

Cycling for Change, 2010

Reflections and “Notes” from the Journey, by Peter M. Schloss

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“The Circle of Lives”

May 10, 2010

A bicycle wheel is 700 millimeters in diameter. That works out to 27.56 inches “high” from the ground. The circumference of that wheel is 86.58 inches, or in other words, approximately 7.25 feet. There are 5,280 feet in a mile, so the bicycle wheel rotates 728 times each mile. Our across the United States journey to raise funds and awareness for the cause of ending poverty is 5,100 miles. Therefore, the wheels on each bicycle will rotate 3,712,800 times over the course of this mission. As there are 12 of us riders intending to complete the entire crossing... our combined effort is approximately 44,500,000 revolutions. That is approximately how many people in the United States now live below the “poverty line”.

If the thought of the number of times these bicycle wheels will spin as we cross the North American Continent is mind-boggling, then imagine that every one of those revolutions is a hungry child, a homeless father, a destitute mother... a life on the margins of despair. NOW THAT IS MIND-BOGGLING!

Pete Schloss



Unanticipated Sacrifices

May 23, 2010

Tomorrow my wife and I drive to Seattle, Washington. We are transporting one of the three vehicles that will provide support for me and the other cross United States Cycling for Change bicyclists. My professional life will be “on hold” until September 13th. We will miss the near daily contact with our children and grandchildren, closeness that we have taken for granted. Our clothing and personal effects for nearly 4 months have been packed into two “carry-on” sized bags. Space is at such a premium that we have focused on carrying the minimum of such things as socks (4 pair), shoes (one pair), long pants (two), shorts (one), and enough “unmentionables” to get us from one wash day to the next. These items are separate from our bicycle specific clothing. Except for 3 nights as we pass through Kansas City, we will not enjoy the comfort of our own bed for nearly 110 days.

We have been mentally and emotionally prepared for the anticipated sacrifices. Sacrifices of comfort... sacrifices of family... sacrifices of finances... sacrifices of privacy.... But, as tomorrow has drawn near I have been troubled by an annoying internal disquiet. I have pondered this to the point of distraction because it has caused me to be more critical, a bit less adaptable, and according to my wife, a bit more annoying (than usual). I have come to the conclusion that my reactions are the product of some unanticipated sacrifice.

For most of us, childhood was punctuated by the litany of “When I grow up, I won’t have to ...”, “When I grow up, I can ... whenever I want to.” The light at the end of the tunnel of childhood was self-determination and control. As adults we continue to embrace the illusion of achieved mastery of the management of our personal kingdoms. Such “mastery” is an illusion, since most of us do have schedules, employers, responsibilities, duties... but these are shrouded in the trappings of our “rights”, our “command” over our homes, persons, and property. We are comfortable in the illusions of our personal security and control.

Tomorrow, I leave the camouflage of my “grown-up” security. I again must accept being told when to rise, when to sleep... when to eat, (God forbid) what to eat. Without question I am a nearly anonymous servant. In some respect I have accepted as a vow, 110 days of poverty, and obedience. Since I will travel with my wife I hope to avoid the vow of chastity. The loss of the illusion of control over my life is a sacrifice that I had not anticipated. It will take some getting used to, now that I am a “grown-up”.

Pete Schloss

Choose Your Own Adventure

May 26, 2010

My wife and I are traveling west through Montana, nearing Butte, on our way to Seattle, Washington. We are transporting one of the three support vehicles that will be used by us and the other “Cycling For Change” team members in our quest to raise funds and consciousness for Catholic Charities’ anti-poverty campaign. Our 5,100 mile cross the United States bicycle journey officially starts Saturday, May 29th at Cape Flattery, WA, and concludes 100 days later on Labor Day at Key West, FL.

I can honestly say that there was never a time in my life when I said... “...and when I’m 58 I will ride a bicycle across the United States, diagonally, via New Orleans!” This was just never on my “radar screen”. So, having driven over 1,000 miles yesterday and looking forward to another 800 miles today, there has been an abundance of opportunity for reflection.

I can identify the moment that this experience began. About two years ago my wife and I were at church. We were joined by our adult children, Peter, Renee, and Alexis, who were accompanied by their spouses. A year earlier, I had taken up bicycling, with a passion. Father Matt Ruhl was announcing from the pulpit that he would be leaving the parish in the Spring of 2010, and would be embarking on an unusual sabbatical. He described the mission, “Cycling For Change”, and indicated that there would be an opportunity for others to join... and for a few to accompany him the entire way. As I sat transfixed, my imagination was ignited by the possibilities. My family, however, gasped and as one turned to look at me. They know me pretty well.

After Mass, I approached Bethany Paul, church administrative assistant to Matt. I introduced myself and asked to “sign up”. I failed to realize that it really didn’t work that way, but to her credit Bethany humored me, took out a blank piece of paper and said I could write down my contact information. It never occurred to me that I might not be chosen to ride. I began regularly calling Bethany for “status updates”. I ignored that no one had yet acknowledged my “application”. In retrospect, I am sure that I was something of a nuisance. Of course, I was selected, and the two years that followed have been full of challenges, frustrations, and the richness of getting to know the other members of “Cycling for Change”. I never doubted that this would happen. After all, I had made the choice.

When my children were very young there was a series of books known as “Choose Your Own Adventures”. You, as the reader, are cast in the role of the protagonist. At various points the story pauses, and in order to continue the reader must choose between two or three different actions. The decision then determines at what page the book continues. In this manner, you are immersed into the story and actively “choose your own adventure”. Mercifully, all choices end happily with the reader as hero. If life were only “written” this way!

2 years ago, and without realizing it at the time, Father Matt Ruhl, S.J., inserted a brief pause into the flow of my life and called upon me to “choose my own adventure”. There have been many events, moments, people, and circumstances, over the last 58 years which were times

of life changing choice for me. Some choices, especially when I was a child, were made for me by others: Where I grew up, where I went to school,... Some choices were my own: Choice of job, choice of spouse...

I like my life, most days a lot. I don't have to like my life, but I choose to. Any of us can focus on moments of disappointment, and tragedy (I have had my share of both) and thus define our adventures in those terms. Looking back upon the choices that I and others have made in my life, I tend to like the choices because I like the outcome. If I did not like my life, I suspect that I would not like the choices which were made.

Looking back, and identifying the crossroads of opportunity, challenge, and choice, it is curious to me that my recollections focus on choices that seem to have eventually worked out well. If I were less satisfied with my life would I then be drawn to recall less favorable and more painful moments of choice? Whether or not we like our life is our own choice. There is a prayer and a quote that are meaningful to me in this context:

“God, grant to me the Serenity to accept the things that I cannot change, the Courage to change the things that I can, and the Wisdom to know the difference.” And;

“When you come to a fork in the road, take it.” (Yogi Berra)

Pete Schloss



Seattle Bus Depot Graffiti

May 27, 2010

I read this on a wall yesterday at the bus depot in Seattle:

“A man in the station, old or young, or maybe a woman, sitting on cold ground, scared, with hungry eyes, and worn shoes. Don’t worry, you are still loved. We wait together. You asked for change, I offered you my heart and my soul. You just wanted change.”



Dignity Dies Last

June 4, 2010

Many of us have heard this speech a hundred times, “In the unlikely event that there is a loss of cabin pressure, a mask will fall from a compartment above you, and provide you with oxygen...”.

We take for granted that on a journey we will be provided with our basic necessities. Air, water, food, safety. Most of us never consider a couple of the other “necessities” that we also take for granted... hope and dignity.

Wednesday (June 2, 2010), the Cycling for Change Team was provided lunch at St. Leo’s Church soup kitchen in Seattle, Washington. St. Leo’s provides breakfast and lunch meals for between 800 and 1,100 people every day, 5 days a week! As one of the staff people explained, the numbers tend to go up at the end of the month when people find that they have run out of money.

Our visit was at the start of the month, but the lunchroom, in a large former school, built in the early 20th century, appeared filled to capacity. As I walked through the door I was not prepared for the sight or the sudden emotional impact. It was as if I had experienced a “sudden loss of cabin pressure”. However, there was no mask within my reach. Before me was the “3-D” version of a post-apocalypse vision that we have all seen so many times in science fiction movies. A crush of vacant eyed people, soiled, many wearing what amounted to tatters. I was to dine, shoulder to shoulder amidst the people that Seattle had forgotten.

Before I took my place in the food line, I visited the men’s room to take care of another “necessity”. As I turned the corner I beheld that there were no doors on the line of stalls. The one that was available to serve my “needs” was a matter of feet in front of the line of urinals. I was faced with the decision of wait in discomfort and go elsewhere, or just sit down and “go” in discomfort. I fought the urge to turn around to leave as I considered that I was there to briefly experience what others live every day. Swallowing my pride I lowered my cycling shorts along with my expectations for privacy. In a matter of minutes a man took his place in front of me at the urinal and without a moment’s hesitation struck up the most ordinary conversation with me about the weather. He was followed by another person who commented upon my bicycling attire, and asked what I was doing. This continued to the point that I felt that I was in a receiving line at a wedding.

Business done, and hands washed, I proceeded to the food line. I was handed a brightly colored compartmented tray, the kind that you would expect to see in a grade school. There was a bowl for the soup, but no plates. My meal consisted of a slice of lunchmeat between two pieces of white bread, a bowl of chili-like soup, and a single chocolate chip cookie. A soup kitchen that serves a thousand people a day from donations does its best by making do with what it gets. The same applies to those who are served. There was coffee, hot and excellent by any standard.

I moved to one of the long cafeteria tables, and found a vacant folding chair between two of the center’s customers. I ate and visited with my “companions”. I was beginning to feel a sense of accomplishment in embracing the experience when my eye was drawn to a man seated across from me, a few seats to my left. Seeing him I was wrenched back into the reality that for everyone but me this was not a diversion, not just “an experience”... this was reality and this was life. Again, there was a loss of “cabin pressure”.

The “oxygen” that was rarified in the atmosphere of the room was the loss of hope. Most of us have experienced a momentary loss of hope, but few who read this know what it means to be without hope, and without prospect of finding hope... true hopelessness. In the soup kitchen I could scan the tables and see a face here and there that bore the signs of a life yet with hope. A father with his young son, the boy looking up to dad with the kind of hero worship that any father lives for. A man and a woman looking deeply into each other’s eyes, sharing grimy gap toothed smiles between words and bites of their meals. But the man who had caught my attention was not one of these, there was no sign of hope visible with him.

What caught my attention was that he visited with no one. He sat ramrod straight, eyes forward. His hair was as neatly combed as hair could be that had not seen shampoo for some time. His stained and worn clothing would not have been suitable for donation to a second-hand store, but was arranged with care. From his leather like and wrinkled complexion, he looked to be in his 50’s, but I suspect the ravages of a life without shelter had aged him prematurely. He might have been 40. He ate slowly, with deliberation... with dignity. Everything about him screamed his dignity. He wore dignity like it was armor. The man grew in my sight and became larger than life. Whatever the cause of his condition, whatever the story behind a life rendered hopeless, he taught me that dignity may be given, may be cast aside, but it is never taken from one who chooses to keep it. Dignity dies last.

I remain humbled by that man.

