

# Bike Love

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**In a tale of malt liquor, cold cash and a place called The Blue Trail, a college student finds true love. But like most university love, it ends in heartache.**

• I still distinctly remember when the cruel side of capitalism found its way into my living room. It was May 1999. I was somehow finishing my twelfth semester of college with no degree to show for my effort. I was also finishing blowing the remainder of my Montgomery GI Bill – valued at a cool \$18,000 – the Army had given me to pay for expenses during college, in exchange for the three backbreaking years I gave to them as a paratrooper.

At 26 years old I felt like I really hadn't gotten my act together. I had no money, no degree, no plan and all I had to show for spending \$18,000 dollars was a fancy mountain bike and

one hell of a hangover.

The end of my governmentally-funded education/spending spree and the impending 1999 fall semester marked the approach of two

words that struck fear into my psyche: student loans. Since I was broke and wouldn't be



riding much that summer – I'd just be working – and since I really had no need for a full suspension bike since I quit racing back in 1996, I

decided to do something sacrilegious in the name of the mighty dollar: sell my mountain bike. To any serious cyclist, selling your bike is akin to selling a child, photographs that cannot be replaced, or your very soul.

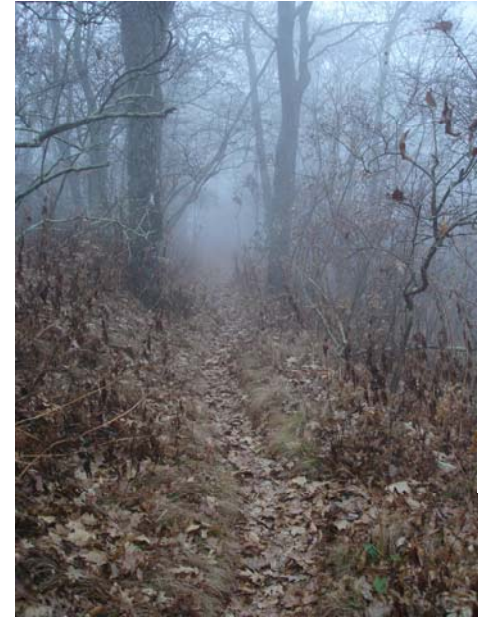
My 16.5-inch red Pro Flex 854, complete with parallelogram fork and artistically-curved swingarm, had been through a lot with me. None of my friends – not even past girlfriends – knew me as well as my bike did. I had logged literally thousands of hours in the saddle, over hill and dale, in good times and bad, midterms, breakups and blurry late nights. We plowed through piles of

windblown snow and slid in the sticky, cool spring mud. Among the oppressive heat and swarming



blackflies of summer we traveled, under the brilliant fall canopies we coasted.

Summers were most memorable and each warm weather ride exceeded the prior in joy. I'd carry by bike down the stairs of my apartment building, the floor still sticky with dried beer and malt liquor from weekend parties, and out the front door, into the sunlit parking area. Once aboard my steed, I pedaled through the deserted summertime campus, jumping steps and riding elevated walkways, continued out past the dormant middle school and across the empty university soccer fields. I arrived at The Blue Trail, a series of serpentine mountain bike paths that traveled above the Saranac River hidden behind the university field house.



The primitive and ill-maintained 10-mile-

long Blue Trail snaked its way through expansive hardwood forests composed of maple, beech and oak; an island of wild land that stood tall above an advancing sea of sprawl. Once on the trail, my bike and I were intimately one.

My tires softly flattened leaves and slid through mud holes that didn't dry up until August. My gloved fingers delicately worked the shifters and brake levers while my suspension soaked up Northeast terrain. Besides the breeze filtering through my helmet and the white noise of rapids churning in the Saranac River below, only my freewheel when coasting, or my derailleurs when shifting, broke the primeval silence.

That's what came to mind when I decided to sell my bike – good times on The Blue Trail – not the \$700 that might end up in my pocket. My decision to sell was permeated with guilt. Who would end up with this bike I loved so? Unfortunately, anyone with \$700. Maybe suburban parents who would buy it for their rotten spoiled brat to leave out in the rain and do

skids on. Perhaps an independently wealthy Phish head would purchase it. A dreadlocked throwback from the 60's who smelled like veggie burritos, rarely dabbled in reality, couldn't tell the difference between Panaracer Dart and Panaracer Smoke tires and would never even ride the damn thing.

Or maybe a muscle bound frat boy would become the owner. He'd carelessly bash my Pro Flex through the woods, attempt lame ass bunny hops in his driveway, ride with the seat way too low and let some girl ride it because she was "hot."

