

Eddie, The Mechanic

A Day at the Pool

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While the girls are hanging out at the tables, some of the guys hang out in the pool, talking about their years of running track while they were in high school. Braden asks Eddie, “are you still training on your bicycle?” Eddie replies, “yeah. I’ve stepped it up a bit over the last few weeks. We officially start training with the team in a few weeks, and I want to be in top shape.” Johnson comments, “that’s because he’s afraid McCrutchen might beat him.” Eddie laughs, and replies, “yeah, right. That’s never going to happen.” Braden asks Mark, “are you still training on your bicycle?” Mark replies, “yeah. Me and Paula ride to the beach and back a lot. Sometimes Eddie and Kathy come with us.”

Braden, who is considering buying a better bicycle, asks Johnson, “where did you get that nice bike you got?” Johnson replies, “I built it myself over the past few years.” Eddie, who already knows the story behind Johnson’s bicycle, smiles and asks Johnson, “you built it over a few years? Really?” Astutely perceiving that Eddie is messing with him, Johnson replies, “yeah.” Eddie laughs, and asks, “why didn’t you just build it all at once?” Evading the question, Johnson replies, “some things are complicated.” Johnson, who didn’t want to explain how and why he built a bicycle over a period of years, hopes the conversation will move on to another topic.

Having no such luck in getting out of explaining the story behind his bicycle, Braden asks Johnson, “I want to hear this. How did it take you years to build your bicycle?”

Still messing with Johnson, Eddie comments, "I really want to hear this too." Johnson explains, "okay. My parents got me a ten-speed when I was in eighth grade. But, it wasn't what I really wanted. I rode that bicycle to my grandparent's house to cut their lawn. And, it was ten miles in each direction. So, I wanted a better bicycle, one that's a lot lighter with better components. But, it wasn't like my parents were going to go out and buy me a new bicycle just because I wanted a better one."

Braden asks, "what did you do about it? That's a really nice bike you got now." Johnson continues, "since I obviously wasn't getting a new bicycle anytime soon, I systematically broke the parts on my bicycle over a few years. My seat broke first, so my parents got me a good seat with an aluminum alloy seat post. Then, I told my parents I fell, and I bent my handlebar. So, they bought me an aluminum alloy handlebar and stem to replace the steel one that came with the bicycle." Braden interrupts, asking Johnson, "what? You fell, on purpose?" Johnson replies, "no! I smashed the handlebar against a brick wall, and bent it." Johnson now has everyone's interest.

Now curious, Mark asks, "how did you break the rest of the bicycle?" Johnson explains, "I rammed the rear derailleur into the curb. I told my parents the front and rear derailleurs have to match, so they were replaced with really nice Campagnolo derailleurs. Then, I hit the curb with my pedal, and bent it. I got new cranks and pedals out of that. A few months later, I told my parents the brakes didn't stop well, and I bent my front rim because I couldn't stop in time. I got new brakes and new front and rear wheels out of that one. So, by the time I was a senior, everything on my bicycle was replaced."

Mark asks Johnson, "how did you bend your rim?" Johnson replies, "I ran it into the curb, over and over. I bent the rim so good, that I had to walk my bicycle home. It was too lopsided to ride. And, if I can't ride my bicycle, that means I can't ride to my grandparent's house to cut their lawn. So, it didn't take too long for my parents to get me two new wheels and brakes that stop well."

Having seen the nice bicycle frame Johnson has, Mark asks, “how did you get a new frame?” Johnson replies, “that was a little more complicated. I couldn’t exactly destroy my frame, so I had to come up with a different plan. I bought a frame from Vito, using my own money. I had to get a frame the same color as my old one, or otherwise my parents would have noticed. Then, I rode over to Eddie’s house with my new frame. We took all the components off my old frame and put them on my new frame.” Still messing with Johnson, Eddie interjects, “wow! I remember that now! I thought you’d never get away with that.” Johnson continues, “so, then I junked my old frame. My parents never did figure out that the bicycle I was riding was not the one they bought for me when I was in eighth grade. So, the bicycle I have right now is totally built with replacement parts.”

Eddie laughs, prompting Mark to tell Eddie, “that’s about as bad as that shit you pulled with your piano lessons!” Staring at Eddie as if Eddie is from a different planet, Braden exclaims, “what? You took piano lessons?” Eddie replies, “yeah. When I was in the fourth grade, my parents made me take piano lessons.” Braden comments, “I never knew that!” Eddie replies, “some things you just want to forget. Piano lessons are one of them. Piano lessons weren’t exactly on the top of my list of things to do.”

Braden asks, “how did you get out of taking piano lessons?” Eddie begins explaining, “the teacher, Mrs. Hildebrand, was a real pain in the ass. She was supposedly some sort of concert pianist from Great Britain. She must have been like ninety years old or something, and she had four pairs of glasses. Oh, and she was always cold. She even wore a sweater in the Summer. And, in the Winter, she was always asking my mother to turn up the heat.” Braden exclaims, “I’m glad I didn’t get no piano lessons!”

