

Bowling Alone

Lefty knew it wasn't safe to bowl alone.

He looked up at his score sheet. Two three-hundred games in the bag. Game three now just one roll away from a perfect series. He rubbed his sweaty palms on his no-chafe track pants. Wiped his brow. He felt *out there*. He loved the rush. The danger.

He reached for the towel and wiped his hands, diddled his fingers over the dryer. He picked up his ball, its eighteen pounds as nature in his strong left hand as if it were a part of him.

The dangers of bowling alone had been drummed into him since he was kid. At home. In the bowling safety classes everyone had to take. The public service announcements on TV, radio, and the sides of buses.

He knew that many bowling fatalities involved alcohol, usually when it is consumed then spilled somewhere behind the ball return, causing and the bowler to slip, fall into the roundabout and get his head cracked open like a coconut. If the bowler is on a league, his team buddies can get him back to the bar for more beer and then drive him home. Otherwise, he just might die there. Alone.

Sometimes it's hard to judge a lane. Being on a team, you can all check it out together, forming a human chain to allow one bowler to safely step out far enough to determine the degree of slide in the lane.

If you are an inexperienced bowler, you'll need the stabilizing influence of league play. You need to learn how much to tip the waitress. What to if you get into a fight. You can get your butt kicked by a bunch of drunken tenpin addicts pretty darn quick if you don't know what you are doing.

The worst accidents are those in which a bowler is swept away by the game. Lefty recalled an article his mother had showed him in *Safe Bowling News*. Back when he was a kid. It was about a guy who bowled alone. A photo in the article showed the bowler's distraught family waiting in the concession area while the rescue crew dragged the lane for his body.

When Lefty reached the age of bowling manhood – twenty-one in his state – his father, Righty, took him to the bowling alley's hot pants cocktail lounge. It was an important learning experience since this is a side of bowling we don't ever see in championship matches on TV. While Righty got blotto, old-timers came up, put a hand on Lefty's shoulder and said something like, "Buy your own bowling shoes. Don't share your shoes with anybody." Or, "Be careful you don't touch the hand dryer directly. Germs can be nasty." "Make sure your wife launders and presses your bowling towel regularly." Then they'd always add, "Bowl on a team. Never – never – bowl alone."

The nervous hot pants waitress – Lefty figured she was anxious about something because she jiggled around on Righty's lap even though he had a good firm grip on her – warned Lefty, "Practice safe-bowling, young man. Always wear a glove."

That would have been good advice for Righty too, since several times during his bowling career he had to go to the doctor to get some kind of special cream for his hands.

Lefty looked to the lane on his right. An elderly man with grandkids. If Lefty got into trouble, Gramps would be of little use – he was not a strong bowler. If Gramps tried to help, they'd probably both go down.

To his left, a group of Boy Scouts. At least, *they* weren't bowling alone. But no backup there.

Then Lefty had an idea. An insane idea that made him think of people who destroy themselves with crazy risk-taking behaviors.

He would bowl right handed.

"This is so crazy," he said to himself. "Not only am I out here bowling alone, I am thinking of bowling with a hand that has never ever rolled a ball."

Something pushed him on. He positioned his toes on the second dot from the left, back near the

edge of the lane. "So crazy," he said to himself one more time.

Lefty started his approach. It didn't feel right, but he couldn't stop. Not now. If this were league play, his teammates would have already stopped him. "It's too risky," they'd say. They'd save him from himself.

But he was bowling alone.

As he lifted the ball up and back to gain maximum momentum, his left leg twisted. He came down on his back hard on the wood flooring. The ball rose in the air, arced up, then down. Directly at Lefty's head.

The cop closed Lefty's eyelids and pulled the plastic sheeting over the length of his lifeless body. He pulled off the surgical gloves he used in such situations and walked over to the Boy Scouts, shaking his head. "See there, kids. That's what can happen when you bowl alone."

The blond hot pants waitress walked over to the cop. "At least, his death will be a reminder to boys like these."

"Yeah," the cop said, putting the gloves back on. "Perhaps there's a lesson here for all of us."