

Issue #20, May 2001

Free to Messengers



EDITORIAL

Making Sense of the Senseless:

Chris Robertson's Murder Met by Judicial Injustice

As most of you know, the death last November 17 of former Lightning and Rainbow Grocery staffer Chris Robertson was another -- though more extreme -- case of road rage against a cyclist. Although the murderer was a two-time felon (including a previous rap for manslaughter), the presiding judge reduced all charges to misdemeanors, meaning that the accused will probably serve no more than one year -- IF THAT. Many road ragers in their SUVs will feel that the judicial system will approve their actions against cyclists and pedestrians. And why not? After all if Chris' murderer gets a wrist slap even with his record, shouldn't somebody with no rap sheet feel that a murder by car will result in NO prosecution? Comparisons of Chris Robertson's issue to the Dan White and Rodney King cases are inevitable. In each of these three situations, a rightly angered community did not respond with violence to the initial outrage. Instead they trusted in the same legal system that they had voted and had paid taxes to sustain. In each case members of those communities had often felt great discrimination at the hands of that same legal system yet they had waited patiently for the judicial outcome.

In the Dan White and Rodney King cases the resulting judicial farces were met with violence. Dozens of SFPD cars were firebombed in the White Night riots. The Rodney King verdicts sparked the worst riots in California history and touched off violence in other cities across the country. Needless to say, in the aftermath of the wrist slap for Chris' murderer, the atmosphere for the April 27 Critical Mass was tense. Protests began early in the day with a noontime rally at City Hall and escalated that afternoon with road blockings. When Critical Mass began to assemble at 5:30 p.m., the usual lighthearted mood at Justin Hermann Plaza was replaced by anger.

It was then that San Francisco's bicyclists -- messengers and commuters alike -- asserted their anger righteously. Led by SFBMA President Damon Votour's call for a peaceful ride, about 2,000 rightly angered cyclists rode into the streets and did NOT burn any police cars, did NOT break any car dealer's showroom windows and did NOT beat up any motorists. In fact, NOT one incident of violence was attributed to any cyclist. This is not to say that things didn't get dicey on occasion. On at least two occasions, Critical Mass riders restrained their fellow cyclists from beating arrogant

motorists. On both occasions, messengers -- who deal with road rage more than other cyclists -- stepped in to defuse potentially violent situations. But overall the Mass expressed its collective anger in peaceful yet dramatic ways. Broadway Tunnel and Van Ness (US 101) were shut down during rush hour. Before dispersing around 8 p.m., Market and Fell Streets had also been blocked.

But for SF's cycling community the April Mass cannot be the last word. Those of us who knew Chris know that it is not just his blood that cries out for justice it is also his soul. If he were as the media have implicitly portrayed him -- a drunken ne'er do well riding a toy in the way of a motor vehicle -- then only his blood -- his death -- would cry for justice. Even that should demand our attention and our activism. But Chris was someone who would be putting his efforts into justice if it had been YOU or ME who had been murdered that night in November. In other words it is his soul - his whole life -- that cries out for justice.

We owe it to Chris and to each other to seize some justice from this outrage. I think everyone agrees on this but we are all still bewildered by the judicial outrage. I want to propose a change in our priorities. Up to now we have focused on the very proper goal of getting Ruben Espinosa locked up for good. Unfortunately that just will not happen. I certainly support ongoing efforts to punish Espinosa for his crime. I hope Chris' family will pursue a wrongful death suit and I hope they will win.

But what we also need to do is remember that there are always two killers involved whenever a human being is slain on the streets -- the driver (who sometimes is guilty of only an accident) and the Auto(mobile)cracy. The Autocracy is never guilty of only an accident. So brazen is the Autocracy that it slaughtered two more Bay Area cyclists the same day of the April Critical Mass. The Autocracy is the accomplice that is ALWAYS guilty of premeditated murder. After 40,000 deaths each year on American roads by "accident" and countless more from smog related diseases, the Autocracy is a murderer with so much blood on its hands that there is no need for any trial. The evidence is clear and now what needs to be done is what we should have been doing BEFORE Chris was killed and before the next person is killed: organize to weaken then replace the Autocracy.

For that reason the SFBMA has called upon the SFBC to join it in a meeting to discuss a strategy to enact laws that will take away the power and privilege to kill from the hands that operate the steering wheels.

