***Sharing the Road***

By John Clayton

About this time each summer, I lament the all-too rapid passing of my favorite season. This year, I’m not concerned about the passing of summer as much as I’m worried about whether it’s ever going to start. This is as I observe one more cloudy, overcast day which reminds me more of our springs than our summers. With all the rain the corn looks pretty good to these unsophisticated eyes, so I assume that our local farmers are happier than usual. I realize that “happy” is a relative term, as the farmers I have known would remind me that they have seen too many turns of fortune to get too happy about any stretch of weather. Surely the drought is on the way, or Tropical Storm Chantal, which is looming.

However, during my gloomy summer driving in the Monocacy area, I have also noted that we are alive with activity, and, without a doubt, much of it is from our neighbors down county. The soccer and polo—and other sports I probably can’t even recognize—are in full throttle, and the farmers’ markets (I won’t be so brave as to name them all) appear to be doing a thriving business, and that can’t all be coming from us.

One of the other constituencies I see enjoying Our roads (more on that later) is bicyclists. On certain days one can hardly drive over the next hill without encountering another group of people on bicycles. They are all around.

I have bicycled around the area in and around Barnesville over the years, and there seem to be three classes of motorists: some swing very wide around you, into the next lane, even waiting out hills and oncoming traffic to do so. Some move about halfway out, giving you wide enough clearance to feel comfortable, and some barely move out at all, blowing by quite closely, perhaps seeing how close their side mirrors can brush past you. It’s a little disconcerting. I have heard of objects being thrown and other abuse, but either I haven’t been out enough to experience this, or my efforts to climb hills make me appear too pathetic to engender much scorn. I can’t be sure.

There are some very specific laws on the books concerning sharing the road with cyclists., including the very common-sense admonition that “Drivers shall exercise due care to avoid colliding with any bicycle, Electric Personal Assistive Mobility Device (EPAMD), or motor scooter being ridden by a person,” emphasis on “avoid colliding.” Good advice, that. There are some other interesting admonitions, including safe distances and rules of rights-of-way, which go in the favor of the motorist a lot less frequently than one might believe. The rules of the road for cars and bicyclists are easy to find on the www.mva.maryland.gov website. I put “Maryland law bicyclists” in a search engine and was one click away. Try it.

In my general observations from the safety of my car, which I occupy far more than my bicycle, I would say that most drivers are pretty cautious and polite, but certainly not all. In conversations with friends and acquaintances over the years, many comments have been less solicitous towards our two-wheel-borne friends. “They’re a nuisance, they make me late, I hate them, etc.” I assume this attitude follows through in driving habits, although I hope it doesn’t. One conversation I have contributed to is the suitability of our roads for bicycling: Many of our roads really aren’t suited to safe travel by slower vehicles, or probably horses and buggies, either. Route 109 through Beallsville and out to Barnesville, in particular, is narrow, lacks wide shoulders, is hilly, and has many blind turns. White’s Ferry Road, a popular bicycle route out to the ferry and the canal, is also narrow and bumpy. Route 28, conversely, has wide bike lanes built into many places. I don’t think that we can limit cyclists to certain roads, although perhaps some think we should. They’re wrong, though. It’s incumbent on those of us in the motorized vehicles to make the adjustments. It’s the law.