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Transcript

Speaker 1

It's time for the outspoken cyclists. Your weekly conversation about bicycles, cyclists, trails, travel, advocacy, the bike industry, and much, much more. You can subscribe to our weekly podcast at outspokencyclist.com or through your favorite podcasting app to listen anytime. Now here's your host. Diane Jenks.

Speaker 2

Hello and welcome to the outspoken cyclist. I'm your host, Diane Jenks. Thanks for tuning in today. This episode features 2 incredibly thoughtful and knowledgeable guests. 1st is someone I would term a Renaissance man. At least he's a modern Renaissance man. Adam Rogers is curious about a lot of things, and while we have a great topic that he recently reported on about bike lanes and their impact on businesses. I just had to ask him about some of the other projects he's delved into in his career as a journalist. So far, one such project involved color, and you might remember the controversy. Did you see a blue dress with black fringe or a white dress with gold fringe? And does it matter that you saw one or the other? Adam thought it was not only interesting, but while working for Wired, he dove head first into the subject, and there's even an extensive Wikipedia page about the phenomenon. There's so much more, and we'll talk with Adam in a moment. In the second part of the show, my conversation is with author and journalist Peter Flax. Peter and I first spoke when he became editor in chief of *Bicycling* in 2010. That was a long time ago, and since then he's moved from the East Coast to the West Coast, worked for some other publications, and now he's written one of the most interesting books I've read in a while. *Live to ride*, finding joy and meaning on a bicycle is Peter's treatise on the bicycle world from the unique perspective of having seen almost every manifestation of bicycling from the utilitarian to the ultra competitive. Peter will be with me in the second part of the show. Adam Rogers is a senior tech correspondent at Business Insider covering science, technology, and our weird future. He reports on how technology changes the way we live. I saw his article *bike lanes are good for business*. Posted on March 7th and wanted to find out what he discovered. What I discovered is that Adam doesn't go off half cocked on a subject. In fact, he uncovers as much as he can find and then digs even deeper to reveal things many other journalists might miss. Or worse, gloss over. In addition to the dress controversy I mentioned at the top of the show, we also discuss another passion of his: booze. Proof. *The science of booze* is the book he wrote that came out of his discovery that we didn't know much about the science of distilling liquor. Ohh yeah, we also talk

about bike lanes and what the differences are between reality and perception when a bike lane is introduced into a neighborhood, it's such a good conversation that I never even thought about taking a break. So grab your beverage and here we go. Hello, Adam, welcome to the outspoken cyclist. Thanks for being my guest today. How are?

Speaker 3

You. I'm well. Thanks for having me.

Speaker 2

It's my pleasure. I came across your article about bike lanes and of course I had to dive into it. You really dove into? It but before. We we actually get into that topic, I'd like to know a little more about you because you've written some interesting things and I think a lot of people will remember this. That there was some science behind a picture that some people saw a white dress and some people saw a blue dress and you actually don't, how weird was.

Speaker 3

She had the best, the. Best.

Speaker 4

That.

Speaker 3

It was an amazing day. It was a yeah, it was pretty wild. I don't. So I mean, maybe people remember this. Maybe they won't. You know, it's it's been. It's been a few years, but there was a there was a a picture that that spread around started on BuzzFeed. That was a a picture of a woman in a dress from behind and and when you looked at the dress some people saw the. The dress is being blue so I can remember this right as being either blue with black fringe or white with brown, fringe or white with gold. Fringe. And when you when you saw it, you're basically your brain sort of chose one and you stuck to it but it. But it was almost random. Who could see what. And so it it like divided it was polarization, you know, before we got the kind of polarization. You get on. The Internet today, and as it happened, I. Had almost 15 years before at the time. And I had spent a fellowship at MIT in large measure, looking at color and the way human beings. The color as a as a thing that I would eventually go into, write a book about, and so I eventually did write that book came out a couple of years ago, but I so I looked at that and said, oh, I know what this is like. This is a, this is a neuroscience story. This is a brain science story. It's a cognitive story. It's called perception story. And I grabbed it, and it was a race because we knew in my newsroom I was working for wired at the time. We knew in The Newsroom that every newsroom in the country was working on that, that the obvious next story was what is the science? With this I was I was ready. It was good. It was finally, finally. I was prepared for breaking news.

Speaker 2

Ahead of the.

Speaker 3

Curve. That's right. Yeah. On it, at least I'm surfing it. Definitely. I was on the. I was on the surfboard on a big on the big. Tsunami of the. News it it was the thing I like about that and it is sort of relevant here is that in one. Sense it was completely frivolous. Right, like in one in one respect. It was a a story that didn't. It didn't matter, you know, Capital M but it. But it did. Because for one thing, it sort of it divided people, you know. And it it it made, you know you sort of put people on two sides of an issue that they wanted to understand why they were on. Those sides. And so that's really highly relevant today I think. Also, this is the thing that that obsesses me, that that you can explain why the world is the way it is, that you can you can do science on stuff and try to understand it better. And there are answers now. People don't have all those answers. And the interesting part of science are the places where people don't have an answer, not where they do. When they do it. Done, you know, but. But, but you can that the process is something valuable and powerful and that you don't have to be out in the in, in. In what? What? Carl Sagan called the Demon Haunted World where it's just all magic and and and mystery that that can be exciting but it's not the end of the story and that we as humans have the ability to apprehend the world. Around us. And and that's that's what I write about in all the different in all the different things that I've covered and and that's what's going on in the dress that I knew I could look at and say like, look, there's a way we can at least have some hypothesis. We understand enough. We I say we like you and I are doing the science scientists understand enough about how and they don't understand everything by any stretch about how the human brain works. But there's enough about how the. Visual cortex works and how Carl receptors in the eye work. Light receptors in the eye work and how light works in the world to at least kind of address this in more of a way than just saying like. Ohh. That's it's it's wild. Why would that be? It's crazy, man. Like we can do more and I care about that. So that's why. That's what I got to do when I wrote that story. And the bike story too.

