

sharper focus “Pedal on”

By Lawrence Shiroma, Major

Early one morning while pedaling to work on my bicycle, I was struck from behind by a car. It happened on Park Avenue, a busy street in Long Beach, and it happened in a split second, although my mind seemed to have captured everything in slow motion.

While turning left, I was suddenly jolted by a car smashing into my bike, throwing me to the asphalt. The incident left me shaken with a crumpled bike. But other than minor cuts, bruises and sore ribs, I was OK. The driver who hit me took me home and later, when I went to my office at Territorial Headquarters (THQ), my staff had already learned about the accident. Commissioner Jim Knaggs dropped by to see how I was doing.

I am thankful the Lord was watching out for me that morning, for it could have been much worse. In San Diego recently, a 21-year-old woman was killed when her bicycle was struck from behind by a car. Each year, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, some 48,000 bicyclists are injured in motor vehicle traffic crashes and an additional 677 killed.

Did the incident cause me to give up biking? No, but I am aware of what streets to avoid in Long Beach and those that are safe for bicyclists. Having been a pedaler since my youth when I had a paper route for the Honolulu Star Bulletin, biking has long been a part of my life.

As an officer, I have been fortunate to bike to work in three appointments, each with a very different terrain. Riding along a beautiful wooded trail to the Booth Memorial Home in Anchorage on my single-speed Huffy was exhilarating. Brutally challenging is the steep incline on Hawthorne Boulevard at the College for Officer Training. Even with my 21-speed Schwinn—courtesy of the Officer Wellness program—biking up that hill is a test of the spirit. Pedaling the flat 4.5 miles to my office at THQ has been generally without incident, except, of course, for that one hit-from-behind encounter with a motor vehicle, and I once lost all of my keys.

Along the way to work in the early morning, I pedal past people leaving their homes and apartments—coffee cup in hand—getting into their cars or waiting at the bus stop to go wherever their



daily journey takes them. I pedal past dog owners walking their pets, and I usually pass at least one cat staring at me from out of a window or under a parked car.

One morning, as I stop at the side of Ocean Boulevard, a car pulls up next to me. Perhaps seeing my Salvation Army fatigue uniform, the driver mistakes me for a policeman. He is lost and in broken English asks me how to get to the 405 South. Anyone who drives in Long Beach knows that it is quite a challenge to get to the 405 from Ocean Boulevard. But retrieving my trusty iPhone, I am able to show him the directions on the maps app.

Coming up to the intersection at Cherry Street, I pull up next to an elderly gentleman wearing faded military fatigues, sitting on a well-used electric scooter with an American flag decal on its back. Perhaps our commonality of being on wheels, him on three and me on two, and both wearing military-type garb draws us. We nod to each other and exchange greetings before the light turns green and we go our separate ways.

Sometimes life throws us a curve, hitting us out of nowhere, as it happened to me that one morning on Park Avenue. We are blindsided, damaged, hurt and angry. Should we curse God and die? (Job 2:9). I think, rather, we can have the faith and determination of Esther, who, when faced with a difficult decision, went boldly ahead, saying, If I perish, I perish! (Esther 4:16).

May God grant you courage when faced with the challenges that come your way and when having done all, to stand (Eph. 6:13).