

Hi, this is Tour Chief Jim, and today I'm in East Lansing at Michigan State University, talking with Tim Potter. Tim, your position here is called?

TP: I call this sustainable transportation manager. That's my preferred title, it's not the H.R. title, but it's essentially what I...I'm the guy that is most interested in advancing non-motorized transportation (on campus).

JP: Before we get into Sustainable Transportation, let's talk about you. You grew up here.

TP: Yes, my father is a mechanical engineering professor. I was a PK, a professor's kid. Me and a bunch of my friends, all grew up running around campus.

JP: I know from experience, we've been friends for 6 or 8 years, a little of your background. As a teenager, you set off across Michigan on a bike, where'd you go to?

TP: We left from home in early summer. I was 15 and turned 16 on the trip, with my best friend and my older brother. We just decided we were going to ride around the state, so we went over to my grandparent's house outside of Grand Rapids. Then we went north up to the straights, and we spend a few days on Mackinac Island, then to the U.P. and spent a week in Ishpeming. My older brother had a mission that he was on. He wanted to meet a famous author who lived up there; that was his main objective. We camped out in Ishpeming when he went looking for this famous guy, and he eventually found him, this guy (had written) for National Geographic, where he had shown his favorite fishing holes. My brother was really into trout fishing and all that, so he was intent on making sure that he met the guy and try to coax him into showing his favorite fishing holes. And so he was able to do that and then we were able to leave. But we were not allowed to meet this guy, because that would have ruined it for my brother (laughs)!

JP: Do you remember the guy's name?

TP: Yeah, Robert Tavor, his pen name. I think his real name is John Voelker. He was also the author of Anatomy of a Murder, so he's a famous Michigan author. So then we rode down to Wisconsin, to Manitowoc, took the ferry back to Muskegon...

JP: You took the Badger?

TP: Yeah, it's still running. Had a guy, and elderly guy that was sitting next to me on the deck, have a heart attack and die on the ship. That was interesting for a 16-year old. Yeah, that was pretty tragic, so we had something to talk about all the way back to Michigan. So we were about a bit over a month on the road, and we were on a \$5 a day budget, in 1979.

JP: Were you carrying cash, did you have traveler's checks?

TP: Yes, I don't think we had anything like an ATM card or else. We only called home like once or twice to say "hi, we're still alive"...

JP: And then you became a bicycle racer...

TP: I was also a bicycle mechanic. My best friend Craig Wilkinson, we bought out a bike shop of their old bikes and tools and parts, and we came to MSU and at auction bought a hundred bikes, of the abandoned bikes, and we basically refurbished all those bikes and sold them. But we also tooled up, so we then started doing repairs for people out of my basement-my parent's basement. So we did that in high school and a little into college. Then both of us go jobs at local bike shops, at Gene's Raleigh on North, and Denny's Schwinn in East Lansing. So we wrenched together, and then started getting into biking because we could get stuff cheaper, and we were all around bikes and saw the movie Breaking Away, and that got us really fired up as it did a million others, and that got us into racing.

JP: And you raced in Japan...

TP: I did, not a whole lot. I did a lot of riding and training there, and I met my future brother in law there a couple weeks after I first went there. I started training with him at the local velodrome where he was based, and then he invited me home to meet his "two ugly sisters"...

JP: ...and you took one of them!

TP: (laughs) Yes! So anyway I trained a lot with these professionals and I attempted to go pro through my brother in law's connections and my father in law was also still racing at the time. They, at the time, the Japanese pro cycling league wasn't allowing any non-Japanese to race. They (brother in law & father in law) tried to work through their contacts to see if they could get an exception for me to try to join the ranks-you go through the school, I was fast enough and I was young enough. They had an age limit, and they had speed limits, but they also had citizenship requirements which they weren't willing to bend on. But they said "well we'll let him, you know" they were willing to let me ride and waive the written test because I wasn't really proficient at Japanese, and a few other things, but they wouldn't waive the citizenship requirement. And that rule stood until about 10 years ago when it finally changed. Now non-Japanese are racing there, not very many, but at the time there were no non-Japanese so it didn't work out for me. I did a couple of amateur races there, on the road not on the track. I did more racing here in the states.

