning, as we pedaled onto the highway, I was reminded again, as I had been hundreds of times in the past, that people are beautiful. Never assume you know what or who they are. No matter what their color, religion, job, or location—people are unique, and mostly, they are doing the best they can with their lives.

Even with all the 'bad' things going on in this society, it's basically a generous, caring, respectful and decent nation. I know we focus on the news every night because bad news travels fast. But when you think of every little child that laughs or smiles at you, your life is blessed. When you say "Good

morning" to someone and pay him or her a compliment, you change the world. When it's returned to you, it changes your world. Try it the next time you buy groceries. As you check out, compliment the cashier, "Gee, your earrings look beautiful on you." Or, "That's a nice shirt, sir...you look sharp in it." Your compliments are warmly received which makes you feel good, and wonderfully enjoyed by the person you complimented.

In the case of Buford and Martha, my world became richer all because I

was smiling and having too much fun. Bless them both for their love, generosity, sense of humor and their children with big bright eyes filled with expectation. I am thankful that most of the world is filled with Buford's and Martha's, and because it is, we are all blessed with joy at surprising moments in our lives.

In my lifetime, I hope to get arrested many more times for having too much fun.

Across America 2012 194.JPG

(My bike Condor parked next to the Route 66 sign out of Chicago.)

Excerpts from my book: The Kickstand Chronicles—The Miraculous, Funny, Sublime, and Downright Terrifying Subtitle: Inevitable Moments of the Ride, Bicycling Across Six Continents, 45 years, 150,000 Miles by Frosty Wooldridge

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