

Tales From the End of the Bus Line: Death of a Kawasaki

written by Megan and William Broughton | September 25, 2015



Tales From the End of the Bus Line is a long-distance collaboration between daughter/father Megan and Bill Broughton to collect the many adventures of Bill's young adulthood in Van Nuys, California. Installments (and photos that should or shouldn't see the light of day, if we're lucky) will be penned by the two of them.

"They've all been pretty light stories so far. I think it's time to go more into the darker times."

"Like friends dying or economic troubles?"

"What? No, I'm talking about the time my Kawasaki was stolen."

"...ok, Dad."

"1979 Kawasaki KZ750 b4 Twin for sale, Special Touring Saddle. \$1500 firm."

The ad was so short and concise that Hemingway could have written it. This was in the *Recycler*, that marvelous weekly that used to be printed at Valley Printers up in Granada Hills. I noticed the ad and made the call the same day, riding my Nishiki over to North Hollywood or Burbank (it's always hard to tell where one neighborhood ends and the other begins in the Valley) to see it. It was midnight blue, which is so close to black they're virtually indistinguishable, and unmarked, without any signs of ever being dropped. There was indeed a touring saddle, very rare and looking nice on a 750 Twin, and the mileage was decently low. The man selling it was about thirty, and as his wife was having a baby, he was selling his bike to get a car. I test rode it around the block, couldn't find a thing to complain about, and bought it on the spot. He tossed in a helmet for free, as he didn't need it anymore.

It had a slightly raked front end, with pulled back bars that held your hands chest high, and was incredibly comfortable to ride. The twin Mikuni carburetors were side-by-side, so synchronizing them was as easy as looking down their throats to watch the valves move up and down in the same rhythm. People questioned my intelligence (and sanity, and life expectancy) in buying it, asking why a bike instead of another car. I'd bought Tom and Lynne's Chevy Vega (of Ensenada fame) some time before, but that had finally given up the ghost and I'd sold it to one of the janitors at work. I responded that a 750 was good on gas, (and with gas prices shooting up to almost a dollar a gallon, that showed intelligence), that I could work on it myself, (which showed sanity, because the insane have a hard time mechanically), and as for life expectancy, I was only twenty four years old, so I could reasonably

expect to live forever, being at that age immortal.

Two years passed, some of them great times and some not so, which I may or may not get to later, and the Kawi took me from San Diego (Betsy's wedding) to Solvang (to see a Danish village, California style) to Bakersfield (God knows why, and I've blocked it from memory). I dropped it a few times, leaving marks on it, and leaving some on me too. Not from riding hard, it wasn't that kind of bike, but from things like turning a corner to find sand on the road, or some idiot making an illegal and sudden turn right in front of me. I liked to think it bore its scars with a certain pride, having survived.

Motorcycles are horribly vulnerable to theft because all you really need is two guys, a pick-up truck, and ten minutes worth of opportunity. I used to keep the 750 chained up to the pole beside my parking spot at the apartment. One morning I went downstairs to do a load of laundry and caught two guys giving it the once over. I asked them what they were doing and one of them said he would like to buy the bike, because he'd just moved here from Israel and needed transportation, did I know who owned it? After explaining I did and it wasn't for sale, they left. I had a bad feeling about the conversation, but figured it was chained up pretty well, so I let it go.

The moral of that story is always listen to your feelings, especially the bad ones.

Three weeks later, Mom was coming to town and my brother was going to pick her up at LAX and bring her up to Van Nuys to our sister Kathy's house. I was going to ride down and meet her when she got off the plane, then I had to go straight into work. When I went down to my parking spot, it was empty except for a cut chain lying on the concrete. I called the police, and filed a report, giving them my plate and registration numbers. The law didn't require you to have insurance back then, and I didn't. It was not really encouraging to hear from the desk sergeant that stolen motorcycles are almost never recovered, but immediately taken to pieces and sold for parts. Lots of folks supported me with their condolences; Traci buying me a beer and telling me "It's so sad, you really loved that bike." This again left me with my Nishiki bicycle as my sole means of transportation. Mom's visit came and went, and there was still no call from the police. Another month with no news, and I had written it off in my mind by this time, starting a "new bike fund" by pedaling straight home every night after work and saving every penny I could.

Five months later, I was riding the Nishiki up Sepulveda Boulevard to Bob's parents house in Panorama City. I'd intended to have lunch at Doctor Hogly Wogly's Tyler Texas Barbeque, but the line to get in was, as usual, about forty folks long and two deep out the door and into the parking lot, so I cut through to Sepulveda Place as a short cut over to Roscoe. There on Sepulveda Place, chained to a telephone pole, was my motorcycle. I grabbed both brakes, skidded to a stop, and looked around. There was a family walking down the sidewalk, so I asked the man if he knew who was riding this bike, quickly explaining that it was mine and had been stolen earlier in the year. He replied that it was being ridden by three guys who lived in the out-of-business swimming instruction place just across the street. One of them had

told him they were staying there with the permission of the owner, but he did not believe this was true. I asked if they spoke with an accent, and he said yes, it sounded Middle Eastern to him. I rode back to corner, where there was a pay phone, and called the Van Nuys Police precinct.

An anxious hour later one showed up. I told him everything that happened, and he asked my why I thought it was my motorcycle, since they all look the same anyway. I showed him the specially made saddle, the damage to the right pipe where I had to lay the bike down, and pointed out the fork lock was broken and the ignition was hot wired; the classic signs of a stolen bike. Then I showed him that the locking gas tank had been left popped open, but that my key, which I still carried on my key ring, still locked it, and did just that, unlocking it again just to drive the point home. He was unimpressed and said lots of bikes probably had the same key, so that was no proof at all. He mentioned the license plates didn't match up, so there was nothing he could do as there was no way of proving it was mine. Then he left. I didn't know Bob's parents phone number, so I pedaled over to their house as fast as I could, with the idea to getting some bolt cutters and using his truck to get my bike back. In the time it took to get that all set up, someone must have tipped off the three thieves. When we got back to Sepulveda Place they had taken the bike and split. It has been thirty-two years; I still look at every KZ 750 I see, just in case.