

OPINION

IT'S OUR TURN

A brush with death on the trail

I almost died on the Central Lakes Trail. It happened a few weeks ago and I still consider myself lucky to be telling the tale.

I was on one of my typical 10K training runs, running west on the trail near Lake Brophy. I checked my watch and saw that I was reaching the halfway point where it was time to turn around and head back home.

It was a beautiful spring morning and I was surprised there weren't that many people out enjoying the trail. It was as if I had the trail to myself.

That was probably my first mistake.

As I made a tight U-turn to go in the other direction, out of nowhere, I saw a tandem bicycle barreling straight at me. It apparently had been zipping along behind me and was now on the left side of the trail, in the process of passing me.

Only a few feet separated us from disaster.

Time seemed to stand still.

I remember seeing the glint of the bike's handlebars, hearing a surprised cry – a high-pitched "aaahhhh!" – from the bike's driver, and I remember thinking, "Wow – are they going FAST!"



AL EDENLOFF
News Editor

In the next fraction of a second, I could see, in flashes, how this was going to play out. The bike was certainly going to crash into me. There was no way to avoid it. I would be sent flying into the ditch with broken bones, all in a bloody, bruised heap.

The tandem bike riders, who were both luckily wearing helmets, would go careening into the woods to the left of the trail, either from the collision or when they tried to avoid hitting me. They'd be knocked off their bike and would also suffer serious injuries. I could envision ambulance lights, sirens, paramedics.

So much for that idyllic spring day.

But miraculously, the driver made a lightning fast adjustment at the exact time I took a startled half-step in just the right direction.

We missed hitting each other by mere inches.

The bike sped off into the distance.

I, however, needed a little time to recover.

My heart was beating so hard that I thought for a few seconds I may need that ambulance ride after all. But after only about a minute, I was OK and started running back home – with a lot of thoughts running through my mind:

I should have looked over my shoulder to make sure it was safe to turn around.

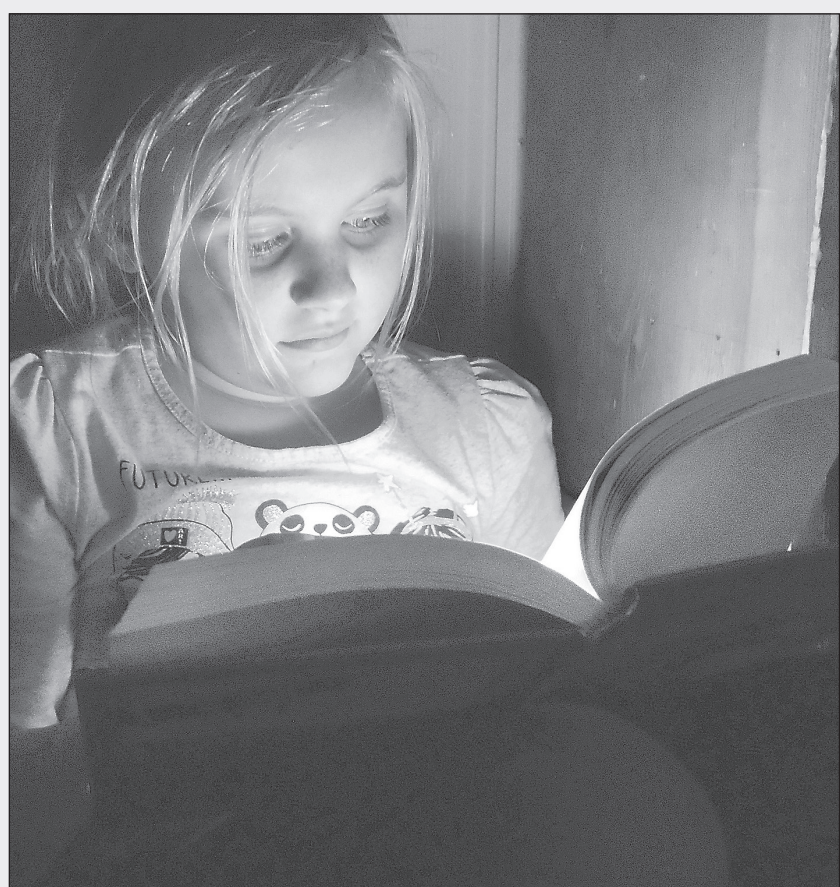
Maybe I should have made a hand signal.

