

**Can a man going nowhere fast
get there more efficiently with a folding bike?**

by Steve Friedman
illustrated by Dan Zakroczemski

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Wanting a folding bicycle is like wanting a girlfriend. There is optimism. There is hope. There are fuzzy wildflowers and lilting melodies. Won't it be nice to cease worrying about bicycle thieves? Won't it be sweet to lose the 300-pound chain and its New York City-strength, tempered-steel padlock? Won't it feel liberating to stop wasting time looking for bicycle racks and vacant parking meters? But let's be honest. Have you ever seen someone on a folding bicycle? Circus bear on wheels, right? That's the first thing you think. That's the first thing *I* think.



Better to admit the truth: Wanting a folding bicycle has its dark side. Isn't it better to own up to that at the outset? A man seeking love might tell himself that he's after something life-affirming and species-propagating, but come on! If he's candid and just the slightest bit self-aware, shouldn't such a man admit that from a certain perspective, there is a better-than-average chance he is hurtling toward heartbreak and searing pain and eternal, shadowless, stygian, hellish gloom?

What I'm saying is, my desire for a folding bicycle is not entirely daffodils and kazoos. I want a folding bicycle because I want to exact a measure of revenge on the vast and uncaring legal system that has recently victimized me by declaring that I need to vacate the spacious and rent-stabilized Manhattan apartment in which I have been illegally squatting for 13 years. My revenge will be mostly symbolic (as most of my acts of revenge lately tend to be), but it will allow me to store my bicycle in my new dwelling, which is approximately the size of a shoe closet. Speaking of symbolic acts of revenge, I look forward to pedaling past the apartment of my former girlfriend, who has recently dumped me and, if memory serves, in the process mentioned something about a "sad little man going nowhere fast."

Nowhere fast? Not this sad little man, who, as long as I'm being honest, is not so little anymore, having recently jacked up his already-bad pint-a-night ice cream habit to soothe his nerves about the change in apartment lifestyle and sudden girlfriendless state. Which means that even if I want to keep lugging around the heavy chain, it will be difficult, because it no longer fits around my belly.

A folding bicycle offers a solution to many of the woes facing me, which my shrink has suggested I think of as "challenges." (She has also suggested I stop using the phrase "stygian, hellish gloom," because "it's really not helping you enjoy your life or get any better, and it might be scaring off potential dates.")

Why a folding bicycle? I'll tell you why. After my ex and I split up, I decided to spend some time healing. I did this by switching from Chubby Hubby to Mint Chocolate Chunk ice cream, because that flavor seemed lighter and more life-affirming. I also spent some evenings typing phrases like "life-changing gadgets" and "worst breakups in history" and "bearproof body armor" into my computer. When none of that brought the fuzzy flowers and birdsong, I took a late-night walk in my neighborhood, the Upper West Side.

And that's where I spotted the man on the folding bicycle. That's where I saw a guy hop off his bicycle, collapse it into a tidy little one-wheeled thing and roll it easily into his apartment building. That night I researched folding bicycles. I learned that improved technology has rendered folding bicycles as energy-efficient and speedy as their non-folding counterparts, according to those who make folding bikes.

Do I believe that a folding bicycle will make me happy or that it will change my ex from a quivering harpy into a "challenge"? Do I think it

will somehow bring me the contentment and serenity that has eluded me thus far in my life? How could anyone think that of any contraption? Here's another question: Do you know anyone who has ever owned both a Bowflex and a wallet OWL? This sad little man has.

I have always been partial to miracle cures, have always invested in them the life-changing powers their sinister marketing major-domos want suckers like me to invest in them. As an eight-year-old, one glimpse of the Veg-O-Matic and its sliced, diced and chopped carrots was enough. I bought a Veg-O-Matic every year for my mother's birthday and was always baffled and saddened when, within a week of expressing outsize delight, she lost it.

What I'm saying is, my reasons for getting a folding bicycle are many. First, storage space. Second, I'm too fat for a lock. Third, my daily forays into the Manhattan subway system seem to be growing increasingly stressful, and my nagging suspicions that global apocalypse is imminent seem to be growing stronger, and I have been noticing more and more bomb-sniffing police dogs at the stations I most often frequent. And my dreams about rogue talking elephants have become more violent. The tusked mammals have been yelling at me. And my best friend, a voiceover actor turned waiter turned law student, recently pulled me aside and told me he was worried.

