

Your bicycle may have been found but..

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by E. Kranz

"Police Department?"

"Yes? Your bicycle was stolen this afternoon? Name? Address? Phone? Make? Model? Colour? Serial#? Good then Mr. Unfortunate will contact you if we find it."

If you're one of the hundreds of unfortunates who fall prey to the unchecked bicycle thefts of this area, I wouldn't be the least surprised to hear that you never got that long-hoped-for happy call from the Boys in Blue's Bicycle Recovery Branch. But you might be surprised if I told you that there's a good chance that your bike has been recovered and in fact is no longer in the hands of those dirty vandals who borrowed it (long since let free) but in the saving protective grasp of that esteemed warden of all orphaned bicycles (regardless of color, model, or # of speeds), the indomitable corporal Wittimore.

"What!" you might say, "They found my bike and they haven't called me?"

Simply "yes" is all I can answer. If you don't believe it go down and look for yourself. There's a room in the back of the station as big as your whole basement and the bicycles not only fill it they're hanging from the ceiling. Two hundred dollar ten-speeds taken from the public gardens and left in the cemetery, more than likely in the same gear you left them the day of the theft. Some aren't in that grand condition: Wheels missing, cables gone, spokes broken but still recognizable as your own despite the rough handling afforded them by the police recovery branch. The great majority have never been altered or painted to disguise their original pedigree.

"So why," you might ask, as I myself asked after happening down to headquarters one day and finding not one but two of my long lost bikes in the great orphanage, "if they've found my bike why haven't they told me???" Well I'll save you the wonderment - They couldn't care less if you ever got your bike back or not. In fact the city would probably prefer you didn't as they auction all the "unclaimed bikes" off approximately every 6 months and put the proceeds in the city treasury. The reason I know this is because they told me. Not only that but the day I found my bikes I was also shown a second room full of these so called unclaimed bikes which were about to be sold the following day. Not wanting to miss a good deal I went to the auction and bought a nice 3-speed. A few months later the original owner, seeing his old bike and me about to get on it, asked where I got it. I told him at the auction for \$40. He said it was his (he paid \$28. for it), that it was stolen, that he had reported it stolen and that the police never told him they found it. "No surprise," I thought. We decided that maybe we should go down together and try to straighten things out. I didn't want to own a stolen bicycle, if I could get my \$40. back. And the original owner didn't like the idea that his bike was sold for a profit of which he didn't get a nickel. So we went, but not before we had asked the local newspaper to send a reporter to verify our claims and inform the people. (They refused). And this is what the Department had to say: First of all, there are 50 or so bikes found everyday and how do I expect them to spend all that time everyday finding out who owns the damn things and then to call the owners to give them the good news? Secondly, they have more important things to do.

Well, it seemed to me-using simple arithmetic- that if the average bike was worth say \$60 (averaging \$300 15-speeds with the \$85 3-speeds and the \$60 super cycles and the \$30 banana bikes) and they recovered 50 a day that's say \$3000 a day -times 7 days a week makes it \$20,000 a week operation. I wonder just how many \$20,000 recoveries of stolen goods they make each week to have to ignore this bicycle influx? well, the only conclusion I could come to based on the facts- I had lost 2 bikes worth over \$150 each and that the police had recovered them practically unaltered and definitely identifiable (including serial #) within 24 hours of the theft, and they hadn't contacted me for over a month and that this other unfortunates bike had lain hidden in the police dungeons (he would have had a better chance to recover it if the police had never gotten their hands on it), for more than 8 months before being sold at auction without his ever being contacted-was that they just don't give a damn if you get your bike back.

What I'd like to suggest is if you've lost a bike and haven't heard about it go down and have a look; it's probably there. Be sure and call up Corporal Whittimore first and ask for a good time as he'll keep you waiting quite a while pretending to have other things to do if you don't. For the Police Dept., I'd like to suggest a new method of determining just who's bike's they have. Rather than two men standing in a corner of a large room full of assorted bicycles and one reading "red, ten-speed men's Mercier, blue boy's super cycle, white ten speed Peugeot", and so on down the list while the other man glances uncaringly about the room as if he were expecting each bike in turn to raise it's handle bar and yell out "Present." as the role is called; and not hearing or seeing any response says "Hope, not here"; They might try cataloguing all reported thefts (in a computer) by serial #, make or style and color. This information should include the name, address and telephone # of the person reporting the bicycle theft. Then when a bike is recovered all they have to do is find the serial owner's name. In all fairness to the Dept., if no serial # is available, the job of returning the bike becomes a bit more difficult and they really can't be blamed for not contacting owners whose un-numbered bikes they've found. However, as the system stands now it seems best to have a look for yourself.

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