Speaker 2

Well, the bike story is very interesting, but I want to go back to one thing because this is a interest to our household, in particular proof the science of Boo. What's the story behind that one?

Speaker 3

Another another obsession of mine. If the camera was camera was turned around, we were on video, and if the camera turn around you'd see a couple of the two various bars in. The house.

Speaker 2

Is 1 bourbon.

Speaker

I.

Speaker 3

There's a lot, there's, there's a lot. Of brown liquor and.

Speaker 2

OK.

Speaker 3

There's, there's still a few you know half and 3rd. Little bottles from a trip to Scotland and Ireland I took. I guess it's over a year ago now. Brought back a nice, some nice samples. I've gotten interested initially in. Malt whiskey and had gone with my dad on a on a trip to Scotland to distilleries and and and got interested in kind of cocktails in the 90s at the beginning of blogging. One of the very very first blogs, in fact, the person who I later became friends with was one of the people who started. It was at Wired. Cocktails, excavating historical recipes and trying to look for ingredients that you couldn't find at the time you couldn't get. Mayor Scheno the cure in the United States. And so you couldn't make an aviation drink from the prohibition era. And so I got obsessed with finding going to Europe, getting about on my skin and being able to make an aviation stuff like that. I I started to care about it. And and I wrote this story for Wired about a a mystery. It was detective story. There was a a black fungus. Going outside and near warehouses where they were distilling bourbon and and A and a researcher a a mycologist guy studies some guy, had figured out what it was and realized that it had been misidentified in the historical. Canon of fungal logical of mycological research and and he was an interesting guy and so I went to meet him in Canada and and talked about how he figured out what it was and we met his mentor and I wrote this story and the thing that interested me the most about it was that this fungus was millions of years old, but it had found this ecological niche outside whiskey aging warehouses. And and human beings have only been aging whiskey at scale for a couple 100. So I got really interested in trying to figure out like how can that be? How can there be something that's millions of years old that finds this this bespoke micro paradise outside of Bourbon warehouse and in the process of that story, I'm making this story longer than it has to be. But I I build it delights me in the in the process of doing that story I I thought like, well, there there has to be. Hey, I gotta find a book you know popularized. You know written for non scientists book about about the science of distilling because I need to know how it works because I need to understand what's getting what the exhaust is off of a building warehouse. You know other house and there wasn't one didn't exist the the most recent thing that had been written about distilling for an accessible easily accessible it wasn't even a lot of scientific research that was there was some. But a lot of it was corporate funded company funded and then you know there was one book it

was from the 40. And I started. Learning all kinds of interesting stuff just as a side thing, it always happens when I work on a big story, so I was learning a thing for. Example about how when. We distill grains so corn or barley, rice, even those are mostly starch. And humans can digest starch. The enzymes in our saliva and in our stomachs, they can digest the starch. It's a starch in the sugar little polymer, so there's multiple molecules of sugar. But yeast, which are the critters, the the fungus that eats sugar and excretes. Alcohol cannot digest starch. They don't they they they need simpler sugars. So one of the issues that a person making beer or whiskey or sake faces is how do you convert the starch in your in your base, in your substrate, into a sugar. The yeast can eat and turn an. Alcohol cause trying to make. And in in beer and in whiskey they do. That by sacrificing they they sort of cook the they, they cook it for a while and it simplifies and gelatinizes and turns into a simple. Sugar. But if you're making a a tequila or an early version of tea, if you're using agave, plant a cactus to do it, then you in in early days like they would they. They steam it underground like they cook it underground and get. That's why it gets that smoky flavor. But there was a corn based drink that was made in South America and. And and some countries further north called Chicha, that was made out of blue corn. And women would sit and chew the corn 1st and so the the amylase in their saliva would break down the starch and then they would make these little cakes, they would spit it out, make these little cakes and then that's what they would let it sun dry and it would. So there wouldn't be any gross stuff in it and then they would ferment and and I think to still maybe just ferment those features fermented. But if you're making sake which is rice. You actually have another fungus called koji. Which is present in a lot of Asian foods, and the code breaks down the starch in the sugars first before and and these and as the yeast is digesting, I got fascinated by this stuff and I was telling that exact story to a colleague of mine, a guy who's now an editor at. The New York. Times Sunday magazine I was telling all that stuff with all of the excitement that I just said to you because I'm fascinated by and I think it's really cool. And he looked at me and he said, you know, Adam, that's a book. And I said. What? Which part?

Speaker 2

Of course it is. Which?

Speaker 3

Part and he said, well, all of it. And and I thought that I thought, oh, man, there is really a lot here and nobody had nobody written it. Nobody written a popular version of it and it appealed to two audiences because it appealed to the booze audience on the science audience of which I am both from there. And I knew I had a good idea when I would tell other journalists about it and they would, their, their pupils would dilate a little bit and they would go. Oh, that's. That's a good one. So OK, a lot more people read it than the color book. I'll show you that.

Speaker 2

Let me take a moment to reintroduce you. We're speaking with Adam Rogers. He's a senior tech correspondent at Business Insider. He covers science, technology, our weird future, and he reports on how technology changes the way we live. And we actually are going to talk about something that has to do with bicycles, although I really am interested in the boost part, I think that sounds really cool. And the dress part was really cool. But anyway, give us a little bit of background about you, although now I've already got some of it because you have so many. Amazing interests. And clearly, when you get one, you dive in head first. So there we'll we'll get to the bicycling connection. I also want to know, do you ride a bike?

Speaker 3

I do I I get obsessed. And not not with any regularity. I know how to, but you know, part of the reason that I got interested in in bike lanes is that this is gonna sound weird. I'm 53. I would love to be riding a bike around my smallish cute city where I live, and I'm honestly too scared to because I'm not that good at cyclist. You know, I I know how to ride a. Bike, but I like. I'm. I'm not. I'm kind of scared to do it and my city has, candidly, a lot of older drivers and it has a lot of. Tesla Model X's and Ford F1 fifties and SUV's, and no really very few protected bike lanes. Cities around you do I live in the East Bay, Oakland and and El Cerrito. I protected bike lanes. Berkeley doesn't. And so I don't wanna I I think. I'm getting killed. People. Do you know? I'm really it freaks me out and and I and and so that that's like a personal reason. Cause I like riding bikes. It's fun, but I don't. I'm not gonna do as a. Hobby. It's not my hobby. It's not my sport. It's a useful mode of of of transportation, you know, and I'd like to use it. I'd like to use it for that, and I'm honestly too scared to do it.