Why, I asked.

"You're talking to yourself more than usual," he said. "You keep muttering, 'They'll pay, they'll all pay.'"

I could take up Pilates, of course, or meditation. I could seek a bigger apartment, in which a nonfolding bicycle might comfortably fit, but that would require more money, which would require harder, or more, work. That sounds really challenging. That sounds stressful. I don't need more stress. I could start walking or running, or volunteer at the neighborhood soup kitchen. Those are out (see "stress; more" above). I could embark on a sensible and long-term program of recovery of mental health, but I've never been one for sensible or long-term. I could (and still might) get ahold of the Ursus Mark VI, the really very cool bearproof suit, made of chain mail, galvanized steel, titanium, high-tech plastic and liquid rubber, and which was recently snapped up on eBay by "an American who works in consulting for military projects" and whom I fully intend to track down.

Or!

Or I can travel to the new frontier of energy-efficient transportation. I can reinvent myself as a pioneer in the brave new world of alternative-energy transportation. It will help me. It will help the world. It will delay global apocalypse.

"Going nowhere fast?" I e-mail my old girlfriend. "Not any more, Pumpkin. Are you interested in joining me on an exciting journey to the future? I have already found nice his and hers models of folding bicycles."

She e-mails back the next day. She tells me she knows that I know she hates the nickname "Pumpkin." She tells me I need help, but that she's not the one who can provide it.

I will be making this journey alone. That's okay. That's more than okay. A folding bicycle is not designed for a pack animal. Pioneers ride solo.

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The first thing is to find the best, most compact, easiest-folding and all-around coolest model. Being a

I will be making this journey alone. That's okay. That's more than okay. **A folding bicycle is not designed for a pack animal.** Pioneers ride solo.

highly trained professional journalist, I buckle down to the lonely, oft-times Sisyphean, painstaking work of research.

"Really cool folding bicycles," I type into my computer and a week and a half later, sitting in the corner of my tiny apartment is a hard plastic suitcase. It stares at me balefully.

Reading about the Bike Friday Tikit was cool. Watching the online video of the guy folding the thing in three seconds was even cooler. But then the suitcase arrived, and I realized I would have to put the thing together.

The suitcase sits for a week.

The night before my first full day on my folding bike, I practice folding and unfolding it for an hour or so. I take a few moments in my apartment to think and to plan. I have already decided that I will not carry any lock at all. I will be self-sufficient. I'll be my own self-contained, self-propelled transportation system.

I wonder if anyone on the subway will make a crack about my clown bike. I wonder if my gym will let me check my bike in the coatroom. The gym lets mothers bring strollers. Since when did being childless consign people to second-class citizenship? I make a note to draft a letter to the appropriate legislative body in the following weeks. I wonder and I plan so much that it's midmorning before I leave my apartment. I decide not to take the folding bike out. That night, still planning, I have a pint of ice cream. I walk to the store to buy it.

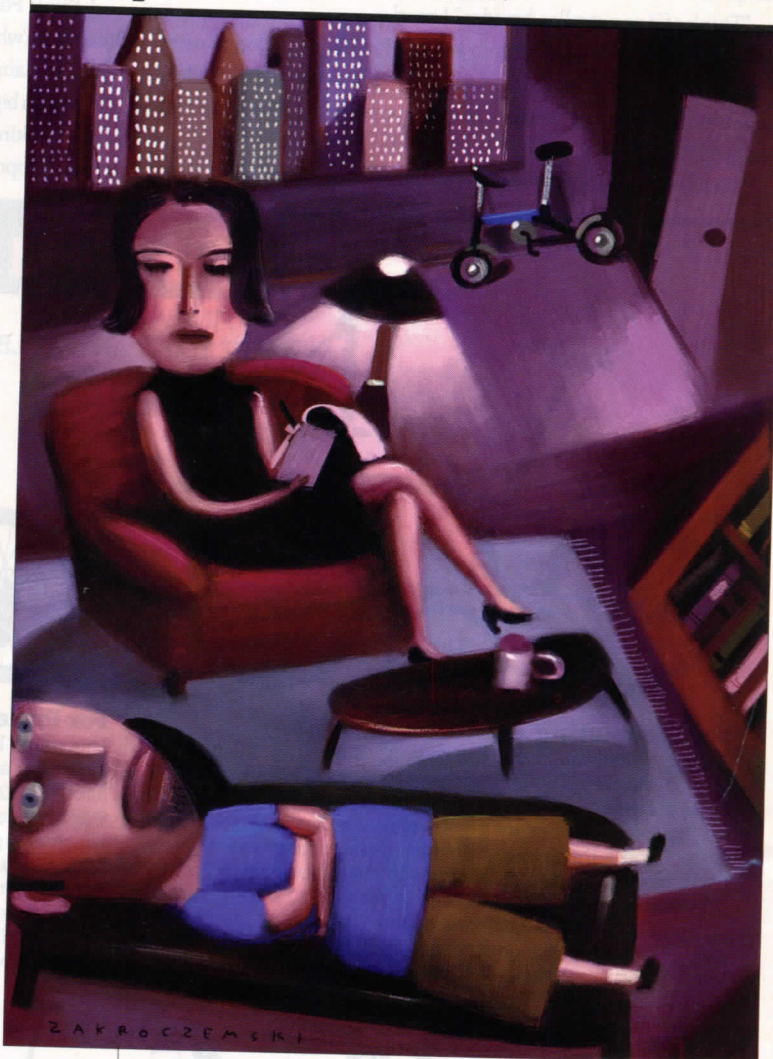
The next morning, because I don't want to risk carrying my folding bicycle on the subway during peak hours, I sleep in. Then I'm so late, I decide I'll just take a cab.