Most importantly, the bike riders should have said the one thing you always say when passing someone on the trail, "On your left." It's not just a courtesy, it can prevent a bad crash.

I urge all bikers on the trail to remember those three words – on your left – when you are about to pass a walker or a runner. Say it loudly and proudly. For added safety, ring a bell if your bike has one. I know a local bike group in town that shouts to me – in a friendly way, "On your left, All!" – every time they come up behind me on the trail.

I've always appreciated it. And now, I'll appreciate it more than ever. Almost dying has a way of doing that.

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"It's Our Turn" is a weekly column that rotates among members of the Echo Press editorial staff.



Echo Press file photo

AN ECHO PRESS EDITORIAL

Five tips to keep kids reading

Don't let the "summer slide" throw young children's academic progress off track.

The "slide" is not just a catchphrase. Studies show that academic regression does occur in students during the summer break. Reading skills, for instance, can diminish if a child skips the opportunity for a few months.

Last week, the newspaper received information from Dr. Steven Witt, director of Concordia University Wisconsin's graduate education program that's worth repeating here. He noted that sharing the joys of reading with children gives them the building blocks for understanding the world.

Witt offered these five tips to combat a stall in a child's academic progress this summer:

1. Visit the public library every week. Witt said research shows that giving access to books is one of the most important factors in successfully teaching children to read. Public libraries offer an abundance of books for all ages, helpful librarians, and a very nurturing environment for the child. Schedule a summer outing to your local library and you'll find limitless choices for children to find something interesting for them to digest. If you can't make it to your local library there are other options. "Little Libraries" are continually popping up in neighborhoods and public areas nationwide, and school book fairs, garage sales, or online shopping offer great (and inexpensive) options for stocking up on literary treasures.

2. Help your kids discover their "just right books." The best books for children to read are the ones they're interested in. Witt says that finding the right genre, author, or topic can deeply spark a lasting interest in reading in general. It could be comic books, magazines, or even books that have a lot of pictures. Like finding a pair of shoes for your kid, the right book has to fit. When a child is entertained by their reading pursuits, it builds confidence in their abilities, and they'll surely want to share what they've

learned with everyone. Around the third grade, Witt says much of a child's reading is consumed by textbooks for school, which can be an intimidating change. With a solid foundation in reading prior to this, it can be much more approachable for the young pupil.

3. Model the pleasure of reading with your own "just right" books. "Just like smiles are contagious, so is reading," says Witt. Children learn the most by watching others, especially the people they look up to. When brothers, sisters, and those surrounding a child read, they will often follow suit. It rubs off on them.

4. Ask questions, make inferences and predict endings. Engage in a dialogue when helping kids understand what they're reading. It is a great opportunity to practice more nuanced communication and look deeper into the books they have. Witt suggests several topics to practice discussing with a child. He says to identify themes and summarize plots. Making personal connections is especially valuable. Why does a character act in a certain way? What would I do in their situation? Dr. Witt explained that reading is a mirror to the self. Looking at characters helps to understand people and how they interact with the world.

5. Journal your summer reading. Reading and writing go hand-in-hand. Help your child log what they're reading, the genre, and the author to help keep track of a child's progress over the summer. This can help them identify their "just right" books from the bunch. They can write what they notice in their books and other important observations as mentioned. The chance to practice writing through journaling books will help a child read independently, which is an important goal in teaching lasting literacy.

With each of these steps, Witt said, take advantage of those moments of free time in your days and use it to practice one of the most valuable skills they will ever obtain. By encouraging children to find pleasure in literacy, other things seem to fall in place.

Submitting letters to the editor:

The Echo Press encourages readers to voice their opinions through letters to the editor. Please, however, keep your letters brief and to the point. Letters of more than 300 words or excessively long letters may be edited to a shorter form by the newspaper staff. Personal attacks against private individuals will not be printed. All letters must be signed and include the writer's address and telephone number. Letters published will include the writer's name and the city of residence only. Writers are limited to publishing one letter every 30 days. Submissions can be emailed to aedenloff@echopress.com or submitted to the Echo Press office at 225 7th Ave. E., Alexandria, MN 56308. For information, call (320) 763-3133.

