



- [Home](#)
- [About](#)
 - [Just Who Is Padraig?](#)
 - [Bill McGann](#)
 - [Da Robot](#)
 - [Rick Vosper](#)
- [Contact](#)
- [Store](#)

Search this website...

- [Body](#)
- [Machine](#)
- [Mind](#)

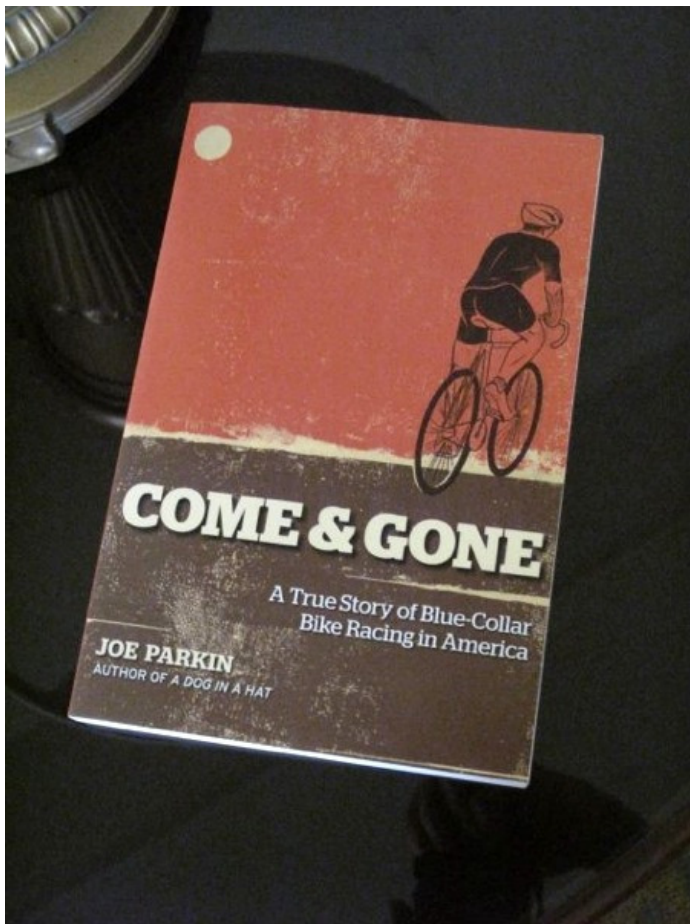
Browse > [Home](#) / [Mind](#) / Joe Parkin: Come and Gone

Joe Parkin: Come and Gone

June 17, 2010 by [Padraig](#)

Filed under [Mind](#)

[11 Comments](#)



If it is true that the greatest truths of our lives are revealed during times of adversity, then Joe Parkin knows a good deal more truth than I do. As cyclists, most of us have come to believe that suffering is a pursuit in which we learn as much about ourselves as we do the world around us. Those truths are relative, changing from rider to rider, making each new revelation a private affair.

What sustained Joe as a bike racer, feeding him hope enough to keep his mind open to possibility and believing that each new race was something other than a foregone conclusion is the book's great mystery. And mystery it stays, teasing us through each page turned. What drives his belief that a big win is still possible that his career trajectory might still arc upward hardly matters; what buoyed him might not work for you or me.

It is his hope that makes this book so fascinating. Because his name didn't become household, even bike-race-household in the way that John Tomac's name did, you know at the outset that his story will end in something other than triumph.

Many of his performances are easy to identify with: the unexpectedly good form, the unexplainable misery, the occasional on-cue delivery, the unsurprising detonation. Most riders would tire of the needle-in-a-haystack hunt, yet Joe perseveres.

I may have looked forward to this book even more than most who read *A Dog in a Hat*. I met Joe in 1995 when he was with Diamond Back Racing racing cyclocross in New England. I'd do the C race and then split my time between offering neutral support (with ace wrench Merlyn Townley) and shooting the A race.

One of my favorite images I ever shot of cyclocross was of Joe at the UMASS 'cross race that year. His bike was on his shoulder as his motion was highlighted by a blur of trees behind him, and while he wasn't winning (that was Frankie McCormack with brother Mark in tow), Joe was hauling ass.

