

FOR THE LOVE OF BIKING

BY NATE DOWNEY

Modern culture's much-needed paradigm shift will come when enough people recognize sustainability's overflowing smorgasbord of incentives. Greener lifestyles must be fun, and they should make or save you money. If our sustainable choices don't turn us into gold-medal athletes, they should at least make us happy, healthy and strong.

With the possible exception of edible gardening, there's no more positive example of sustainability than bicycling. I'm no Olympian, but I am 20 pounds lighter than I was when I started bike commuting five years ago. I bike everywhere: to my landscaping projects, kids' schools, errands, and to

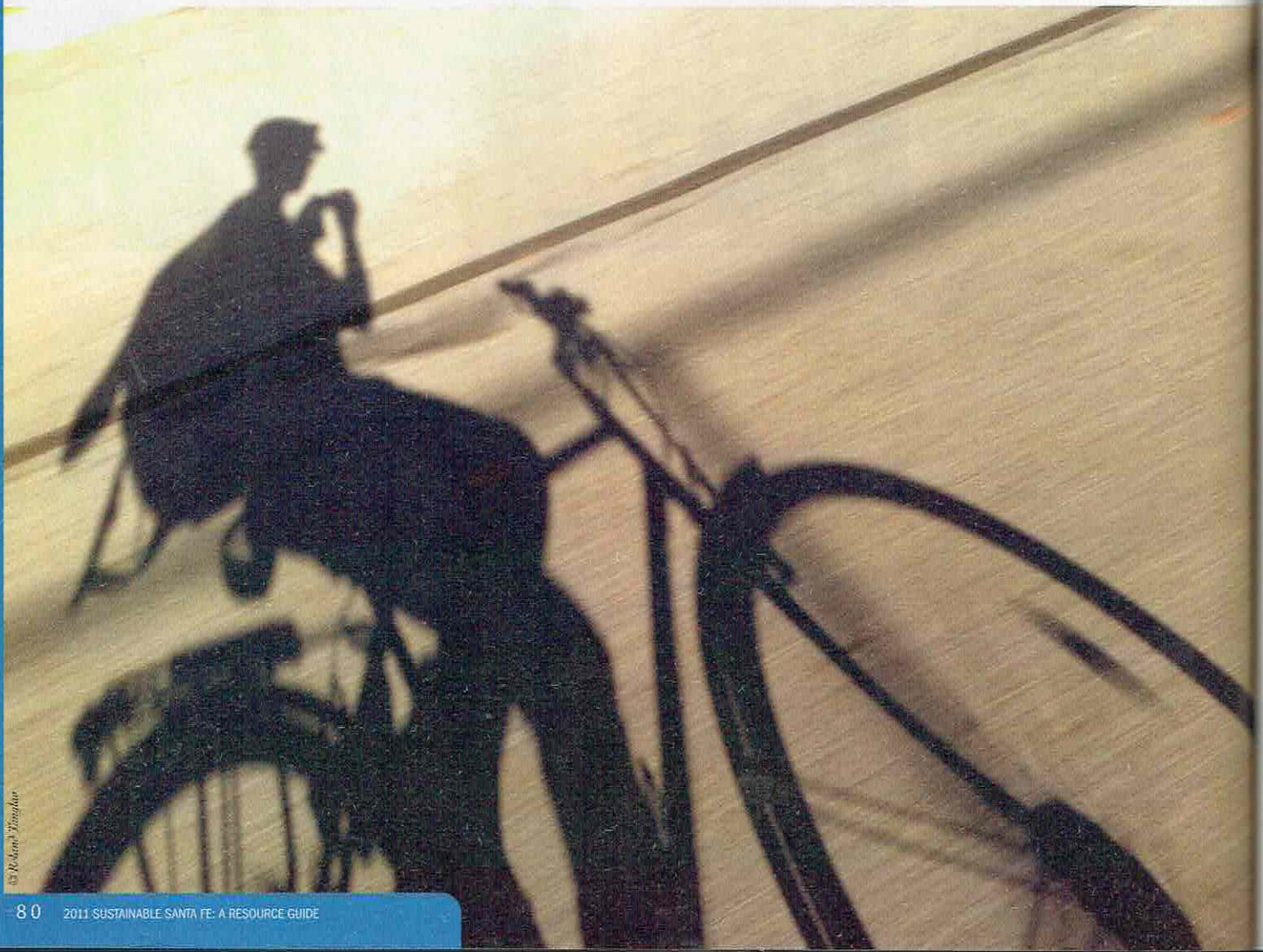
many social and cultural events. Thanks to the cool bike straps on the Rail Runner, several times I've cycled to Albuquerque for a morning meeting or an afternoon consultation.

Although many of my clients love it when I show up on a bike, I don't know that I've made money as a cyclist. But over the years

I've surely saved lots of cash in terms of gas, car maintenance, speeding tickets, and parking fees. Biking almost every day also gave me five wonderful years not paying for a gym membership.

I'll refrain from claiming to have found religion, but my spirit has certainly been elevated ever since getting

into purposeful (as opposed to recreational) cycling. Like a morning rain in the desert, there is a sur-



At the potluck of life, there are choices.

prising inspirational energy that you get from two-wheel travel. Sometimes it comes from within, and other times it's generated by the smiles, waves, thumbs up, and hefty measure of respect that large numbers of drivers have for cyclists.

Merely coasting downhill can instill an uplifting power in the soul, but an in-your-face wind in the middle of a long, steep incline can do even more for the human spirit. Here, life becomes more meaningful as you realize you can conquer the impossible. During those magical "I did it!" moments, you feel free from your addiction to oil, and that's a pretty heavenly feeling these days.

Whatever your motivation, here are three important cycling tips:

Be visible. Wear bright colors, employ hand signals, and always use lights at night.

Take to the streets. I spend about 98% of my bike time on streets as compared with sidewalks. On the street, a bike is visible; on the sidewalk it's not. Fences, walls, shrubs, trees, parked cars and signage all make sidewalk biking more dangerous than street biking. Choose quiet residential streets when possible and take up an entire lane when you can't give cars at least five feet with which to safely (and legally) pass you. Avoid

super-busy streets when sharrows (share-the-road arrows), bike lanes or smooth shoulders are lacking.

Know where you stand. At some intersections, in order to get a red light to turn green, your bike has to be in the right place. If there happens to be an icon of a bicycle painted at an intersection, standing at that spot will usually make the light change. If, at a red light, you see a pair of large rectangular pads embedded in the asphalt, put your weight and your front tire on the forward-most portion of the rectangles (right on the "X" where they intersect). This should also trigger a green light, so that you can easily go on your way.

At the potluck of life, there are choices. For those who understand it, biking toward sustainability is not a choice anymore. It's a knee-jerk reaction to the natural desire for a better world. It's almost as if planet Earth *needs* us to enjoy life to the fullest. Fortunately, doing this is tons of fun! ☘



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Harvest the Rain

HOW TO ENRICH YOUR LIFE BY SEEING EVERY STORM AS A RESOURCE



by Nate Downey

Illustrated by George Lawrence

photo by Jennifer Esperanza

"Downey writes in a captivating style ... with intelligent enthusiasm about what average homeowners can do ... Readers will find his book ... hard to put down. He stresses the gains of green gardening, such as beauty, shade, privacy, wind protection and the joys gardening provides to families and neighborhoods."

—The Texas Observer

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