

— LifeCYCLE —



Stories from the
Minnesota Bike Community

Photos by

Nancy Musinguzi

An exhibit by the
Cycling Museum of Minnesota

In partnership with
Hennepin History Museum

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LifeCYCLE: Stories from the Minnesota Bike Community

In 2016, the Collections & Exhibits committee of the Cycling Museum of Minnesota had the idea to create an original exhibit that would highlight the stories of a select few exceptional figures in Minnesota biking. But who to profile? Despite the title for this exhibit, in truth there are many bike communities, niche groups that don't always cross paths. Our goal was to celebrate difference and diversity, but also to bring these special people together in one space through their shared love of bikes. The committee labored to arrive at a list of eleven people who exemplify a breadth of cycling histories, identities, and associations. We were amazed when all eleven agreed to take part. Plans for a photo exhibit accompanied by interview excerpts from each individual began to take shape. CMM commissioned the portraits from Minneapolis artist Nancy Musinguzi, taken between July and October 2018. At each session, members of the CMM LifeCYCLE exhibit committee recorded interviews; the quotes in this booklet are all drawn from those conversations.

LifeCYCLE took on ever greater meaning as we listened to the inspired, courageous, wise, and visionary insights from our subjects. These people see possibility. We hope you'll be inspired by their cycle-lives.



Nancy Musinguzi

Nancy is a visual storyteller, mixed-media artist and freelance photojournalist working and living in Minneapolis, Minnesota. They experiment with both traditional and emerging processes in media-making to document the lives and perspectives of marginal cultures, communities, and voices that chronicle and shape the contemporary American experience. Visit their website for more information: www.nmusinguzi.com Instagram @afrikansniper Twitter @afrikansniper



Cynthia McArthur

St. Paul

Cynthia started her bike life as a self-taught mechanic in Fargo/Moorhead, and then spent her career as an educator getting people on bikes all over Minnesota. Her cycling adventures include a solo long-

distance ride, leading bike tours, bikepacking in Europe, and commuting to work. Today, she teaches clients of Center for Victims of Torture to ride and care for their bikes.

“People would come in and say, ‘... I don’t want her to fix my bike. Because she’s a girl. Because she’s young...’ ... **I needed to prove myself** but I also needed to do everything that everybody else did... I wanted to be a mechanic. I didn’t want to be a girl mechanic... I didn’t want to be one of the guys. I wasn’t one of the guys. I was a girl. It was different to be in the shop in those days. It was a blast.”

“... you’ve got a kid at home, you’ve got to pick them up from daycare, and you’re a single mom working an hourly job. Why should you be left out of being able to bike...?... Life shouldn’t happen and then biking falls apart... **My passion is always to see how I can help people put the bicycle in their life as it best fits them** so that it’s fun, it’s utilitarian, but it’s also all the metaphoric pieces... independence and self-confidence and the joy of watching your body move.”

“I like the way [Center for Victims of Torture staff] use and incorporate volunteers into healing for the clients... Think about torture, it happens in one second, one minute, one hour... **And when you come and give me this bike in one second, and I fix it in an hour, and in a day we give it to someone and they ride it for a week, we are closing the circle of torture and starting the circle of healing.** And you’re part of it, and I’m part of it, and that client gets to experience that. That is pretty amazing.”

My passion is always to see how I can help people put the bicycle in their life as it best fits them...



Marques Watson

St. Paul

Marques started working at Express Bike Shop in 2015 as an apprentice through Right Track, a youth professional organization. Now, he works as a shop mechanic and supervises current youth apprentices. The recipient of the first Philando Castile Memorial Scholarship, Marques studies engineering at St. Paul College and envisions himself opening his own bike shop.

“It feels good because at one point in time I was the apprentice, and now I get to look at it from the other end [as supervisor]. **It’s interesting and fun to see and watch them gain skills from where they were in the beginning, not knowing anything. It’s cool.**”

“Somebody donated this and I was like, ‘Man, I gotta get this bike.’ I’ve loved it ever since... **I can go really fast on it.** Light wheels. Aluminum wheels. All I did was put a new chain on and a cassette... I put new bar tape on it. The shifters are the same. Everything’s pretty much still the same since it’s been donated. It pretty much came all the way purpled-out. I just added a few touches to it. I got a bell.”

“I would say **you feel free** [on your bike]... You really clear your mind. Pretty chill. I like how I can switch up between driving and riding a bike... When I didn’t have a car, I rode my bike in the wintertime... That was kind of fun. I had studded tires. My friends thought I was crazy though.”

“I plan on transferring to Mankato to finish off my Bachelor’s in engineering. It’s a lot of math. It’s kind of hard, **but I like a challenge...** I would say [working here] kind of made me want to go to school for that. I really love working with my hands. I really love working with tools. I think I’ll do great in that field.”

