

## The Musings of CJ Ong, jr.

Friday Fitness Musing, 3/24/06...on bike shops...not bike stores...

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My friend Ronn Ritz when asked the question “how many bikes does a person need?” offers the following response “one more than he actually owns”. An appropriate reply when one considers Ronn is one of the familiar faces at Skunk River Cycles in Ames, IA. And Skunk River Cycles is one of my favorite bike shops.

Late this winter I added to my stable of bikes. Having never owned a cyclocross bike I went up to see my longtime friend Kevin O'Connor at Gear West in Long Lake, MN. To many of us Kevin and the crew from Gear West are familiar faces at the Pigman triathlons (and to be honest familiar backsides as well as many of the Gear West crew do quite well as triathletes!) Clar and I walked in the door of the bike shop and were greeted not only verbally but with the offer of some leftover pizza. Having had the privilege of working in a bike shop some years ago for Ronn I knew the offer of pizza to be a genuine greeting. Bike shop employees love pizza! Well, any food for that matter...but to share food is a sign of a bike shop.

A few years ago I was contacted by a client who wanted to buy a new triathlon bike. I suggested a road trip up to Ames to see Ronn. I called and Ronn suggested that we stay overnight with him and his family, that he would bring a bike home for my client to ride and then we could take the time to select the bike he wanted. So we drove up, had dinner with Ronn, Dianne and their family. The next morning we went for a ride, then went down to the shop where John ended up selecting a Kestrel Talon.

Why do I buy my bikes and gear at bike shops, not stores? Bike shops are staffed by the guys you see at and in the races. They are not poseurs. Bike shops have guys with degrees from M.I.T. working there because they love the sport. Eventually they might move on but chances are you will see them in there on Saturdays helping out – probably for the shop discount. Bike shops such as CycleStation are owned by people like my friends Oliver and Julia Keil in Kauila-Kona, HI – Oliver was there at the swim exit of the 1998 UltraMan Hawaii to help drag my jellyfish stung carcass out of the Pacific and set my butt on the bike for that 90 mile ride even though he was crewing for someone else!

The guys at bike shops never “talk down” to you. I remember going to a race once and having to have my bike “safety checked” by the local bike store. They had all the bike store bling bling and all things M-Dot and plenty of attitude. Apparently since I had not done that particular M-Dot event I was deemed unclean by Illsa the She Wolf and destined to eternal cyclic damnation. That's OK, I took my money and spent it elsewhere.

In today's society the concept of “no child left behind” has permeated our society to an alarming degree. To me “no child left behind” says ‘that's good enough’, ‘that's OK’, ‘we don't really have the time give you a lot of attention’ and ‘stay away from my pizza’. Bike shops offer a defense against this concept. Bike shops let you take as long as you want to buy a bike, they think it's OK to go test ride a bike elsewhere. They don't sell you what's off the floor, telling you a 58 cm frame is one you will, at age 35 and 5'7” tall, “grow into”. Stems are swapped at no charge. There is always attention to detail.

For you see at bike shops the owner's children come in and most of the time ask their father if they can ride the tricycles on the show room floor. And he agrees. Why? Because everyone knows that tricycles are the beginning vehicle. And a bike shop is great place to get a start on life's journey, regardless of ones age.

**C.J.**

**"Let the beauty we love be what we do" - Rumi**

Friday Fitness Musings, 2/25, 2/28 and 3/2/06, The Anniversary Edition

I have kicked around in my head many ideas on what to write for this edition of Friday Fitness Musings...I have decided to offer some passages from authors influencing my perspective on life as the core of this anniversary edition.

In high school I read and with help from Sr. Kathleen Saunders began to understand Shakespeare's Julius Caesar. From that play the following passage has remained with me for many years...

**Let me have men about me that are fat;  
Sleek headed men and such as sleep o' nights;  
Yond' Cassius has the lean and hungry look;  
He thinks too much, such men are dangerous.**

Before I was married I attended welding school. I rode my bike 11 miles to school, arriving at school before 7 am, welding from 7 until noon, then taking a philosophy class at 1 pm. I then rode my bike 11 miles home, often uphill and into a snowstorm, even in July! (I really did ride my bike 11 miles each way but could not allow the opportunity to embellish a bit slip by...) Curiously enough my welding instructor had an masters in history from Drake but could make more money as a welding instructor. Sorry Clar but so much for academics!

