

CYCLISTS ARE MISSING THE REAL, AUTHENTIC NEW YORK EXPERIENCE

So, over the bridge, through Brooklyn Heights, to Prospect Park we go. I always huff and puff a bit coming up Third Street (my bike, after all, is a three-speed Raleigh loaded down with Christmas decorations and a 20-pound pug dog). But I'm happy to remind my fellow cyclists that "they don't call it Park *Slope* for nothing."

We get to Third Street and Prospect Park West, where we meet up with another group of cyclists—double the number as were at City Hall. Fabulous! It gives me a powerful sense of community: Ah, these are my peeps. Candy canes and bicycle carols are distributed, greetings exchanged, and photographs taken. Then off we go, singing "Bicycle bells, bicycle bells, ringing all the way!"

It's dark when we reach Dyker Heights, and the Christmas light displays are spectacular. The owners of these phenomenally decorated homes seem delighted to hear us sing, "We the cyclists from Manhattan are, pedaling our bikes from boroughs afar."

The ride home brings another opportunity to revel in the beauty that is the Brooklyn Bridge. The lights of Manhattan float like the Emerald City in the distance, and the spirit of Christmas sparkles in the chill air. Why do I ride? Because biking is a celebration of love and joy—for me, it's like Christmas all year 'round.

Nadette Stasa is a casting director, actor, writer, and on-camera commercial teacher and coach. She has cycled in Cuba, Vietnam, Quebec, Prague, Paris, and Cordova. In 2008, she plans to cycle in the Middle East. She lives for her pug dog, Olive, and her fiancé, Jon.

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This is addressed to you New York City bike riders. Yeah, okay, so you get around without obstruction, delay, or reliance on anyone or anything else. That's good...but you're missing sights and experiences that make people true, authentic New Yorkers.

For instance...you take a bus. Well, you wait for a bus. And wait. And, uh, wait. Here comes one! No, check that: here come several. All together. A four-pak, traveling as one, nose to tailpipe, like circus elephants. Driver No. 4 pours through a red light to join his buds, blocking a cross street, obstructing cross traffic, making people very cross, and giving new meaning to the term "cross training."

And people say New Yorkers aren't social. You just tell them about bus drivers. They wait for each another so they can play leapfrog up and down the avenues. Give one another a big wave. Yell something to their bro' when one pulls abreast of another. Now you just know that's fun! And, best of all, they can skip stops which makes their routes easier for them which is, after all, their real goal.

Listen to the cell phone conversations on the bus (as though you could help it). Suffer the "likes": "...so I'm like," "...so he's like." See the elderly passenger standing. See the pregnant passenger standing. See the mom with young children standing. See anyone offering them a seat? All these are, like, New York experiences you don't get on your bike.

You wait for a train. And wait. And...plug your ears against the screeching (unintelligible) station announcement! Here comes the train. Plug your ears against its screeching brakes! The car is crowded. The door opens. You get the last space. Oops, no, not quite. As the doors close, someone shoves you to make room for himself. Now you're surrounded by people in more intimate proximity than you ever imagined short of a sexual experience.

The train arrives at a stop. Not at a station. It just stops. Between stations. The brother of that squawking station announcer, whose announcement you couldn't understand, pierces the air: "We'll be moving shortly." And, sure enough, you are...10 minutes later, but not before you've had a chance to fully appreciate the full range of early 21st Century literary wit and graphic imagination known in New York as art, but elsewhere as graffiti. You finally arrive at your station. You'd get off except people are pushing in before you can push out.

You have a car. After circling and circling...and circling the block looking for a parking space, you give up and go into your wallet for 25 bucks to park it. Nah, no you don't. You just park it illegally. Not to worry: likely you won't get a ticket. Now it's morning and you're on your way. Not. See that dog walker, up just ahead? You passed him a few blocks back. Ditto that old man with a walker.

You're in a cab experiencing the thrill of watching the meter move while you don't. The driver doesn't acknowledge your tip any more than he does the red lights...or the cyclists in his way. OK, so you share in *that* experience.

Look, I know you suffer plenty for riding in the city, but how can you call yourself a real New Yorker when you don't regularly suffer these New York experiences?

Richard Rosenthal never rode a bike in his adulthood until he was 40. He has solo ridden the Alps in 14 summers; originated the expression, "One Less Car"; and is responsible for the curb cut onto the GWB.