Speaker 2

Well, and that seems to be the bane of a lot of people's existence, because COVID encouraged people to get on a bike and ride and post COVID it's beginning. To sort of. Dwindle again in some sectors and and stay the same in others. But I absolutely understand we no longer ride on the road, we ride paths and trails and the tow path and we ride at my husband. I ride a tandem. I'm like I'm not getting back on the road and I'm in the business. This is, you know, bicycles have been my life for almost 50 years and it's like. Nope, not anymore. And we live in. We live in a ring suburb of Cleveland. And it's, you know, people. People actually are used to seeing bikes, but they don't care. It's not like they respect them.

Speaker 3

No, I I think that you know, there's some interesting science about kind of the psychology of of drivers. And I experienced it too. I I, I I grew up in Los Angeles. I've been driving since I was 15, if not a little younger. I think cars are fun.

Speaker 2

Well, I'll bet.

Speaker 3

Tell and I. You know, I think that the sort of ceiling of driving fast at night with the window down on the freeway is one of the better kind of vibes that human beings can experience. But you know, when you when, when we drive and now I can use we because I. Do it too. We see the world through. Kind of a proscenium made by the windshield and it it assumes a sort of less of. That that wasn't a reality, but we we we feel like we're, you know, just as entitled to space as a vulnerable kid walking with their parent as. A bike and we.

Speaker 2

Right.

Speaker 3

You know, we think that we're we're driving everyone else's traffic like some weird stuff happens in our head and it happens to me too. And I, you know, I don't want to be on the business end of that on a bike like I just. I'll mess up and that and that. That I'll. I'll get doored or bumped or whatever. And so and then. And that's not you know there should be there should be look for both. I don't want people to not get to drive as much as they want but there should. Be room for other options for a lot of reasons, but I'm sure you already know. Well, yeah.

Speaker 2

I I do but and and I agree with you 100%, we've grown up. Me too with driving, you know, 16 was the magic number. You. You put your bicycle in the basement and you grab the car keys. So let's talk a little bit about the article. It's March 7th. It was Business Insider. Bike lanes are good for business.

Speaker

Yep.

Speaker 2

My husband and I were talking about your article last night and he, without ever reading it, he knew exactly what it said because he has thought about this. I mean, he's a bike designer. This is what he does. He's an engineer. He's into all that stuff. But he also understood that bike lanes are going to be good for some business and not necessarily. All business. So tell us what you found. This article is fascinating. We will post a link to it on our site. And I recommend that all of my listeners read it because they know how interested I am in urban transportation and sustainability and walkable, bikeable cities. So go.

Speaker 3

So here's the the the fundamental issue 2 fundamental issues. Really. One is that people drive generally farther than they will bike, regardless of whether they're protected bike lanes for them or not. And two is that when cities put protected bike lanes at various levels and you know the share of the sort of. Anything from like painted to, separated with concrete bollards. Those tend to replace or displace street parking. Now there's a lot of good research dating back. 30 years little bit more on how free Street parking is a real detriment to the to the the smooth functioning of a city at every scale, traffic congestion, pollution, economics, sort of how people get around. But it's it's one of those things that, like urbanists who are real into it, know about Donald Trump's work on parking. And it still hasn't in most places, filtered into cities, although a lot of cities and their new zoning rules when trying to build new housing will also say there are no more minimum number of parking spaces, you have to build for these apartment buildings. That's what that research comes from. OK, it's related. So if you are. And what you would like, you know, if you it's like if you and I would like see putting a protected bike lane down into a medium sized city, we would go well, where are the high streets where the the shopping St. That people want to go to, and let's put the bike lane to those and maybe pass some schools too, you know, like places where people might wanna ride bikes. If you're a retail owner, if you're a shop owner, a shopkeeper on one of those streets, you're. Knee jerk reaction to that and I know it's a knee jerk reaction because it happens in every American city where they try to do it and it happened in the European cities where they did it too is to say. You can't take away my customer's parking. I'll go out of business. And that's the immediate response that shopkeepers have. So if I come at a street like that, if I come to a City Council meeting and I start saying. Things like look. If more people site you build more bike means more people cycle, more people cycle, they're healthier, there's less pollution in the city, there's less car traffic, there's less, there's less climate change because people are driving and transportation is a huge sector for invading carbon. The climate change in the. It's quieter, it's more pleasant, and more people can. The kids can go places where they couldn't before because they aren't driving yet, and families can do that. And with new kinds of bikes, you know, people can actually do some of their marketing with bikes or get their kids around. And E bikes are important for that, too. And there's a lot of ways that cities get a lot better if we put. People, if we share these modes, we put people on bikes. I can say all those things and I buy them like that. Sounds great. I want cities like that. I look at Paris. What Mayor Anne Hidalgo is doing in Paris. And think like, well, I want a city that looks like that. I want to be able to bike and get a the best baguette in the world and then go to work. OK. Well, the the shopkeepers who are the ones who paid the taxes pay a lot of taxes in cities and who are a major interest group, importantly because they're they're driving and that the economics of the city and a lot of respects. And are already in trouble because Amazon and other things like it around American retail into dust. Will say you're gonna put me out of business. There's people are gonna want to ride their bikes anymore. There won't. Be any shops? On this street, and if you're a City Council person or mayor, you take that very seriously. You should. You should take that seriously. So every time they would, there would be an announcement of a bike lane