That winter I covered the snowy 'cross nationals at Leicester, Mass., for *VeloNews* and wound up playing a role in getting Joe and teammate Gunnar Shogren reinstated following their relegations from eighth and ninth to the last two places for their method of bike change in the pits. I pointed folks at USA Cycling to videotape showing that most of the riders in the top-10 had used the same technique of dropping their bike on entering the pits and picking up a fresh one at the exit, giving them a few steps relieved of the weight of their bikes. Joe and Gunnar had been unfairly singled out. I'm not sure Joe was aware of it, but I was in contact with DBR team manager Keith Ketterer as the events wound to their satisfying conclusion.

My recollection of that fall and winter was that Joe was unfailingly nice. He was humble, prepared and knowledgeable. The only thing he seemed to lack was that big win, the one that makes people just nod nonchalantly with an 'I saw that coming' air. Seeing that fall through his eyes shows just what reserves of hope he possessed.

My favorite moment in the book was his description of the confidence that comes with *form*. Joe writes:

A rider in form can comfortably ride just about any bike. The seat position can be wrong, the handlebars can be too small—it really doesn't matter. A rider in form simply gets on and goes because the feeling of form—the perfect combination of physical and emotional fitness—creates an almost

euphoric state in which pain and suffering of racing a bike become life-giving, and equipment hindrances cease to even register. A rider in form can crash, get up, and chase for as long as it takes, while one without form will never progress beyond staring at the torn handlebar tape.

In keeping with the humility that marks both *A Dog in a Hat* and *Come and Gone*, he closes his career by writing, “Only champion bike racers get to retire. The rest of us just quit.”

It’s a passage that is at once hilarious (I’ve known far too many amateur racers who “retired”) and unspeakably sad because it is the sunset of a dream. That sadness lingers, at least it has with me. Here we have a decent, hard-working guy, a guy who dared to look within. He simply ran out of opportunities before he ran out of hope. The world usually beats the hope from us before we run out of opportunity. It’s enough to make your heart ache.



Tags: [A Dog in a Hat](#), [Come and Gone](#), [DBR](#), [Diamond Back Racing](#), [Frank McCormack](#), [Gunnar Shogren](#), [Joe Parkin](#), [John Tomac](#), [Keith Ketterer](#), [Mark McCormack](#), [Merlyn Townley](#), [UMASS](#), [USA Cycling](#), [VeloNews](#)

Comments

11 Responses to “Joe Parkin: Come and Gone”



1. *josh* says:

[June 17, 2010 at 7:39 am](#)

i totally agree, there was an enormous sense of melancholy in the tone at the end of the book that followed me after finishing it. great read, though i liked dog in a hat a bit more.



2. *Souleur* says:

[June 17, 2010 at 8:24 am](#)

I am also reading it as we speak, its a must read for cyclists! Thanks padraig



3. *Jim* says:

[June 17, 2010 at 12:19 pm](#)

I liked it and thought it was a pretty good book. Could have maybe used an editor other than Joe, however. I was amazed that he buried the money shot of the book – his discovery that he loved the process of racing more than he cared about winning or other factors – around the 2/3ds point of it.

The editing doesn’t matter that much, however. The book is worth getting just for his stories about racing and persevering. It was a very good read.



4. *Alex* says:

[June 17, 2010 at 2:12 pm](#)

I’ve read a few stories about cyclists going to retirement, and every time I end up with this same melancholic feeling. From the most successful of them all (think Merckx, LeMond or Armstrong) to guys like Parking and down to the most frustrated and bitter ones (think Kimmage), seems to me that the single line common to the post-race life of every hyper-active, friendship-sharing, globe-trotting, hard-training bike racer: when they cross that last finish line, all that’s left is a lifetime of good memories (even and usually from the worst of times), vacancy and depression. Must be really hard to retire from professional bike racing!

Nice article Padraig, thanks 😊



5. *James* says:

[June 17, 2010 at 3:58 pm](#)

I enjoyed “A Dog in a Hat” so am looking forward to this new book. “Retiring” from any sporting endeavor is difficult. I played volleyball for years in college and on club teams. I didn’t really choose a time to quit it just sort of happened due to time constraints with work, etc. But, there was a void! I missed the competition since I was pretty good at playing. Cycling never really filled the void because I wasn’t a good racer at all (I always maintained that I lead the team from the back!). Now I just live vicariously through others!

6.  [Matt Walsh](#) says:
[June 18, 2010 at 10:46 am](#)

As always, well-written and insightful. I read Dog in a Hat and look forward to reading Come & Gone — even more so after your review. I enjoy Parkin's writing style which is very matter-of-fact and honest and humorous. I hope to meet Joe sometime. An excellent review.

