



TREADMARKS | *Through the Eyes of a Child*

WORDS - BILL DRAGO

I am fascinated by the inquisitive nature of children. As a young adult who happened to be an only child, I avoided them like the plague but over the years they have grown on me. We have seven grandchildren so I suppose satiation has contributed to my inoculation. A couple of those grandchildren and a few stray loaners from neighbors and friends have taken an interest in my workshop and the machines within. On occasion they will ask to come over and hang out, a request I will bend over backwards to make it happen. You could say I find myself wrapped around these tiny little fingers.

I will set up scenarios to keep them busy and provide tactile sensations of cold steel, lubricants and cleaning agents while filling their minds with the nuances of operating a ratchet or pair of safety wire pliers. The fundamental value of using tools unfolds before me as I coach how to align a screwdriver or reverse a ratchet and when to use the open or closed end of a combination wrench. As I watch them, I feel a connection, a freshness of knowledge that takes me back to my own youth, digging tools

from the floorboard of my grandfather's old pickup or from a cluttered workbench in the garage next to the country filling station that supported my family in those days.

Nine-year old Allani, AKA LaLa, is one of those prodigy children who is infatuated with her motorcycle. Daily, she tears around her acreage at warp speed on her Honda CRF 70 or balances at low speeds while engaging technical terrain like a half pint trials rider. She routinely asks to come over and her parents are always quick to accommodate. Her bike was showing signs of needing maintenance so we took advantage of the opportunity to do a deep dive into how things work. On the way to fetch her and her bike I picked up Oli, the twelve-year old son of another good friend who has also shown interest in motorcycles and hanging with "Uncle Bill." These two had only met once before but they became fast friends, taking turns to remove plastic, drain the oil, replace the spark plug, and clean and adjust the chain. We even performed a valve adjustment, an operation I royally messed up on my own Honda CL 70 more than a half century ago. I didn't have an Uncle Bill to save me from myself.



LaLa and Oli worked for hours, handing off tools to one another, helping hold things to prevent dropping parts and going elbow deep into the solvent vat to clean the outer engine case and other parts before reinstalling. They learned to measure and pour oil, gap a spark plug, adjust the chain and set tire pressures. They washed and oiled the air filter and replaced a cracked fuel line.

Once the bike was reassembled, they waxed the plastic and polished the chrome wheels, leaving the bike gleaming and



begging for a ride. There is a satisfaction to maintaining machinery and children feel it deeply when they are hands on, reversing the effects of rough treatment.

The time finally came to load the bike and return the borrowed children to their respective parents. Big smiles, dirty faces and greasy fingernails left no doubt that these kiddos had had a good time. Budding confidence showed in their eyes and they were eager to tell their friends and parents what they had learned. I felt a satisfaction far above the usual feeling of accomplishment for a day in the workshop. Tasks that are routine for me are amazing to them and that amazement is reflected back to me when I see these operations performed for the first time through the eyes of a child. 



ABOUT BILL DRAGO

Bill embraces adventure travel in many forms – two-wheeled, four-wheeled, and on foot. As long as it involves experiencing more of the great outdoors he is hard-pressed to resist an opportunity. When Bill's not tackling the toughest trails in the Rockies on his adventure motorcycle he's busy exploring with his wife, Susan, in their Toyota 4Runner, the "GS of Trucks."

Among his many pursuits, Bill is an MSF-certified riding instructor and BMW Motorrad Certified Off Road Instructor, and owns/operates the DART (Dragoo Adventure Rider Training) school near the Dragoo's hometown of Norman. Bill was a member of the 2010 BMW GS Trophy team, representing the United States in competition in Africa.

You can join Bill for one of his training classes by visiting www.billdragoo.com.



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