that would get that kind of resistance. In the past few years, I have gone on social media and said. Does anyone have any actual sign? Any actual research, economic sociology, whatever urban planning that shows what happens to the businesses next to a bike lane when they put in a bike lane before and after they go out of business or not? And then I mentioned I was in Berkeley, Berkeley one or build 1-2 and passed a lovely short couple three blocks of. Shopping called Hopkins St. with like a supermarket that sells the best California produce you've ever seen at a butcher shop and a really inexpensive liquor store and a great fish monger. And you know, just like the kind of place that you think. Like, this is what, this is the best thing about living in kind of a urban suburban environment. You know, and the neighborhood and the shopkeepers just went ballistic about it. They, they, they just they, they fought it to the mail and some of that is, you know, in California especially people fight land use changes. It's just it's the thing for a bunch of different reasons for tax bases and stuff like that but also you know this placement by it goes past three schools. You know, it's a it's on a a major street is it's perfect for every reason. It's perfect place for a protected bike lane and they fought like hell. And I thought, well, why well do they have reason? I want to be empathetic to this. I want to be sympathetic. I want these kids in the same business too. I go to them. I I don't wanna lose that butcher shop. And finally, when they they seem to have killed that plan now. And when that when that kill finally came through, I said alright, I'm just gonna go read this work. Like I gotta go find it. I want to find it. And there and there was over the past, you know, 30 years or so there were. Think you know 35? Studies reports published some of them peer reviewed, some of them just reports out of Department of Transportation. But reputable, you know. And and I just said so like I said to my boss like, look, I'm just gonna read them all. I need a. I need a. Couple of weeks I'm going to read them. All and see what they say. With, you know, of course I had hypothesis. I was pretty sure that there gonna. Say is like. They're fine. You know, but I, but I would I. Wanted. To know and what I found was that after being reading that many, many, many of them were just surveys, not just on being a kind of a jerk about that. They were surveys. They were. They the people, you know, good researchers. Qualitative and quantitative research have gone and interviewed people in that neighborhood. High streets about their opinions about bike lanes or about what had happened with the bike lane, or how much money people spent. You're you. I see you riding your bike. How much money? How often do you come to this neighborhood? How much money do you spend? You know, really useful questions. But I read them and I said like, OK, Well, survey data is not as useful here methodologically because people. Let's remember, they get stuff wrong. They. The lie the they, they, you, the the person who stops to take your survey has a different opinion about things than the person who says not right now. Shopkeepers are motivated, have, are, are being some motivated reasoning here so and and the best example of that and this shows up again and again and again in the literature is that shopkeepers consistently underestimate how many of their customers arrive on foot or by bike. They think everybody they think it's 50% come by car and it's actually 30% or 20% depending on where you are. People by the bus to downtown, you know to go shop. And it's the people who this is, I mean, a little bit

reductionist about this. But in general, you know, it's the the, the, the person who blazes into your store in a huff saying they couldn't find parking and how terrible it is now is the complaint that you remember, whereas the people who who you know locked their bike to the no parking sign in front of your. Store and breeze right in aren't complaining. They had a nice they had a nice ride, you know, and so you don't remember that you don't hear them complain. So I made this decision in the vein of what in science is called a meta analysis in science. You can if there are a lot of studies on a particular subject. The researcher will do meta analysis. They'll, they'll they'll take all the data from those studies and then they'll do another analysis on the data altogether to see what the preponderance of evidence sets, not just what any given study says. And so I was doing kind of in my. Head I was doing a. Of a qualitative like. Journalism version of the meta analysis. I wasn't going to do all. I wasn't going to aggregate all the data like a real researcher would, but I was going to read it all and say what the preponderant said and what I decided. Was. I I wasn't gonna use any of the survey studies that I was going to say that they existed. And so basically what they showed, which is now the. Bike lanes are fine for businesses, but there were. Half a dozen. Like 6 or 7 papers that used better data that used sales tax data that used census data that used there were there were some propriety to their proprietary data sets of national businesses and and how they're doing that use their actual numbers for for how the business is going. And a couple of those. And there were researchers who were getting that. When we're looking. At. It and in those studies in places like New York and San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Speaker 4

Yes.

Speaker 3

Minneapolis. Cleveland. I think this one Cleveland, the the researchers were were also they were learning methodologies. So in the last 1520 years, they were doing things like. It's not enough to compare your shopping St. before and after the bike lane goes. In. You also have to compare the shopping St. to a place that's like that shopping street, but they didn't get a. Plane. So two different kinds of controls before and after, but also yet got it and didn't study group control group. Good science, and you could you could do things like use Google Maps to compare where the areas were and how many parking spaces actually lost, and you could say, well, how many parking spaces did this they actually. Take away and. Did that matter? And you could, you know, nobody started doing this. Yeah, but eventually we're gonna start using mobile phone data to figure out how people are actually moving around who comes there too, which is the thing that transit planners are doing a lot. In the United States now and certainly we're starting to do before COVID messed up all the public transportation system. So I read those so that came that got me down to, you know, six big studies, including a recent 1/20/20 that was, you know, from Portland State University, 250 pages long, and did all of that for six or seven different specific regions in different cities around the country as an exercise not only to find out what happens with bike lanes, but. You developed a a really kind of

rock solid methodology because the idea is if you have a rock solid methodology and really good data, you can go, you can try to allay the fears, if indeed it turns out that they're OK of the shopkeepers, but also you can put that in front of the City Council and say don't listen to those guys, they'll be fine.

Speaker 2

Right, sure.