JP: How many years were you in Japan?

TP: A total of 5 over the past 35 years. I met my wife there, been going back & forth ever since. I've also led some bike tours in Japan, for two different groups of American cyclists. I was actually under subcontract for a tour company in Montana-no Jackson Hole Wyoming. They had the places lined up and the route, and I think I saw an ad in the back of some bike magazine. I wrote them a letter and said Hey, I'm here in Japan, do you have any tours? I'd be happy to be a guide here. They said Yeah, and send all the information and sent a small group of people. I was their driver, the mechanic, their tour guide, the interpreter, everything, and didn't get to ride very much, unfortunately, and it introduced me to what you do now for a living...

JP:...and I can tell you how much (that) tour leaders actually get to ride! (laughs)

TP: I did that twice, same route. Every night we stayed at hot springs. We should put together a tour like that.

JP: And then you did get married, your wife is here, and you have two grown children...

TP: Three!

JP: Three, super. I know of two on Facebook, where's the 3rd?

TP: She's on Facebook too. I've got one son, the eldest, then two daughters. They're all married and out of the house, and we've got one grandson who is 2 years, and a granddaughter who's going to be here any day now.

JP: Let's come back and talk about being on a university campus. College and university campuses are unique places to be. You've got a locked-in base of people. They're all focused on something, it isn't traffic, it isn't walking on the sidewalk or riding a bike, and yet they're out there ambulating. These are special places, congested, tough parking, everyone's in a hurry, no one plans enough time...

TP: We're right in the middle of it. We've got 17,000 that live on campus, and a total of 50,000 students plus another 12,000 faculty and staff, so it's a small city, 20,000 cyclists.

JP: So walking in from the parking lot which is further away than you think, I crossed a two lane one-way road, I walked through a parking lot, then crossed a bike trail and a commuter trail on the south side of the river.

TP: Yes, a very busy (trail). That took a long time to get funded and built. So, back in the 60s there were these 18" concrete strips, and we called them spaghetti noodles, they were so skinny. And they would go in pairs, once for each direction, all over campus. Some people said they followed old wagon tracks, it was the desired path. They were all over campus, but they've now all be replaced & removed. Along the south bank of the river they're replaced with 12' of concrete and 12' of asphalt. That has really cleaned up the confusion and mess of people weaving in and out of each other. But now it's clearly marked, the bikeway especially, has a dotted yellow line so people know to keep to the right, like on a roadway, and separate pedestrians out. It mostly works. I've also lobbied for putting "no bikes" in other places, but the University hasn't found funding for this. That might help, getting people to NOT ride on sidewalks. But anyway, that east west bike route, the campus river trail, goes from behind Kellogg center on the west, not quite to Harrison Road like we'd like, and then it goes all the way to Farm Lane. This past summer we were supposed to get from Farm Lane to Bogue in a similar way, but the big construction project for the Broad business school has delayed things. They didn't want to lay down a new path and then have...crush it with the construction equipment needing to go in and out of there. So, once Farm to Bogue is done, and that little bit to Harrison, we'll have it completely east-to-west across campus.

JP: Which is significant because the campus is longer than it is wide (not quite right)...

TP: Yeah, the housing, connecting to academics, the east-west is probably more critical, but north-south, we heard that the Farm Lane bridge may be getting rebuilt. I don't think it's been approved yet, but

there are structural problems with the bridge and it's a critical bridge in the county because of some technical reasons. So it needs to be strong enough to support truck traffic, because apparently it's the highest bridge in Ingham County, so if there's a 500-year flood it might be one of the only one's (bridges) still above water (laughs). So, if and when that gets rebuilt, this little bottle neck at Farm Lane, there's some bike lanes, then they disappear for 500-1000 feet, that will finally get widened and reconfigured so it will be our first north-south complete street through campus.

JP: This is interesting how much (infrastructure) directly affects bicycle traffic...

