

When Animals Attack!

A short story by Jon Knouse

“Call 911!”

“Anyone got a cell phone?” Frantic fingers were everywhere, dialing. Meanwhile I was setting my bike down on the side of the road about to find out how my fallen friend Kenny Motew was doing. Sh*t, I thought, just like Franco. I had not thought about that accident in awhile.

“Nobody move him!” Glenn Armstrong was already there next to him.

“Squeeze my hand, Kenny,” Glenn said gently, “Don’t go to sleep; do not go to sleep.” Kenny wasn’t really responding.

“Right Turn!” We were headed north on Ridge from Clavey Road, avoiding the regular ruts and holes on the road at that corner that seem to grow larger each week. About 30 riders were riding the Plaza ride that left Plaza Del Lago that morning at 6:30 a.m. Drew Passaglia was leading the group on his red and white Trek as he always does. Among the discussions being held included the route, though it seemed safe to say we were heading west on this glorious morning. As an aside, these discussions before any ride gets going always make me think of Mos Isley Space Port from the original Star Wars.

“You will never find a more wretched hide of scum and villainy,” says Obi Wan to Luke. Not the scum and villainy, mind you, but the colorfulness of the riders and bicycles and the randomness of the conversations.

Several riders worked the front of the peleton during the warm-up. Kenny and I seemed to be paired each time we were up front. That was ok by me. I much prefer him next to, rather than in front of me because for me riding behind him is like a professional quarterback playing behind a Pop Warner line...no protection. We wound our way down Ridge around the Highland Park police station at Deerfield Road and Richfield. We were delayed by a stoplight and Dave Kenzer rode up to say hello.

“Twice in one week I see you,” he said. We had ridden together for a bit together on Wednesday. I mentioned it was an honor to see him that much. The light turned green and we headed on again. “Just wanted to say hi, I’m off now,” said Kenzer.

“You going home already” I said, “We have not even started riding yet!”

“No,” he replied, “Just to the back of the pack, it’s easier and safer back there.” “Plus, Schless is in town from North Carolina and he’s back there too, we’re riding together.” “OK,” I said, “I’ll see you up here later.”

“Did I do anything wrong?” Kenny asked for the fifth time. He was coming around now, sort of. “No Kenny,” said Glenn, “Just relax.” Where are the paramedics, I thought? These questions, slightly comical now, were becoming increasingly worrying as he was asking the same ones over and over again. At least his eyes were no longer rolled up in the back of his head. I noticed the contact from his right eye resting gently on his eyelash. I picked it up and tossed it to the side.

“What happened?” Kenny asked. “You were in a crash, a deer hit you.”

“Am I bleeding?”

“A little, some from a cut just below your right eye and some from your nose.” His nose now was swelling up the size scale from golf ball to small hand grenade.

“Did I do anything wrong?” “No, Kenny, just relax.”

“Here comes the ambulance!” someone shouted. Thank God I thought. The big red and white Highland Park ambulance rolled to a stop and three men, any of whom looked like they could have been on our ride today, walked over. They made their way through our scattered peleton and took over. They exuded authority.

“What’s your name?” the first one asked Kenny.

“Kenny Motew” he responded. Phew, at least he got that right. Lord knows what would have happened had he said “Batman” or some other superhero he secretly admired in his subconscious somewhere.

Meanwhile, a police office approached Stuart Grinnell and me.

“What happened here?”

We picked up Ridge again and headed toward Route 22. Kenny and I were back in front discussing the ride we had done the day before. Kenny had not had the best of rides that day though all were impressed he gutted it out without complaint. It’s hard not to like a guy like that.

We rolled past Garland and Northland Avenues.

“I’m going to pull off at Park Avenue,” Kenny said. “Fine by me,” I replied. I was tired from yesterday’s ride, one of my better rides this summer in a maze of mediocrity brought on by my second lovely daughter, Eleanor. Her middle name is Responsibility.

We passed York and looked for cars at the T intersection of Ridge and Berkeley Roads. Kenny looked to the right as he was on the inside and I was on the outside of our pairing. Seeing none, we rolled through the stop sign just as all of us have done a thousand times before. Another half mile or so and Park Avenue would be here and we'd be done.