Peter Schloss



The Roads Now Less Traveled

June 7, 2010

A few days ago, as we proceeded on our bicycles from Castle Rock, Washington to Portland, Oregon, our course paralleled that of Interstate 5. There were occasions that our route through the towns of Kelso, Carrolls, Kalama, and Woodland, Washington, (where we ate lunch) crossed near, under, or over that super highway. For the most part I ignored the Interstate, and it ignored me. Once, however, as I peddled up an overpass I could see the next town that we were to traverse in the distance. With some envy I eyed the onramp and the two messages that the road posted for me: “Kalama 2.2 miles”, and “Non-Motorized Vehicles and Pedestrians Prohibited”. One message was a temptation and the other a firm and final rejection. As cyclists, on human powered vehicles, we were orphaned by that well traveled road. I thought that I might argue that my bike was indeed “fossil fueled”, with me the 58 year old fossil that fueled it. However, I knew that such a petition would fall on deaf ears if I were stopped by one of the highway’s police guardians. Continuing across the overpass another sign appeared, “South Old Pacific Coast Highway”. This was the path that I was obligated to travel, on a road now less traveled.

Turning my back on the Interstate I saw the contrast with the road that now lay in front of me. The beast of concrete and steel behind me was a creature of post World War 2 prosperity and expansion in America. It is a monument to the ability of mankind to wrestle nature’s boundaries and obstructions into submission. It stood as a byway without passion or soul, a road known only by a number and a direction. The Interstate is blunt force that catapults the traveler from one place to another as a bow shoots and arrow.

The Old Pacific Coast Highway, in the shadow of South I-5, is a highway in name only. This road, now less traveled, was born in the distant past. Some of her course was determined by nature, some portions by the pre-Columbian residents, and other sections by early explorers. She proceeded in her path making compromises with the natural lay of the land. There are only gentle modifications to grade and course. Unlike the Interstate, which blasts through a hill in order to maintain direction and grade, The Old Pacific Coast Highway meanders on and around the rise and fall of the land, like a ribbon uncoiling from its spool.

This living road has a personality, it has a soul, and I was captive to her course, and her emotions. As I peddled, the road would smile seductively with her long slow descending curves. At times, I was embraced by the safety of a wide flat shoulder. With caprice, her mood would change. The shoulder would become a sliver of pavement, the road forcing me uncomfortably close to the onslaught of the wheels of thundering lumber trucks. Her gentle slope would suddenly turn skyward to challenge my legs and my lungs. She could be calm with the smoothness of new laid asphalt, or she would thunder anger through my thin tires, shaking me bodily as I rolled over broken and rough damaged pavement. A change in the wind speed, direction, or temperature would either brush my cheek as a kiss, or smack me in the face with force.

The Interstate is a wasteland. In some parts of the country, a place which is available to serve travelers with food and fuel is appropriately named an Oasis. People are only permitted within its boundaries if encased in a motor vehicle. The Interstate separates us from the natural environment, and creates its own. There are no sounds, no smells, and the sights are relegated to the distance in favor of declarations of speed, distance, and destination.

On the Pacific Coast Highway, there were dogs to chase us and children to cheer us. Schools, churches, and stores extended their parking lots to us. Cemeteries presented the memories of those who passed before us. The roadside was picketed as far as the eye could see with the mailboxes of the homes which bordered her lanes... I could not only read the names of the residents, but actually exchange greetings. A man weeding his garden..., a boy seated on his swing set. There was a woman sitting in a wheelchair on a covered porch who called out a hello to me. Perhaps she considered our wheeled conveyances were a connection that erased the differences that otherwise separated us. Bridges nearly touched the water. I could peer over the low railings to see the wildlife that the river sustained. A silver metal silo reflecting the sun by day would do the same for the car lights of night. I counted the rivets in one of its seams as I passed. This road served up sights, smells, and sounds as a banquet for the senses.

For 75 miles I had a relationship with this road. With sadness, I knew there would be a parting with her at Portland. As I neared the Columbia River a huge bridge loomed in the distance. This would be my crossing and on the other side I would leave the Old Pacific Coast Highway. Riding toward the north end of the bridge I saw where the road channeled bicycles to one side. I also saw, with some concern, the shape of a familiar white rectangular sign, the kind that stood to prohibit my entry to the Interstate Highway. But this time the sign was at the start of a narrow lane leading up and over the bridge... this sign declared: "Motorized Traffic Prohibited". I smiled as I knew I was not an orphan of this road; I had been adopted and was now one of her children.

Peter Schloss



Just an update...

June 10, 2010

Yesterday we had a grueling 82 mile ride from Hood River to Umatilla. The ride had some uphill stretches, but none that were unusually so. There were times that the wind was in our faces, but it was not a particularly strong breeze. The scenery was stunning as we rode aside the Columbia River, and the traffic was moderate. There was no rain, and on the whole, the temperature was pleasantly warm. The problem was the #%\$&@* ROAD!!! The surface and shoulders had a relatively fresh application of “chip and seal”, unfortunately in Oregon “chips” are 1 inch pieces of limestone. The Oregon DOT must also have some kind of demonic machine that carefully orients the sharpest point on the rock upward. The result was a ride that shook me to the marrow! My touring bicycle seat is a Brooks B-17, a proven design, favored by touring cyclists, which dates back to the 1890’s. Even that venerable piece of equipment wanted to desert me. It felt like I was riding on the post! I was never so glad for a ride to be over...

The ride having concluded, we were hosted at Our Lady of the Angels Parish in Hermiston, Oregon. The parishioners provided us dinner last night and breakfast this morning in their church hall. They even sent us off this morning with sack lunches! Christine and I spent the night in the home of Vince and Maria Trevino. They are a charming couple who have been married 34 years.

This morning we had a 56 mile ride to Walla Walla, Washington. Frankly, my tailbone dreaded a repeat of the 82 mile debacle. Much to our (my seat and me) surprise, the road was long, smooth, and the wind was to my back. We made great time and still were able to take in the magnificent scenery. When riding in Kansas City, it is not unusual for me to ride 30-40 miles at an average speed of between 18 and 20 miles per hour. I had figured for similar speeds on this across the country ride. The reality, however, is that riding day after day, with 11 other people tends to reduce the speed a bit. Today, I was happy to have exceeded 15 miles per hour.

We arrived at 2 p.m. in Walla Walla, greeted 8 miles from arrival by a sudden thunder shower. No surprise there! We were hosted by St. Patrick’s Church parishioners, who provided us with dinner and host family residences. Christine and I are the guests of Rose Anne McClellan. Rose Anne is 83 years old, and lives in a home that was designed by her architect son (one of 8 sons!). James, her husband, passed away in 2002, after a 7 year debilitating illness. James was a physician, who attended medical school at St. Louis University, in Missouri. This home was designed from the ground up to be a modern “prairie style” home that is very handicap accessible, but in a way that is not at all obvious. Sadly, Dr. McClellan passed away a matter of months after he and Rose Anne moved in. We spent much of the evening visiting with Rose Anne over a glass of wine and exchanging family stories. It is bitter-sweet that she reminded Christine so much of her own mother who is in a nursing care facility in Florida. Rose Anne plans to make us an early breakfast in the morning (bacon and eggs for Christine, and oatmeal with plain yogurt for me). We must be at the church by 7:30 a.m. for our departure to Pomeroy, a ride of about 68 miles, where another parish will again be providing for our needs.

One noteworthy incident: While on the road today, we stopped at a service station/convenience store. We were resting, and refreshing, when a woman approached me from the gas pump where she was fueling her late model Subaru. She made, and held eye contact with me as she drew near. When she was within speaking distance, she asked me what I and the other riders were doing. I told her of our mission on behalf of Catholic Charities. She smiled and told me that she had a 24 year old daughter who was severely disabled. Her daughter had the mental function of a 6 month old. Catholic Charities of Washington had provided services and assistance to her daughter for many years. She was profoundly grateful to the organization. We spoke for quite some time, and she offered to put Christine and me up for the evening if we needed a place to stay. She also shared that she was an avid bicyclist and that she was celebrating the 26 mile ride she had accomplished early in the week. With mounting tears, she explained that her physicians had discouraged her from riding because her most recent course of chemo-therapy would not leave her with enough strength. At this point she was not the only person struggling with tears. She embraced Christine and me, saying “thank you”, and left us her phone number, just in case we needed anything. Please say a prayer for Kathy from Walla Walla, Washington.

Peter Schloss.



A Life in the Day of Cycling for Change...

June 18, 2010

3 weeks ago today my wife and I left Kansas City, driving one of the support vehicles to Seattle, Washington for the start of our “Cycling for Change” bicycle ride across the United States. The riders converged in Seattle on May 27th, and the ride officially began in Cape Flattery on May 29th. Today is the 21st day of our journey, and we have crossed 1014 miles of our anticipated 5,100 miles to Key West, Florida.

We have settled into something of a routine, and it occurs to me that some people might appreciate some insight into our typical day. While the days are far from carbon copies on one another, there is a commonality that has begun to emerge.

The “routine” really begins the prior night. Christine reviews the route and conducts a brief, informal, meeting with the riders. We are reminded of the destination and distance. We are told of any issues with road conditions and changes in the route. We riders find the weather one of the most important topics. What is the predicted temperature? What is the predicted wind velocity and direction? Second in importance is whether the ride to the destination involves an increase or decrease in elevation.

The weather information helps us to select proper cycling attire for the following day. Most of us lay out our cycling gear that night. This might include raingear, consisting of rain pants, a rain jacket, shoe covers, waterproof gloves, and a helmet cover. The only thing more miserable than cycling while wet and cold, is to do so into the teeth of the wind! A 15 mile per hour tail wind is a gift from God... turn that into a headwind and it becomes a curse from Hell! With a tailwind, a cyclist who normally averages 15 miles per hour on the flat will do 20. The 15 miles per hour is reduced to 10-12 by the headwind. The difference between the headwind and tailwind can easily be 8 miles made good each hour. Much of our anticipation and our apprehension are based upon wind direction and speed. Of similar importance is the grade of the road.

A reasonably fit cyclist can peddle a 6-7% grade for many miles, but at a much reduced speed. For me that is about 8 miles per hour. A reasonably fit cyclist can curse any grade in excess of 7%. The percentage of grade represents the number of feet of increase or decrease in elevation over 100 feet. Thus, if the road increases 6 feet in elevation over a run of 100 feet, it is said to have a 6% grade. We recently rode a section of highway where there was a 4000 foot increase in elevation over 20 miles. That represents an average grade of approximately 5%. I wondered how cyclists, Judy and Lynne, 70ish year old retired women, who we encountered on the road, were doing with the grades. With a twinkle in her eye, Lynne had said that she had never met a hill that she couldn't walk her bicycle up.

The road gives us “clues” as to our cycling destiny. As we peddle, if there are signs that caution slower traffic to keep right, the road goes skyward, unlike our attitude. If there are signs that caution trucks to use lower gears, we celebrate!

Our average C4C cycling day covers about 65 miles. To make ourselves feel even a greater sense of accomplishment we call that a “metric century” (over 100 kilometers). When we ride at home we pick our days, our routes, our rest stops... “Oh, it's too (windy, cold, rainy,) to ride today. I think I will ride tomorrow”. On this cross country ride the refrain is, “Crap, it's too (windy, cold, rainy...). Buns up, it's time to ride!”

We are all experiencing a kind of sensory overload. The scenery that rolls by us, mile after mile is amazing and unforgettable... at that moment. Just as soon as I think that I have witnessed beauty that I will never forget, that memory is overwritten by the next scene. Deep blue rushing waters at the feet of towering pines... the scent of wildflowers and clover... butterflies dodging my cycling onslaught. I find myself mesmerized and I wonder if the “locals” have become so accustomed to these scenes that nature’s mural is reduced to old wallpaper.