Walking home, I stop every person I see on a folding bicycle. "It's changed my life," a guy in his early 30s says. He's wearing a suit. He says he rides to the subway from his Upper East Side apartment every morning, takes his folder onto the subway, then rides it from his exit station to his office. "Best investment I ever made," says a book illustrator, a 27-year-old woman. "Anyone in Manhattan who doesn't own one of these is either very, very rich or merely silly," says a guy with a rear-view mirror attached to his helmet. (People on folding bikes, like Mormons, PETA members and other apparently odd, possibly dangerous but unquestionably sincere folks, will talk about their faith at the slightest provocation.)

The next day, I check out subway timetables. I consult weather forecasts. I walk to the subway stop at 58th and Seventh Avenue, which is about half a mile from my apartment, walk back, then unfold my bicycle and make the trip. Eight-minute walk, one-minute ride. I'd be saving myself seven minutes a day. That's 35 minutes a week. That's more than two hours a month. I think of the things I might do in two hours a month. I could go somewhere.

By week four of riding my folding bike, I have become adept at folding and unfolding, but I can't seem to get it to lie on the ground, like it's supposed to. I call the guy from Bike Friday. He talks me through the three-speed changer, expresses dismay and surprise that I can't seem to get it to sit with stability—that was a problem on the older

I tell my shrink that I feel self-conscious, that **I delayed going out on the folding bike for a week** because I was sure people would mock me.



prototypes, he tells me, but he'd had that fixed. He mentions a screw that needs to be tightened when putting the bike together. I vaguely remember a screw that hadn't looked like it needed to be tightened.

Week five, I ride the Tikit to my shrink's, normally a 15-minute walk, or a 10-minute, \$6 cab ride. I make it in four minutes, fold my bike on the sidewalk and roll it into the good doctor's office. She is intrigued, asks how I'm enjoying my new vehicle.

I tell her I feel self-conscious, that I delayed going out on it for a week because I was sure people would look at me funny, would mock me. Why would I think that, she wonders. I know that "Because it's a fucking clown bike" would not please her, so we talk for a few minutes about my mother, and a dream I had recently about lady elephants toying with me before feeding me corn, and then it's time to write a check and go.

I wheel the bike onto the street, then snap it open. "Let's go, Foldy,"

I say, as I ride into the sunset. (I live west of my shrink's office.) Somehow, Foldy has become my bicycle's name.

I look at the world differently now. I evaluate coffee shops on the basis of their floor space, stores for their aisle width, restaurants for the size of their coat-check rooms. Some locations don't measure up to my new, exacting standards. I take Foldy to Starbucks, where I glare at a young mother who gives me an irritated look when Foldy accidentally bumps her.

"Think of it as a stroller, breeder," I snarl.

That night I ride Foldy downtown, to a Ping-Pong parlor, to meet friends. There's a woman there I don't know. She doesn't seem unduly impressed by Foldy. She does seem impressed when I call it Foldy. Not in a good way.