“Did you get a nap in yesterday after the ride?” I asked Kenny. “Yes I did. I needed it.” We were through the S curve on Ridge past Partridge Lane. Twenty–three miles an hour on the power tap. Seems fast enough to keep people from bitching about not going fast enough. Plus the morning was so nice; this summer has been like riding with a heat lamp shined on your face. Bloody hot. This was the first weekend of nice temperatures in a summer awash in heat.

Hmmmm, look at that baby doe. She was skipping merrily northward parallel to Ridge on the west side of the street opposite us. She darted back in the woods as quickly as she appeared. They always do.

What the hell? My hands began to react independently it seemed, of my brain and they jerked the handlebars of my used Colnago to the left....

“Officer, it was the most incredible thing I have ever seen while riding a bike,” I said.

It was. As I watched the fawn bound off into the woods, a large doe, the fawn's mother, maybe, came tearing right at us. Hard to know whether she was protecting the fawn or simply stupidly and randomly running across the road where we happened to be, the way deer always seem to run stupidly and randomly across roads.

She was heading at us at a 45-degree angle from northwest to southeast, her powerful legs bounding furiously. As I said earlier, my hands instinctively pulled the bike left. It appeared that her angle of approach was one that it might miss us. Uh-uh. She leapt over my front wheel directly in front of me. Kenny, on my inside never had a chance. Lord knows he probably never saw her due to my size. The end of her jump over my wheel led her to directly pancake Kenny on his left side. Full on direct hit. The kind of hit that Hank Aaron would applaud.

The doe knocked Kenny slightly sideways and sent him just about straight down to the cement. It was as if Brian Urlacher was blitzing the quarterback and I, the small halfback, was assigned to block him. Except I didn't; he simply jumped over me and blindsided Motew the QB, who was looking the wrong way.

Even the sound of the impact was quite stunning. The doe, which must have weighed 250 pounds, colliding with a 165 pound human on an 18-pound bike sounded like Rocky throwing 50 punches at the side of beef in the meat freezer except all at once. The thud was resounding. Still, the doe was not finished.

Her momentum carried her past Kenny even after she hit him. Probably frightened, she lashed out at Kenny with her hind legs. I watched her hoof catch Kenny underneath his left eye. Fortunately, she was about 90% to 95% extended when she hit him, so the full energy of her kick had mostly dissipated by then. No small consolation. After that, it was time to call the fight; if not a KO, definitely a TKO. The doe finished her assault by caroming off a telephone pole and disappearing into the woods as quickly as she appeared. The whole episode must have taken 10 to 15 seconds.

“The bike can’t be ridden,” said Grinnell. The officer offered to take it to Kenny’s house. Stu could not quite remember Kenny’s address. I suggested the officer take the bike to Stu’s house and Stu gave him the officer’s address. Dan Rudrud took the wheels off the bike and we got it into the police car.

“Anyone else hurt?” asked the officer.

“One other rider fell and hurt his arm,” someone said, “But he left already, he’s riding home.” It’s really a wonder only two people fell. There was some good bike handling executed.

The paramedics now had a neck brace on Kenny and were moving him to a gurney. He had no road rash to speak of. Guess you don’t slide when you hit a brick wall you just go straight down. He seemed a lot more alert now. Grinnell picked up his helmet, smashed in the back. That knock probably resulted in a slight concussion. Kenny normally does not ask questions over and over again. Thank god for helmets. I picked up his red light. Still works, but smashed up. It sits on my desk waiting to be returned to Kenny. What a souvenir.

The cop said they were taking him to Highland Park Hospital. He also said they would contact Kenny’s wife Jill and for us not to call her. They knew the protocol. The ride for the GTE boys, Grinnell, Armstrong and me was over. We headed home to shower and go to the hospital to check on our boy.

As we all slowly mounted up to continue, us home, the rest, the ride, I recounted the conversation Kenny and Glenn and I had held while he was lying there, especially the part about him asking over and over whether he had done anything wrong.

One rider replied, “Yeah, he forgot to bring his f*cking rifle on the ride!”