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Steve Flagg

Bloomington

After graduating from University of Minnesota, Steve got involved with the co-op movement in Minneapolis. In 1974, he and five others started The Freewheel Bike Co-Op. Today, he is the founder and chairman of Quality Bicycle Products, the largest distributor of bicycle parts and accessories in the world.

“People will do amazing things when there’s purpose involved. I mean, myself included... We started the bike co-op with our own money. With about \$8,000 that we managed to raise between the six of us. And we quickly turned it into the second largest bike shop [in Minneapolis].”

“I learned that knowledge really is power... I think I was lacking leadership skills and I was probably somewhat shy at the time. But what I did have was a really great knowledge of bikes and bike parts. I accumulated that. And I had a great knowledge about how to buy product and how to find it. I recognized that and **I realized I had a voice, a strong voice.**”

“It’s a little bit about the opportunity of freedom when you ride, the opportunity to get away. There’s a little bit of that. The solitude... There’s an elegance, too, about bikes... There’s an elegant beauty to the mechanical aspects of bikes. That’s way cool... It’s so interesting that **there’s an aspect of solution that bikes bring about to so many different things.**”

“Well, my goal just for Minnesota for instance... It’s like when you throw a rock into the water and the rock makes a big impact for the first couple of inches and the ripple effect kind of diminishes over time and over distance. **We should make the biggest difference right where we’re located.** Where people live and work. In this case, that’s Minnesota.”

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Megan Witt

Eagan

Megan is a thirteen-year-old mountain bike racer. She rides with Little Bellas and the ISD 196 Mountain Bike Adventure Club and Race Team. A multi-sport enthusiast, Megan also plays softball and basketball. She hopes to make it to the varsity level on her mountain bike team and continue racing in college. Her goal is to continue to mentor girls in the Little Bellas program by becoming a mentor.

“Every race I manage to get chain grease on my legs. **It’s a badge of honor.** I’ve had it where you can actually see the chainring... I can see the little teeth marks on my leg.”

“Yeah, I think we should definitely put out the word and get more girls on bikes... You always see at races that there’s tons and tons of boys there. There’s 50 girls, maybe. And there’s 150 or 200 boys there... Mountain biking isn’t like other sports where you can only have male or female. We all race on the same course.”

“If you don’t know that much about a bike, it’s ok. You can find a book and learn about it. You don’t necessarily have to know so much about it. There’s a lot of people who have not so good bikes, but they’re good enough to ride the trails. And they go ride because they want to try it, they want to explore. I would say, **go explore and don’t be afraid to do it.**”

“I always want to do my best. **I’m getting better and better.**”

Yeah, I think we should definitely put out the word and get more girls on bikes...



Louis Moore

Minneapolis

President of the Major Taylor Bicycling Club of Minnesota, Louis has been cycling for over fifty years. He worked for nineteen years in the district office of Congressman Martin Olav Sabo on transportation initiatives and he has organized several bike tours in support of the United Negro College Fund. In the fall of 1999, he helped create the Minnesota chapter of the Major Taylor Bicycling Club, a nationwide cycling group dedicated to creating community for Black cyclists.

“For me, it’s physical health. I’m going on 78 and I don’t feel anywhere like being 78. I think cycling has been the part of my life that has kept me physically fit and physically healthy... The freedom. Being outdoors. Fresh air. And setting those goals for myself. **Seeing what I can do.** Not many people my age can still bike at twenty or twenty-five miles per hour. And that’s my goal. That’s what I do every day when I’m riding my bike.”

“I think if you just decide that you’re going to do something and be involved in something, you’re gonna go ahead and enjoy it. And I think **there’s nothing better than to see the bike club all in their jerseys either at an event or on a ride or at a national event...** You kind of feel proud of what you’ve created and people recognize you.”

“**We need to continue to promote cycling** as a resource to get... to work or get back and forth to wherever you have to go. If we keep going the way we are, we’re going to have nothing but roads packed with cars and pollution and all kinds of problems that we just don’t need.”

“I went to an event here in Atlanta a couple weeks ago and there were 1,500 Black riders... It’s called the One Love and it’s an event that really brings together a lot of the riders from the east coast and west coast and other parts of the country... We only got three [Major Taylor] members out there but **it was important to be present. To represent.**”

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Erik Noren

Minneapolis

Erik works as a frame builder creating unique, custom bikes out of his shop, Peacock Groove. His goal is to evoke emotion and connection through his creative work. Peacock Groove has received

nationwide attention for their handmade bikes including the Purple Reign, a bike honoring Prince that is now on display at the Seattle Museum of Pop Culture.

“I remember working at a place that didn’t value my creativity... and I remember thinking, **‘Why can’t I just create?’** It was frowned upon. But then I thought, wait a minute. **People are coming to me to build bikes, and they tell me to run wild with it.** It’s like, do you really, really want that? It’s gonna cost you money and probably at least two or three friends.”

