送馒头的夏天

五年级暑假，我爸的馒头铺忙不过来，让我学骑车送馒头。别的孩子学车是为了玩，我学车是为了上工。这就是为什么我学得快——不上学就没馒头吃，这话是我爸说的，说得平平常常，我听着却记牢了。

车是铺里那辆旧的，后座两边焊了两个铁架，架着两只柳条筐，筐里码馒头，一层报纸一层。第一趟我爸跟在我旁边走，不扶车，就看着。他说：慢骑，筐里是饭，摔一跤，人家一天的早饭就没了。我头一回知道车把上握着的不是玩，是别人家的早饭。

摔是在第三天摔的。下坡想捏闸，捏重了，前轮一死，我翻过车把，人和车砸进筐里。馒头滚了一地，有几个滚进了水沟。我蹲下去捡，手抖，把能吃的和不能吃的分开。不能吃的我数了数，整整十一个。我爸追上来，先看人，再看馒头，说：沟里的别捡了，回去我补上。那天我赔了十一个馒头，从我零花钱里，一个五分。

从那以后我爸给我定了三条：下坡先减速再捏闸；过坑要站蹬，不能坐死；到门口先按一声铃，别喊，喊哑了嗓子误事。这三条我用了三十年，后来我骑电动车、骑山地车，过的还是这三条。

暑假结束，我送完了整个夏天，认得半条街的人。买馒头的大婶会在车筐里放两个煮鸡蛋，说是谢我雨天也送。开学后周六我还送，一直送到上初中，铺子不干了为止。

馒头铺关那天，我爸把车擦了，推到杂物间。我上高中再没碰过它。前几年老屋翻修，杂物间清空，那辆车当废铁卖了，一百二十块。我爸收钱的时候愣了一下，说：这车送过多少万个馒头了。

我后来吃过很多地方的馒头，没有一家有那个味儿。有一年冬天加班到半夜，路边有个早点摊刚出笼，白汽冒起来老高。我站在摊前买了两个，边走边吃，吃到第二个，眼泪不知怎么就下来了。筐里的馒头一层报纸一层，我送过整个夏天。

The Summer of Delivering Steamed Buns

During the summer vacation of fifth grade, my father, who ran a steamed bun shop, had me learn to ride and deliver buns. Other children learned to ride for play; I learned for work. That is why I learned fast. No riding, no buns to eat. My father said it plainly, and I held onto it.

The bike was the old one from the shop, with two iron frames welded to each side of the rear seat, holding two willow baskets stacked with buns, a sheet of newspaper between each layer. On the first trip my father walked beside me, not holding the bike, just watching. He said: ride slowly; the baskets hold the meal of families, and one fall wipes out the breakfast of a family. For the first time I understood that what my hands gripped was not a toy but the breakfast of some family.

The fall came on the third day. Going downhill I squeezed the brake, squeezed too hard, the front wheel locked, and I pitched over the handlebars, body and bike crashing into the baskets. Buns rolled everywhere; several rolled into the ditch. I squatted to gather them, hands shaking, sorting edible from ruined. The ruined ones I counted: eleven. My father caught up, checked me first, then the buns, and said: leave the ones in the ditch, I will make up the loss at home. That day I paid for eleven buns out of my pocket money, five cents each.

After that my father set three rules: slow down before braking downhill; stand on the pedals over potholes, never sit dead in the saddle; ring once at the door instead of shouting, since a hoarse voice wastes time. I have lived by these three for thirty years. On electric bikes and mountain bikes since, I still ride by them.

When the vacation ended I had delivered the whole summer and knew half the street. The auntie who bought buns would leave two boiled eggs in my basket, saying thanks for delivering even on rainy days. After school started I still delivered on Saturdays, all the way through middle school, until the shop closed for good.

The day the shop shut, my father wiped the bike and pushed it into the storage room. In high school I never touched it again. A few years back, when the old house was renovated, the storage room was cleared and the bike sold for scrap, one hundred twenty yuan. My father paused when taking the money and said: that bike delivered how many tens of thousands of buns.

Since then I have eaten buns in many places; none taste like those. One winter year I worked overtime past midnight, and by the road a breakfast stall had just opened its steamer, white steam rising high. I stood there and bought two, eating as I walked. On the second one, somehow my tears came down. In the baskets, buns under layer after layer of newspaper, I delivered a whole summer.

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