LETTERS

Science says life begins with single cell

To the editor:

Pro-choice people often say "It's my body; I should be able to do with it as I please." To such a person let me say with all due respect, "We are not talking about YOUR body. We're talking about the life of a body INSIDE of your body." A life dependent upon you. A life created by what you were able to do with your body. A body with the makings to be similar to yours, only smaller and less developed. A life for which you are responsible.

Science says life begins with a single living cell. That cell undergoes metabolism, grows and divides. Now there is a multi-celled organism, a living thing, containing from conception all the DNA which will determine in detail what that fully-grown body will someday be like. The organism (the life) as it develops has its own blood type, which as soon as twenty-two days (three weeks) after conception is circulated by its own heart pumping that blood through its own arteries and veins. That life responds to the environment, responds to stimuli, and develops towards maturity. So according to science, the developing baby in the womb is a developing human life at any stage subsequent to conception.

What can possibly give anyone the right to terminate that human life form just because it is short of complete development? Surely only God has that right, short of the mother's own life being thrown into jeopardy. Supreme Court Justices, doctors, politicians, mothers and fathers (yes, let's not forget the fathers) can all pretend to have that right. It is God that will have the final say.

Richard Thompson
Alexandria, MN

Oh, the places your blood will go

To the editor:

Thoughts and conceptions can be misguided from time to time. In my mind, I have always been aware that "giving blood" helps others in your community that are in need and quite often it can save lives as well.

After taking a couple years off from giving blood, over a year ago I started going to blood drives again, which is a very rewarding thing to do. After downloading the Red Cross App it was amazing to get notices of my "blood's journey."

That is when I became aware of my misconception of what impact my simple act of giving blood was.

It feels like I am going on a trip every time I give, and I am never sure where the trip will lead me. Just in the last year,

my blood has been to the Orange County Regional Medical Center in Middletown New York, Mercy Hospital in Coon Rapids, Minnesota, McLeod Regional Medical Center in Florence, South Carolina, Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, and Kearney County Health Services in Minden, Nebraska.

Today, I will be giving again, wondering where my venture will lead to this time.

Such an amazing feeling that an hour of my time can help so many.

Robin Lloyd
Alexandria, MN

Non-vaccinated people pose risk to others

To the editor:

I do not understand the logic behind the no-vac mentality gripping the country. I'm taken back that there is no mention of the risk that non-vaccinated people present to a large number of people who are immunocompromised. I'm one of those individuals as I have multiple myeloma. Mayo Clinic has been instrumental in extending my life.

My treatment involved collecting my stem cells, followed by a procedure to destroy my blood in order to kill the cancer cells. Next, my collected stem cells were introduced into my system to create a new blood supply. At this point, I'm at serious risk of contracting an infectious disease because along with killing my blood cells, my immune system was wiped out. I spent six weeks in a sterile environment recovering from the treatment, gaining back strength so that I could start to be vaccinated. The vaccination is good news and bad news for all people suffering from compromised immune systems due to the treatment of a major disease.

The good news is that we can be vaccinated with synthetic viruses that will protect against several diseases. The bad news is that we cannot be vaccinated with live viruses because our systems do not have any antibodies to create immunity against the live virus. The bottom line is that a large number of the population, old and young, who have been made immunocompromised by medical treatment are vulnerable to mumps, measles and rubella.

The recent measles outbreak is extremely dangerous to those of us that are immunocompromised. People have to avoid any crowd that has the potential for the spread of live viruses. This is tough to accomplish. I avoid mass transportation and large crowds and my movement is going to be further restricted as soon as there is a record of a case of measles in Minnesota.

Daniel New
Alexandria, MN

Reader Advisory Board helps improve newspaper

In its ongoing effort to improve the newspaper, the Echo Press has a Reader Advisory Board that meets every other month to offer feedback, story ideas and suggestions. Readers can also offer advisory board members their comments. Current members include Louie Seesz, Mary Anderson, Jim Nelson, Don Schoonhoven, Jane McCrery, Mark Hintermeyer, Judy Backhaus, Joel Novak and Mike Dempsey.