



How Far is 'Too Far'?

As regular readers of A Story A Week know, I use a bicycle for all my local running around. I have never owned a car, and although I had a driver's licence once upon a time, necessary for my employment, I let it lapse nearly thirty years ago.

I do my grocery shopping by bike, and frequently combine those trips with errands to the post office. My backpack is full of print packages as I leave the house, and is still full - now with groceries - when I get home!

If the destination is too far to reach comfortably by bicycle, I use the train or bus, or perhaps go with Sadako together in her car. But how do you define that phrase 'too far'? It seems as though many of us have very different opinions about just how far 'far' is! And these definitions have clearly changed over the years.

I am now quite used to hearing people say to me "You came here by bicycle? All the way from your home?", when I am in a shop or place that is actually only a few kilometres away from here. On one occasion in a shop in the next town, perhaps a half-hour ride from home, I refused a shopping bag and packed the goods into my little backpack. When I explained to the clerk that this was the best way to carry things when travelling by bicycle, he actually came outside to watch me ride away, as though he hadn't believed me!

Now I have no feeling at all that my behaviour is 'special' in any way, although I do recognize that it is somewhat unusual these days. Many sports cyclists certainly travel very long distances, and making five or ten minute trips is something that everybody does, but using a bicycle for these in-between trips is just no longer common, now that everybody has a car.

If you were to ask some of the local seniors about this, I am quite sure what they would say. "He went shopping in the next town by bicycle? What's the big deal about that? We used to walk over there, and never thought anything of it!"

There is quite an interesting twist to this question of 'how far'. When we think of a country on the other side of the world, younger people probably think nothing of jumping on a plane to go there, but to older people such a trip would be quite a special event. But the next town - a distance of just a few kilometers - is not far at all to those seniors, but is 'too far' for younger people!

I suspect though, that it is not so much a question of distance, but of time. Most people today don't use their bicycle for those 'next town' journeys because it takes too long. They can run their errand in just a few minutes in a car, but to make the journey by bike would of course take much longer. But when I make such a trip, it's not just the errand that is the point; I'm also getting an hour or so of good vigorous exercise, outdoors in the fresh air to boot. The person who went by car has to then go to the sports club (driving there no doubt!) for a workout on a stationary cycle!

But what's that you ask? What do I do when it rains? Please, please ... let's not think about such things just now; here in the middle of February the weather in my area is always beautifully clear and crisp, just perfect for a ride in the sunshine. And that reminds me, I have some errands to do; I need some envelopes from the stationery shop and some wood screws from the hardware store. Along with the usual post office and supermarket visits, my bike and I are both going to get a nice workout this morning. See you after lunch!

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