“There’s this kid around the neighborhood... he came in and his dropout was broken... He says, ‘How much would this cost to fix?’ It’s a \$50 fix... The kid didn’t have \$50. I remember jokingly saying, ‘Does your mom bake apple pie?’ He says, ‘Yeah, actually.’ I said, ‘Whatever. Just leave it here and come back in half an hour and you can have it... **I’ll just fix it for you.**’ He comes back and gets his bike and takes off... So I’m sitting out on the couch, watching people on the Greenway, and here’s this lady walking up... She’s got something in her hand. I think, ‘Oh, f**k. Here’s a lady with an apple pie. I didn’t want an apple pie. I was just kidding.’ And she’s got tears in her eyes... she’s looking at me... she’s like, ‘Are you Erik?’ And I say, ‘I don’t know. Are you gonna throw that at me?’ She says, ‘No. This is yours- you deserve this... you don’t know this but [that bike] is the only thing that he has.’”

“You can buy freedom with a bike for five bucks, or for free, or for fifteen grand, but the **smiles you get when you ride a bike** are all the same.”

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Salma Nadir

Shoreview

Salma is a student-athlete at the University of St. Thomas. She races mountain bikes through the National Interscholastic Cycling Association. As one of the only Muslim women racers in the league, Salma says racing with her team helped her gain confidence and meet friends.

“When it comes to mountain biking... my brothers actually started riding first... in Cuyuna I think... I thought, ‘Oh, that looks so fun!’ I used to ride with my mom on the paved trails all the time. I was like, ‘This looks much more fun than that. The paved trails are super boring.’... **So then I got a mountain bike and started riding trails. I basically fell in love...** I’ve done tons of sports but honestly mountain biking is my favorite because it’s just really fun and exciting.”

“I was extremely shy... I was kind of afraid to go and talk to people and join groups, so I’d always be on the outside... But the girls on the team, and even the guys, they were super nice and they’d always invite me to ride with them and talk with them. It really **helped me with my self-confidence.** Yeah.”

“Other sports like hockey or soccer, if you don’t do it in college or on a team you can’t really do it on your own. But with biking you can just... go bike wherever. Which is super awesome. And **there will always be someone with you.** I’ve never seen an empty trail.”

“... a lot of people will say, ‘Hey, I’ve never seen anyone who’s Muslim riding a bike and doing races.’ There are people from lots of different cultures and religions in this sport. But specifically Muslims with hijabs... I’ve never seen another girl like that. But maybe there will be more because they see me! I don’t know. That’s what I hope. **Sometimes all it takes is one person.**”

So then I got a mountain bike and started riding trails. I basically fell in love...



Cali Jirsa

Minneapolis

Cali is a founder and solo owner of Cherry Cycles, the first woman-owned bicycle shop in Minneapolis. She focuses on providing bicycling comfort, safety, and reliability especially for people of color, femmes, transgender people, women and all who appreciate thorough and attentive service. With over a decade of experience in the cycling industry, Cali offers quality repairs at a variety of price points, bicycle fitting services, and community education classes.

“There’s such a push and pull of progress when it comes to politics and so much red tape. But at the shop someone could come in and say their bike was broken and I could fix the flat and then they leave and they’re happy! It’s instantaneous. And I get to work with my hands. **I can see incremental progress.** Maybe it’s a cheap way to try to produce social change.”

“... this is the **first solo woman-owned bike shop in Minneapolis...** How long have bikes been a thing?... and folks don’t think that it makes a difference. Like, they wonder why it matters... It’s not that women can’t do fine detailed things with their hands like cooking, or needlepoint, or whatever... people will say, **‘I’m surprised to see a woman working on bikes,’** and I say, **‘Well, more of us would do it if people didn’t make it so weird!’**”

“I would like to see the bike industry kind of have a more serious conversation about diversity within their establishment because I think so far it’s been more, like, ‘We want women to work at our bike shop because women are our top market, and they’re 50% of the population...’ But, it’s more like, how do we change our mentality so that women feel comfortable working here? So non-binary people feel comfortable working here? So we create accountability and standards?”

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Sveta Vold

Belarus; St. Louis Park

Sveta is an avid cyclist, endurance racer, and community organizer. She immigrated from Belarus, where she worked to make the city of Minsk more accessible to bikes. Sveta has excelled in

many challenging races such as Arrowhead 135, Almanzo 100, and the Day Across Minnesota. She is the mother of two girls and is currently training to become a firefighter.

