Cycle and celebrate the 2016 International Men’s Day

“When the spirits are low, when the day appears dark, when work becomes monotonous, when hope hardly seems worth having, just mount a bicycle and go out for a spin down the road, without thought on anything but the ride you are taking.”

- Arthur Conan Doyle

Do you believe in serendipity? I do. While I prepared myself conceptually for an article to celebrate the second most important holiday for the global male population - second only to Father’s Day - I was analyzing what and who should be the leading theme and character. I wanted the bicycle to be in the background, as this year is the first year we campaigned to establish World Bicycle Day. With that thought to narrow my search I touched base with my first male bicycle enthusiast and BINGO, I knew I also found my man. After a few sentences, I learned that his birthday is on November 19, which is of course, International Men’s Day!

The 2016 International Men's Day is dedicated to male health and the motto is Stop Male Suicide. The robust evidence of morbidity and mortality by international health organizations demonstrates that men’s health is worse than that of women, which can be very detrimental for the mental health of women and children. Closing the health gap that men face must be included and prioritized in the global health equity agenda, especially the silent global epidemic of male suicide caused by deep and wide spread depression.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QRktbxX2Zos

However, I would like to deviate slightly from this year’s theme, and introduce women and men all over the world to the very fundamental fact that life is worth living and when respect is paid to healthy living, life can be quite an enjoyable endeavor. The quintessential man found himself in a new equation due to globalization, robots replacing
heavy manual labor, gender leveled playing field, introduction of a new gender, and a new life style requiring different skills and assets as they used to be expected to possess.

In this era of new challenges and plenty of opportunities, the solution can be summed up in three words by author Glen Poole: “LEARN, LOVE, LISTEN”.

Men have to intelligently adapt and retool to new times – humanity already passed the point of no return. The notion of "manning-up" is archaic and only leads to further unnecessary pressure resulting in anxiety and depression. Men have to start paying close attention to their physical and mental health and talk about it openly to start a constructive debate while voicing their current plight to all involved. The gender conversation needs to be aimed at males being reliable partners. Men don’t have to always be the primary leader – let’s share the burden of responsibilities equally, but in order to be able to achieve it men need to treasure their health and well-being to keep up with the pace of contemporary lifestyles.

One of the best remedies for men to stay physically and mentally healthy comes to us in one of the most loyal and resilient manmade tools known as the bicycle. It is not in the luxury of fast cars great health honed. Just as the bicycle liberated women during the 1890s I am hopeful this time the “freedom machine” will cycle men out of an obsolete stereotype and into a healthier and happier lifestyle in this new global setting as the new “medicine device.”

So, who is this man that is a champion of the bicycle and who was born on November 19? His name is Klaus Bondam, and he is the former Mayor of Copenhagen for the Technical and Environmental Administration and for the Employment and Integrations Administration. He is a man who loves to ride the bicycle on and on and in fact he didn’t get his driver’s license until he was 36. Before his public service, he was devoted for over 20 years to his other passion, which was acting. He serves currently as the Director of the Danish Cyclists Federation. He lives in the countryside in Odsherred not far from Copenhagen with his husband Jacob of 13 years who is a landscape architect.

Klaus strongly believes that the reasons why many Danes leave their cars in the garage for the sake of grabbing a bicycle include comfort, exercise, and an easy means of transportation. Greater Copenhagen is one of two global cycling capitals besides the Amsterdam. On several occasions it was voted the most bicycle friendly city in the world. According to Bondam: “The Municipality of Copenhagen has been conducting research and analyzed the level of cycling in Copenhagen. Almost 41% (2015) of all work and study places in the city are reached by bike every single day throughout the year. The amount of people who choose bicycles in favor of cars save Copenhagen from an estimated 90,000 tons of CO2 emission annually. Compared to the total emission from road traffic in the city of 344,000 tons of CO2 (2015), this is a considerable reduction.” He adds: “We have to focus on the fact that choosing to cycle to work or other places is an equal means of transportation comparing to cars or public transport. Millions of Danes commute by bike every day, and it is not because we are poor or do not have a driver’s license. We do it because it is an easy and effective way to transport ourselves, and it gives us a positive start on the day. It is refreshing and saves us the
pains of traffic congestions.”

Bondam is fully aware of another important aspect of regular cycling that is not talked about much - the health benefits. Cycling increases cardiovascular fitness, muscle strength and flexibility, joint mobility, decreases stress levels, improves posture and coordination, strengthens bones, decreases body fat, helps to prevent and/or manage many chronic diseases, and reduces anxiety and depression. Cycling is predominantly an aerobic, which means that the heart, blood vessels, and lungs all get a workout. It forces you to breathe deeper, perspire, and experience an increase in body temperature, all of which improve fitness. As a typical proud descendent of his Viking ancestors, Klaus enjoys good food and wine with daily cycling providing the balance to his fitness and health. The Vikings wanted to die with the sword in their hands; Klaus hopes that the velocipede will be his companion until the very end.

Bondam believes that his foremost achievement as the bicycle advocate to the city of Copenhagen was probably closing one of the biggest arteries the Noerrebrogade Street to the car traffic providing much better accessibility for cyclists and public transport. Of course he didn’t do it alone as he was strongly supported by a majority of the City Council; however, as the Mayor he was in charge – by some criticized and by some cherished for accomplishing it back in 2008.

Just recently, Klaus went for a bicycle spin around Copenhagen with the US Secretary of Transportation, Anthony R. Foxx, and was accompanied by the Danish Minister for Transport, Hans C. Schmidt. According to Klaus, while on this ride Secretary Foxx, noted: “We need to stop believing that smart mobility is only about technology and driverless cars. Smart mobility is also low tech. We already have smart mobility: cycling and well-integrated public transport. That is low-tech smart mobility. We have a tendency to believe that you have to invent something new. No, it is invented. We just have to integrate it.”

It seems like Jim Burlant was right with his observation: "Cycling is like a church - many attend, but few understand." - all this after over 200 years of serving humanity? Do we really need Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson to investigate this any further or we have enough of evidence?

Get a bike, go for a ride, enjoy life, and celebrate the International Men’s Day!

Ooops, almost forgot! Happy Birthday Klaus!

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