

## **"Of Boys, Bikes and Dads"**

Kerry S. Doyal

Boys riding bikes. To me, that is one powerful memory and image of summer. Exploring, racing, being showoffs and daredevils. Taking a few hard earned or luckily found cents to the store for candy. Quick getaways from foes, real or imagined. Getting me to and away from trouble.

Bikes meant exposure to a bigger world. They transported me from the circle - Keystone Court - I grew up on, to new worlds, vistas and experiences. They took me down the street, into town and across the tracks. Bikes carried me to friend's homes, baseball games, the library, bank, post office, Red's produce stand and "the woods."

Bikes were my horse, my motorcycle, my racecar, space ship and friend. It knew my moves and I knew its every squeak, its potentials and limits. It lifted me skyward off of ramps. It sent me scrapping, sprawling into gravel, dirt and pavement.

My father worked for the Phone Company, first as an installer, then a PBX repairer, then a manager, finally a safety instructor. He retired from "Ma Bell", and she and he paid for my upkeep coming up.

My brothers and I, in our journeys on bikes, would often come across men in phone trucks, making repairs, fixing a line, climbing a pole, riding a cherry picker. What started as a "hey, do you know my dad?" became an obsession.

Seeing these hard hat wearing, hard working skilled men would cause us to pull up to their work site on our bikes and ask if they knew Ronald Doyal. It always struck me odd to call my dad by his name. No doubt we asked more than one man "do you know my dad?", requiring them to ask "what's his name?".

A few men came to recognize us. "Aren't you Ron Doyal's boys?" they would ask as we stopped to watch, getting a glimpse into our dad's world. It was a question I was always exceedingly proud to hear and even prouder to answer.

The thing that made us habitually stop and ask our question was the answer we would often hear from the men we asked. Their response was frequently far more than we had asked, but no boy or girl could have asked for more. I can still hear and feel their reply. "Yes. I know your dad. He's a good man."

With no effort, I can recall how much taller I rode in my bike's saddle

after hearing those replies. These men not only knew my dad - validating this work site's solemnity due to its connection to my dad - these men respected my dad. He was a good man. Yes, they did indeed know my dad.

It took just a couple of interactions like that to lead us to almost look for phone men when we were off on our bikes. If we saw them, you could be sure we would stop and ask "the question." More often than not, they knew our dad and would add "he's a good man."

Sometimes, while biking with friends, I would stop to ask The Men if they knew my dad so my friends could hear the answer. Though it was not quite the "my dad can beat up you dad" scenario, I was bragging none the less. I could trust that if those phone men knew my dad, they would speak well of him.

I had no idea how enviable that was for so many little boys and girls. For me it was a solid given, something I took for granted - for better and, I am sure, for worse.

I was and am proud to be my dad's son. Period. No disclaimers. No qualifiers. I am Ronald Doyal's youngest son, and would have it no other way. Nor would my brothers or my sister. Just as my wife rightfully feels about her dad - another very fine man.

If you feel that way about your dad, make sure you tell him. If you can't find your own words, give him this column. He will get it. Whatever you do, however you do it, let him know.

A final thought about those bikes. It was my dad's hard work that provided them for my two older brothers', our baby sister and me. His sweat gave us the means to discover who he was, to see how others saw him. That was not the intent of the gift, but it was the precious impact none the less.

It occurs to me that the same thing will happen in my efforts to raise my girl and four boys. For better or for worse, I pave the way - better yet - provide the wheels by which they will encounter me in this world. I can only hope and pray and try to make sure the kind of report my kids get about me is nearly as good as the one I was blessed to peddle up to about my dad.

Thanks for a good name, Dad. I honor you.

"Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you." Exodus 20:12

"A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold." Proverbs 22:1 (NIV)