Finders Keepers
By Bob Ingram

This happened one bad, cold, rainy evening in early January; the holiday spirit already faded like the Ghost of Christmas Past and most New Year’s resolutions as broke as the economy. It had rained on and off all day, but about four o’clock it had cleared enough that I figured I could get in my daily stroll on the Wildwood Boardwalk. So I went off, all bundled up in a down jacket and the ultra-warm knit cap my cousin Eileen had given me for Christmas. The sky was slate gray and a stiff southern breeze made it even chillier; the feel of rain was still in the air.

I walk from Second Street in North Wildwood to the Ferris wheel and back, and the only people I came across on my hike that day were two guys who regularly run the boards. They’re in early middle age and go at a pretty good clip and we always wave or nod. One guy has a classic stride and the other sort of drags along a step or two off his shoulder; but they get it done and they have my respect and admiration as a runner of twenty-five years.

When I reached the turnaround point, the last of the sun poked out just long enough to put on a sunset light show, the horizon streaked with a brilliant magenta glow that spread faintly across the whole sky before darkness finally settled in with the finality of a closed coffin. I paused at one point and looked back and the Boardwalk stretched into the night like a deserted film noir set.

Just as I got back to my car, the sky opened up in a lashing rain. This has happened to me a few times, brought to a walk by really bum knees, the first time I attribute it to the gods of inspiration as a runner of twenty-five years. I paused at one point and looked across the whole sky before darkness finally settled in with the finality of a closed coffin. I paused at one point and looked back and the Boardwalk stretched into the night like a deserted film noir set. The sky opened up in a lashing rain. A stiff southern breeze made it even chillier; the feel of rain was still in the air.

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We were going to cruise around in Al’s red truck that had been shown frequently on PBS. When we were back in the truck, I told Al where I saw the bike. “A five-hundred dollar bike!” he exclaimed.

The kid had left the bike, unlocked, outside the club. Bad move. Now he and Al were going to cruise around in Al’s red truck to see if they could find the purloined bicycle. “Let me come with you,” I said.

Both boys were so quiet in the back seat that I might have even thanked Al.

“C’mon,” Al said, and I followed him into the rec center. I got a feeling.

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And there, the only one in the rack, an orphan of the storm, was the bike! The kid climbed out of the truck, reclaimed the bike, and pedaled off into the rain. He might have even thanked Al.

“C’mon,” Al said, and I followed him into the rec center where he told the no-nonsense lady in charge what had happened. She nodded in understanding and went into the gym and came out in a few minutes with a Sheepish girl in her early teens, her black hair pulled back in a severe pony tail and a faint sheen of sweat on her face.

“Who? Who?” the lady kept on. “Speak up, girl.”

“Who was it?” the rec supervisor pressed her. “You know I’m not playing here.”

A girl stumbled and mumbled and finally came up in an almost inaudible voice with a name. “Who? Who?” the lady kept on. “Speak up, girl.”

Al and the lady both nodded at the name and said, “Tell him you used to be a cop and he could get locked up for that if we went to the police. You tell him, Hear?”

“I don’t think there’s anything I’d rather be and write about.”

Bob Ingram has been a writer, editor, and journalist for more than 45 years and his work has appeared in Philadelphia Magazine, Atlantic City Magazine, South Jersey Magazine, the Philadelphia Daily News, PhillySport Magazine, Philadelphia Weekly, Atlantic City Weekly, Philly Arts, the South Philadelphia Review, the Cape May County Herald, The Drummer, The Plain Dealer, The Philadelphia Free Press, The South Street Star (which he co-founded), The Fishtown Star, Food Trade News, Supermarket Business Magazine, and Progressive Grocer Magazine.