Editor's notice

Lately many of you have been asking me "Where's *Cognition*?" As I stated before the recent SFBMA elections, I needed to get on it and you the members of the SFBMA have every right -- and duty -- to keep on your officers to do their jobs. So here with my apologies for tardiness is the latest *Cognition*. You'll notice that it's smaller. That's because we'll be doing more *Cognitions* -- once a month -- rather than bigger editions as in the past. However about once each quarter we'll come out with the larger issues similar to what we've done before. Thanks for your patient reminders,
--Howard Williams, Secretary of the SFBMA and Editor of *Cognition*

Speedway Messengers Go to the Table

Messengers at Speedway Delivery have chosen their negotiating team and assigned them to bargain for a new contract with the owners of that company. Representing the Messengers will be Driver Messenger Jim Hewlitt, Jr, Walking Messenger Paul Rosen, and Bike Messengers Bernie Corace, Manuel Affonso and Howard Williams. The current contract expires June 5. In company issues,

Messengers are seeking increases in pay and benefits. Regarding industry issues, we are demanding contract language permitting the right to join an industry-wide strike for better industry standards especially higher tag prices.-- By Howard Williams

SFBMA June meeting place changed! Local 34 for free pizza!!

The June SFBMA meeting will be on Thursday June 14 at 7 p.m. However the place will be at ILWU Ship Clerks Local 34 Hall at 2 Berry Street NOT Local 10 as previously announced and not Local 6 as in previous meetings. In fact we'll also be holding our July and August meetings at Local 34. Local 34 is easy to find. Just go south on 2nd Street till you see Giants Stadium. To the left of the ballpark is the hall tucked in under a grove of sycamore trees. You can't miss it! See you at our summer home – Local 34 at 2 Berry Street on June 14 Thursday at 7. And yes the rumors are true we'll have FREE PIZZA for those who get there first.

RUSSIAN RIVER RIDE!

Once again it's that time of year again. One of the greatest customs in all Messengerdom continues onward with the 16th Annual Russian River Ride. Meet early on Saturday the 26th in the A.M. at the Celestial Palace of the Imperial Dynasty of Woo -- better known as Harvey's. It's the Messenger way to celebrate Memorial Day! Three days of woodsy fun and frolics.

MAY DAY ALLEY CAT RESULTS

By Bernie and Nice Tim

Revolutionary Ride II was Sunday, April 29th and here are the results:

1st overall, from Godspeed Couriers: Super Mike; 1hr. 3m. (4pts)

2nd overall, from Speedway: Jason Whitehead; 1hr. 16.5m. (3pts)

3rd overall, from Jetset Couriers: John Z.; 1hr. 16.5m. (2pts)

1st fixie, from Godspeed Couriers: Ali; 1hr. 20.5m. (3pts)

1st women, from City Sprint: Natasha; 2hr. (3pts)

AND, in her first alley cat:

DFL, from at large, Nicole McMorrow; 2hr. 39m. (1pt)

Congratulations to all 20 participants. Hope to see you all out at other races (see below) throughout the season.

***** (pts) indicates points received for the S.F. Alley Cat Challenge.

MORE ALLEY CAT ANNOUNCEMENTS

June 23 Saturday, South Park, 1 p.m. Team Satan Alley Cat -- \$5 entry fee PLUS \$5 to use for various duties along the course. The second race in the SF Alley Cat Challenge.

This summer -- THE 5TH ANNUAL MOUNTAIN LION – the 3d race in the SF Alley Cat Challenge. See Matt R. (Broiler) for more info. This is the longest running Alley Cat in SF Messenger history.

Biketoberfest -- this October -- this is the final SF Alley Cat Challenge ride.

SFBMA ELECTION RESULTS – RECORD TURNOUT!!

For President:

Damon Votour (incumbent)	78 (68.4%)
Jonathon “Nosmo” Hendrickson	12 (10.5%)
Thomas Miller	8 (7.0%)
Michael Crane	8 (7.0%)

Three persons received a total of 7 write-in votes. There was 1 abstention for this office.

For Executive Director:

Bernie Corace	64 (56.1%)
Neils “Bones” Miller	33 (28.9%)
Michael Crane	13 (11.4%)

Three persons each received one write in vote. There was 1 abstention for this office.

For Secretary:

Howard Williams (incumbent)	105 (92.1 %)
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Seven persons each received 1 write in vote. There were 2 abstentions.

For Treasurer:

Manuel “Rak” Affonso (incumbent)	90 (79.9%)
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Eleven persons received a total of 20 write-in votes. There were 4 abstentions.

***CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL VOTERS WHO MADE
A RECORD TURNOUT FOR THIS ELECTION!!***

DISCOUNTS for SFBMA Members available at the following places:

Patronize these friendly establishments! And look for *Cognition* at these hot spots!

The following bike shops give 10% discount on parts to SFBMA members.

* Foxy Flyer Bike Shop, 3330 Steiner, phone # 674-1910

* Big Swingin’ Cycles, 1122 Taraval, phone # 661-2462 (also 10% discount on labor)

* Road Rage Bike Rental and Repair, 1063 Folsom, phone # 255-1351

(also 15% discount on labor)

* The Sports Basement, 1301 6th St., phone # 437-1415

And Cassidy’s Bar, 1145 Folsom, phone # 241-9990--\$2 beer specials M-F, 5-8pm for working messengers

IN the next *Cognition*: Book Review of “The Immortal Class” & CCMP article