I felt I was plotting to sell a lover into a degrading life of masochistic prostitution,



exploited by dirty pimps, soiled by abusive Johns. The very idea of selling my bike to a

substandard owner reeked of irresponsibility. But after attempting to withdrawal forty dollars from an ATM later that day, which was unsuccessful due to "inadequate funds," necessity prevailed emotion.

I printed the advertisements: "Full Suspension Mountain Bike For Sale." It was the catchiest headline I could think of, seeing a full suspension bike was a relatively new school thing in 1999. An unflattering black and white image of my bike was placed under the headline. Below this simple illustration I listed all the parts. At the bottom was my name and number. I tacked the announcements up in bike shops, bookstores and coffee houses, hanging my head in shame after pressing each thumbtack.

Two weeks evaporated and no one called, thank God. I hoped no one would ever call. I kept reassuring myself no one wanted my bike. "A five-year-old ride for \$700? No way. It's a dinosaur. 28 pounds of Shimano DX parts and suspension that consists of pieces of foam hyped

as 'elastomers.' Nope, this thing isn't going anywhere."

Unfortunately, a week later, the phone in my living room rang. I prayed the call had nothing to do with my bike. I picked up and gave the usual "Hello." An obnoxiously enthusiastic voice greeted me.

"Hi, I'm calling about the bike for sale." Showing some respect for my bike, I walked into the kitchen, out of sight, to spare it from overhearing the details of a potential sale. I whispered into the receiver, "Yeah, the Pro Flex?"

A gratingly chipper voice asked, "Yes, is it still for sale?"

I asked him to hold on a minute. Laying the phone down I walked back into the living room and gazed at my bike. I thought back to The Blue Trail and all the good times we had riding that route. Our route. If I sold my bike, who would go to The Blue Trail with me? I didn't want to go alone.

But I walked back into the kitchen, stared at

my useless ATM card laying on the table, and picked up the phone, demurringly reporting, "Yeah, it's for sale."

"Great. Can I come over tomorrow?"

The rest of the day I didn't look directly at my bike. It was just too damn sad. Though it sounds psycho-delusional, I somehow felt my bike heard the phone conversation and knew I betrayed our relationship. By evening we both knew we were breaking up. It was over.

At 10:00 o'clock the next morning the potential buyer arrived. I led the young man into the living room and to my helpless bike, soon to be sold to a substandard owner. But once this kid and I struck up a rapport, things started looking a little brighter.

Though only 16 years old he noticed the Shimano DX front hub and noted, "Whether it's Shimano DX or XTR, a front hub is still only a front hub." He commented that I chose a very economical set up, parts wise. He agreed that wheel sets are where you should always try to

save weight since it's rotating weight. Therefore, he appreciated the Kevlar-beaded tires, double-butted spokes and Bontrager BCX rims. He respected that I took good care of my bike, saying it looked really clean.

"You always keep it inside?" he asked.

"Yeah, I wash it after every ride, dry it off and put it right here." With a self-deprecating, nervous laugh I added, "It's kind of like a little system I have."

He looked the bike up and down one more time, pushed on the rear suspension again, and took a step back. "I'll take it."

Right on cue, an enormous pile of cash was handed to me. He gentlemanly said, "You're more than welcome to count it, but it's all there. \$700." I slowly drew in the stack of well-worn twenties as



I stood in shock; in total disbelief I had just sold a bike I rode every other day for five years straight. I counted the money, then put it in my pocket reassuring him it was all there. Then I thanked him. He replied with a devilish little smile, "No, thank you."

He wheeled the bike out my apartment, carried it down the stairs, his feet sticking to the dried beer and malt liquor, and arrived in the sunlit parking area. From my window on the second floor I watched him inexplicably mount the bike the same way I always did, then he rode away, pedaling and shifting delicately, gently leaning into his very first turn. I never saw my bike again.

I slowly turned from my lookout and stared at where my bike was just moments earlier. There were two small imprints in the brown carpeting where the front and rear tires sat. Next to the front tire print were my riding shoes and toolbox. On the coat rack behind where my bike used to

rest, hung my helmet and full-fingered riding gloves. These objects looked so out of place; so exceedingly useless and lonely.

I stared at the desolate scene with sadness, took the massive wad of cash out of my pocket and felt like a chump, giving into the mighty dollar so easily. Suffused by a feeling of loss, I comforted myself by reasoning there would be other bikes in my future and that eating and paying rent was more important than riding. But if I had the chance to do it all over again, I would have chosen riding my bike on The Blue Trail for just one short minute over comfortably eating and paying rent for that entire summer. «« **ES** »»