Not all of my life is taken over by snarling at Foldy-haters and scaring

those who don't understand my Foldy-love. I spend quite a bit of time actually riding my new sidekick. And it's a good ride. A little twitchy, a little hyperresponsive to the slightest pressure on the handlebar, and in spite of all the genius engineering, it's not quite as efficient as a regular bicycle. Still, fun. But not nearly as much fun as dismounting on a crowded corner and nonchalantly folding Foldy, all in about three seconds.

"Is that a bike?" people say. "How does it work?" "How much?" "How does it ride?"

I think Foldy is calming me. I haven't had any talking elephant dreams in a while. I don't mutter "They'll all pay" anymore. I have caught myself exclaiming, when I stumble into my kitchen in the morning, "We've got a big day ahead of us, Foldy." Or, "We're going to a coffeehouse where our kind are not exactly welcome, Foldy, so don't get nervous." Or, as we approach a Starbucks, "You're gonna have to trust me on this,

In the Fold

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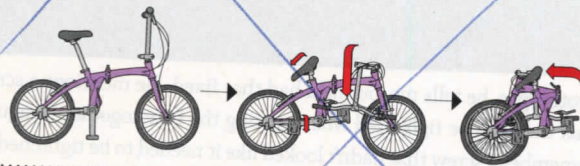
By Mike Cushionbury



Abio Penza
\$790

For Commuting

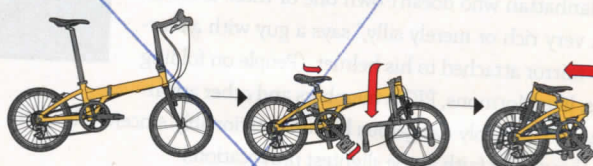
Folding bikes made for short commutes and city riding can be opened and closed quickly, and when collapsed are small enough to be stashed in an office or coat closet. Abio's Penza folds to 76x58x36cm—about the size of a typical suitcase. A shaft-drive system and a three-speed Shimano Nexus hub prevent greasy parts from coming into contact with clean business attire, but provide a big-enough gear spread to get you to the watering hole up the hill. The Penza weighs 30 pounds, can hold as much as 220 pounds of rider and luggage, and includes accessories such as fenders and a rear rack. **INFO:** abiobikes.com



Dahon Speed Pro TT
\$1,499

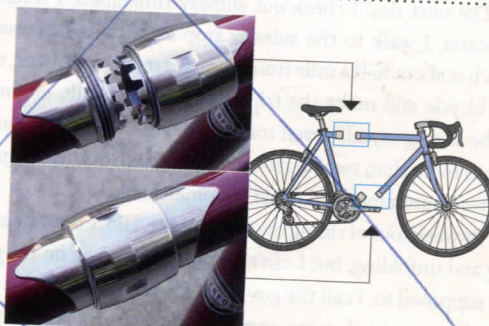
For Fitness or Hourlong Recreational Rides

This small but serious road bike can handle a marathon training ride or a long-distance journey, yet still folds down to a compact, 77x62x39cm, 21.5-pound package. The 7005 aluminum frame is designed with what Dahon calls BioLogic geometry, which is supposed to eliminate the twitchy feel of small wheels. SRAM's DualDrive transmission combines a three-speed internal-gear hub with a nine-speed cassette for 27 gear options. It has speedy Kinetix Pro wheels and time-trial bars with a Syntace VRO adjustable stem for multiple hand positions. **INFO:** dahon.com



For Folding Convenience with a Full-Size Bike

If you're set against riding a small-wheeled bike but still want to be able to travel without lugging along a full-size bike, your best option might be an S&S Bicycle Torque Coupling system. The couplers, shown here, are a custom option for many frame builders. Teeth on each coupler mesh, then you screw them together with a tool that resembles a traditional fixed-cup bottom-bracket wrench. The bike breaks apart and fits into a 66x66x25.4cm suitcase. The additional weight of the couplers is minimal; in titanium, for instance, the lugs are press-fit into the frame and welded into place, adding about eight ounces to the overall weight. S&S couplers can be used on any frame material, including carbon. Many custom builders can add couplers to nearly any bike they make, and S&S couplers can be retrofitted to your current steel, ti or carbon bike. **INFO:** www.sandsmachine.com



Foldy." I also say "Me and you, Foldy, me and you." Or, in times of stress, "We'll show the bastards, Foldy."