7.  [wvcycling](#) says:
[June 18, 2010 at 8:56 pm](#)


One of the less important things that came to mind while reading this book was his mention of a certain titanium DiamondBack mountain bike being one of his favs ever. I have heard the same testimony from several others that raced with him, or raced in that era. I would love to know what made that bike so memorable...

8.  [fournwi](#) says:
[June 21, 2010 at 4:44 pm](#)

Well done! I look forward to reading his next book as I really enjoyed "A Dog in a Hat". Interestingly your article and the comments above reminded me of my experiences after finishing playing football in college. At 21 I really hadn't thought about what a full stop that last game meant. Starting at about 8 years old each fall was another chance to improve and experience the excitement of really intense competition. It wasn't until I found cycling about ten years later that I found a sport that provided similar experiences. The same need for dedication and practice, the same flow of a group following defined rules & patterns, same thrills & speed, and even similar penalty for mistakes (ending up on your ass). Thanks for reminding me.

9.  [David A](#) says:
[June 22, 2010 at 9:03 am](#)

I raced with Joe in Belgium when he first arrived in Flanders. What he never mentions is how dedicated and how hard he raced from the very beginning of his journey to Pro status. He gained the respect of the Belgians watching the races because he liked to ride from the front and attack and attack until the break was established. He was as good as some of the riders on the Belgian national team placing 2nd over 20 times. Unless you have lived and raced in Flanders you will never know the Highs and Lows that can motivate you to ride beyond yourself or send you into a black hole of depression unlike you have ever experienced. The rain, the bone crushing hours of training, your health constantly hanging on a thread, and the non-stop advise from supporters and other "racing experts" Joe Parkin was a very, very good Liefhebber and Pro, don't let his humble reporting of that era fool you.

10.  [Ron](#) says:
[June 22, 2010 at 1:09 pm](#)

Thanks for the nice review of the book; I certainly am going to read it myself after this heads up.

fournwi – Wow! Nice post and I was in a similar situation regarding the end of a lifetime sport. Mine was lacrosse though, and I played from the age of 7 until I graduated college at 21. I was kind of lost there for a few years, missing the challenge, the fun, the competition. I stayed active, but nothing was that exciting.

A few years ago I picked up my first road bike. Well, now I have too many bikes, ride daily, do group rides, check out sites like this, and have become a full-on cycling wacko. I think I've found my lifetime sport and cycling has really filled my need for exercise and physical challenges. I'm not as competitive as I used to be, but I still love seeing how far I can push myself and doing my best to be an agitator in fast group rides.

I'm quite thankful I found cycling. When sports are your life, for most of it, the transition to post-competition can be extremely difficult, even depressing. Cycling keeps me happy, fit, and sane!

Trackbacks

Check out what others are saying about this post...

1. [Tweets that mention http://redkiteprayer.com/?p=2755utm_sourcepingback -- Topsy.com](#) says:
[June 17, 2010 at 12:58 pm](#)

[...] This post was mentioned on Twitter by . said: [...]

Speak Your Mind

Tell us what you're thinking...

and oh, if you want a pic to show with your comment, go get a [gravatar!](#)

Name (required)

Mail (will not be published) (required)

Website

Notify me of followup comments via e-mail

Subscribe without commenting

E-Mail:



• Sponsor Yourself™





FOLLOW US ON [twitter](#)

• Recent Posts

- [Friday Group Ride #58](#)
- [RKP Featured on Bike Radar](#)
- [Ricco Thinking](#)
- [Thanks Leroy!](#)
- [Friday Group Ride #57](#)

• Categories

- [Body](#) (181)
- [Machine](#) (93)
- [Mind](#) (185)

• Archives

- [February 2011](#) (8)
- [January 2011](#) (20)
- [December 2010](#) (21)
- [November 2010](#) (21)
- [October 2010](#) (18)
- [September 2010](#) (26)
- [August 2010](#) (22)
- [July 2010](#) (25)
- [June 2010](#) (21)
- [May 2010](#) (24)
- [April 2010](#) (28)
- [March 2010](#) (26)
- [February 2010](#) (28)
- [January 2010](#) (26)
- [December 2009](#) (27)
- [November 2009](#) (22)
- [October 2009](#) (20)
- [September 2009](#) (22)
- [August 2009](#) (19)
- [July 2009](#) (31)
- [June 2009](#) (4)

