



Illustration by Greg Siple.

# A Stranger In The House

By Carl Cahill with FBI Agent Martin Houlihan

**I'm** a bike rider, for exercise and pleasure. My longest ride, however, has been only 65 miles from my home in Chesapeake, Virginia to Nags Head, North Carolina.

Still, it was no mean feat for a 108-year-old man who looks 37, especially when moral support was not forthcoming from friends and associates. When I told the late General William H. Sands, an associate, that we were going to ride bicycles from Chesapeake to Nags Head he replied, "What do you want to do that for?"

There was, of course, no ready answer. But stories of free spirits (not to be confused with the bike of the same name) who unshackled themselves from the internal combustion engine had made me increasingly restless.

All over America there is a rush to get back to self-propulsion. You see it in the soaring sales of bikes, backpacks and canoes, and in the scads of magazine and paperbacks devoted to activity out-of-doors.

So, despite bones growing increasingly brittle, stiffening sinews, and a receding hairline, I wanted to be a part of it. After all, Nags Head was only 65 miles away.

"Your saddle will kill you," said Gerald Teeuwen, a biker of note. (He has won races all over the eastern half of the nation.)

"You can make it," said his brother, Peter, also a biker of note. "But you'll be dead."

"Stop by," said General Sands, who owned a cottage at Nags Head, "and I'll fix you a bourbon and water." It was the green light I needed.

Long distance bike riding is a breeze for some people. I knew a Navy commander who rode 50 miles every day. But for me there was the problem of conditioning (Two 30-mile rides through the back roads of Chesapeake took care of that.) And there was lower Battlefield Boulevard, a lumpy, heavily traveled artery the width of an alley, put down shortly after John L. Macadam invented the paved road and unimproved since.

Finally, there was my traveling com-

panion, Gary Norfleet, a young athlete whose energy output rivals the power company's. Unless he takes in thousands upon thousands of calories each day he cries out weakly for milkshakes. Our fare consisted of sunflower seeds and raisins, called "gorp" by the health food folks. Norfleet didn't like it.

We set out at 2:30 a.m. to avoid traffic and jarred our way to Carolina where we glided onto smoother, wider roads. Norfleet complained of muscle spasms until he discovered his kick stand was rubbing his rear wheel.

At 8 a.m. we knocked on General Sands' door for our bourbon and water. He looked out. "I'm not fixing you breakfast," he said. Norfleet, metabolic processes slowing, turned pale.

But General Sands' houseguests insisted he feed us, which he did.

At 10 a.m. our pickup car arrived. In it was my wife. "You look better than when you spend a day at the office," she said. "I don't want to hear you talk about your high blood pressure again." Such was the pedestrian legacy of my longest bike trip.

My son, however, is the long distance bike rider in the family. One winter he rode from Los Angeles much of the way through Mexico ("Come on down, Dad, a six-pack of beer is only 30 cents") to Guatemala. The next summer he rode through Europe until his bike was stolen in Lyon, France.

So it was with this many-faceted interest in long-distance bike riders that I observed not long ago a young man with backpack stop his 15-speed in the Chesapeake Civic Center to study a map.

"Where you coming from?" I asked.

"Virginia Beach," he replied.

"Where you going?"

"Asheville, North Carolina."

It was the answer to whet a fellow bike rider's appetite for conversation. Anyone who sets out on a 400-mile bike trip is okay in my book and since it was dinner time and the skies were about to unloose another torrent on an already sodden landscape, I invited him home for a meal and a place to

spend the night.

The next day, while trying to sandwich a tennis match between showers, I told my opponent, FBI Agent Martin Houlihan, about our house guest.

He responded in typical law-enforcement fashion. "Watch your silver," he said, and hinted my wife and I would be murdered in our sleep.

"Houlihan," I told him, "I've asked him more questions than you ask a bank robbery suspect. Besides, anyone who rides a bike is all right."

Houlihan snorted. But since his is a good friend, even though he calls my aces out of bounds, he kept calling us by telephone to make sure we were still alive.

Our guest turned out to be Ken Kirby, an exceptionally interesting young man who is active in the Monford Park Players in Asheville and who had ridden to Virginia Beach in six days to spend a vacation. But constant rain had ruined his stay and he was on his way home when I found him studying the map. Ken once rode up Mount Mitchell, the highest in the east. His story of the trip down, when his brake pads disintegrated, was a thriller.

The rain continued and since we couldn't put him out into the downpour the next day, we took him with us to a house-warming party to which we were committed.

Houlihan called again, fearful that if we failed to answer it would mean my wife and I were lying dead in bed, hacked to pieces by a crazed itinerant posing as a bicycle tourist.

Two days later, the rains let up long enough for Ken to set out again for Asheville. Seven days later, he called to let us know he had arrived safely.

If there's a moral in this story it's this: I have known some bad tennis players. And I have known some bad FBI agents. But I have never known a bad long-distance bicycle rider.

Houlihan called again the other day. He said he's sending his two sons over on their bikes and for me to put them up for a few days.