Our safety equipment probably provides us more peace of mind than real “security”. The exception to that statement is the helmet that each of us wear. In a typical year there are about 750 fatal bicycle vs. motor vehicle encounters. The bicycle usually loses. In these incidents the helmet is largely irrelevant, except to preserve the “open casket” option. On the bright side, there are many thousands of bicycle crashes that do not include a motor vehicle. 95% of these crashes which result in death involve a cyclist who was not wearing a helmet. The bicycle helmet is our “seat belt”.

In addition to the helmet, we each have a headlight, taillight, and a rearview mirror. The lights have improved greatly over the last few years with the advent of LED (light emitting diode) technology. These insanely small and efficient lights can emit usable light in flashing mode for over 100 hours on one set of ordinary AA batteries. They are effective both day and night to increase our visibility to traffic. I have a headlight that is rated at 900 lumens. Don’t ask me what a lumen is... all I know is that this light might strip the paint off of a car at 50 feet. I think that the Starship Enterprise had a few of these in its weapons locker.

The rear view mirrors fall into two categories, bike mounted and head mounted. The bike mounted mirrors usually attach to the end of one’s handlebars, the head mounted mirrors attach to either the helmet or the rider’s glasses. Mine attaches to my sunglasses. Initially it takes some getting used to, as the image is in a very small piece of mirror, about the size of a quarter that hangs a few inches above and to the left of my left eye. It provides enough of a view that I can see approaching traffic. Once accustomed to a mirror, the rider feels partially blind without it. As for my glasses, they provide impact protection from rocks, and keep the eyes clear of rain, dust, and bugs. My glasses have replaceable lenses, dark UV protection lenses for the bright of day, and amber for dusk or night riding.

One piece of equipment that I have which is unique in our group is a small stereo speaker (about the size of a pool cue-ball). Except for days that have a threat of rain, I attach the speaker to my handlebars and connect it to my I-Touch. My I-Touch has over 8,000 songs. I set my I-Touch to random play... it is a musical lottery, one moment it’s the Eagles and “Hotel California”, the next it’s Frank Zappa and... “Why in the hell is THAT on my song-play list!”

Another piece of high tech equipment that a number of us have is the bicycle specific Garmin Edge 705 GPS unit. Thankfully, it does not have a voice that interrupts one’s thoughts with “Turn right in two tenths of a mile”. This device provides tons of statistics that cyclists have never found necessary, until now, thanks to the miracle of mass marketing. Each day I “know”: how many calories I burned, what my average peddle cadence was, what my average heart rate was, how many feet of elevation I climbed, what the grade of the road is, the President’s current approval rating (according to both CNN and Fox), and it also displays a “real time” map of where I have been and where I am going. There are over 40 different pieces of information that the unit can be programmed to provide. By the way, it also tells you how fast you are going, and how far you have ridden.

We cover approximately 65 miles in an average riding day. Including stops, we figure that it will take between 6 and 7 hours to complete the day’s ride. In those hours the mind is

divided between the wanderings of its stream of consciousness, stream of unconsciousness, and attention to the road. At the start we ride in a line, with our legs rising and falling in cadence. We are an unintended chorus line engaged in a synchronized dance... our toes drawing vertical circles... accelerating downward toward the pavement only to slow, stop, and then rise to complete a circle at the top of the arch... the process continuing about 400 times each mile. As the ride progresses, the line of riders stretches a number of miles, the stronger riders proceeding at their pace and the slower riders, at theirs. Some days a “stronger rider” will throttle back a bit and pair with a slower rider. Even though our abilities are varied, we still consider ourselves part of the same moving “community”.

The ride, minute after minute, hour after hour, is hypnotic. There is cadence of the legs, cadence of the breath, the roll of the pavement beneath the wheels, the rhythmic “thump-Thump” of measured expansion lines in the road. All of these things, coupled with the roll of the scenery and the surf-like whoosh of the wind in the ears conspire to take ones soul beyond the “now”. What jolts the rider back to “now” is a low rumble, and a distant form in the rearview mirror that grows as the rumble becomes the roar of 18 wheels pounding the pavement at 65 miles per hour, passing within 4 feet of the rider, the slipstream of the semi shaking the cyclist. You get used to it... and after a few minutes again succumb to the heartbeat of the bicycle... mile after mile, day after day.

Peter Schloss



A New Life Shares a Very Old River

June 25, 2010

“Prologue”: The Cycling for Change ride carries with it a message about poverty in America. However, financial poverty is not the only form of poverty, or even the worst poverty. There is also destitution of spirit. There are those among us, wealthy and poor, who lack the ability to appreciate the beauty around them, the beauty within themselves, and the beauty within others. They are the spiritually poor.

Yesterday, June 24, 2010, my journey with Cycling for Change took me from the town of Ennis to West Yellowstone, Montana. 72 miles, with a gradual ascent from the valley of the Madison river at 4,900 feet to the apron of Yellowstone National Park at 6,800 feet. On my left extended an endless parade of mountaintops, over which the morning sun rose to illuminate the hard etched fissures of bare stone peaks. Snow yet remains in the deeper recesses, giving the mountainsides an appearance of having been engraved and then inlaid with ivory.

To my right I was paralleled by the Madison River. Nearing its headwaters, it meandered through a lush green plain, defined by rolling hills and moraines to the west. Here, the river is young and makes a fast paced decent, providing life to abundant trout, and sport to the anglers who periodically appeared on shore or waded in its waters as I passed.

I rode my bicycle, precariously perched on the narrow shoulder of the two lane asphalt road which serves to connect Ennis to the world south. I also chose to ride at a speed which would not exceed my ability to absorb the sights, sounds, and smells presented to me that day. I was a small, insignificant, part of the grand scene, here for just a moment... moving on with the road. The interplay of the landscape and the monumental personal events of the prior day worked as an ironsmith in my mind, taking hold of each thought and forging them together as links of an emotional chain.

On Wednesday, June 23, 2010, at 2:13 pm Central time, Peter Nicholas Schloss was born to my son, Peter William Schloss and his wife, Nikola Suzanne Smith. He is their second child, my eleventh grandchild, ten of which have joined our family in the short span of only 30 months. The scenery was visually overwhelming, and the events of June 23rd were emotionally overwhelming. My physical exertions brought streaks of sweat to my forehead... the emotional exertions mingled tears with the perspiration. I was fortunate that other members of Cycling for Change were far enough behind and in front of me to make my ride solitary.

58 years ago I broke the surface of this river of life and took my first breath of air. I was greeted by a young olive skinned woman of Middle Eastern descent, and her 30 year old husband, a broad shouldered athlete and coach, his German heritage apparent in his blue eyes, red hair and light complexion. I was their first child. I have known my parents as young adults... I have known my parents through the middle of their life... I have known them into the infirmities that older age brings, and I have known the time that my father left these waters, forever.

In my early years I knew my mother's parents, but only as they were defined by their age when I took my first breath. My Grandmother, Labibi Francis, was a woman of prodigious proportion. I would nearly suffocate in the embrace of her bosom. She remained for 27 years of my life, but I never knew her as the young lithe beauty that appeared in her passport picture. Her

husband, my grandfather Joseph, died when I was 6. Yet, I remember him well as a large rough hand that had known years of labor but communicated only love in the touch of his fingers. I recall his green wool sweater vest, a small moth hole here and there, its two pockets concealing his age darkened pipe and his leather tobacco pouch (That pouch holds a place of honor among my keepsakes). I recall his high-top leather shoes and his socks which always seemed to have one hole for me to “find the piggy”... “This little piggy went to market. This little piggy stayed home...”. I never knew Joseph as the young, powerfully built immigrant who forged a life for his family in the hills of West Virginia, providing his 6 children with a warm home and college educations.

My children knew my Father, and they know my Mother, but not as I have known them. They know my parents within the definition of their own lives. They never knew my Grandparents, but I have made it my duty over the years to give my children such stories and impressions of Labibi and Joseph as to make them a part of their own experience. I hope that I have succeeded.

So it is with my grandchildren. They will know me in the experience of their lives. They will not know me as my parents knew me. They will not know me as my children know me. God willing, if I am given the opportunity to share these waters with my grandchildren, may I do well by them and leave them with a sense of these waters, the many lives that preceded them... and which have contributed to our shared heritage.

“Epilogue”: My granddaughter, Daphne, was with us in life for only 7 weeks. She never left the hospital where she was born. However, I believe that she knew the embrace of her Mother and her Father as different from the hands of the many doctors and nurses who ministered to her medical needs. I believe that she knew love, concern, and comfort from Renee’ and Nate. From her I learned how fragile and helpless we really are. I also learned what it is to hold a priceless life, literally in the palm of your hand. I will be a better grandfather for having known her.

Peter M. Schloss



The Coffee Pot

July 7, 2010

We are 12, but not Apostles, we are bicyclists. We are 4 more, but not a Mathew, Mark, Luke or a John, we are support drivers. For nearly 40 days, like apostles or disciples, all of us have been cast into a unique mobile community, a bicycling commune. We have over 60 more days ahead of us. We have sacrificed our comfort... sharing rooms with former “strangers”... We have sacrificed our privacy... the “ladies’/men’s room” is in the bushes on THAT side of the road. We have compromised our sleeping habits, and our eating habits. We share our physical aches, and our emotional ones. The forge of our condition has tempered us into “family”.

I have pondered the inevitable times that we would be called upon to bring “others” into our fold. The “segment riders”... people who wholeheartedly embrace our undertaking, but because of work, family, or other considerations, are unable to assume the obligations of our entire coast to coast journey. What a challenge to suddenly appear, bags and bicycle in hand, among 16 people who have evolved their common experiences into understandings that need no words. We read the shrug of a shoulder, the furl of a brow, the shuffle of a step, as a melody in another member’s day. Sometimes our emotions sing the same song, sometimes another... but almost always with harmony... we are a chorus. Enter the “stranger”, the unknown voice.

The first such segment rider, was actually no stranger. Kristi was scheduled to join us for 21 days, riding with us from Missoula, Montana, to Denver Colorado. Most of us had previously ridden with Kristi. She attends church with many of us in Kansas City, and she was with us for the week long mountain training rides last summer. Many of us already knew Kristi to be a kind, and generous person. We also know her to be a petite young woman who has the heart of a lioness when she is on a bicycle... Many times I have seen the kind eyes of this young pediatrician sharpen with grim determination as she charges a steep mountain grade into submission. The only anticipation about Kristi’s arrival was our wish that it happen as soon as possible. Her time with us has now passed. The place we made for her, and that she filled so well, is now vacant. We miss Kristi.

Enter the second segment rider, Tom. Unlike Kristi, Tom was a stranger... he was unknown to us. Tom had not bicycled with any of us. He is from Kansas City, but he is a member of another parish. Tom, and we, faced the challenge I had pondered... how a “stranger” best enters the ecology of our emotional and physical environment.

Tom arrived in time to join us for the long and challenging ride from Rawlins to Riverside, Wyoming. That day’s ride on July 2nd, had seen us persevere over rough narrow roads, through thunderstorms and hail, with headwinds and crosswinds gusting to over 50 miles per hours. There was no time for small talk, and no polite social graces were exchanged. At the end of the day, no one was in the mood to “welcome” anything other than a hot shower, a cold beer, and a warm bed. That night, our accommodations consisted of “quaint” rough hewn log cabins... likely built in the early 20th century... the plumbing and fixtures an odd mixture of copper, rubber and steel parts and pieces which the owners have been able to cajole into delivering water and electricity on demand.

