

Humble Beginnings

By; Rev. "Broke Winger" Taylor

Hot. The kinda hot where your shoes get soupy, and your underwear get... Well never mind those. The sting of summer on my skin, like a good friend giving me the business. I was just ten years old. And I was small for my age. I was small but fearless. I mean nothing scared me. I was poking around in the back of a near collapsing garage behind an abandoned house. I was hoping it would be cooler in the shade. It wasn't really but at least the sun wasn't burning me.

The garage was crowded with shadows and musty smells. Crammed full of old junk, furniture mostly. An old wringer washer, a bent up ironing board, some stuff I didn't recognize and can't remember today. Having nothing better to do I poked around in that junk just to see what I could find. Back in a corner, heaped over with old buckets, and rags and god only knows what else I spied a set of handle bars. Pulling and tugging I moved enough junk to see that it was a motor bike of some sort and thought I had to be the luckiest kid in the world.

Well I piled all that junk back on top of it, I didn't want someone else to come along and find it. I jumped on my Schwinn and pedaled like mad all the way home. Seven blocks north and fourteen blocks east. Course at that age north and east meant nothing to me. Pouring sweat, and drawing huge gasping breaths I all but threw my once beloved Schwinn down the basement steps. That bike had been my most prized possession. My trusty steed. Now, now that I had found a motorcycle...not so much.

Stopping just long enough to guzzle just enough water to give me some respectable cramps from the outside spigot I set off again at a run. Seven blocks south, fourteen blocks west. My PF Fliers slapping the pavement, and the sun slapping my bare shoulders and back. Even then I wore my hair long. Bleached almost white by the sun, it hung heavy with sweat and hot against my neck. My hair lifted slightly as I ran the hot sticky air felt cool on my neck.

Pounding down the sidewalks I ran, as hard as a ten year old boy on an epic mission can. Dreams of dare devil stunts, of speed, of roaring engine and gleaming spokes flashing through my head I ran. Back to that falling down garage full of unwanted junk. My gut in a knot fearing the worst, just knowing someone had come while I was taking my bike home and found my treasure and taken it away.

Thundering into the garage at full speed, I came pretty close to ending it all right then and there. I all but impaled myself on a broken shovel handle when I tripped over some anonymous, yet no less malicious hunk of junk bent on the murder of an adventurous kid who knew nothing of caution. Tearing through the junk and dust I dug it out.

I didn't know what kind of bike it was. I didn't know how to ride it or how to start it even. But as soon as I got it clear of junk and far enough away from the wall I jumped right on it. Making Vroom Vroom sounds and twisting the throttle like a retard. All set to ride it home, ride it to the park, ride it, ride it RIDE IT! If I could just get it started.

All of that had to wait though. Because the first thing I had to do was get it out of that garage full of junk. Cursing under my breath, then immediately giggling at myself and the use of the "bad word" I set to work. It probably took me about an hour, though it felt like an entire day of hoisting, pushing, grunting lifting and dragging to clear a path just wide enough to wheel that magnificent hunk of shit out of there and into the sunlight.

The only gleaming chrome on it turned out to be the foil wrapper from a piece of chewing gum. It had more rust on it than any thing else. My hopes and dreams seemed to dim a bit. But I started pushing. And pushing. Seven blocks north fourteen blocks east. It creaked and squeaked and sometimes didn't want to go. The front tire was almost flat and every so often it would make the bike try to turn or fall over.

I had found in the garage that I could reach what I thought of as its "pedals" but I couldn't reach the ground on it. When ever it would sway away from me it took every ounce of strength I had to keep it from falling over. There were a few times that if not for someones hedges I would surely have dropped it. But I kept pushing, and I kept dreaming of races, and of how envious all the other kids would be.

I pushed, and I dripped sweat, and I grinned all the way home. Seven blocks north, fourteen blocks east. I was dirty, I was itchy, I was sun burnt. I had blisters on my hands and feet, and I was happier than I had ever been in all my ten years.

I got home, in the back yard and I parked it, leaned it against a cherry tree really because it didn't have a kickstand and I couldn't seem to get the center stand to stay down. There in the dirt, because we had no grass. Bicycle parts strewn around and stained with fallen cherries the ground hard to walk on if you were bare foot because of all the cherry pits I just stood there in the shade of that enormous cherry tree and stared at it. After a few minutes I started wiping at it trying to get the dirt and dust off. I got a bucket of water and a dirty old rag and started cleaning it up as best a dreamy headed ten year old could.

To tell you the truth that piss poor washing would have been all that thing would have gotten if not for an amused neighbor. That guy with the beard who always smelled like cold medicine and seemed to always have a cigarette hanging out of his mouth. He showed me how to get the rust off the wheels with a wire brush. I put air in the dry rotted tires with my bicycle pump.

