

Eulogy for Tyler Nelson

Positive Spin - October 6, 2015

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I met Tyler when he was 10 on an evening in August when I was in the garage working on bikes with the door open. He was out riding and stopped to ask me about my bikes, some of which were unusual and caught his eye. I showed them to him and we talked about them a bit, then we looked at his bike – which was unusual in that the only thing it did was roll. There wasn't a working brake or shift lever on it. So over the next few nights he came over and we got it back in running condition. We talked about different things while we were working, but I remember in particular while we were truing a wheel he looked at me through the spokes and thanked me for spending time with him. Later I was to learn that every cop in town knew him from trouble he had gotten into. But when we spent on-on-one time together, he was as sweet a kid as you would ever meet.

For some time I had considered starting a community bike shop, so I talked to John Lozier about it and suggested that there might be more kids like Tyler out there who would benefit from the chance to work on bikes one-on-one with adults for both the practical and inspirational reasons. Our plan was to find volunteers who were interested in working with youth, and start an organization out of my garage similar to shops where I had volunteered. About a week later hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf coast and our mission switched from youth education to disaster relief, helping local refugees and sending bikes to New Orleans. As a result we were given a nice shop to operate out of in Sunnyside, and eventually the old shirt factory in Marilla where you are all now.

I remember Tyler telling me once that he had phoned his father and talked about our friendship. He told me his father said “You stick with that guy and you'll turn out alright.” He didn't. We made plans many times to get together and work on bikes. He came to the first few, but then he started missing our meetings. I would go to his house and he would be gone. The last time I tried to connect with him I saw him riding away as I approached. Other things had gotten his attention. Over the next few years I would see his mom or grandma and they would tell me what was going on with him. A few times he came by the shop and said he wanted to get involved again.

I was glad to see that he was getting involved again this past Summer, it sounded like he was really going to get things together finally and inspire other kids to get involved with biking too. Though I haven't spent much time with him in recent years, he's always on my mind. And now I'm focusing how I can help make sure that every kid has opportunities to make a constructive life for themselves and serve others – no matter what their skin color, income level and where they were raised. Please give my sincerest condolences to Tyler's sister, grandma and mom – who I knew – and to his relatives who I didn't. I wish I could be with you to share the life he lived, and what it means for what we all do next. Take good care of yourselves, each other, and anyone else you can.