TP: So, up to the year 2000 there was really nothing other than those little 18" concrete strips, and then one of the administrators said "whatever road project we do, we're going to make it a 'complete street'". They didn't have the term back then, but that's what he meant. So every time there is a major road project they widened it, added curb & gutter, and made bike lanes. So that's when we finally started about the year 2000, getting some traditional bike lanes on campus. Of course nowadays no cities are even installing traditional bike lanes, they're all doing protected bike lanes or buffer or cycle tracks. We've been trying to encourage the University to consider doing something new, but they continue to like the traditional bike lane. Unfortunately, some 90% of our bicycles are still on the sidewalks and not in the roadway, even with bike lanes. So it's a never ending challenge.

JP: So, this may be redundant, what strategy can we use for safety education for all roadway users? This would be motor vehicles, pedestrians, cyclists, wheelchairs, etc., to be informed?

TP: To change behavior? I've been in Davis, CA, and in Chicago, where the city culture starts to change. I've bumped into people, in Davis, on a nice bike lane and I have about 50' to go from the roadway over to a bike parking area. I was going to ride the short distance, like I'm used to doing on campus. I had an older woman, that I was approaching, and she would step in my way, I'd move over and so would she, till I stopped and she yelled at me "don't ride on the sidewalk!" That sort of enforcement by an average person, it wouldn't happen on this campus because it's so common for people to ride on the sidewalks.

JP: So was she just upset?

TP: I said I'm just trying to get to the parking, and she said 'well walk your bike'. It was this mindset that you just don't ride on the sidewalks in Davis, and the residents will help enforce it, not just the police.

JP: So is that their city code?

TP: Yeah, Chicago too, I had an even older woman yell at me for riding on a sidewalk. I think the difference is long term residents help enforce things, they don't say that's the cops job, they help in reinforcing the rules, so to speak. But on our campus, we're so transient, people changing all the time, everyone's in a hurry, they don't bother to interact, they think it's the police responsibility to reinforce, they don't take time to engage or shake a finger. As long as we say it's up to the police, then the police will say 'you need to educate these people'. How do we educate them? We can't get face time with all these students. 4 years and they're gone, every year another 8,000 freshmen with a mindset of 'mommy-daddy told me to ride on the sidewalk, that's where they've ridden, the only place they're used

to riding. But for motorists, I think there's more. The police are more likely to enforce motor vehicle laws, they don't seem to want to enforce walking or biking laws. I've heard them say they don't want to appear to be the bully. But with motor vehicles, they'll enforce speed limits. Now that we have the 3' passing law, I would hope they start to do some enforcement... We try, MSU Bikes, is get videos and things of that sort out into the campus community for people to watch, but it's not easy. They've got monitors in all of the cafeterias, and I've asked for PSAs up on that and it's like 'it can only be text, no pics, no video,' so it's hard to get on these monitors that people watch when they're having a meal...

JP: Somebody builds this content, there must be someone in charge of that...

TP: There is, but it's like every little idea I have, it's extremely difficult... The little table tents in the cafeteria, it's an effective way to get the message out. One side of the table tent, years ago, was \$1,000, and I don't have that kind of budget. The police did do their own little thing, they called it Move Safe covering biking, walking, mopeds, motor vehicles, and they did those table tents and posters, just all text. Here are all the rules, just read them...

JP: Text alone isn't going to do it...

TP: Not many people are going to sit there and read the text with fine print. So then there's also academic orientation, all the incoming freshmen come and sit there, probably fall asleep, but they're there for a day and listening to all the stuff they need to know to be a student here-they won't even let us put (printed matter) into their bag of stuff. The police only get 15 minutes of face time to talk about everything related to security including lock your bike, register your bike, and that's all they talk about bikes, much less where or how they should ride their bikes. So that would be the ideal time to get 10 or 15 minutes to talk about safe bicycling, or what we'd like them to do about transportation around campus. But there are roadblocks everywhere I go to get a message out about safety. I'm starting to get a little jaded...

JP: But I do know that you maintain a fairly constant posting schedule on Facebook of safety-related things. I don't know how many pages you post on...

TP: Well, I have my own page, my professional Facebook persona, and one MSU Bike Center page, so I oversee both. I have a personal Facebook profile as well. I'm involved in other national things, so I post when it's a national interest.

JP: Well, let me compliment you on that, I think it's very important that those of us in the bicycle industry need to have this safety thing up in the forefront. Perceived lack of safety keeps many people from ever getting a bike.