At 5:30 a.m. on July 3rd, I reluctantly stuck my head out the warped doorway and through the open and shredded screen. Like “Punxsatwney Phil”, of Groundhog Day fame, I was looking to see if there was some sign of another day of hell-weather. The sky was ambiguous, but the scent was not. My nostrils were assailed by the rich pungent aroma of fresh roasted coffee. There was real caffeine in the air. Not the thin hint of the tepid dark imitation that is served up by most

drip machines, but coffee with the raven darkness of abused motor oil. Tom, like the Pied Piper, was calling all of us coffee loving “rats” out of our lairs with the melody of his brew. He stood upon the dew sodden grass, illuminated by the early hint of dawn with a large, old style pewter espresso coffee pot in hand. I and the other “customers” lined up at his bidding, cups in hand. The tribulations of the prior day were forgotten, and Tom was “one of us”.

The next few days gave me pause to consider the genius of Tom’s foresight. It occurred to me that anyone entering into a social order has a limited number of options with regard to the established group. One may ignore the group, not rejected or rejecting, but never accepted either... a non-person. One may choose to identify oneself to the group by emphasizing the distinctions and differences that exist between the individual and the group. This is a certain recipe for non-acceptance. There is also the less malignant, but no more effective, “I am one of you, but what makes me unique from you is...”. Then there is the “coffee pot”. The foresight to think of the others, to strive to embrace what we have in common, what we share, what we understand.

In our cycling group, we are not lawyers, clergy, doctors, business persons, social workers, retirees... we are people, we are family. Among us we strive to be “we”, “us”, “our”... never “them”, never “they”. So it should be in the human family. It makes it so much easier to help and be helped, to accept and be accepted.

Peter Schloss



The Nine Dollar Haircut

July 12, 2010

Today was hot. No, not just hot, but HOT!

“How hot was it, Pete?”

So hot that the roll of my bicycle wheels gave the continuous sound of separating Velcro as the sun-beaten asphalt reluctantly released its grip, revolution after revolution.

So hot that colors appeared bleached into the dull grey of sepia photos by the arc-welder brightness of the midday sun.

So hot that...

Prudently, we awoke early and had the vans packed with our luggage by 6 a.m.. Arrangements had been made with a local diner in Norton, Kansas to accommodate the 17 of us for an early breakfast. The goal was to eat, and then be on the road, via US 36, to Smith Center, Kansas, by 7 a.m.. 61 miles separated these towns, and the prediction was for the temperature to break the century mark by 2 p.m.. Mercifully, the headwinds of the prior day had moderated into tolerable side winds that had the intermittent character of gusts from the mouth of a blast furnace.

We arrived in Smith Center shortly after noon. Our motel, The Buckshot Inn, was cast in the mold of countless motels that sprang up in the heyday of the old US Highway system. As with its more famous sibling, “Route 66”, US 36 was once a primary link for commerce and travel across the United States. These roads, wonders of the 1930’s and 40’s, have long been eclipsed by President Eisenhower’s visionary network of Interstate Highways. US 36 is now mostly frequented by local travelers, huge, lumbering farm combines, and today by our bicycles. Most of the motels are gone, but the ramshackle remains of some are still visible as ghostly reminders of an earlier era. The Buckshot Inn survives, and thrives, thanks to the attention, care, and maintenance of its owners. To our great delight, the one story line of rooms faced across the parking spaces and a small yard to a blue turquoise concrete swimming pool. The crystal clear water invited us to make its depths our first non-cycling activity of the day.

Refreshed, our focus shifted to finding a late lunch. The urgency of the morning’s ride had caused us to skip our usual meal break. Christine and I went into the old downtown area to seek a diner.

Downtown Smith Center is not dead, but like many historic central business districts, it is not well. The two and three story brick and stone structures harken to a time when a building’s name and year of “birth” were prominently displayed at the top and on the cornerstone. One such building in Smith Center is the Shite Building, 1888. Another, The First National Bank building, displayed “Founded 1886, Erected 1930”. That was a tough year to build a bank, but clearly The First National Bank had successfully weathered the adversity of the Depression. Faded paint indicated the character of some of the long gone businesses. Much of the former commerce has been replaced by antique and second hand stores. A modern addition to the bank facade informed us of the time, 2 p.m., and the temperature, 101.

We ate at the Second Cup Café, where \$6 can still buy you tenderloin with all the trimmings, and a piece of homemade pie... Apple, with Maple flavored crust, fantastic! A patron asked if we were with “the cycling group”, and after a pleasant discussion with her and the café owner, she smiled and gave us a \$5 donation and a “God Bless You”. We left the café and were again assaulted by the wall of heat. Across the street I saw a small faded barber’s pole mounted next to the door of an old and timeworn storefront, “Paul’s Barbershop”. It had been over 6

weeks since my last haircut, and curiosity got the best of me. I crossed the street to peer in the window. Over the years, the glass had lost its clarity, etched by countless dust storms. I shaded my eyes against the glass in order to better see within. I beheld not just a barbershop, but a living “barbershop museum”, with one of our riders, Jeremy, in the barber’s chair.

We entered the shop. It was a “three chair” store, each of which was a creature of cast iron, nickel, porcelain and leather nearly 100 years old. Jeremy was in the center chair, but what immediately drew my eye was that the chair to the left was a fully functional chair, in miniature... the perfect size for a 5 year old and elevated to the perfect height for Paul the Barber. This tonsorial “throne”, fit for any young prince, differed from its larger brothers only in the absence of the long leather razor strops which hung from the full size chairs. “Atmosphere” was provided by a mahogany encased, single dial radio which still used vacuum tubes to amplify the broadcast signal. An older console version stood near the back of the store. Perhaps Paul could no longer locate the parts to keep it in service. The service counter displayed bottles of men’s grooming products such as Vitalis Hair Tonic, Krew-Kut, Hask Hair Tonic, and a few other such brands that I had thought long extinct. Behind the counter was a very old ornate white and chrome cash register... the kind that shoots little metal “tombstones” up at the sound of a bell to announce the amount of the transaction. I would soon learn that the register remained in use. Then there was Paul, the shops sole proprietor.

I suspect that in Paul’s younger days he had been at least 6 feet tall, but 7 decades and bending over countless heads of hair had taken their toll. As he focused his attention on cutting Jeremy’s hair I noticed a tremor in Paul’s hand that seemed to stop just at the moment the clippers reached their destination. Barbers are observant of people and human nature, and Paul was no exception. He seemed to read my mind and commented in a matter of fact manner that he had suffered a stroke but was able to pursue his calling after only 6 months of recuperation. Paul was confident of his skills to the point that he made jokes... “If I make a mistake, the hair will just grow back”... “If you want something fixed, you can always ride your bikes back here”... Paul and I were amused, Jeremy smiled, but there was just a hint of reserved nervousness in the corner of his mouth. I sensed that my wife, Christine, preferred that we leave my hair to other hands.

Paul put the finishing touches on Jeremy’s hair-cut, and with practiced mastery removed the barber’s cape, shaking the clinging hair to the floor. “That will be nine dollars”, Paul announced. Jeremy and I both must have displayed a micro reaction, as Paul then followed up with, “I could do it cheaper, but only if you fellows pay my bills.” Now, it has probably been over 30 years since I had a \$9.00 haircut, and here Paul had assumed we were suffering sticker shock!

My turn in the chair... Paul went to work as a craftsman should, with calm practiced confidence. We talked as he cut.

“So you fellows are Catholic. Well, I’m Lutheran, which is kind of like Catholic, just simpler.” He stopped and chuckled.

“Was a time there weren’t many Catholics in this area, but there are sure a lot of them now”. He was making a matter of fact observation. There was no animus in the statement.

I asked Paul for a recommendation for a dinner restaurant. “Well, I prefer to eat with Mom (his wife) at home, but I suppose if I had to eat somewhere else it would be Patches or Duffy’s, downtown here.” We ate at Duffy’s, and Paul’s recommendation was spot on.

I learned that Paul and his wife had celebrated 50 years of marriage in June, that they had two daughters and a son, and one grandson. This was his second barber shop and he had been

cutting hair in this second shop since 1962. He confirmed that the chairs, register, and fixtures predated his arrival. It was at this point that Paul became serious. “There have been many people over the years who have offered to buy my chairs, cash register, and other items.” He and “Mom” had talked about it, but it just didn’t seem right. The shop was his business, his life. He just couldn’t see parting with it piecemeal. With sadness he remarked that in front of the shop there once stood a tall barber’s pole that was as old as the shop itself. About 8 years ago some fellows passing through town wanted to buy it. Of course, Paul politely declined to sell. “I was in the shop Saturday, and by Monday the pole was gone. Someone stole my barber pole”. Paul declined to blame “those fellows”, or anyone else. He just remarked, with a hint of sadness, that maybe someone needed it more than he did.

“What do you think?” asked Paul. “About the barber pole?” I replied. “No, the haircut! Is it ok?” I smiled and looked in the cracked and time worn wall mirror at the white skinned border that now separated my bicycle tan from my shortened hairline. “Paul, it looks great!!!” Paul beamed and said, “That will be nine dollars.” I gave him a ten... “Please keep the change”. His smile broadened, broken only by the word, “Thanks!”

As I left the shop I considered that my ten dollars had purchased a haircut, and a moment in the life of a very good and extraordinary man. Smith Center had the fortune of Paul’s good will for over 50 years. “Mom” had enjoyed his love and company for over 50 years. How rich the community, how rich his family. My 15 minutes in his chair were priceless. I wish I could take my grandchildren there... just once. You know, that tonsorial “throne”, fit for any young prince (or princess)... I wonder if children’s haircuts are also nine dollars. Let’s see, that would be \$90.00 plus the tip... What a bargain.

Peter Schloss



Guardian Angels

July 31, 2010

The first portion of the Cycling for Change ride took us from Cape Flattery, Washington... as far northwest as you can go in the 48 States without treading water, to Limon, Colorado. We bicycled approximately 1900 miles in those initial 42 days. Each day was a feast for our senses as Nature overwhelmed us with the grandeur of river-cut gorges, endless green vistas, processions of snowcapped peaks, and the occasional trauma of wind, rain, sleet, and lightning. To awake was to be rewarded by God. Then came Limon...

Before the ride began, I “predicted” to the team that at some point this would become labor. For me that transition occurred as we proceeded east from Colorado Springs and escaped the grasp of the Rocky Mountains. Before us was the seemingly endless, and empty, savanna of eastern Colorado and Kansas. The ride became a grind as our task was to cover large distances, while our resolve was tested by scorching sun, headwinds, and the dull repetitive brownness of the rolling hills. From Limon, Colorado to Atchison, Kansas, we reeled in nearly 550 miles in 7 days. Joes Colorado gave us torrential rains, Norton and Atwood, Kansas, repelled us with head winds, Smith Center, Kansas treated us to a heat index of 114 degrees. Each of these beads in our “bicycling rosary” was connected by the “string” of US Highway 36... a ribbon of asphalt that was more a home for lumbering farm combines and 18 wheelers than to the wispy elegance of an 18 pound bicycle. Our goal was the midpoint homecoming ride from Atchison Kansas to Kansas City... our group would be celebrating the half-way point of our pilgrimage. Christine and I would be greeted by our friends, children, grandchildren, and newest grandson, my namesake, who had been born on June 23rd while we labored over the mountain passes from Virginia City to Cameron, Montana.

I was joined from Atchison by my son-in-law, Nate, and nephew, Phil. Entering Leavenworth, Kansas, we were greeted by over 100 bicyclists who had ridden from Kansas City to meet us the morning of July 17th, and escort us into the city that had not seen us for over 50 days. A lump grew in my throat as a group of riders charged toward me... my cycling buddies, the “Gravy Train”, had turned out to embrace the return of one of their own. I, Nate, Phil, and my “Gravy Train” friends quickly reduced the 30 miles from Leavenworth, Kansas to Parkville, Missouri by a sustained paceline effort of over 23 miles per hour... good by even the “Gravy Train” Sunday morning ride standards. In Parkville I had the additional surprise of being joined by my other son-in-law, Brian. By now the number of cyclists had grown to over 200.