Speaker 3

So that was, that's all methodology which maybe you can tell where my obsessions are. That's why I got interested in it. And when I read them the the what? All of them said essentially was if we find a statistically significant change in the the, the, the successfulness, the, the, the economic survival. Or thriving of these businesses along these protected bike lanes, if we find a significant effect at all, it is positive they do better. In in a couple of places like, there's one study in Seattle where they did wildly, better, like Forex, but that doesn't always happen. It's usually less and then you get into the weeds, like what actually changes, because if you're a shopkeeper who sells paint, let's say you're a paint store. Then you say all well and good, but. I got people come in here buying 30 gallons of paint and and a loading zone in front. Of my shop. What do you think is gonna happen if I don't have that loading zone? I don't have parking in back, or you have somebody who says I'm the best framing store in in town. So people are coming to me from every suburb. In the city. To get the best you know, picture frames, best lamps and nobody's riding my bike here. I'm in. I'm in the downtown that because I'm in an American downtown, you know, 50 years ago was destroyed by white flight and and the end of streetcars and. 30 years ago was destroyed by a huge recession and then five years ago was slammed by a by a pandemic. That meant that no office workers come to this downtown anymore, and now you're telling me you don't want anybody to drive here. And I will say these are valid concerns. That's for real. You know, the people who are, who have businesses, some in some of the studies and it's hard to do this because you need a whole other set of coding to understand what kind of business it is on that retail stuff. Some of those kinds of businesses are places where people are are either where either the shop itself needs a big loading thing in front because it doesn't have an alley cause it's it's big bulk goods. Or they're relying on a bigger watershed of customers from all over the region, or they're selling something that's big and heavy and it's it's not good for a bike. You know, the bars. And restaurants do great. They love it. Yeah, so, so these bike lanes have to be integrated into a larger system of thinking about cities, for sure. A downtown that's also putting in a lot of. Or a neighborhood High Street that's putting in a lot of new residential construction. You know, that's pretty, you know, five level one apartment building which I know people don't like, but they're fine with me or that's building last towers for residences or that's just changed its zoning rules so that more people can build more houses. Those that means there are more people closer and they wanna ride bikes. And people tend to be posed to those too. Another obsession online. But even with those differences, those

effects on different kinds of businesses turn out to be. And inconsistent and the the overall effect still remains positive. These bike lanes are a boon for these these shopping streets, more kinds of people come more often and more easily, and something that any business want. I understand why. They're why shopkeeper would be very concerned about change right now. Being in retail, being in in food service is is real scary, but this is not a change to be scared of.

Speaker 2

So we've been speaking with Adam Rogers, his article in Business Insider is titled Bike Lanes are good for business. I have a, a, a couple of comments and questions. We're seeing a a new generation. Of people who may or may not want to drive, and so are looking to live in a an urban area where they can walk or bike. I also have the cargo. Like you know, phenomenon that's happening both E bike and pedal bike and then you you have all the bike share systems. So there are a lot of things that are encouraging people to bike. You also have a fact about building bike lanes that if you compare the building of a bike lane to the building of a road or a highway or a bridge. You put more people to work building a bike lane for a lot less money than you do building a bridge or a highway. You know, with concrete and whatever it is. So All in all, are you seeing any overall trends, something that you could actually extrapolate out to maybe five years or 10 years?

Speaker 3

Well, I think it certainly if my household is any indication that the the data trend you indicate of younger people not wanting to drive is true. The the race that I, you know I couldn't couldn't get into a car fast enough as a teenager and and my kids have little interest. One of them has none.

Speaker 2

Right.

Speaker 3

The other one is like maybe you. And I think that's true across the board for Gen. Alpha Gen. Z, where we what, how do we describe teenagers now? I don't know. So they. Yeah, I mean, the cars are a hassle and they're expensive and. And we've built, you know, we've built this economy in this country where our car is essentially because of the way we build.

Speaker 2

I have no idea.

Speaker 3

Because of how far we put housing from because of how little housing there is because. Of. The way we build roads. We built this economy. Where having a car is like the. Cost

of entry. You know, \$30,000. Whatever it is now \$8000 a year. Ticket to participate in the American economy. That's bad for equality. That's bad for people. And the cars do bad things. There's a lot of externalities that. We don't pay for so. We have to provide alternatives. We want cities to continue to function if we want people to still be able to get to work, if we, if we want to. The rest of. The economy to work, there have to be more options and and. The the joke about it is, is that the is the war on cars, right? They're very successful popular podcast about that that people. Are saying you don't want anybody to. Drive anymore and. You know I. Think like well, you know, people should drive less, that's for sure. But let's start with letting people who don't want to drive have that chip. This, and I think that choice becomes more and more plausible in cities that are also open to building more places for people to live more homes. Another thing that's true about my neighborhood is that it's the neighborhood in town where there are where a lot of my neighbors are on house. And to me, you know, I'm reactionary about this. I'm like. Look, there's no, there's no neighborhood. Character. There's no Bay window. There's no, there's no little garden in the backyard. To me, that's more important than somebody dying in the street. I don't. I don't know what kind of society you can describe yourself as having if you're letting that happen. Right. And the way that you fix it again, I've read a lot of this science. Not all of it, cuz a lot. But I've read a lot of this.

Speaker

Search.

Speaker 3

And it is very clear that the way you make sure there are not unhoused people. Is by building. A lot of homes and cities that do that, like Emeryville near me, seem to also almost magically also be very open to having protected bike lanes and a lot of bike paths. It's really interesting that those two things are associated.

Speaker 2

Sounds like a new story.

Speaker 3

Yeah, actually should try to find a like a little instead of me just asserting it. Our podcast is what? I know what I'm talking about.

Speaker 2

Really interesting observation that you know, we're talking about housing unhoused people who I am. So in that same camp with you and then suddenly. Transportation becomes very important to these people, and many of them ride bikes to work to whatever job they do get or to whatever they're doing. Yes, very interesting.

Speaker 3

Yeah, I do think that the, the, the planning, the urban planning profession has professionalized in a way that has given them some more political. Influence and that that and has changed its capacities and its goals, been leading urbanism since I was 18 and 19 years old as a another separate session. And this is a this is a profession. And it's all it's associated professions. The economists who work in it, the sociologists who work in it, the the architects and designers who work in it, who really are thinking like it's the job now, not to just satisfy the limbs of existing suburbanites, but to make these make places better for people who will come to them, and people who are there now and. You know, I was, I I was really struck by one of the one of the other critiques that that, that Hopkins cycling in my town levelled is that the Berkeley has a lot of older people because it hasn't built any housing in 30 years. So the people who lived here 30 years ago are still the ones who live here now. And and a lot of them were very scared of the bikes. They were scared that if there was a bike lane that they had to cross, they'd be hit by the bike that the bike would hurt them. And and that was really they were very people frightened. You know, there was a lot of I'm I'm a I'm an older person with limited mobility and and I don't want to be mixed in or next to that. Some cyclist whipping past, you know, with the little European cap and a on a on a 2 LB carbon fiber frame they were thinking of of like roadside, you know.