• Recent Comments

- [Souleur](#): very nice tribute, good work!
- [Armybikerider](#): I also ride 95% alone on Fort Campbell and miss terribly the social scene of a regular group ride. In...
- [James](#): Due to my work schedule it's solo rides for me. Once in a great while I can coerce somebody into riding...
- [Adam](#): I live in Bermuda. It's 20 square miles here, but we still manage a pretty healthy cycling community....
- [sophrosune](#): My club <http://pc2001hortaleza.es/> is based in a neighborhood in the northeast of Madrid called...
- [Nom](#): Stanley (and Cavendish I suppose), are you really advocating rape as a fitting punishment for cheating? As...
- [Dan O](#): Nice write up and well deserved. This is a great blog.
- [Howard hesterberg](#): Here in Sonoma Cty. there is a broad selection of rides, mostly social in nature even if long in...
- [Mike](#): Touriste-Routier — lol! I just read your post and see that your group in PA describes itself in the same...

- [Mike](#): There are several groups in Cincinnati, but the one I hook up with on occasion is Gears4Beers "A drinking..."

• Top Commentators

1. Robot (253)
2. Souleur (252)
3. Sophrosune (184)
4. Lachlan (182)
5. SinglespeedJarv (166)
6. randomactsofcycling (151)
7. James (118)
8. michael (108)
9. Touriste-Routier (103)
10. todd k (100)

• Faves

- [All Hail the Black Market](#)
- [Belgium Knee Warmers](#)
- [Bike Snob NYC](#)
- [Boulder Report](#)
- [Competitive Cyclist: What's New](#)
- [The \(Allegedly\) Fat Cyclist](#)

• Notable Blogage

- ['Cross in New Belgium](#)
- [25Seven](#)
- [34x18](#)
- [6 Years in a Rain Cape](#)
- [A. Dig's Spot](#)
- [Above Category](#)
- [Anklebiter](#)
- [Ben Likes Bikes](#)
- [Bicycle Design](#)
- [Bike Portland](#)
- [Bike Race Info](#)
- [Bobke Strut](#)
- [Calirado Cyclist](#)
- [Carpet Machine](#)
- [Chris Milliman](#)
- [Church of the Sweet Ride](#)
- [Cozy Beehive](#)
- [Crossniacs](#)
- [CX Magazine](#)
- [Doug Report](#)
- [Drunk Cyclist](#)
- [Embrocation Magazine](#)
- [Fermaguina](#)
- [Fix Ma Wheel](#)
- [Flahute](#)
- [Frites en Mayo](#)
- [Fyxomatosis](#)
- [Go Faster Jim!](#)
- [Gunz'n'Rosenthal](#)
- [How to Avoid the Bummer Life](#)
- [In the Gutter](#)
- [Introspection-Section](#)
- [Ira Ryan Bicycles](#)
- [Jacie Phelan](#)
- [Kill the Darkness](#)
- [Laatste Ronde](#)
- [Large Fella on a Bike](#)

- [Le Grimpeur](#)
- [Liz Hatch](#)
- [Mad Dog Media](#)
- [Masi Guy](#)
- [Mike's Imagination](#)
- [Molly Cameron](#)
- [Moscaline](#)
- [Mud and Cowbells](#)
- [Neil's Blog](#)
- [One Wheel in Front of the Other](#)
- [Pavé](#)
- [Pedal Power](#)
- [Perpetual Motion](#)
- [Pink Bike and Flowers](#)
- [Plus One Lap](#)
- [Portland Cross](#)
- [Pro Bike Wrench](#)
- [Racer Blue Squirrel](#)
- [Richard Sachs' 'Cross Reference](#)
- [Road Bike Action](#)
- [Rolling Big Wheels](#)
- [Rosey's World](#)
- [Rough Riders](#)
- [Signals, Calls and Marches](#)
- [Ski Bike Junkie](#)
- [Skinny Bikes and All](#)
- [Slow Your Roll](#)
- [Sprinter Della Casa](#)
- [Sprinting for Signs](#)
- [Steve Tilford](#)
- [Svelte Cycles](#)
- [The Blue and Red](#)
- [The Bottom Bracket Blog](#)
- [The Snot Rocket](#)
- [The Soiled Chamois](#)
- [The Sporting Life](#)
- [Tour Fever](#)
- [Two-Wheeled and Other Misadventures](#)
- [UT Rider](#)
- [Velodramatic](#)
- [Weights and Pulleys](#)
- [Zank](#)