We arrived at Rockhurst University in Kansas City at 1 p.m.. There were paralleled lines of well-wishers, a canopy of balloons, photographers, a band... friends, family, and our grandchildren. The sight of little Peter N. Schloss put me over the emotional edge. It was a homecoming such as sailors returning from sea might have enjoyed in the days of wooden square riggers ships.

We paused in Kansas City for 3 days... too short to feel at home, but long enough to regenerate the pangs of departure. Our grind continued as the next major destination was St. Louis, Missouri. We rode to Sedalia, Missouri on the first day where we picked up the KATY Trail, a “rails to trails” conversion that links Sedalia in the west to St. Charles, Missouri, just 30 miles west of St. Louis. The virtues of the KATY are that it is relatively flat, there are regularly spaced rest stops with toilet facilities, and it is devoid of motorized traffic. However, those virtues come at a price: the KATY is “paved” with hard packed limestone chat, a course sand-like mixture that is like concrete when dry, but spongy when damp. When wet, it sticks to the

wheels of one's bicycle, only to be thrown back upon the rider's legs and bicycle components. When dry, the dust generated by the bicycle's passage seems to mimic the exhaust of a steam locomotive. As luck would have it we had rain the first day, and sauna-like heat and humidity the rest of the passage. We were treated to the entire spectrum of the KATY Trail experience!

My son-in-laws had left us in Kansas City and Sedalia, but my nephew continued with us until Jefferson City. I experienced another sad farewell.

Days and towns continued to roll under my wheels... Clinton, Booneville, Jefferson City, Marthasville, St. Charles, St. Louis, St. Genevieve, and Cape Girardeau, Missouri. Then, in a span of two days we left Missouri, passed through Illinois and Kentucky, and entered Tennessee. Since our departure from Kansas City, we had covered another 600 miles. All connections with "current events" have long been lost. We have no weekends. Each day is a repeat of the prior day. Cycling consumes our waking hours, while the pains of abused muscles and joints intrude upon the sleeping ones. Without question, this is the hardest job I have ever had... and I would not trade it for anything.

On the night of July 30th, in Dyersburg, Tennessee, I walked past one of our two support vans. These vans prominently display our "Cycling for Change" logo, and sponsorship by Catholic Charities. Next to the van was a man who sat astride a tired looking adult tricycle. His baskets held an assortment of "odds and ends" which appeared to be a mixture of personal items, and random finds from a tour of roadside parks. The man, perhaps 40 years old and of African-American descent, wore a turban-like head covering and robes made from rough-spun cotton or burlap. Our eyes met, and without hesitation "Steve" (his real name is unknown to me) asked me if I knew who owned the van. I acknowledged my connection and we spoke briefly of the mission of Cycling for Change. As I left, he asked if it would be ok for him to leave some information on the windshield. I saw no harm and told him that it would be "ok". I thought nothing more of the encounter, and neglected to mention it to the other team members that night.

The next morning, as Christine was unlocking the van, she called my attention to a sheave of folded papers under the windshield wiper. I then remarked that it must be from the man that I encountered the prior evening. Together, we leafed through the papers... "Steve" had left us a tract on poverty in America, a hand written note, and two dollars. He thanked us for our work, and for caring, but he asked for nothing from us. At breakfast I shared my encounter with "Steve" to our group, and one of the riders remarked in humor that maybe he is a "guardian angel". Throughout the ride that day, the irony of "Steve's" kind wishes, and his donation, occupied my thoughts. He lifted my spirits, and the spirits of our group. He gave us perspective for the day and a greater sense of the meaning of what we do. In these ways he was truly a "guardian angel". The impact that he had on us was disproportionate to his humble contribution... a \$10,000.00 donation from a wealthy benefactor would not have eclipsed the value of "Steve's" gift.

My brief encounter with "Steve" has also given me pause to consider the other "Guardian Angels" who have eased our burden with kind words, encouragement, prayers... my mother, my children, my grandchildren, my friends, our segment riders. You "keep an eye on us"... you know who you are. I would list your names, but the peril of an innocent omission is too great... I trust that you know who you are, and that you know that I am thankful to you from the bottom of my heart.

Peter Schloss

Sometimes It Is Not So Simple

August 2, 2010

Today is the scheduled departure of Ben from our group. Ben joined us as a segment rider in Atchison, Kansas, and has ridden nearly 800 miles with us across Missouri, Illinois, Kentucky, and into Memphis, Tennessee. Ben is the youngest (23 years old) rider, and the thinness of his profile suggests that a strong wind would take him and his bicycle skyward. His steady temperament and strong legs quickly made him “one of us”.

Last night Ben asked if I would be willing to ride this morning across the Mississippi River to Arkansas. Even though this is a non-riding day, with a series of Cycling for Change events scheduled in the afternoon, it seemed a fitting way to enjoy one last ride with Ben. He and I were off at 6:30 am. The temperature was already in the mid 80’s, as was the humidity. We navigated a decidedly bicycle “unfriendly” route through industrial Memphis, crossing the Mississippi River on the abandoned (apparently) sidewalk of the I-55 bridge, which seemed paved with broken beer bottles. We ignored a few “keep out” signs on the west river levees, and after hazarding a gravel farm road arrived at a truckstop in West Memphis, Arkansas.

We enjoyed breakfast and the good humor of two waitresses, who knew how to make a couple of spandex clad cyclists blush: “You boys are REAL bikers... we know where your motors are!!”. With breakfast concluded we reversed course, returning to Tennessee. Ben asked if we could detour to see the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis. A quick check of the map confirmed that it would only take us a few miles off our route.

The National Civil Rights Museum is the restored Lorraine Motel, sight of the slaying of the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., by James Earl Ray, on April 4, 1968. I have memories of the black and white television and newspaper images of black men standing over Dr. King, on the motel balcony, pointing in the direction of the shot that had struck him down. As Ben and I turned onto Mulberry Street, we saw the Lorraine. There was the balcony, with a large white wreath marking the place of tragedy. What surprised me were the bright colors of the motel and marquis, aquamarine, red, yellow... cheerfully “retro” like a 1960’s hamburger stand. However, the Lorraine was merely being true to the day that Dr. King was assassinated.

We rode forward, intending to take a few pictures, but on the opposite side of the street was an old table, a folded and faded beach umbrella, and amateur painted signs which proclaimed in large letters, “Boycott the \$10 million dollar James Earl Ray Memorial”, and “22 years, 199 days”. We adjusted our course to get closer to the site of the apparent protest. Jacqueline Smith, a slight built but attractive older black woman was at the table, unpacking some pictures and papers. Frankly, I had expected some kind of white supremacist, to be the engine of protest, not this woman of color. She greeted us, cheerfully asking where we had cycled from. We enjoyed a brief social exchange about bicycling and the weather as she organized pictures of Martin Luther King, and an assortment of memorabilia. I pointed to her signs and asked the simple question, “why”?...

Ms. Smith, in a manner that betrayed years of practiced delivery, explained that she was the last resident of the Lorraine Motel. Pointing across the street she said that it had been her home. She gestured around us and added that this had been her neighborhood. This was where her family and friends once lived. When the Lorraine was converted into a Memorial, she lost her home. When the neighborhood became “gentrified” as the focal point of the Memorial she lost her friends, she lost her neighborhood. Jacqueline Smith lamented that the neighborhood was

now populated by centers of entertainment, dining, and million dollar residences. It was no longer a place for her people, for the people that Dr. King loved and worked to benefit. “Dr. King preached that he tried to be right, he tried to feed the hungry, he tried to cloth the naked, he tried to love and serve humanity”. “There is nothing in what they have done to the Lorraine and my neighborhood that is a tribute to what Dr. King stood for.” Jacqueline Smith has stood on that corner every day to deliver her message, the counterpoint of the National Civil Rights Museum, for 22 years and 199 days.

Ms. Smith and I talked for about 20 minutes. I admitted to her that I planned on returning to tour the Museum later that day, but I thanked her for giving me another perspective. I also promised her that I would share the experience of meeting her.

It seems so simple that the site of the slaying of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. should be dedicated to his memory and his work... until the simplicity is complicated by the reflection that the work of Dr. King was not the erection of monuments and memorials... his work was feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, housing the homeless, serving humanity. Sometimes it is just not as simple as it seems...

If you would like to visit Ms. Smith’s website, it is www.fulfillthedream.net

Peter Schloss



A Painful Reminder

August 6, 2010

At about 9:45 a.m. today, 25 miles north of Vicksburg, Mississippi, John Bodie drove his small pickup truck south on Mississippi Highway 61. John is an older gentleman, who bears a passing resemblance in his face and build to the actor, Ed Asner. John is certainly of retirement age. One of his joys in life is fishing, and on this day he is pulling a trailer and his small green flat-bottomed aluminum fishing boat. Here the highway closely follows the course of the Mississippi River. It is a warm day, hot by usual standards, but only warm by the measure of the last few days. Highway 61 is a typical secondary highway in Mississippi, two undivided lanes of concrete and asphalt with only a narrow unpaved shoulder of gravel and debris. The speed limit is 65 miles per hour, but it is not uncommon for passenger cars, logging trucks and farm semis to push the limit a bit. As John navigates a long bend in the road, his attention is drawn to a line of similarly clad bicyclists. John's pulse quickens as he maneuvers his truck and trailer into the oncoming lane in order to provide a margin of safety for the cyclists. He looks into his rear view mirror and is haunted by the face of the lead cyclist... it has been over 20 years. "Don't let it happen to them." he thinks, over and over. John begins to look for a place to safely pull off the road. He feels compelled to act by a ghost from his past... a painful reminder.

As I lead our line of cyclists south on Mississippi Highway 61 a small, older pickup truck, pulling a fishing boat passed us on our left. This courteous driver had given us more room than most drivers, which was especially noteworthy on this well traveled but narrow stretch of highway. On highway 61 we are denied the refuge of even a small shoulder at the side of the road. A few minutes later I see that the truck, boat and trailer have come to a stop on a flat area of grass far to the right of the roadway. The driver, a heavily built older man, wears loose fitting faded jeans, an equally faded western style shirt and a sweat stained wide brimmed straw farmer's hat. He stands next to the driver's side of his vehicle. He is flagging us down... I am the first to come to rest next to him. Is he in trouble? Is his scowl a sign that he angry with us? His face gives no further clues. His wide hand tooled leather belt has multiple images of the Confederate "Stars and Bars"... I am apprehensive.

John addresses the cyclists. "I saw you all, and I just had to stop. You see, around 1987 I was driving my semi, loaded with grain. I had a new installed canvas tarpaulin cover over my load. I saw a bicyclist who was dressed just like you all and as I passed him..." Here John hesitates, draws a deep breath and looks directly into the eyes of the lead rider. "Well, as I passed him, the cover and frame over my load tore off and struck that boy in the head... he wasn't wearing a helmet like you all, but I doubt that it would have done him any good. He was struck in the head and he died." Another deep breath and John's eyes intensify their focus on the lead rider. "Please, please, please be careful."

The driver handed me a simple white business card, "John H. Bodie, trucking". He took my hand and held it longer than is common for most handshakes. I said that I would be careful... my words were repeated by the other cyclists. There was relief in the way that John's brow relaxed and his hard eyes grew kinder. He got back into his truck and repeated to all of us, "Please be careful"... Another embrace of my hand through the open window of his truck, and we parted. John's painful memory returned to his past, and became a part of ours.