So from Thomas Merton's translation of Chuang Tzu's parable of "The Man with One Foot and the Marsh Pheasant" I share the following:

**Kung Wen Hsien saw a maimed official  
Whose left foot had been cut off -  
A penalty in the political game!**

**"What kind of man," he cried, "is this one-footed oddity?  
How did he get that way? Shall we say  
Man did this, or heaven?"**

**"Heaven," he said, "this comes from Heaven, not from man.  
When heaven gave this man life, it willed  
He should stand out from others  
And sent him into politics  
To get himself distinguished.  
See! One foot! This man is *different*."**

**The little marsh pheasant  
Must hop ten times  
To get a bite of grain.**

**She must run one hundred steps**

**Before she takes a sip of water.  
Yet she does not ask  
To be kept in a hen run  
Though she might have all she desired  
Set before her.**

**She would rather run  
And seek her own little living  
Uncaged.**

And closing with some insight from Neil Young... **"It's better to burn out than fade away"**.

**C.J.**

**"Let the beauty we love be what we do" - Rumi**

Friday Fitness Musings, 02/03/06, on Mexican food and attention

Noble Peace Prize nominee Thich Nhat Hanh often writes on the importance of attention in our lives. He feels that in some ways attention should be looked upon should be looked upon as a gift, a gift we can first give to ourselves and then to others.

Several years ago I was, along with Clar standing behind my in-laws garage. We were alternating the slapping mosquitoes with the slap of a paintbrush as we painted their garage. It was late in the evening as we maneuvered around volunteer lilac bushes, cast off cinder blocks and such, hurriedly trying to finish before the mosquitoes carried us off for some insect ritual sacrifice. Our finish was soon delayed for around the corner came Clar's dad, Frank with two aluminum foil covered paper plates. Beneath the foil was a Mexican dinner he had carried back from the Malibu, the tavern a couple of blocks away.

Frank lived in central Iowa the majority of his life. Along with his wife he farmed and raised six children. While serving our country during WWII he jumped out of truck and jammed his hip. This along with years of riding in the tractor caused one hip to sit different than the other but he always paid attention to his hips by unloading his spine by the use of the dishwasher and the corner of the countertop – placing his palms on the corner of each and raising his feet off the floor and executing a spinal twist and release that I often called the “dishwasher dance of death” for the dishwasher was mounted on casters! It would have never worked for me but he knew through attention what worked for him.

When Frank and Christine moved off the farm he brought his farm to town with an ever expanding garden. This garden symbolized how grounded he was to the earth and in paying attention to himself and others. He knew when it was time to plant and when it was time to harvest. When the green beans would be ready to eat. And even though he did not care for cucumbers others did and would plant them in his garden for us to eat. And he knew I really liked Mexican food. He paid attention. Simply put, he was mindful. To himself and others.

Over the past few years as my overall understanding of fitness evolved I now realize I had let my attention to fitness lapse. Rather than obsessing on my fitness, attempting to

change everything at once I began with a simple starting point and gradually added to my fitness landscape, a pointillism approach to overall fitness for as I now realize by not being mindful I had started to separate my body from my mind. So I began to simply pay attention. Point by point, gradually yoking my body to my mind. As my fitness shifted to the positive I came to realize so was the attention I was giving to myself. Gradually I became ready to give my attention to others, returning to teaching Yoga, spending time helping others with their attention by sharing my attention with them.

With the correct intention attention to ourselves and others can be a wonderful gift. One we can carry with us forever. Even though Clar's dad passed away in 1999 I still occasionally have a can of Hormel chili with him when Clar is gone on business. I am glad I paid attention to the brand of chili he liked – as I am glad he paid attention to my enjoyment of Mexican food – a better understanding of the true meaning of attention was provided to me as a plate of Mexican food on a Iowa summer evening.

Friday Fitness Musings, 1/13/06, on Yoga...(with attachment)

It is with great happiness that I return to sharing what I know about Yoga in a classroom setting. It has been over 16 months since I have led a Yoga class and I feel I am sincerely returning as a more enlightened human being.

I was first drawn to Yoga in 1999 while beginning my education as a massage therapist. During that time I began to realize the importance of spiritual awareness in ones life. I had entered into what Ken Wilber describes as a “witness consciousness”, asking myself “Who am I”.

Having had the advantage of a liberal arts education I turned to books. Once while working in a corporate fitness center it was opined to me by a supervisor that “you read way too much”. I also listen to way too much music so I offered in return the answer taken from Zach de la Rocha “where ignorance reigns life is lost”. And so as I began to study I came to realize there was much more to Yoga than the asanas. I slowly realized that Yoga offered me a path to come to an understanding of my consciousness and it's potential.