Speaker 2

Yeah, sure.

Speaker 3

Or whatever. And the thing that struck not only reasonable concern, I mean, and they they were all remembering a few years ago a person was killed by a cyclist here in Berkeley. And, you know, the one thing stands out in memory, of course too, but. They're forgetting all the people who were harmed by car crashes and the reason that they were forgetting this is how I'm hypothesizing not to, and I don't have data for this. Is that cars have become the background. We don't see them anymore.

Speaker 2

It's a good point.

Speaker 3

We we we won't see it any more than than you than people sort of notice the sky. You know there's a there's a one of the theories about what about mammalian color vision about why we why we see red so well. And and kind of don't identify blue and green as much as even though there's more blue and green in the world. Is the idea that like, oh, we were looking for ripe fruit when we were evolving. There's this hypothesis, a lot of problems for ripping ripening fruit, these brighter, these red and yellow orange colors and the and the Blues and greens that the trees and the sky and the water. Were just context. So our brains are like, that's not the important part. But if you see something enough every day, it becomes context. It becomes the background. And I think in our, in

our cities cars have just become the. Background and people only notice them when you say maybe we should have less of those people. How am I gonna get to work? The idea that people are more scared of getting hit by a bike to getting hit by all the cars jockeying for the few parking spaces was really shocking to me. I've I've I've gone far afield from your. From your question I as.

Speaker 2

Important as I do think, there are trends. I think it's a very valid point that. It's another place I hadn't thought of that pedestrians are afraid of bike. Bikes. Cars are afraid of bikes and pedestrians, and yet more people are dying by cars than by bikes, that is.

Speaker 3

Yeah. For sure I just looked up the number last night. This is, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2

It's scary. 40,000 people last year, if I'm not mistaken, were injured or killed by a car.

Speaker 3

Ohh, that's just the death.

Speaker 2

Oh, that is just death.

Speaker 3

The 40 the yeah, the 45,000 is just debts. It's millions of injuries, yeah.

Speaker 2

You're absolutely right, I. Mean it's. Like absurd. It's absurd.

Speaker 3

Oh. And you know, we can do better that we can fix that. That's the thing we can fix. You can be like, oh, we can fix. That, that's fixable. We can. Do something about that but.

Speaker 2

Will we? Political will. That's another whole topic.

Speaker 3

It's the.

Speaker 2

Well, Adam this. Has just been a wonderful conversation. I wish we could go on all day. We've been speaking with Adam Rogers. He is the senior tech correspondent for

business. Insider recover science technology, our weird future, and boy, it's weird, he reports on how technology changes the way we live. His article bike lanes are good for business, was published on March 7th. We will have it on our website. You can just log into Business Insider and see. Thank you for taking time to talk with me. I hope we get to talk again because you. Are fascinating. That's.

Speaker 3

Very kind of you. Thank you for having me. I appreciate it.

Speaker 2

All right, take care.

Speaker 3

You too.

Speaker 2

My thanks to Adam Rogers for joining me. As I said, I could have talked with him all day, his article bike lanes are good for business is linked on our site outspokencyclist.com or you can find it on Business Insider and you might want to delve into some of his other work, much of it linked on his bio. Let's take a short break, and when we come back, we'll speak with journalist and author Peter Flax about his new book, *live to Ride, Finding Joy and meaning on a bicycle*. You're listening to the outspoken cyclist. We are back on the outspoken cyclist. I'm your host, Diane Jenks. Peter Flax is a bike rider. He not only says so at the beginning of his new book, he has and does live it in *live to ride, finding joy and meaning on a bicycle*, Peter breaks down his thinking into distinct categories such as adventure. Speed and self-expression. Each chapter of the book is punctuated by people, photographs and commentary that represent the title of the chapter. I caught up with Peter at the Austin Airport when he was waiting for his plane to take him back to LA. Hi Peter. Welcome to the outspoken cyclist. Thanks for being my guest. It's nice to talk with you again.

Speaker 4

Love wise. Likewise, it's great to be here and talk to you once again.

Speaker 2

Yeah, well, we've had. Several conversations over the years, beginning in December of 2010. And the reason that's relevant is I started this podcast in September of 2010 and also in that year you became editor in Chief of *Bicycling*.

Speaker 4

Right. And I believe we met at an event in Ohio perhaps where we gave away bikes is that? Right. Am I remembering that correctly?

Speaker 2

No, I don't think so. Maybe.

Speaker 4

OK. OK. No, maybe I'm forgetting but. It has been almost 15 years.

Speaker 2

A long time. I mean we've spoken, you know, periodically over the years. But yeah, our first encounter was then catch us up a little bit on what's ensued. I mean, I've been following you for a while, both on social media and just knowing. Being in the industry, but catch us up on. And what you've been doing and how you transition to writing the book, which is what we're going to talk about, your new book live to ride, finding joy and meaning on a bicycle. And it's a hard bound book, which I love. And like it's tact how you can touch it. It's not just like something online. So yeah, tell us what you've been doing.

Speaker 4

OK, well, since 2010 for maybe four years, I was editor in chief of Bicycling and then got fired from that job and and moved to LA.

Speaker 2

When he fired.

Speaker 4

Yeah, it was the CEO of the company that owned bicycling, felt like I was like a bike racer guy and and that like the brand wanted to be more. Open to all riders. So it's like a terrific irony of, like, where we're winding up talking today. I never felt like that's who I was. But when you swim in the deep waters of corporate publishing, that sometimes things go that way and. And I moved to LA 10 years ago and got a job at The Hollywood Reporter, which was actually a great place to work. But I it meant that I was no longer, like, employed to write about bikes and it and at the same time I transitioned from mostly riding from for recreation. To being a utility rider who just commuted in Los Angeles. Course and and so the last 10 years in a lot of ways has been a journey of of like finding a new identity within bike culture that's different than the one I had had before. And this book is in a lot of ways a a product of that journey.