Where I go, Foldy goes.

I attend a fancy dinner party hosted by the wife of an old friend. I wonder whether I should call and ask if I can bring Foldy into her fancy penthouse apartment or just sneak her up the freight elevator, like a trampy Tri Delt. Remembering that ill-fated college romp gets me thinking about Foldy's sex. I decide he is a guy, more sidekick than girlfriend. He is plucky and brave. Sometimes he needs taking care of, when it's raining. But he is dependable, always there for me in a pinch.

I let Foldy stretch out next to the television in my apartment. The next day, I decide it might be a good idea to figure out why the first seven gears aren't working, perhaps even get a tune-up. By now, because of many hours spent on Internet sites dedicated to folding bicycles, I have located the folding bicycle inner sanctum in New York City. It is not, contrary to some dealers' recommendations, any of the bike shops that traffic in the folding contraptions. It is a cluttered, cramped basement apartment tucked away in the Union Square neighborhood, a hole-in-the-wall that feels more like a drug den or Prohibition-era speakeasy than it does a bike shop. If Yoda had been a folding bicycle nut, he would have hung out here.

I meet David Lam, the founder and owner, at the basement apartment, and show him Foldy. I tell him what's wrong. I ask (rhetorically of course) whether I am indeed the proud owner of "the Mercedes-Benz of folding bicycles."

Lam merely grunts. I notice walls and walls of another kind of folding bike. It's the Brompton, of which I'd read about and tried futilely to procure for a test ride.

"I see you have lots of Bromptons," I say. "They're not better than my bike, are they?"

And that's when my journey into the heart of folding bicycles acquires its guide.

Lam tells me that since he became a folding bicycle aficionado, he has come up with the Six Essential Elements of a folding bicycle.

"Six?" I ask. I do not ask whether "having an owner who bestows a nickname" is one of them.

The six essential elements of a folding bicycle, Lam tells me, are: folding speed, compactness, engineering, ride, weight and price.

"So Foldy, I mean, the Bike Friday Tikit, is clearly the Merced..." I begin, but Lam is not done with his disquisition.

"The Brompton was created in England, for London traffic," Lam says, and in terms of compactness, "it's the best."

He pulls down a Brompton, unfolds and folds it. Neither action is as rapid as the folding and unfolding of Foldy, but, I have to admit, the folded Brompton is a marvel—like a large, oversize lunchbox. I feel embarrassed for Foldy's folded state—all gangly and flopping.

He then tells me that most of the Brompton components are proprietary, while Foldy uses standard parts, but when I press him, he admits that "for a longer ride, I'd take a Tikit or a New World" (which is another of Bike Friday's offerings).

I begin to request a tune-up from Lam, but he is not done. He tells me that 10 out of 10 Bromptons get past Manhattan's security guards, while only nine out of 10 Bike Fridays do so. He tells me that he sees himself as an ambassador for folding bicycles and that when he stores his bicycle at the Museum of Modern Art, for example, he makes sure

Then, I cheat. **Not on the woman who had rediscovered her sexuality,** though I do that, too. I cheat on Foldy.

to give the coat-check person a large tip. He spins tales of the fabled Moulton, with its "elastomer technology," and of a genius recluse in Brooklyn who cranks out cheap and speedy folding bicycles for anyone plucky enough to find him.

I leave Lam with a headful of information and folding-bicycle envy. I spend the next few weeks trying futilely to get a Brompton from England. Also, I log many hours on chat boards and Internet sites devoted to folding bicycles.

I love Foldy, but I now know that he is just one of his kind. There are, as my poker buddies assured me when my "sad little man going nowhere fast" girlfriend dumped me, many fish in the sea. Online, I find the Strider and the Seven. I read about the fabled and impossible-to-locate Moulton and the Montague, a full-size folding bike sold by an MIT graduate student. I learn about the cranky recluse in Brooklyn who sells handmade folding bicycles for \$700. I learn that people love the Tikit but that many, many people love the Brompton, which might not be as comfortable for riding 100 miles as Foldy. I learn that there are some people even more obsessed with folding bicycles than I am.

While I'm on the Internet I decide I might as well join some Internet dating sites. (Is my new dedication to multitasking and efficient time use a consequence of my life as a folding-bike owner or a cause? I make a mental note to ask my shrink about this.)