He tinkered with it and muttered unintelligibly while I washed and wire brushed it and just generally got in his way. He showed me the kick start lever and told me what it was for. Showed me the clutch lever and brake lever. He took the tank off of it and we walked three blocks to a gas station And I spent my entire life savings to fill it with gas.

He reinstalled the tank and I kicked that thing until the sun went down and mom called me in for the night. I was dust, dirt and grease from head to toe, there was a brownish blackish ring an inch wide around the tub after my bath. And under my finger nails was still black.

I woke the next morning to the usual sounds of the neighborhood. Northeast side of Cleveland Ohio 1982. Barking dogs, police sirens, ratty old cars screaming kids. The occasional gunshot. The smell of fermenting cherries mixed with the stink of one of the worst neighborhoods in one of the dirtiest cities in the country. A hand full of generic cereal and a Dixie cup of Koolaid for breakfast I fly out the back door to "work on" my motorcycle some more. It was yellow, or at least had been at one time. And had a number plate on the front. The number was almost completely worn off. I grabbed an old spray paint can from beside the collapsed chain-link fence at the back of the yard and repainted the number. 16. That magical age I couldn't wait to be.

I spent the rest of the day wearing myself out on that kick starter. Kicking, kicking kicking. Switching legs and kicking some more. I'd stop for breaks and wash it some more with that dirty old rag. I'd tug on cables and wiggle the drive chain. I'd kick the tires and look at the wires then try kicking it some more. Then the process would start all over again.

The day passed into exhaustion without so much as a cough from the engine.

The next morning I skipped the cereal and carried the Dixie cup of Koolaid outside with me. I climbed up in the tree and ate some cherries. I had been thinking about pushing the bike over to the park. Because there was this hill. I was thinking I could "ride it" down the hill just coasting it. It would be fun to ride it even that little bit. But pushing it home. Pushing it back up that hill. Well that task took me all afternoon. But the ride down that hill was nothing short of spectacular!

The next day the guy with the beard came over again while I was again hard at work on the kick starter. He started working on it again and sent me over to his garage to get his tool box. I thought I would pull my arms right out of their sockets carrying that thing across the yards. But I got it there. A few minutes later he had the carburetor off and laying in the dirt. Much to my horror he had taken a part off of my motorcycle!!! It would never work now!

But he showed me how to take that carburetor apart. How to take an old toothbrush and a few wires from the wire brush and clean it all out. To get all the yellow stuff out. I didn't have a clue at the time but I scraped all the gasket material away in pieces into the dirt. So he sent me in the house to get a cereal box. I came out with the big yellow box that simply said CORN FLAKES on the front in black letters. He pulled a gleaming switchblade which was the coolest thing in the world to me...well next to my motorcycle that is. Anyway he pulled that knife out of no where and used it to cut new gaskets out of that cereal box and we put the carburetor back together. "Well" I thought " I'm a mechanic now. It has to run we fixed it." So I spent another hour kicking it, just convinced that it was gonna start. The neighbor with the cold medicine smell and the beard just laughed to himself and wandered back over to his house.

The next day I decided to push the bike to the park again and once more know the thrill of riding it down the hill.

The following day the guy with the beard came back and together we pushed the bike over to his house, and rolled it into his garage. He showed me how to get it up onto the center stand. I could do it, but it took all I had. He pulled this little white thing out of the engine and went at it with a wire brush and some sand paper. Then he turned this little lever that was attached to the bottom of the gas tank. And he started kicking it. I nearly jumped out of my cut off shorts cuz when he kicked it it actually made engine sounds. As I mentioned I was small for my age, I really didn't have enough ass to do more than get the motor to turn but one stroke. I could have kicked that thing for a year and it wouldn't have started.

Anyway he kicked it a few times, twisted the throttle a few times and I dove under his junk covered work bench thinking someone was shooting at us when it back fired.

He just laughed at me, but not in a way that made me feel stupid. When I crawled out from under that work bench he didn't say a word. Come to think of it he never did talk much at all. He just winked at me and he kicked that old rusty P.O.S. one more time and the world has never been the same for me since. The coughing sputtering near death rattle of that motor was the most wonderful sound I had ever heard.

He took a screwdriver and poked at the carburetor with it, And he twisted the throttle and poked around with the screw driver some more and after a bit it started to smooth out a bit. He squeezed in the clutch lever and did something with his foot and I wanted to kill him when I heard something break in the motor at the same time the bike kinda jumped forward. He just chuckled again and motioned me over with his right hand. Without a thought I climbed right up in front of him onto the bike and grabbed the handle bars. I revved it up!!! No more Vroom Vroom noises and coasting down hills only to have to push it back up!

He took me around the block on it a few times and showed me how to use the throttle and the brakes, how to shift. He let me have the handle bars wrapping his hands over mine.

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