Speaker 2

So it's interesting that you say you went from being a recreational rider to sort of a utilitarian rider. When I think of Los Angeles, I don't think of good riding infrastructure there and and you have written about that in the past. I I don't know how it's changed in the last few years. But it's something. That we're talking about a lot on the show, infrastructure and urban planning and the way transition are being made for younger people, not wanting to drive, they want to ride. So I just think it's interesting that you've

transitioned that way. The publication of your book is kind of interesting right now. At the beginning of the 2024 cycling season. And the bicycle business has changed so much. You capture the essence of a lot of my thinking. In the last 40 years, so maybe 35 years ago, when I own my own store and I would write nasty letters to bicycle dealer showcase, which was the the trade journal at the time instead of by school retailer, I would get a lot of negative response to the fact that I feel like the bicycle. Business is like a bunch of little tiny factions. And what is it that could unite us all as bicycle? People, just people who want to ride bicycles. So the way you describe what I've always called the factions, I think it's interesting. So tell me about the essence of your book and how you came to describe it.

Speaker 4

Yeah, I I I mean I think. For a long time. I adhere to this unspoken hierarchy within by culture where whether riders realize it or not, they're slotted into a subculture of like are you a roadie? Are you a mountain bike, or are you a triathlete? Are you a commuter? What? Whatever it is you you are and and that folks in that subculture are, you know, use particular kinds of equipment and where certain kinds of clothes and have their own rules and the Expo. Sense of moving to LA and and realizing that my life had evolved in a way that I didn't really feel like I belong to any of those subcultures like I had one foot in a bunch of them and and not both feet in any of them made me slowly realize, you know, that everybody who rides is. Inter interconnected and and so so much of what the the book is about is an exploration of all these things that everyone who writes has in common that instead of just being like oh, this person was baggy shorts or this person wears jeans or whether you're handlebars like flat or or curved that we're all. Interconnected in all these ways, and that in particular in the you know, in the relation to things like safety and infrastructure, that the the way the riders will have the most power in our culture is by uniting that having like tons of smaller subgroups doesn't help us with advocacy and unity. And so. I I do think there was like some quiet advocacy to the thesis of the Book of of like Wanting Everyone who rides to feel like they're one big block.

Speaker 2

Let's take your book apart a little bit. It's divided into sections titled Adventure, Speed, Utility, Nature, Competition and self-expression. I'm not sure. Self-expression might not be a kind of an overarching, you know, quality to to each of those, but how did you come up with those six categories? Well, I I mean, I just tried to. I spent about a year thinking before I started writing and was just trying to think of.

Speaker 4

Like why I ride and why and why people I know ride and really try to talk to people who have different sorts of riding lives. And and just try to write notes and and create some structure for it and I'm oddly enough, I originally had 7 chapters and that some self-expression was two different ideas because it's really about this sort of beauty and

individuality, which is a big part. And then the self. Expression part of of like feeling. And the like the the sense of inclusiveness being important within by culture and. And so I like combined those into one idea where where it's about like representing some piece of yourself and feeling accepted for that, that piece of yourself as as one big idea you, you know and it and it's. You know, just a construct to get at the things that drive people to ride. And what I found is, is that, you know, people who were bike ride riders were bike racers. Excuse me, were increasingly interested in safety and advocacy, and we're riding to the coffee shop. And and the people who ride in cities were still relating to the adventure of being on a bike ride. And so I really just tried to distill it down to these qualities that everyone could relate.

Speaker

So.

Speaker 2

Let me take a moment to reintroduce you. We're speaking with Peter Flax. His new book is live to ride, finding joy and meaning on a bicycle and everybody who listens to this podcast clearly finds Joy riding a bicycle. However they ride or he rides or they she rides so. You chose a bunch of interesting people to highlight each of these sections of the book. How did you come to? Do you know all these people like, personally, or did you seek out these? People.

Speaker 4

I knew everyone with the exception of Anne Hidalgo, the mayor of Paris, who I do not know, but every I mean, I I have been in fight media and bike culture for a long time. And so in some ways leading on people that I really care about or really respect who I. No, and I really tried to like in each chapter individually and collectively pick people that showed the different sides of that idea. If I'm talking about. Adventure. You know, I didn't want to just exclusively rely on professional mountain bikers. Who do you know, epic adventures. I wanted to really capture the breadth of these ideas and and really. Representation felt important and and kept an eye on like who I was inviting to be a part of the book, because like collectively I wanted it to be a statement about, you know, kind of who's in the gang in bike culture. And it's a huge range of people.

Speaker 2

It is, it is, and a lot of. It's so much fun for me to to read it because so many of these people I've also spoken with for the podcast. And I'm like, I remember them. I remember them. So what do you think has changed in cycling and sort of by extension has changed? Cyclists over a past generation, because now we're hearing kids don't want to drive. And I just did an interview with Ralph Bueller, who's a professor at Virginia Tech whose studies have found that children are not learning to ride a bike. They're not being taught to ride. So what's changed, and how do you think we can maybe change it back so that we get a new generation of riders?

Speaker 4

Yeah, I I. I'm not sure that I see it as clearly as as like needing to change it back like the bicultural is always shifting and that during the early years of the pandemic there was a big boom in participation and interest in in bikes. And so I see it as this, like oscillating. Thing where interest goes up and down, but surely there are a lot of kids growing up who aren't learning to ride like I did when I was a kid. But they're there are more people who live in these urban and suburban and exurban places where parents. They're afraid about their children being in the street, on a bike or on foot, right. Like I remember, I grew up in the suburbs and we played like stickball in the street. And I think now you have to really get out into a really rural area to find somewhere where people feel safe, their children. Playing in the street. But I I think. There is this growing sense, at least for people who are lovers of bikes or adjacent to that that the bikes can actually really change the world for the better that we we have all these problems going on in our culture, whether it's just like traffic, air quality, climate change. Public health. You know, people finding. They're just perpetually online and connected digitally and and for so these and so many other problems like bikes are a potential answer to them. And so I think there's a greater sense now that bikes are more than a hobby, right. Like, I think that in the world I inhabited 15 years ago. There was a lot of people for whom it they were, just like enthusiasts who did something for fun. And I think everybody that I know, even in those spaces now realizes that bikes are transportation, that. Can transform cities that bikes can be a way that you can express something about yourselves and and so. I think part of what I'm tapping into or I hope I'm tapping into in the book, is is like those ideas taking root. We're starting to take root and by.