Peter Schloss

Seven Seatbelts for Angola

August 10, 2010

At 3 p.m. on August 9, 2010, the Cycling for Change contingent neared the end of our 20 minute ride, destination the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola. This afternoon we had exchanged bicycles for a school bus. Our group was augmented by representatives of Catholic Charities of Baton Rouge, the driver, Mr. Washington, and Brad the prison chaplain.

It has been decades since I have ridden in one of these ugly yellow steel sausages. Not much has changed over the last 40 years in “busland”... while other passenger vehicles are easily placed in their eras of creation, the ubiquitous school bus is “timeless”. The grunts of our members in the back of the bus tell me that engineers have never figured out how to keep the rear axle from amplifying road irregularities into an amusement park ride. Careful examination does disclose a few changes and one major improvement. The roof has two escape hatches. Apparently, children in my day were smaller and better able to wiggle out the windows in the event of a rollover. Maybe if they bring PE back into our schools? The steel hand bars on the back of every seat are gone. They were notorious for being located precisely at tooth level in the “good old days”. This modification and the introduction of fluoride into the water have done much to improve dental health in our country. The improvement; AIR CONDITIONING!

It is 100 degrees outside. Factor in the humidity and that number exceeds 110. The sun is relentless, coating its unshaded victims like molten glass. Our bus briefly stops under a corrugated canopy, and after a guard takes a headcount and examines our picture ID’s the gate opens and the creaks of the buses undercarriage (another thing unchanged) announce that we are proceeding into the prison grounds.

Angola is unlike any other prison. It was created from 3 former antebellum plantations and encompasses 18,000 acres, roughly the size of Manhattan Island in New York. The Mississippi River, which is nearing the end of its 2,300 mile journey, forms an imposing natural barrier on three sides of Angola. The fourth side lacks a perimeter fence as the dense mosquito infested woods are considered enough of a deterrent to escape attempts. Brad comments that the last fellow to try his hand at “the woods” emerged to surrender himself after 5 days, nearly eaten alive by the bugs.

There are no imposing walls, no medieval looking stone structures. Located here and there in Angola are razor wire enclosed “camps”. These are self contained penal complexes of varying size, each one holding a portion of the total inmate population. Brad tells us that there are just under 5,000 offenders, and then corrects himself stating that with the addition of the newest camp the number has grown to nearly 5,200. Camps are designated by letter... Camp “A”, Camp “B”, and so on. We learn that Camp “J” is the discipline Camp... a jail within the Prison housing around 600 offenders who present special problems and risks. That is really significant since 98% of the entire offender population of Angola will ultimately die in Angola.

If Louisiana’s prison needs grow, it is a simple matter to build additional camps at Angola. The spacious grounds look vacant, each camp appearing as a distant community, separated by flat expanses of farmland. Angola is, in fact, one of only three agricultural prisons in the United States. There are miles of row crops, vegetable farms, 3,500 head of cattle, and one of the largest horse husbandry stables in the Country. This prison feeds itself, and provides most of the animals used by law enforcement for mounted patrols in America. Inmates are the sole source of labor on these grounds, and with the exception of the medically, mentally, or behaviorally unfit, every inmate has a job. The grounds are impeccable. There are decorative

flower gardens, neatly trimmed right of ways, pristine white cattle fencing. This could easily be Churchill Downs if there were only more trees and a racetrack.

Brad conducts our driving tour of Angola, directing Mr. Washington on where to turn and when to make stops. Brad is a curiosity in his own right. He is a man/boy of 27, married and father of two small children, his baby face and soft eyes seem ill-suited for a chaplain who ministers to the spiritual needs of one of the “hardest” congregations imaginable. Brad is a big man, a very big man, who turned down a major college football scholarship in favor of the seminary and God’s calling. As Brad talks about Angola and its residents there is obvious love and respect for the population. God chose well.

Brad speaks with pride of the reforms that have occurred at Angola over the last 30 years. Gone are the days of the “hot boxes”. Inmates are provided with a well conceived system of freedoms, privileges, and incentives. He reports that prison gang activity has been largely eliminated. Serious inmate on inmate violence has been reduced from over 500 incidents per year to less than 100 occurrences annually. Offenders have opportunities to advance their education with GED classes and college courses taught by volunteers from local colleges and even Loyola University. Inmates eagerly seek to take advantage of those programs, even if they will never have the opportunity to use the knowledge in the free world.

As we proceed down one of the flat, ruler straight roads, Brad instructs Mr. Washington to stop at the small one story concrete structure ahead on the left. This is the “Red Hat Cellblock”.

Angola’s Warden, Burl Cain, is credited with many of the reforms and improvements at Angola. Perhaps he subscribes to the notion that to forget ones history is to risk repeating it. Red Hat was closed during the reforms implemented by a prior Warden in the 1970’s. Rather than level this structure, it was placed on the National Register of Historic Places under Warden Cain’s tenure, as a monument to a penal system of abuse. It is now protected from demolition. Constructed in the 1930’s, Red Hat is a long, narrow, white, single story, single hallway, standalone building surrounded by a tall barbed wire fence. It has 40 small cells, arranged 20 on each side. The corridor runs end to end. Each cell measures approximately 7 feet wide, by 9 feet deep. There was no heat or ventilation except for a small 1 foot by 2 foot barred window near the top of the 10 foot outer wall. Each cell had a single toilet to serve the needs of the 8 to 12 occupants. Brad reported that one of the cells housed an inmate who was renowned for his repeated escape attempts. That inmate became the solitary resident of one of the Red Hat cells, his cell door being welded closed for over 7 years until near the time that he died.

The grounds surrounding Red Hat are desolate and forsaken. At the rear of the Red Hat cellblock is a large rusted engine powered electric generator. Wires still run from the generator toward a side room of Red Hat, the sole purpose being the delivery of a massive surge of electrical energy into the hand and foot restraints of a wooden chair within its chamber. Within that room the original, but now rusted, three blade switchbox rests detached from its wires on the floor. There is a replica of the original chair in place, but the room is otherwise more alike a room in a long abandoned farmhouse... holes in the walls and ceiling, cobwebs, mud wasps flying about. Returning to the bus we leave Red Hat, but the images of Red Hat will never leave us.

Before proceeding on to Mass and dinner with inmates at the Prison’s main Chapel, we arrive at the last stop of our tour. The bus pulls into a parking lot. In contrast with our experience at Red Hat, there is a well maintained parking lot. The grass is trimmed with the precision of a golf course putting green. Flowering shrubs abound in front of and on the sides of a newer single

story white building. There is no fence but the pastel colored exterior and interior doors all have curiously large locks, the kind that take keys which are the size of those made for a toddler's play. We are greeted by uniformed prison staff, and Brad is addressed by name. We proceed into a larger group room that has 5 or 6 large round dining tables. The brightly painted cement block walls are decorated by two large oil paintings. They are both well executed scenes from the Bible's Old Testament; Daniel in the den of lions, and Elijah riding a chariot to Heaven. Brad makes a brief presentation before leading us down a corridor and through another door. We enter. On my right is an opened door and through that door I see that there are two small adjoining rooms which are separated from each other by a sliding wood paneled door. Each of these rooms has two rows of short but comfortable wood and leather chairs, the kind that might be found around an office conference table. I notice that one of these two rooms is slightly smaller and contains fewer chairs than the other. The chairs in both rooms are arranged to all face the large picture windows that look into our destination room. Each room has a loudspeaker above the glass.

We enter the destination room, silenced as the air is emotionally pulled from our lungs. In the center of the ceramic tiled floor is a single cruciform bed upon a metal pedestal. It is constructed of white enameled steel, thin black vinyl pads cover the top and the arms which extend to the sides. Without instruction we arrange ourselves around the perimeter of this room which measures approximately 14 feet on each side. Near the head of the bed is a small window of one way glass which conceals its interior. The only connection between those persons or things within that room and the room in which we stand is a circular 4 inch port. At the left arm of the bed are two identical red wall telephones. Although they each have a touchpad "dial", we are given to understand that one is connected to the State Superintendent of Corrections and the other to the office of the Governor of Louisiana. At the right arm of the bed are the two picture windows. These windows are crystal clear and provide us with an unimpeded view of the unoccupied wood and leather chairs. Lighting on the white ceiling, 12 feet above the bed, is furnished by 4 fluorescent light fixtures. The light is harsh even though the fixture lenses are browned with age. Harsh as the light is, for some in the past it might have been easier to gaze into those fixtures than into the adjoining rooms, or upon the large round clock face that is above the two red telephones. I think to myself... "Let those who enter here abandon all hope."

This is a foreign place. It is a place where few have ever been. It is a place where fewer have left alive than have entered. We are given 5 senses to know our surroundings, but here our nature resists the use of our senses. The only sounds of this place are those that we make by our presence. There are no smells. There is nothing within for the preservation of life, nothing to taste, nothing to drink. None of us touch the bed even though there is nothing to prevent it. What we know is delivered in stark clarity by our eyes. What our eyes disclose is all strange, unfamiliar, not a part of our prior experiences... except there, lying upon the cruciform bed I see and I understand the sad irony...

About 20 years ago, somewhere in this country or another, there is a factory. Within that factory a worker stands at his or her duty station. It is a day like any other for that person. Perhaps the worker takes a little pride in the knowledge that the otherwise simple task being performed results in the saving of countless lives every day, the avoidance of serious injury, the enhancement of safety and security for thousands of people. On that day the worker carefully selects and packages 7 seatbelts, and addresses the shipping label; Louisiana State Penitentiary, Angola.

Peter Schloss

Moments and Memories: #1 Daily Mass

August 17, 2010

My good friend and former neighbor, Jane, has been following our bicycling journey on “Facebook” throughout the last four thousand miles. Realizing that we are down to the final thousand miles, and that we have entered our final State, she suggested that I might write a “top 10 list” of my favorite moments and memories. Jane really got me to thinking... In the incredible complexity and fullness of our experiences, how could I possibly pick the “10 best”? I have come to the conclusion that I cannot. As soon as I make such a list, I will think of some other encounter that also deserves to be on the list. I suspect that processing my experiences from Cycling for Change will continue for the rest of my life. However, I like Jane’s idea a lot. I know this because I began to muse about experiences that I might put on the “list”... consumed my thoughts through much of today’s ride. Therefore, I have decided to write some reflections of moments and memories that stand out as special in my experience. I may or may not make it to “10”. I may go beyond that number. There is no significance to the order in which I present these reflections. I consider them all important to the experience that I have been privileged to be a part of. Here is my first such reflection.

Daily Mass

Our ride, 100 days long, corresponds with the 100th anniversary of our sponsor, Catholic Charities, USA. In Kansas City, 70 percent of the beneficiaries of the services provided by Catholic Charities are not Catholic. Cycling for Change has not been a pulpit to seek conversions to my faith... frankly I am very comfortable with others practicing their faiths, Christian and otherwise. I hope that others have no objection to me practicing mine. I have never considered myself rigid in the practice or practices of my faith, but Catholicism is the faith of my birth, the faith of my roots, the “Faith of My Father” (and Mother, and grandparents...). At the urging of my Mother, I was an altarboy for much of my childhood. I once toyed with the idea of being a priest, and I would have probably been happy in that life. The richness of my married life, the joys of being a father and a grandfather stand as testament that I have walked the correct path.