I take Foldy to a first date, and the woman says "nice equipment." She also tells me I have nice eyes and that she has just "rediscovered [her] sexuality." I oil Foldy back at the apartment. He deserves it.

Owning a folding bicycle changes a man. I plan more before I leave my apartment. I pack fingerless gloves, for riding and for typing next to drafty windows, which is often the only place near which Foldy will fit. I carry liquid soap, in case the chain falls off, which, honesty compels me to admit, has been happening about every fourth day. I realize that this (preparation for hardship, enduring the little indignities that every pioneer must endure) is how my great-great-great-grandparents must have lived, plucky Ukrainian serfs dreaming of a better life. That cheers me when people jostle me (and Foldy) at Starbucks.

Then, I cheat. Not on the woman who had rediscovered her sexuality, though I do that, too.

I cheat on Foldy.

I set up lunch with a PR guy from Dahon, a company that sells more folding bikes, worldwide, than any other. I have heard stories about Dahon, that they're cheap, and fun and easy and for someone who longs for a lasting connection, a bad idea. I of course heard the same things from friends when I started dating Bess, an exotic dancer, and though that liaison ended with tears, recriminations and self-loathing (mostly mine), here I am, again reaching for something gaudy and in all likelihood treacherous. Why can't I be more like I imagine my doughty and sensible Ukrainian forebears had been? They didn't date exotic dancers or betray their faithful wooden carts.

FOLDY, continued on p. 84

FOLDY, continued from page 57

Or horses. Or whatever they used to get around.

The PR guy tells me, when he sees Foldy, that if I'm taller than 6 feet, having a bike with 16-inch wheels is self-destructive, that I need 20-inch wheels. He tells me that Dahon has more than 100 patents, that his company makes 50 percent of all folders sold in the United States. He tells me about a place in Santa Cruz, California, where if you take a commuter class, you get a \$200 rebate. He tells me that he's been pushing the idea of hanging tags from folding bike seats, so people will know how to fold them. Clearly, this guy knows folding bikes. Or folders, as I now and forever will call them.

He gives me a Dahon MU SL with 20-inch wheels. This folder is not cute. It's hard. It's mean. It's all business. It rattles my butt. But it's easy to pick up. It's incredibly light. It's not into gimmicks. It makes my teeth rattle a little. I don't like folding it as much but I like carrying it. That's not true; I don't actually like carrying it, but I like carrying it better than I like carrying Foldy.

At my shrink's, I talk about wanting the perfect folding bike, and the perfect wife and a perfect life. She tells me that accepting life on life's terms might make living easier. Before I go to bed, I discuss my shrink with Foldy. We both agree that she is a little too easy with facile aphorisms. When I complain that she has made a lot of money from me, and mention that I wish I felt a lot happier and more content than I in fact do, Foldy does not disagree.

I don't talk to the Dahon much. It is nice to ride, but difficult to talk to.

I love Foldy, but I take the Dahon when I worry about flights of steps

or space or the goodwill of the coat-check girls at the gym, especially Debbie, who I'm thinking of asking out. Yesterday I rode the Dahon, who needs a name, to the gym. It's fast, jumpy, kind of harsh and inelegant and a literal pain in the ass. Like a girlfriend I once had, a temperamental and biting harridan, I always marveled at how sweet and compact she looked at rest, curled in on herself. Should that be the Dahon's name? Phoebe? No, Phoebe would kill me if she found out. Speedy? Bump? Swifty? Twitchy? Touchy? Insaniac? I decide on Bump.

That night, after Debbie the coat-check girl turns down my offer of coffee, and after I contract what I'm pretty sure is food poisoning and after I wake at 3 a.m., then rush to the bathroom, where I puke, I lie on the cool tiles of my bathroom floor for an hour or so, staring at the ceiling, wondering how I possibly ended up middle-aged, crammed into a space better suited as a storage closet, single, with two folding bicycles.

I grab a legal pad and pen, crawl back into bed, and between vomiting episodes I make a list of former girlfriends I should have married. I make another of former girlfriends who might accept Foldy. I cross-reference that list with a list of former girlfriends who are still single and have not uttered the phrase "please don't ever contact me again," and/or "I don't know who you are anymore." I puke some more, and drink some ginger ale and moan a little bit. No one is on my final list.

I look at the only friend who has never insulted me. He is sprawled in the corner, uncomplaining.

