

Stories from the Helmeted Masses

By Sarah Wassner Flynn

When thousands and thousands of cyclists take over the city on May 2 for the TD Bank Five Boro Bike Tour, it'll be hard to make out just one face among the many. But from his vantage point up on stage, Cousin Brucie always manages to connect with many of the riders that buzz by the start line. He knows full well that among the helmeted masses are enough stories to fill a library—tales of family tradition, comebacks, impressive feats, and inspiring personal journeys. Here's a look at his own story as well as those of three others who will be riding this year.

Check bikenyork.org for more rider stories as ride day approaches.



A Welcoming Voice: Cousin Brucie

Back in August 1965, radio personality Bruce "Cousin Brucie" Morrow experienced what he deems the most electrifying and emotional moment of his career: the chance to introduce the Beatles at a historic Shea Stadium concert

attended by 55,000 screaming fans. Morrow remembers the noise from the crowd being so earsplitting, the screams so strident, that the fabled foursome was hesitant to take the field.

"We were in the dugout, and John Lennon looked at me and said, 'Brucie, is it gonna be OK?' They'd never experienced such contained pandemonium," says Morrow, a Brooklyn native.

Though the din at the start of the TD Bank Five Boro Bike Tour is not quite so deafening, Morrow—the event's longtime emcee—still revels in his role of sending off thousands of cyclists each year. If you've done the ride, you'll likely recall his smooth, baritone voice booming over the loudspeaker, welcoming passing cyclists with a hearty "Where you from?"

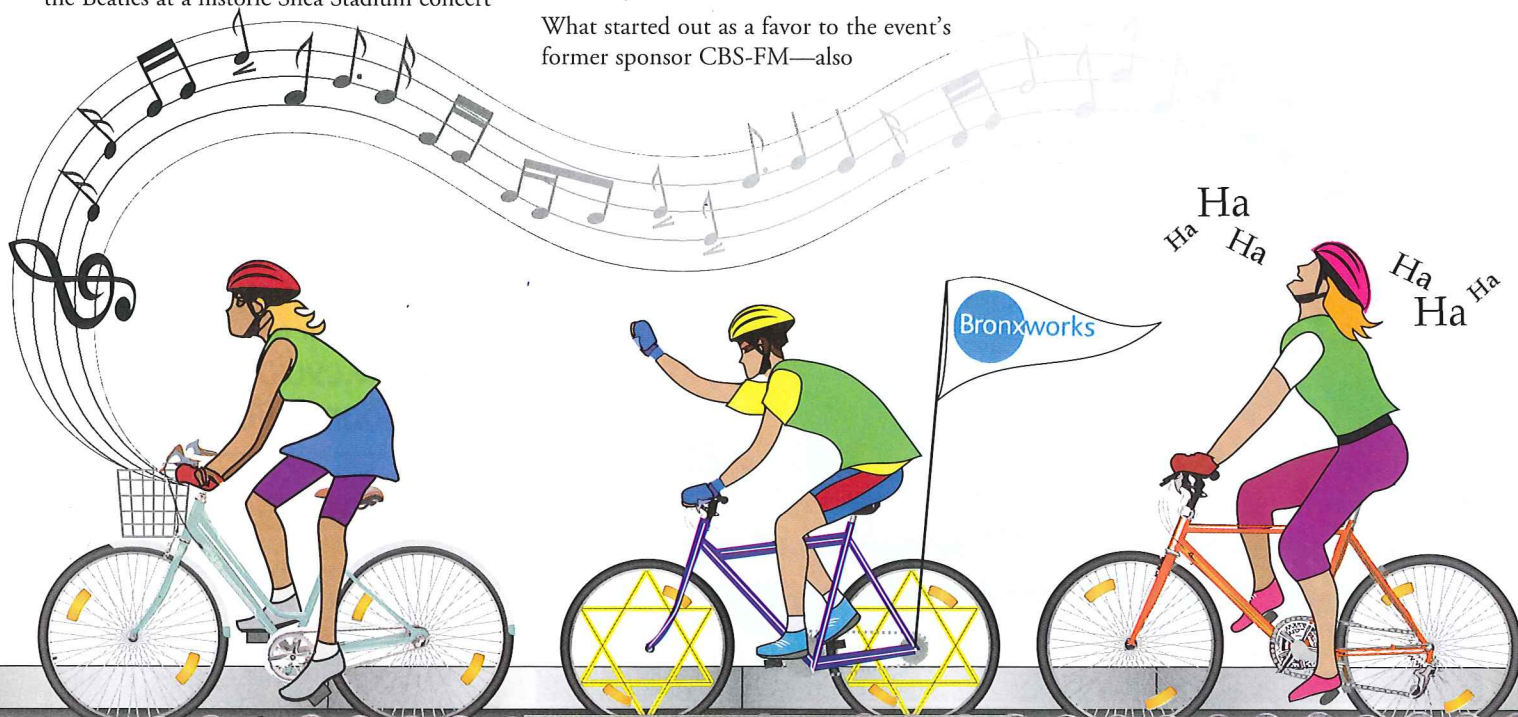
What started out as a favor to the event's former sponsor CBS-FM—also

Morrow's former employer—blossomed into a decades-long relationship between Brucie and Bike New York. Though sponsorship shifted and Morrow moved on to Sirius Satellite Radio, he remains a staple at the start of each ride. He's such a part of the event's fabric, in fact, that a portion of West 52nd Street near the Tour route is named "Cousin Brucie Way."