There have been periods in my life that I skipped out on the formal practice of my religion... my rebellious late teens stand out in my mind. I have not attended daily Mass since my days as an altarboy. I still consider daily church attendance as a bit extreme, but blessings upon those who can do it! One of the commitments that I made in being a member of Cycling for Change was to participate in a tradition of daily Mass in the course of “the ride”. Daily Mass was the first thing to make my “list” of memories as it has become so fundamental to the experiences that we riders share.

We have celebrated Mass in churches, Cathedrals, and Basilicas. We have also held Mass in trailers, college dorms, and motel rooms. Mass usually occurs around 5 p.m., after our ride has concluded, we have showered, and we have had an opportunity to relax. Mass is usually followed immediately by dinner. For me, the most memorable of these Masses have been those

conducted in our motel rooms. Our celebrant of these Masses has almost always been our co-rider, Father Matthew Ruhl, SJ.

I imagine the Last Supper as a gathering of friends, crowded into an upper room. I envision Christ and his Disciples meeting as a “family”... people who have shared the same experiences, joys, and hardships. Our daily Masses mirror my imagination of the First Eucharist. We are friends who have shared trials, both physical and emotional. Matt sets up a makeshift altar, usually using a nightstand or coffee table. He has a small traveling “kit” which includes a simple green stole that he wears around his neck as a vestment, much like a very narrow scarf. It is handmade and of coarse cloth in the fashion of a Native American weaving. Matt also has a small brass Chalice, Crucifix, and a single clear glass votive candle. His makeshift altar reminds me of worship conducted by Chaplains under fire at the front lines of the Second World War. The Mass is quite short, usually lasting only 25 minutes. It is shorn of pomp and ceremony which are common to many Sunday services. However, any vacuum created by the absence of such ceremony is more than filled by the Spirit. All the necessary portions of a Mass are present, and conducted with solemnity.

We look forward to these Masses as one would look forward to dinner with the family you love. The readings from the Old Testament and the Epistles are presented by one of the cyclists. Matt reads the Gospel and then delivers a short homily, usually less than 5 minutes long. What his sermons lack in length, they more than make up in depth. The message often focuses upon an experience we have shared that day that is relevant to the scripture readings. As an example, today the Gospel was from Matthew, where Christ explains that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a wealthy person to attain salvation. Matt pointed out that for the last 82 days we have lived under very austere circumstances. Our day is focused on the ride, and at the end of the day, dirty, hungry and tired, we are happy and satisfied to have a shower, a meal, and a bed. No one is craving any “luxuries” that Madison Avenue may say that we “need”. Matt adds, “Humans have the right to expect those basic comforts... a meaningful job, a shower, a meal, a bed.” “When Christ said we are commanded to love our neighbor he was quite specific... feed the hungry, cloth the naked, tend to the sick...”. As a society and as individuals we have a duty to provide these things to “our neighbors”.

In the course of Mass we join hands around the room for the Lord’s Prayer. We then offer each other a sign of peace. Initially this was a handshake, but it quickly became a hug. This part of the Mass continues until each of us has exchanged such a greeting with every other person present. This is not an obligation, but it has become our practice. Communion is distributed from member to member both in the form of bread and wine, much as a family passes food at the dinner table. These actions are simple, common, yet sacramental.

No matter what may have occurred in the day, the 25 minute celebration of Christ’s sacrifice brings us together, centers us, and refreshes us spiritually. The powerful simplicity of this daily part of the bicycle ride across the United States will remain one of my fondest memories.

Peter Schloss

Moments and Memories: #2 Angola's Lethal Injection Chamber

August 19, 2010

One of the most poignant experiences of “The Ride”, and my life, was the 15 minutes that I spent in the Lethal Injection Chamber at Angola State Penitentiary, Louisiana. It was part of the tour that we were privileged to have of the infamous Angola Prison. My reflections on that entire visit are contained in my lengthy Facebook “Note”, Seven Seatbelts for Angola, which can still be accessed and read. Of the entire visit, however, my thoughts often return to those minutes spent in the execution chamber... an execution chamber that is still in use, an execution chamber with a current “waiting list” of 84 men.

I will draw from my earlier note to describe my experience in the execution chamber. However, if I only present the impressions of that quarter hour, then I will deny you the broader impact of that experience in the context of “Cycling for Change”.

Our tour of the Angola Prison was conducted on the afternoon of August 9, 2010. Near the end of our tour we arrived at the last stop. We exited our bus in a well maintained parking lot. The grass was trimmed with the precision of a golf course putting green. Flowering shrubs decorated the front and sides of a newer single story white building. There was no fence but the pastel trimmed structure and interior doors all had those curiously large locks, the kind that take keys which are the size of those made for a toddler's play. We were greeted by uniformed prison staff, and Brad, the Prison Chaplain who conducted our tour, was addressed by name. We proceeded into a large group room that had 5 or 6 large round dining tables. The brightly painted cement block walls were decorated by two large oil paintings. They were both well executed scenes from the Bible's Old Testament; Daniel in the den of lions, and Elijah riding a chariot to Heaven. Brad led us down a corridor and through another door. We entered. On my right was an opened door and through that door I could see two small adjoining rooms which were separated from each other by a sliding wood paneled door. Each of those rooms had two rows of short but comfortable wood and leather chairs, the kind that might be found around an office conference table. One of the two rooms was slightly smaller and contained fewer chairs than the other. The chairs in both rooms were arranged to all face the large picture windows that looked into our destination room. Each room had a loudspeaker above the glass.

We entered the destination room, silenced as the air was emotionally pulled from our lungs. In the center of the ceramic tiled floor was a single cruciform bed upon a metal pedestal. It was constructed of white enameled steel, thin black vinyl pads covered the top and the arms which extended to the sides. We arranged ourselves around the perimeter of the room which measured approximately 14 feet on each side. Near the head of the bed was a small window of one way glass which concealed its interior. The only connection between those persons or things within that room and the room in which we stood was a circular 4 inch port. At the left arm of the bed were two identical red wall telephones. Although they each have a touchpad “dial”, we were told that one was connected to the State Superintendent of Corrections and the other directly to the office of the Governor of Louisiana. At the right arm of the bed were the two

picture windows. These windows were crystal clear and provided us with an unimpeded view of the unoccupied wood and leather chairs. Lighting on the white ceiling, 12 feet above the bed, was furnished by 4 fluorescent light fixtures. The light was harsh even though the fixture lenses are browned with age. Harsh as the light was, it might have been easier for the condemned to gaze into those fixtures than into the adjoining rooms, or upon the large round clock face above the two red telephones. I thought to myself... "Let those who enter here abandon all hope."

It was a foreign place... A place where few have ever been, and fewer have left alive than have entered. We are given 5 senses to know our surroundings, but in that room our nature resisted the use of our senses. The only sounds of that place were those that we made by our presence. There were no smells. There was nothing within for the preservation of life except the air that we breathed. There was nothing to taste, nothing to drink. None of us touched the bed even though there was nothing to prevent it. What we knew was delivered in stark clarity by our eyes. What our eyes disclosed was strange, unfamiliar, not a part of our prior experience... except that I saw lying upon the cruciform bed the seven ordinary seatbelts used to restrain the prisoner. It is ironic that the ubiquitous seatbelt has become synonymous with the saving of life, the enhancement of safety and security... Here, some might argue that these seven seatbelts fulfill that function for society. Others may disagree.

EPILOGUE:

In 2009 over one million abortions were performed in the United States. There were 52 State sanctioned executions in the United States that year. People proclaiming the Right to Life rally and picket against abortion, yet may or may not object to the death penalty. The Right to Life is not limited to the right to one's first or last breath of air. It is often overlooked that the infant should also have the right to enjoy a quality of life that includes adequate food, an education, health care, shelter. In the absence of these things the value of that life is diminished... The likelihood of the child growing into a life of crime is enhanced. In the United States there are 40 million men, women, and children who lack these basic necessities. One third of the homeless in this country are veterans. 20 percent of the homeless are children. Poverty is a Right to Life issue.

Peter Schloss

Moments and Memories: #3 You, Our Guardian Angels

August 21, 2010

As a child, my Mother often spoke to me of my Guardian Angel. I vividly recall a large framed but faded print of a Guardian Angel which hung over the bed at my Grandmother's home. It was a classic 19th century image which depicted a young boy and girl, crossing a chasm over a dangerous bridge. Hovering over them was a young woman in the form of an angel, watchful to their needs. As an adult, I am still comforted by the thought that there are beneficent and watchful "others" who help me through the pitfalls and perils of the day. I imagine in the role those that I love, but who have left this life before me. I imagine the Guardian Angel of my childhood.

We have now covered nearly 4300 miles of our bicycle journey. Throughout the course of our travels we have experienced extreme weather, dangerous roads, and the perils of huge trucks passing within mere feet of us, at expressway speeds. It seems a miracle that we have suffered no serious injuries or mishap. To be sure, there have been countless flat tires (I have had ONE!), but then that is another kind of "holy". I do find some comfort in my childhood and adult concepts of a Guardian Angel...

We have other "Guardian Angels" as well. These are the people who have offered prayers for our safety. They are the friends and family who have given us support and encouragement. Even those who just keep an eye on our progress are our Guardian Angels. On Facebook, these are the people who post comments, or who occasionally hit the "like" button. You are the people who have given us an emotional push when our spirits were down and our muscles were sore. We know that many of you watch over our progress, silent and unseen... many of you we have never met. We appreciate you more than you know. You know who you are, because you are reading these words.

I don't think that my spiritual Guardian Angels have ever posted a "Comment", or hit the "Like" button on Facebook, but many of you have. For me and for my fellow riders, we say "Thank you"... even if you have chosen to watch over us silently, like that Angel in the 19th century painting from my childhood.

Peter Schloss

Moments and Memories: #4 Segment Riders

August 23, 2010

Before the Cycling for Change ride began, the core of our 12 cross country riders and 4 support drivers knew that we would be joined by other bicyclists for portions of our 5,100 mile ride. I had pondered the times that we would be called upon to bring these “others” into our fold. The “segment riders” are people who wholeheartedly embrace our mission to bring greater awareness of the plight of those who live in poverty. However, because of work, family, or other considerations, these riders were unable to assume the obligations of our entire coast to coast journey. I had imagined the challenge for these riders to suddenly appear bags and bicycle in hand, and join 16 people who had evolved their common experiences into understandings that needed no words. Within our core group, we read the shrug of a shoulder, the furl of a brow, the shuffle of a step, as a melody in another member’s day. Sometimes our emotions sing the same song, sometimes another... but almost always with harmony... we are a chorus. Enter these “strangers”, with their unknown voices.

As I near the end of this journey I consider it a privilege to have shared segments of the ride with these dedicated bicyclists. There are so many segment riders that I cannot begin to list all of them. Each of them saw a different portion of our country. Some rode with us for weeks, some for a day. To just list a few:

There was Kristi, already known to us, who has been a St. Francis Xavier “Flying Fish” rider for years. She is a petite young woman who has the heart of a lioness when she is on a bicycle. Many times I have seen the eyes of this young pediatrician sharpen with grim determination as she charges a steep mountain grade into submission. Kristi was our first long segment rider. She was with us for three weeks, from Missoula Montana to Denver. We miss Kristi.

Tom joined us in Rawlins Wyoming, his legendary Coffee Pot in hand. (See my Facebook note, “The Coffee Pot”). Tom had the foresight to use his Espresso maker as a lever into our hearts. Even though he arrived as a stranger, the whiff and taste of his brew on the first morning he awoke in our camp created a lasting bond. I have previously (and accurately) described his coffee as having the raven blackness of abused motor oil. We miss Tom, and his coffee!