Unfortunately many people who take Yoga classes will never see this path because of what Georg Feuerstein writes in his book The Deeper Dimension of Yoga “**As one Yoga teacher observed: Yoga has been reduced to fitness, more specifically stretching, and yet more specifically of the hamstrings. This comment would be funny if it were not sadly true**”.

This distillation of Yoga becomes more alarming as Yoga is offered to America as a panacea for all our problems. Jennifer does Yoga to get over Brad. (One does not do Yoga get something, one simply does Yoga to do Yoga) In the local paper a physical therapist states “Yoga and Pilates are beneficial for people who don't like to stretch because it forces them to do it”. (Yoga should never be about force) Adding to the distillation is the lack of knowledge by those in offering Yoga to public, like the instructor unable to educate a superior when told they felt that Yoga was voodoo.

(voodoo is a religion practiced in the Caribbean, Yoga is a way of life) Taking America even further away from the path is fear – I have witnessed reluctance to allow classes to end in a universal namaste – what is so frightening about telling another human being “the divine in me recognizes the divine in you”?

As a solution to this distillation I offer reading books. There are many amazing books on Yoga, just as there are many types of Yoga. B.K.S. Iyengar is a wonderful author to begin with. Take time to explore the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. Called by Osho “an Einstein in the world of Buddhas” his Yoga Sutras offer us a way to understand the relationship between the body and the mind. I encourage everyone to feed their minds with some classic Yoga readings! An education in the classics is not such a bad thing. Explore the path of Yoga.

K. Pattabhi Jois shares with us the following: “If we practice the science of Yoga, which is useful to the entire human community and which yields happiness here and hereafter – if we practice it without fail, we will attain physical, mental and spiritual happiness and our minds will flood towards the Self.” Like water I am learning to flow around obstacles – through the insights of Tara Mala, (my Yoga teacher in Hawaii) I have experienced the joy of surrender and my first true taste of “yuj”. Yoga has offered me a way to begin to understand who I am. It has not made me a better athlete but has helped me grow as a human being. Perhaps it can provide you with the same opportunity.

**C.J.**  
**"Let the beauty we love be what we do" - Rumi**

Friday Fitness Musings, 06 January 2006, my fitness resolution

A couple of years ago a friend of asked me “Why are you so angry?” The question stopped me in mid rage...it took me until recently to realize that the question, like the anger, was a gift. (It took my friend a tremendous amount of courage to ask why I was so angry. But then again she’s been my friend almost 25 years)

Zach de la Rocha of Rage Against the Machine sings in “Freedom” that ‘your anger is a gift’. Definitely not a gift that one wants to keep, like an ugly tie or a Chia Pet. For me, anger was the gift giving me reason to consider my choices and concerns.

Seven years ago a series of events in my personal life caused me to begin a downward spiral into a hole of depression. Confused, I began to replace exercising with exorcising. No longer were my workouts filled with joy and happiness – instead they become a way to suppress the feelings that made me angry. As my personal satisfaction with my performances began to disappear so did my appearance in the triathlons. I signed up for races, intending to train and race again, only to donate money to race directors for races I failed to start.

The cycle of anger and depression is difficult to break. Oddly the body becomes addicted to these destructive emotions so often when presented with a difficult situation I acted out

in anger. Then in an effort to thwart the feelings of anger I would crawl back into that hole of depression, pulling the covers over my head and escaping the emotions of anger. Missing life.

Missing things like riding my Kestrel, watching Brodie's and Lennox's ears blow back while going for a walk on a blustery day, crossing the finish line of a triathlon and feeling good about my performance. Enjoying life.

This past winter I began to effect a change. Instead of worrying about those things which really did not matter and being in love with my sadness and anger, I instead began to fall in love with enjoying life. Appreciating the goodness in my life allowed me to live in the present moment, looking at my existence as Choygam Trungpa describes in his book Great Eastern Sun: The Wisdom of Shambhala... **'what comes next is the appreciation of that first good thought, which is called the stroke. Coming out of the dot is the brushwork, just like when you touch an actual brush and ink to the paper. First you touch the ground, the canvas or the paper, then you create a stroke. The stroke of goodness is connected with the second thought. From the first thought, the dot, you extend the second thought, which arises from gentleness. You are not trying to fight with your world or to destroy anything, nor are you trying to gain anything personally. There is just the first flash, and there is a sense of continuing that'**.

The Buddha teaches us "Holding onto anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone else; you are the one who gets burned". I have taken that lump of coal and tossed it in the hole representing my depression. I know there are times ahead where I may be tempted to retrieve it. Instead of I shall take a breath and listen to my inner wisdom. That is my fitness resolution for 2006.