"It's you and me, Foldy," I bleat.

Though sometimes when I'm in a big hurry, I still take Bump, otherwise, I'm back with Foldy.

Foldy helps me befriend the crabby waiter at the Greek diner, where

I have been eating eggs for the past five years and where, until I wheeled Foldy in, the waiter had only grunted at me. When I'm not riding Foldy through Manhattan, I daydream about small children waiting for me. I imagine them jumping up and down with delight as they spy my slim silhouette cresting a hill, crying, "It's Foldy! And Foldy's master, Steve!"

On the streets, I nod at other folding-cycle riders. We raise eyebrows, we nod. We give each other the upturned chin. The message is the same: "Hey, dude, we might look like circus bears, but inside our chests beat the hearts of lions. Of road warriors!"

Sometimes I stop a fellow road warrior and we talk. We talk folding time, riding performance, strategy with crabby doormen and waiters. I learn to endure the cars cutting me off, and I learn to deal with the obdurate doormen. I can even deal with the wiseacres who ask, "What happened to your bike?" Or, "Where's the rest of your bike?" My new archenemies are pedestrians crossing against red lights—always maddeningly heedless of cyclists who by law have the right of way, and positively dismissive of people like me, on folding bicycles. I decide I will buy an air horn.



Best Buddies Challenge

CHALLENGE YOURSELF TO CHANGE LIVES

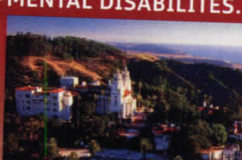
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I don't buy an air horn. My shrink suggests that if I'm so angry at pedestrians, it might be a good idea to spend a few sessions discussing my anger. That pisses me off. Foldy is also feeling some resentment—I can sense these things—and this troubles me more than my difficult therapist. In fact, things between Foldy and me, while ostensibly pleasant and superficially peaceful, have not been so great lately. Foldy has helped me lose weight, true, and he doesn't judge me when I eat my ice cream late at night, but still, I feel that we have plateaued. What's our future together? Do I even want a future with Foldy? Why don't we do anything fun anymore? If I do get ahold of the Ursus Mark VI, will I be as emotionally available to Foldy? I can feel Foldy's unhappiness in the accusatory silence.

I know that in a relationship, forward movement is necessary. I look for something for Foldy and me to seek together, some life-changing goal. Something that will bring us closer, that will make Foldy and me happy. Happy together.

That's how I decide to enter us in the Folds Up! folding bicycle race, held every spring in Central Park.

I spend the week before folding and unfolding Foldy in my apartment, because folding bike races, from what I have learned, involve sprinting approximately one city block, folding, carrying your folder about 10 yards and back, unfolding, then sprinting back from whence you came. I have studied the races on the Internet, late at night, with Foldy by my side. Bump has left us. I gave back the lightweight and feisty aluminum racer that was causing me so much confusion.

The night before the race, I wash my cycling shorts. I take Foldy from my bedroom, let him spend the night in the living room. He will not be hidden anymore. I'm ashamed that I ever hid him.

"They laughed at you, Folds," I say. "They laughed at us."

Foldy says nothing. How did I ever mistake his silence for shyness or insecurity? His is the silence of the warrior.

"No one's gonna be laughing tomorrow, my friend," I say, and pat the Velo Plush prostate-protecting seat I have fitted onto Foldy's frame.

Tomorrow comes and people do in fact laugh. They laugh when I scream "What???" upon learning that the folding bicycle race will not be a block long, but 3 miles, or twice around the lower loop of Central Park. They laugh, or at least I hear laughter, when I hop off Foldy at the finish line and kneel, breathing hard and sweating from what I suspect might be a minor heart attack. They laugh

when Foldy's chain falls off midway through the folding-bike ramble that follows in lower Manhattan.

But I don't care. The laughter of strangers doesn't bother me as much as it used to. That's what life as a folding-bike owner will do to a man. I put Foldy's chain back on and quietly leave the group. I decide I will fold Foldy, then get a coffee, and think a little bit about life, then I will unfold him, and together we will ride back to my apartment, where I'll surf the Internet and look for true love of the human female variety. I decide that today might be a nice day to cruise along the Hudson River. We can get some sun.

"How would you like that, Folds?" I ask my friend, as we roll toward the river, homeward-bound. Folds does not dignify the question with a response. I admire his quiet ease. ①

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