A piece of paper

A piece of paper, blank, folded,  
sticks out of my pocket.  
I put it there to get inspired  
hoping to record an idea from my bike ride.  
Riding jacket pockets are for essentials—-  
gel food, tools, keys, spare tire and such,  
but a piece of paper seems unessential  
this cold, sunny Sunday morning.

There were ideas and experiences worth recording.  
The sharp, cold wind reminded me of  
how our fragile lives are insulted  
by just a thin protective layer from hurt or even death—-  
like my riding clothes protected me  
from the perilous freezing cold.

A brisk, westerly wind,  
a wind chill of 3 degrees F.  
set eyes watering, face stinging, fingers going numb.  
I kept riding to stay warm,  
but mostly for the joy, and 16 miles  
after one full hour was more than just enough.  
I made notes; the ideas live.  
In summer, when the jacket is stored  
and the paper is unfolded,  
I will recall the bright, bitter cold.

-Ralph Brandt

An Outsider’s View of Indiana

Indiana is a backwards place  
Where the squirrels are red  
And the dirt isn’t,  
Where greetings are warmest  
From those who like you least,  
Where there are trees in the city  
And none in the country,  
And Middle American teenagers  
Long for anonymity.

-Jacqueline Hawk