Speaker 2

Culture. So this is sort of a question that I I'm not sure you can answer, but it's one that I'm having trouble answering and that. Is. The cost of entry for a bicyclist and the and this may be not happening everywhere, but we happen to know in our area. Northeast Ohio of quite a few bike shops who are closing. Their doors. Which is not a good thing, because then you don't have a neighborhood shop and a neighborhood shop is important for neighborhood. Cycling and then the cost of a bicycle, one that isn't a Walmart bicycle, which I'm not saying Walmart doesn't make a a bicycle you could ride. They do, but a bike shop bike you used to be able to go in and buy a reasonably priced bike shop bike and today I'm not sure you can. Do you think that that's a deterrent?

Speaker 4

I think it's a factor. I mean, I think like a lot of industries, there's a lot of consolidation going on in the bike industry and so shops are closing or you know there's more like direct to consumer sales now of bikes which cut the local shop out. But I I get asked this question a lot and that you know with the exception of this maybe 18 months during the pandemic where finding a used bike was really difficult. But once again finding a used bike is really great, right? Like there's a lot of people who made impulse purchases

during the pandemic. You now aren't riding and. And so yeah, if you put a little time into it, you know, I would rather buy a super high quality used bike and then bring it into a shop versus buying a big box store. But. Week of lesser quality so and and it and frankly a lot of the bike companies after being out of inventory built like hack and and now bike shops are overflowing and arguably it's one of the better times to get a deal on a bike than.

Speaker 1

Them in past.

Speaker 4

Years because everyone's trying to get bikes off the floor.

Speaker 2

That's true. That is true. There is an inventory glut. Now you know it. It's this ebb and flow that just during the pandemic, it was insane. You couldn't even get inner tube. So yeah, no, I get what you're saying.

Speaker 4

Yeah.

Speaker 2

Never even occurred to me that there would be a great used bike market right now. Of course there is.

Speaker 4

Yeah, it's, it's it's. It's as someone who I I bought a A used steel bike last year it it was like the best time in a decade to go online looking for used bikes because yeah it's people made so many impulse purchases. Yeah, the other. Thing I'll add is that. Bikes are not cheap and I understand that that. There's a barrier for people to get on something really super high quality, but at the same time part of it is is evolving from this mindset of just thinking you're buying a toy to thinking you're buying something that's real transportation. Well, I live in Los Angeles and I don't have. Car and I get to work, which is 15 miles each way on a bike, and I'm not saying that's something that everybody would want to do, but that when you start thinking like ohh, I could be making trips that are two or three miles to the store with the bike or or ohh if I think about how much I'm spending on a gym membership. And and this could like replace that there are a lot of ways to think about it. Well then the cost of a bike is something that's gonna last you for so many years. And and you bring a lot of like like I said in the book meaning and joy.

Speaker 2

Meaning and joy. I'm really glad that you bought a steel bike too.

Speaker 4

I'm very happy on it.

Speaker 2

Yeah, we're not going to have that carbon fiber conversation. Well, I I know you're waiting for a plane. I really appreciate you taking time to speak with me. I really appreciate you writing the book. It's live to ride, finding joy and meaning on a bicycle. Peter Flax journal. Bike rider and commuter I love that that you don't even own a car in LA. That's sort of like unheard of. Tell listeners where they can get a copy of the book.

Speaker 4

Well, the book, as he said, is called live to ride and it's available at least online everywhere that you would buy a book. Like a lot of the local book sale sellers in your in your area can surely I get it, but it's on Amazon and Barnes and Noble and Target and everywhere else that sells books on.

Speaker 2

I'm glad it's doing well, I hope it continues to do well. It's a really good book to have on your shelf and I hope that all my listeners take a chance to get a copy. Thank you, Peter. Have a safe trip home and I hope we get to talk again.

Speaker 3

OK.

Speaker 4

We love that. Thanks. Good to talk to you. Alright, bye bye.

Speaker 2

My thanks to Peter Flax for taking time out of his travels to chat with me. You know, I think he nails it when he talks about people who ride and how their reasons for riding manifests themselves. I believe we. Are all interested in safety and advocacy and have a common interest in our love of the bike, regardless of how we might try to pigeonhole ourselves. I like the book a lot, and if you want to have a copy of thoughtful discourse on your shelves, you would do well to get live to ride, finding joy and meaning on a bicycle. It's available wherever you buy your. Books. My thanks to you for tuning in to the show today. I hope you enjoyed the conversations. Remember that you can find show notes, links and photos on our website outspokencyclist.com, and follow us on Facebook, Instagram, and. Twitter ohh X. I'll be back soon with a brand new episode, so if you don't want to miss it, why not take a moment to subscribe to the podcast on your favorite app and maybe leave a comment while you're at it. I hope you have a great week. Stay safe, stay well and remember there is always time for a ride. Bye bye.

Speaker 1

Thanks for joining us today on the outspoken cyclist with Diane Jenks. Who welcome your thoughts and contributions on? Our Facebook page. Or visit outspokencyclist.com to leave a comment on any episode. We'll be back next week with new guests, topics, conversations and news, and world of cycling. Subscribe to the show on your favorite podcast app and you'll never miss an episode. The outspoken cyclist is a copyrighted production of DBL promotions, with the assistance of JCU FM Cleveland, a service of John Carroll University. Thanks again for listening. Ride safely and we'll see you next week.