

## What Goes Around

Bob Geyer

When a college student in Boston, I frequently rode my bike around the city at night. One summer night I was returning home around 11:00. I was on Massachusetts Avenue in Cambridge, not far from Harvard University. Mass Ave is a very busy street at any hour, and 11 at night is no exception. With on-street, parallel parking, a cyclist must constantly watch for suddenly opening car doors. (In fact, often, riding down the center line of the road is the safest strategy. Drivers usually look before turning left!) I was completely focused on the traffic around me when I heard what sounded like a gun shot right behind me.

I've had many flats in my cycling career, but this was the first and one of the few that was a literal explosion. It caught me by surprise, and I swear I must have accelerated by 10 mph the instant I heard it. The extra speed didn't last long, however, since I was riding on the rim. I grated to a stop and assessed the situation. I was four or five miles from home—on busy, city streets—and I had no spare tube or patch kit. (Hey, I was young!) So I hoisted my bike onto my shoulders and started walking.

I'd gone no more than a couple of blocks when a guy on a bike pulled up and asked what was up.

"Flat tire; no spare," I woefully explained.

"I live only a block from here, and I've got an extra tube at my house," he said.

"I don't have any money on me," I replied, still walking.

"That's ok."

So off we went to his house, which, as promised, was a block away, on a side street. We went in a back door that opened on a workshop full of bike parts and tools. In a flash, this guy had my rear wheel off, the tire off, and a new tube fitted. He cheerfully put the tire back on and pumped it up with his floor pump. As I headed out the door, I said, "I'll bring some money by, for the tube, tomorrow."

"Not necessary," he said. "Just pass the favor on to the next cyclist."

I've helped out many cyclists in many ways over the intervening 28 years, but I recently had the opportunity to pass on the very same favor. I was driving home from work, on state roads in Rutherford County, when I saw a cyclist walking his bike along the side of the road. I pulled along side him and asked if he needed some help.

"Flat tire; no spare," he replied.

"I can offer a couple of options," I said. "I can give you a ride home, or I can give you a tube."

"I'm not very good at changing a tube, but I'd really like to finish the ride" he responded.

As I hopped out of my car and opened the trunk, I said "No problem." I carry tubes and a floor pump in my car all the time, and I am quite practiced at changing a tire. (This summer, I had four flats on one ride alone.) In no time, I had him ready to go.

"Give me your address and I'll send you some money," he said, in obvious gratitude.

"No need," I replied. "Just pass the favor on to the next cyclist."

As I drove off, I smiled, feeling harmonious with the Universe.