

## Slow Down For Strangeness

To some, calling our city “Snailem” is a putdown. But there’s a lot to like about slowing down.

This lets us sense the sweet strangeness of existence that often goes unnoticed. Marcel Proust said: “The voyage of discovery is not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes.”

Slowing facilitates that fresh vision.

Especially if we are outside of what motorcyclists call cars: cages. So true. Zipping around town at automobile speed enclosed in metal and glass doesn’t allow us to connect with what makes Salem marvelous.

Nature and people. Absent these, our city (or anywhere else) is a sterile wasteland of blah.

Salem appears as a blur of mediocrity when viewed through the windshield of a car speeding past the uninspiring strip malls and almost empty sidewalks of Commercial Street and Lancaster Drive.

Moving at walking or biking speed changes everything. Now we’re much more open to sights, smells, other sensations. Most importantly, to other people, for we are social animals.

I’ve become addicted to riding an outdoor elliptical bike, the StreetStrider. It’s undeniably weird-looking. Powered by standing upright while pushing on foot pedals and arm levers. Turns by leaning. I hear a lot of “cool!” comments.

Recently I biked by two men many would derogatorily view as bums. They were sitting on a bench at the west end of the Union Street pedestrian bridge.

One of the guys said, “Hey, man, stop. I want to check out what you’re riding.” We had a pleasant conversation about the StreetStrider. As I was about to head off he said, “How about next time I drink too much, you give me a ride home on the back of your bike?”

I pointed to the luggage rack. “It’s got a 10 kg weight limit. Looks like you weigh more than twenty pounds. But I could give your beer a ride home.”

He laughed. We had a human-to-human moment made possible by two people who normally inhabit different Salem worlds taking time to interact with each other.

I liked the guy’s directness about his drinking. He reminded me of another man I saw downtown holding a cardboard sign that said “I need money for beer.” I prefer that over “Need a helping hand,” for sure.

Quality is what we crave from life, not quantity. Unmeasurable moments when we pause to honestly feel, connect, sense, experience. Who among us feels that he or she had a great day by driving X miles at Y mph?

Walking or biking along at what may seem like a snail’s pace, with our consciousness antennae fully extended and alert, finely attuned to the wonderful strangeness of life, is so much better than rushing from here to there and back again with little awareness of what lay along the unnoticed way.

Having trouble finding a downtown parking space? Consider it a blessing. Park a few blocks away. Walk to where you’re going. Slowly and smilingly.

Remember: this is Snailm. Happily embrace an unspeedy lifestyle.

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Strange Up Salem seeks to lift our city’s Blah Curse. Give us a Facebook like. Brian Hines blogs at [hinesblog.com](http://hinesblog.com)