

Morningside Takes Back the Street

Written by Stuart Sheldon, BT Contributor
October 2019

It's Kidical Mass, so get on your bikes and ride!



Imagine the street in front of your home abuzz with joyful clusters of giggling kids of all ages on bicycles, easing down the road, dinging their thumb bells and popping wheelies. Afternoon sunlight dapples lawns while delighted parents ride along beside their kids or hang back, chatting with the neighbor across the street about what's good in the hood.

Everyone's invited to this rolling party: friends, neighbors, relatives, *you*. Welcome to Kidical Mass.

The brainchild of Rachel Furst, a Morningside resident and mother of two, Kidical Mass is modeled after Critical Mass, the iconic monthly bike rides enjoyed in major urban centers around the country and described in Wikipedia: "A form of direct action in which people meet at a set location and time and travel as a group through their neighborhoods on bikes.... Based on the old mantra 'There's safety in numbers,' a Critical Mass is a traffic jam on bikes -- though often cheerier."

In other words, bikes rule, and stop signs and traffic lights don't exist during Critical Mass.

I spent the 1999 millennium New Year's Eve in a Critical Mass, riding down the center of Market Street in San Francisco with 5000 people in costumes. I recall riding no-hands and throwing my

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head back and staring up at the old and new skyscrapers, in wonder at the fabulous crazy of it all.

It's hard to be blue on a bike; each pedal turn tickles the kid in us -- and reminds us to get outside and celebrate community. That celebration gets turbo-charged when you're a massive squad with total control of the streets.

As its name makes clear, Furst's creation is about the children. Filmmaker John Lasseter produced *Finding Nemo*, *Frozen*, and *Monsters Inc.*, among others, and knows a bit about child psychology. He's reported to have said, "I worry about kids today not having time to build a treehouse or ride a bike or go fishing. I worry that life is getting faster and faster."

With two children ages 9 and 11, I can relate, and I revel in every chance my kids have to get out of the house, play with old friends, and make new ones. No screens. No cost. No stress.

Kidical Mass is totally analog and totally free. Adults benefit just as much as kids with Furst's brilliant community-building tool. While enjoying nature, parents and neighbors get to know one another and the local landscape, sharing a languid cruise through their own streets. Morningside neighbor Jacqueline Ledon summed it up perfectly: "It's such a nice way to get in a little exercise, enjoy the fresh air, and get to know our neighbors." Every Miami neighborhood should do this.

Started in 2018, the ride has quickly become a beloved Morningside ritual. There were three rides in 2018 and two already in 2019. The goal is to make it monthly. The May event this year drew over 130 neighbors. "I wanted to celebrate the joy of childhood bike rides on a summer night with friends. Morningside's beautiful, wide streets are perfect for biking," says Furst, "and by joining together as a neighborhood and with the police, we're able to explore them safely."

The basic program has everyone gather at 6:00 p.m. in a central place. At 6:15, wheels roll. The ride lasts 40 minutes or so. The pace is relaxed, so the little ones can go at a comfortable speed while grownups chat. A route is e-mailed before the ride, and anyone who arrives late can join the group; a massive cluster of bicycles shouldn't be hard to find. Says Furst: "Bikes, trikes, babies in baby seats, big kids, little kids -- all welcome! The larger the group, the more fun the kids will have."

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Before the first event, Furst approached the police officers assigned to the neighborhood, and they happily volunteered to escort the ride on their own bicycles; this way, no traffic mishaps dampen the fun and parents can truly relax. After the ride, Morningside children, parents, and friends gathered for a block party. Kids hopped off their bikes and, without missing a beat, ran around with their pals, continuing the good, old-fashioned fun. Neighbors kicked in food and drink, and welcomed the weekend as a big happy tribe. When an ice-cream truck rolled up, the kids went bananas. Instant community.

Eli Stiers, president of the Morningside Civic Association, says, “Kidical Mass has been a revelation for kids and families in the neighborhood. When you take the streets away from cars, if only for a little while, and you give that space back to the people through safe group activities like this, something amazing happens. It strengthens neighborhoods, and it makes everyone feel better about where they live.”

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