Eddie continues, “when I was playing, she would count over and over, ‘one, two, three. One, two, three.’ She was a human metronome. So, just to annoy her, I started playing the left hand and the right hand like an eighth-step off from each other. It drove her crazy. But, that didn’t

work. She kept coming back every week. The next thing I tried was playing what should be played with the left hand with my right hand. And, what I should have been playing with my right hand, I played with my left. That drove her crazy too. I was so happy when I heard Mrs. Hildebrand tell my mother, 'this kid has no talent.' But, she kept coming back every week."

Braden then asks, "how did you finally get rid of her?" Eddie explains, "when she was leaving one day, she told me, 'go fetch my jersey.' I asked her, 'what's a jersey?' Sounding like an old schoolteacher, she told me, 'my sweater! Don't tell me you've never heard of a jersey! Jersey and sweater are interchangeable.' So, I told her, 'fine, then. New Jersey, New Sweater, what's the difference? I'm moving to New Sweater.' Then, I asked her, 'what brand of Hilde are you, anyway?' So, she got really mad that I made fun of her name. Then, when she was leaving, she told my mother, 'you shouldn't really waste your money on piano lessons for that lad. Edward has absolutely no talent. There is no hope for him.' So, the next week, Mrs. Hildebrand didn't show up. I was so happy." Mark laughs, asking Eddie, "she called you a lad?" Eddie replies, "yeah. She can call me whatever she wants to, just as long as she never came back."

Braden asks Mitchell, "speaking about lessons, how are the martial arts lessons going?" Mitchell replies, "I'm working on my fourth-level belt. It's probably going to take a few years." Bobby B. comments, "I remember when you started taking lessons. That was back when we were all freshmen." Mark mentions, "that's really fast, going from zero to third-level black belt in four years." Mitchell replies, "in my school, you have to fight off three first-level black belts to earn your third-level black belt. That's usually the big challenge for most students. I fought off three first-level black belts when I was at the second level. So, I guess that put me on the fast track."

Eddie asks, "by the way, how are Cullen and Royser doing these days?" Bobby B. asks, "who are Cullen and Royser?" Eddie replies, "Joey Cullen and Mike Royser. Those are the two guys we ran into during the first week of

school when we were freshmen. They're the two guys we caught messing with Mitchell when we were walking home that day." Bobby B. exclaims, "I remember that! You worked those guys over good."

Mitchell explains, "when I was a junior, I ran into those guys again. I was walking home after school one day, and those two guys came out from behind the bridge abutment near the middle school, and tried to shake me down. They didn't get too far." Always wanting to be on top of any news about an ass kicking, Braden asks, "what happened? I wanna hear this!" Mitchell replies, "you don't want to hear it. It wasn't that big of a deal." Braden insists, "sure I do!" Mark tells Braden, "I want to hear this too. I've never heard about Mitchell kicking anyone's ass."

Mitchell explains, "it was dark out, and I was walking home after track practice. Amber had an orthodontist appointment, so her mother picked her up after practice to take her there. I walked under the bridge near the middle school, and Cullen, the bigger one, approached me with a knife. I greeted him with a flying two-point move. In the first move, I kicked his knife out of his hand. The knife went flying. In the second move, I kicked him upside his head. He landed on the ground." Braden exclaims, "wait a second! You did all that shit when you were in the air?" Mitchell replies, "yeah, bro. That's what we do in Karate."

Mitchell continues, "then Royser, the fat guy, came after me. He was wildly throwing punches. I was messing with him, evading every punch. Then Cullen gets up, and rushes me. I picked him up, and threw him up against the bridge abutment. Royser came after me again. Royser was a little easier to take care of. I smashed his face into the bridge abutment a few times, and rubbed it into the concrete until it bled. Then, I left them lying on the ground, and I walked home." Braden exclaims, "I wish I was there to see that ass kicking!" Mitchell again states, "it wasn't really a big deal." Not to a third-level black belt, anyway.

Mark asks, "what happened after that?" Mitchell explains, "apparently, they didn't know who I was. But, I

remembered who they were. I didn't see either of them around the school for a few days. Then, I passed them in the hallway, and Royser was looking really rough. Neither of them said anything to me, so I figured they had no idea who took them down." Braden points out, "that's more than a take down! That's a major league ass kicking!"

Kathy then yells out to the guys, "hey! We're packing up! It's time to get pizza!" As the guys get out of the pool, Mitchell tells Eddie, "let me show you the new car I got." Eddie asks, "what did you get?" Mitchell replies, "it's a surprise." The guys head out, all interested to see what kind of car Mitchell bought.