Reflecting on organizing a first-ever Open Streets-style event in Minsk: “In Belarus, the bikes are not allowed to ride in the road... And [after the event] the city say, finally, ‘Yes, the bicycles, this is... big part of our community.’ **I’m proud that now this event is keep going...** When I moved here next, I was so upset that, like, I don’t want that this event will die. So... I keep doing administration job from here, but my volunteers do job there.”

“My cousin live in Minnesota, in Minneapolis. He say, ‘It will be easy if you know at least someone here.’... I never heard about this city... **So, I Google... it was the city number one in the U.S. in interest for bike, infrastructure.** And my cousin say, ‘Yes, we have lots of bicycle there! So **you will like it!** You will not be missing your bike community so much.’”

“... In Belarus... everybody know me, in sport community, who I am. And [my daughter] was proud... Then I moved here. And I’m nobody. And she’s seven years old, and she knows that all the time, you’re mom, everybody know you mom. And **to me it was like motivation, again to be strong person.**”

...to me it was like motivation, again to be strong person.



Elena Alsides-Haynes

Minneapolis

Elena is a worker/owner of The Hub Bike Co-Op where she works as a service manager and teaches community bike mechanic classes. She has gained a unique perspective on the world of cycling in

Minneapolis through her involvement with several shops, race teams, and the bike messenger community.

“As a teenager I wanted to go out and find my way around the city. I had an internship at Mixed Blood Theatre when I was sixteen, which was right next to where the old Grease Pit was located. I thought that all the punks over there looked super cool and I wanted to get into bikes. So **I started hanging around, getting underfoot, doing the trade.** I built my first bike and fell in love from there.”

“I think the cool thing about Minneapolis is that [the different cycling communities] all kind of overlap in a lot of ways. A lot of my friends in them, they’re all really into bikes and making biking accessible. They all found themselves and **created themselves off of this two-wheeled, weird structure that we all really like.**”

“I think **riding a bike definitely makes you more immersed in your immediate surroundings.** I think it’s hard to tap out. So you can see all the life on the street, all the life on the road. You can see all the nature when you’re riding out in that. It’s a very immersive experience.”

Q: What do you like most about riding your bike?

“I like that it’s mine! That I’ve made it comfortable for me to ride. I feel confident working on it. It’s a rad vehicle for independence and self-sufficiency. And **it’s my friend!**”

...riding a bike definitely makes you more immersed in your immediate surroundings.



Eric Hawkins

Oakdale

Eric is the Owner, CEO and Chief Mechanic of Park Tool Company, the world's largest maker of bicycle tools and repair equipment. He started his life in the bike business as a mechanic and has been at

the Park Tool helm since 1998 and at the company since 1983. Since birth, bicycles have been a major part of Eric's life as his father was a Schwinn retailer and co-founder of Park Tool. Eric would love to see more kids on bikes and hopes more kids learn how to fix their bikes.

"I spent my whole youth in [the shop]. Playing in the boxes, riding boxes around, putting kids' bikes together for 50 cents, or whatever. But I can't think of a cooler way to grow up than having your dad own a bike shop, right... **The bike itself was and is a part of my fabric. I've always been around bicycles, I don't know anything different.** And as a family, every vacation we took, we brought bicycles with us... As a kid, I just rode my bike everywhere. It's just what you did."

"[Park Tool has] had such great people over the years that have worked for us... It's just a different way of doing business... We're not a sales organization. We make a product, and we say, 'Here it is.' And if it's a good product people buy it. We've kind of hung our hat on the fact that **we make good stuff.** And the rest really takes care of itself."

"The number of bikes sold over the last ten years has not changed. And everybody says, 'Really? I see more people on bikes.' Yeah, you see people on bikes, on trails, and the people who are bikers are maybe more enthusiastic about it than they used to be. But, **we need to get kids back on bikes,** is the biggest thing. Because they just don't do it, they don't think of it."

The bike itself was and is a part of my fabric. I've always been around bicycles, I don't know anything different.

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Nancy Musinguzi

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CYCLING MUSEUM OF MINNESOTA

The Cycling Museum of Minnesota's mission is to be a hub for unlocking the transformative role of bicycles. As a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, CMM builds programs and exhibitions that help people better understand the foundational and continual influence of cycling and cyclists on our past, present and future. Visit by appointment at The Vault collections space: 519 Oak Grove St. Minneapolis, MN 55403. Or online at cmm.bike. Instagram @CyclingMuseumofMN. Twitter @CyclingMuseumMN.



HENNEPIN HISTORY MUSEUM

Founded in 1938 as the Hennepin County Historical Society, Hennepin History Museum is dedicated to bringing the diverse history of Hennepin County and its residents to life through exhibitions, library, collections, and educational programs. Its mission is to collect and preserve the history and stories of Hennepin County. Visit during museum hours to explore exhibits, local archives, and more. Or online at hennepinhistory.org. Instagram @hennhistmuseum. Twitter @HennHistMuseum.