"It's fascinating for me to see the event grow from year to year, and to see people coming here from all over the globe," says Morrow. "There's so much energy, and it's such an amazing event—to ride through the streets of New York City traffic-free. These bicyclists are given a key to the city."

When he's not on the air, Morrow busies himself by writing books. He recently penned *Rock & Roll... And the Beat Goes On*, a coffee-table tome featuring photos and stories from his colorful past.

"It speaks to how rock and roll reached into our lives and our culture," he says. "Music makes the most impact of all art forms—this is evident every year at Bike New York. You have an ocean of people from all over the world, yet they're all somehow emotionally connected to music."



TRUE OR FALSE?... Answer on page 36

Your seat height is adjusted correctly when there is a slight bend in your knee at the bottom of the pedal stroke.

A Ride of Passage

Last year, Cole Tallerman, then 13, rose early on the morning of the TD Bank Five Boro Bike Tour, looked out his window, and saw rain. Lots of it. His mom came into his room, letting him know he didn't have to ride if he didn't want to.

But Cole wanted to ride. After all, he'd been prepping for the Tour for months, and people were counting on him. As part of a community-service project leading up to his bar mitzvah—the Jewish rite of passage marking a child's entry into adulthood—Cole had worked tirelessly to raise money for BronxWorks (formerly Citizens Advice Bureau), a Bronx-based social-service organization that is one of the Five Boro's official charity partners.

"I felt like the ride would be even cooler if I was doing something for it," says Cole, now an eighth grader. "I wanted to ride for a cause."

Cole rallied his friends and family, who generously donated on a website set up for the effort. Within a month or so, he had raised about \$1,350, far exceeding his initial goal of \$500. Then, at his bar mitzvah reception, Cole spoke about his experiences in front of a poster-size photo of him in his riding gear.

"I told them about the rain, and how I could have turned around early if I wanted to, but I kept going because I had raised so much money and wanted to finish. A lot of people thought it was really impressive," he says.

Impressed friends aside, the true takeaway of the experience was Cole's interaction with the homeless children living in the BronxWorks shelter, with whom he visited after the Tour.

"I went in, did some art activities with them, and told them about the bike ride," recalls Cole, who will be riding again this year alongside his parents and his younger brother, Jesse, 11. "It was important to me to see firsthand who I was riding for."

Spoken like a true adult.

A Family Affair

Back when she was just a toddler, Erika Mayo's father would snap her into a bike seat and cycle from their Brooklyn home to her East Village school every morning. She loved feeling the wind in her face and watching her father's strong pedal strokes as he navigated the city streets. This shared love of biking has carried them through several TD Bank Five Boro Bike Tours.

Their first, in 1990, was a family affair: 8-year-old Erika rode alongside her father and her 10-year-old brother. Her dad's bike had a basket crammed with a jug of water, a pack filled with snacks, and a heavy radio whose music allowed the young children to easily locate their father amid the dense crowd.

"My-eight-year old legs burned, and my dad still tells me he has never seen my face as red as it was on the climb up the 59th Street Bridge that day," recalls Erika. "But we stuck together for the Tour, and it was unforgettable."

In 2009, Erika's father suffered a knee injury and could not ride. Erika cruised the five boroughs solo. "Between the rain and the solitude, it was more meditative than in years prior. I made a few friends along the way. The harder the ride, the more people seem to come together."

These days, Erika is prepping for her next Tour by "riding everywhere," including daily spins from Carroll Gardens, Brooklyn, to her Midtown office. And just like her dad did years ago, she's attached a basket to her three-speed city bike. In it? Some water, some snacks—and tunes, thanks to an iHome boombox. Some things never change.

A Changed Woman

"It's really not hard; you'll enjoy it."

Those were the words Janis Gibson's friend used to convince her to register for the 2009 TD Bank Five Boro Bike Tour.

"To me, the idea was laughable, as I had been pretty sedentary for the prior ten years," says Janis, a 58-year-old from Danbury, Connecticut. "Yet, when I was a kid, I was on my bike constantly, so I knew it was something I once enjoyed."

Janis registered, dusted off the Cannondale that had been sitting in her garage for a decade, and rode through all five boroughs with her friends.

The experience sparked a transformation. "I found real pleasure in the mechanics of riding a bike. Once I start riding, I want to keep going. I love it when you get the cadence going and it's almost like being on autopilot."

Janis continued to ride, soon participating in the Bloomin' Metric ride closer to home. There she won a drawing for a six-day bike tour that covered more than 150 miles through Italy's famed Tuscan countryside. As a copy editor for two local papers, the trip was a splurge she could not have afforded on her own—just one of many wonders she credits to her bicycle.



Sarah Wassner Flynn is a freelance journalist in Hoboken, New Jersey. When she's not running or competing in triathlons, she's writing about those sports.



TRUE OR FALSE?... Answer on page 36

If your brake levers pull too close to the handlebar, unscrew the adjusting barrel a couple of turns to tighten your brake cable.