TP: Yeah, I try to post things to encourage. Like yesterday there was a former air force pilot who had a bunch of fairly technical ideas about how pilots are trained to avoid collisions in the air...

JP: Yes, I read that, about how your eyes move...

TP: How your eyes don't pick up every detail, they float over stuff...its fascinating. I don't like just sharing things like 'here's another crash victim' even though I'm deeply connected to the Ride of Silence. I'm on the board and spend tons of time every year working on that. But just sharing another crash victim story doesn't really accomplish a whole lot, so I tend not to do that sort of thing on Facebook. I'd rather focus my effort on things which improve safety, have a positive result, and move us forward.

JP: So help me understand those safety concerns on campus, vs. being out on a weekend ride with friends.

TP: The layout of campus is a little different that your city or country riding. There are multiple ways to get around, pathways, sidewalks, roads, and you have a lot of intersections when you're off road. In the city you don't have as many options. Around here you have to have your head on a swivel, because there are diagonal intersections, maybe 5 or 6 different pathways intersecting all at once. During class change time when it seems like all 65000 people are moving, it feels like Chicago or New York City, it's so crowded. It's a very unique situation and much more akin to a major city. Every hour during class change it's total mayhem out there. The roadways tend to come to a stop because there are so many people trying to drop off friends, and professors who don't want to walk or ride a bike across campus. In some cases they'll have leased parking spaces at two or three places around campus, which is insane because it's such a small campus that they can get there in 5 minutes (by foot or bike) but they choose to drive and take half an hour, plus 15 minutes to find parking, it's crazy. The layout and design of campus, and numbers of people moving around, is much more complex vs. what we see outside campus. The numbers of bike to bike or bike to ped crashing is probably a lot more than you'd see anywhere else.

And those (crashes) tend not to get reported as much. And even if an ambulance or the police go to the crash, those crash reports don't get end up the state data base. It makes it really difficult for bike advocate to get a grip on what's going on in terms of bike-bike, or bike-ped, or bike solo crashes.

JP: Can you or can the public get that information from the campus police?

TP: I could, with a FOIA request. Are you aware of michgantrafficcrashfacts.org? There aren't very many states which have this data available, but you can go to Michigan traffic crash facts.org and the state police puts their crash reports in there. Since 2004 through 2017, you can see all the crash reports and you can generate all the bike related crashes. All the bike crashes that were fatal. You can break it down so many different ways-drunk driving crashes, time of day, rainy condition crashes. But the one category required, all of these reports have to involve a motor vehicle. So bike to bike, bike to ped, solo bike crashes, even if there's a police report or ambulance call, someone dies, it's not going to be in that. So all the rail trails in Michigan, there's no way unless you'd go to each city or town, or sheriff's office and make the request (for crash data). You'd not be able to know how many crashes are on our trails. This is something that Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance, they might work on. I pointed that out to them, maybe this is something legislative they could pursue, getting any bike related crashes added to the data base. It wouldn't even have to go through the house and senate, just a policy change by the state police. Just say all of these reports, get them into the data base so we have a more comprehensive picture of

the crashes. I don't know if many bike safety advocates even know about it. But if you think about it, we have the largest collection of rail trails in the country, and we don't even know the frequency of crashes.

JP: If the MSU bike shop could make one change for safety, what would it be?

TP: Unfortunately it's really difficult to get anything that requires funding or anyone's extra help to do something new. We do have a bike advisory committee; we meet monthly to figure things out. This fall I've been involved with 4 different academic projects at the engineering school, and with urban planning because they now have a professor who specializes in non-motorized transportation planning. She and I have become well acquainted. Her name is Teresa.

JP: Are you commuting by bike?

TP: In the winter time I park on the south of campus where it's free at an undisclosed place. From there it's about 10 minutes on the bike.

JP: Are you using LED lights on the bike?

TP: Yes, that's what I preach and that's what I sell. Daytime running lights, DRLs, it's the way to go. It's worked for cars and motorcycles, shown to improve their safety. I tell people, hey you need lights, not just when it's dark, but in the daytime, because you need to be seen.

JP: Thanks for taking time

TP: Thanks for the opportunity!