In Colorado we were joined by Richard and Bob. They both hail out of St. Louis and are parishioners in the same church. They rode with us from Colorado, across Kansas, on to St. Louis, some of the most challenging days of our passage. Both were dedicated to being physically prepared, but Richard defined a new level of intensity. Prior to joining us he had ridden the same number of miles each day in his home area as we were riding on the road! We miss both of these good gentlemen.

23 year old Ben, all 125 pounds of him, was with us from Atchison Kansas to Memphis Tennessee. I really enjoyed Ben's enthusiasm and spirituality. Early on the morning of his departure from us, he and I shared a bicycling detour across the Mississippi River into Arkansas, and a memorable stop in Memphis at the site where the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated. (See my Facebook note, "Sometimes It's Not So Simple") We miss Ben.

There have been many riders who have joined us for shorter periods, anywhere from an afternoon to a few days. Especially memorable for me were the rides with my two son-in-laws, Nate and Brian. There was a 6 day stretch during which my nephew, Phil, rode with me from Atchison Kansas, through Kansas City, and on to Jefferson City, Missouri. The days I shared with these young men bridged not only miles but generations.

Approximately 200 cyclists joined us from Leavenworth Kansas, into Kansas City, Missouri, as part of our mid-point celebration. From my vantage point on the road their colorful jerseys were visible for as far as I could see. We were graced by a group of 15 riders who joined us in our passage across Missouri via the Katy Trail. One of those riders was Barry, who I had not seen in over 15 years. It was wonderful to learn that life and bicycling had both treated him well. There were riders in Tennessee, Kentucky, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Florida. We were joined by riders in Colorado, including a cadre of "adapted" cyclists. These are riders with physical "disabilities", who with grit, determination, and creativity, are able to pursue their love of bicycling. Sadly, the day they rode with us in Colorado Springs saw a near record rainfall and the cancellation of a rally which had been arranged on our behalf. We miss all of you. You made fundamental contributions to the mission of Cycling for Change. I wish I could honor all of you by name, but just to name a few: Allen, Jim, David, Mark, Tim, Robbie, Carrie, Kari, Dan, Elizabeth, Milwaukee Tom, Kyla, Ed, Chris, Michael, Robert, Paul, Bob, Jonathan, "The Gravy Train Riders"...

Thank you all, named and unnamed in this "note", for not only sharing our experience, but making it richer through your presence and participation. We miss you all!!!

Peter Schloss



Things I have Learned That Have Nothing To Do With Poverty

August 27, 2010

We have 6 bicycling days left and we have covered 4,600 miles in the last 92 days. There are about 400 miles left. We have all begun to wax a bit philosophical in our pre-finished musings. I have been asked many times during this ride, “So Pete, what have you learn while on this bicycle ride?” Inevitably, the question refers to issues concerning poverty in the United States. However, it has occurred to me that our experiences this summer have gifted us with a significant fund of knowledge that has nothing to do with poverty. I apologize in advance, the following list is not organized in any particular fashion... instead, it is a “stream of consciousness” product. Also, if an entry offends or is TMI (too much information), then please don’t deny yourself the accumulated wisdom contained in the remaining entries... This is knowledge acquired in the course of approximately 9 million peddle revolutions (honest!). So, here we go....

1. It takes approximately 1000 miles to begin to form an appreciation for the finer points of road kill. By 3000 miles one becomes a connoisseur.
2. It is impossible to have empathy for a dead armadillo.
3. The “Warning, Bear Crossing” signs in Florida are much larger than they are in Montana. (Perhaps because they don’t need as many of them in Florida)
4. There are proliferations of “evacuation route signs” in Washington (tsunamis and earthquakes), and in Florida (hurricanes). So why do people speak fondly of living in either of these places?
5. Nuns actually can have a sense of humor: Nun at St. Gertrude’s Monastery to Karl (a rider in our group), “Why does a milking stool have only three legs? The Cow has the udder one.” The Sister laughed so hard at her joke that we thought she might pass out.
6. Either by luck or design, a regular tube of toothpaste will last the average adult for an entire summer. Ditto with 125 yards of tooth floss.
7. It is possible for a man (I can’t speak for the other half of humanity) to get through a summer on 4 pair of underwear without resorting to wearing them inside out or backwards.
8. A Catholic Church that does not have a Parish Hall is not Catholic.
9. One should not refer to the wives of the Knights of Columbus members as “Ladies of the Knights”.

10. Two of the most popular brands of long distance, flat resistant, bicycle tires are named after two of the most popular species of road kill: “Armadillos”, and “Gator Skins”. Go figure...
11. There is a very popular product that long distance cyclists use to avoid chaffing of their “precious parts”, called Chamois Butter, but more commonly referred to by cyclists as “Butt Butter”. It is sold in small squeeze tubes and has a graphically interesting image of a cyclist’s derriere:
 - a. It is unwise and unhealthy to leave one of these packs laying out in plain view in most bars or saloons west of Denver Colorado.
 - b. In a discussion with a group of experienced cyclists, if one (with a perfectly serious demeanor) says he finds that “Butt Butter” takes too long to dissolve in his water bottle, it is highly likely that no one will correct him on the products proper use and application.
 - c. When giving an inexperienced rider a tube of “Butt Butter”, in anticipation that the rider will be cycling longer than he ever has before... don’t forget to tell the cyclist that a tube is typically good for 3-5 days of use. Failure to include this advice will result in the cyclist having difficulty remaining firmly planted on this bike the next day.
12. Even though Lasagna is known for its simplicity of ingredients and preparation, it remains probable that after having eaten it in 17 different parish halls and in 17 different formulations, the 18th parish hall will yet have another formulation as unique as the prior 17.
13. Whoever initiated or perpetuated the advice to well meaning pot-luck supper chefs that “Cyclists need pasta”... should be shot.
14. The creativity of the brand name of a craft/micro beer is frequently in an inverse relation to the quality of its taste. In any case, after drinking a few it really becomes irrelevant. Just some examples (of really good beer) from this journey: Moose Drool Beer, Dog Fish Head Beer, Fat Tire Ale, Arrogant Bastard Ale, Delirium Tremens Ale. With names like these, who needs “Lite”!
15. First: NEVER trust your luck to a motel that includes “Best Value” in its name. Second, IF at an alternate establishment you ask for the room rate and the clerk first gives you an hourly rate, and then a weekly rate, but can’t give a day rate without having to make a call, then you just might have a reason to go back to “...Best Value...”.
16. The amount of fun that one can have with a one dollar bag of plastic cockroaches, at the expense of one’s fellow bicyclists, is limited only by one’s imagination.
17. Dorothy was right; there is no place like home.

Peter Schloss

C4C, An Epilogue

September 10, 2010

On September 4th, 12:45 p.m. EST, the Cycling for Change team reached the southern most tip of the 48 contiguous United States, Key West, Florida. This was the physical conclusion of a 100 day, 5,000 mile bicycle journey that began May 29th at Cape Flattery, Washington, the northwestern extreme of the 48 States.

I know what we did, but what we accomplished is not immediately knowable. Did we have a lasting impact on public and individual awareness about poverty in this country? Will our own lives reflect a change due to this experience? Were the lives of others improved by our ride? Certainly we raised a substantial fund for programs here and in other communities. I am satisfied to know what we did, and to let others decide what we accomplished.

The journey gave us a microscopic view of a line drawn by our travels across the United States, a connect the dots puzzle where the dots are the many communities that we rode through and the people we visited. We directly experienced the changes in topography, climate, and attitudes. The world was around us. The world embraced us. I had become emotionally co-dependant on the intimate features of this three dimensional world which I viewed on a 360 degree screen. As I looked out of the port hole like window of my flight back to Kansas City on September 6th, I saw the same land that I had crossed on a bicycle, but it was smooth and almost featureless with a horizon that hinted at the curvature of the earth. It was devoid of the familiar icons of my bicycle experience. The magic of my emotional attachment to the earth was 32,000 feet below, and moving at a bicycle's pace. I was insulated from people and places. My return trip was hardly a journey as the 4 hour flight made a mockery of one half of the bicycle passage.



16 of us set out on May 25th. 16 of us exchanged tearful embraces of gratitude on September 4th. However, our experiences of C4C are uniquely individual and personal. We had each pursued preparations for C4C in our own way. Some preparations were collaborative, such as the development of the route and the preparation of equipment. Other matters were consciously individual such as arrangements with work, households, family, pets. We each unconsciously developed expectations of what lay ahead. For those of us who tend to

think in pictures, the mental images developed and changed over the course of months and for

some, over a span of years. For those of us who think in terms of dynamic interaction, our pre-ride thoughts were scripts under constant revision.

On May 29th two vans and an SUV arrived at a parking lot in a heavily wooded area of northwest Washington. Doors opened and 16 people emerged. 12 of us wore bicycle attire, supplemented by foul weather gear appropriate for riding. The grey sky pressed down upon us with a cold and clammy hand so thick that the air left water on everything that it touched. Bicycles were removed from the trailer and assembled. Air was pumped into tires. Scattered dialogues



occurred among the riders and support people. This was a scene which would become ritual and play out countless times over the next 100 days. The images of anticipation and the scripts of expectation were overwritten by the real experience which was unfolding for each of us.

The bicycle journey began with a quarter mile walk on a moss slickened boardwalk through the pillar like trees of a dense old growth forest. The walk was rendered hazardous by our non-pedestrian footwear. The bicycles remained at the parking lot as the sounds of our procession, amplified by the stiff water resistant clothing we each wore, continued toward the trail's end.



We gradually became aware of other sounds, sounds of the sea, intruding into the woods. Our arrival at the Cape was sudden and dramatic. The woods ended abruptly while the walkway continued another 60 feet to a platform that hung upon a cliff overlooking the Pacific Ocean. 100 feet below us was an explosion of waves and foam. The battle of water against stone was a clash of titans that had triggered Homer's imagination over two millennia ago, and now held my mind in its grasp. Looking west I imagined that the small rocky island that I

saw was the only land that separated me from the other side of the Earth. To my back, thousands of miles east, was another ocean and another world. Our bridges to that other place were fragile creations of metal and carbon fiber, which would be powered by muscle, bone, sinew, and at times by force of will.



The hypnosis of the Cape wore off enough for the first cameras to emerge and preserve the moment. We posed for one another in groups of two and three. There was mounting adrenaline driven excitement as a banner was unfurled. We assembled behind the banner and faced east toward our future. We each knew what we hoped to

do, and what we hoped to accomplish. Our commitment could be read upon our faces and in our hands as the banner announced: “This is the Beginning of the End of Poverty, Cycling for Change”.

Peter Schloss



Cycling For Change Travel Itinerary and Calendar

Day	Date	Origin	Destination	Mileage	Day #
Saturday	05/29/10	Cape Flattery, WA	Clallam Bay, WA	26	1
Sunday	05/30/10	Clallam Bay, WA	Port Angeles, WA	50	2
Monday	05/31/10	Port Angeles, WA	Kingston, WA (Edmonds)	63	3
Tuesday	06/01/10	Edmonds, WA	Seattle, WA	20	4
Wednesday	06/02/10	Seattle, WA	Yelm, WA	66	5
Thursday	06/03/10	Yelm, WA	Castle Rock, WA	65	6
Friday	06/04/11	Castle Rock, WA	Portland, OR	61	7
Saturday	06/05/10	Non-Cycling Day			8
Sunday	06/06/10	Portland, OR	Hood River, OR	69	9
Monday	06/07/10	Hood River, OR	Biggs Junction, OR	47	10
Tuesday	06/08/10	Biggs Junction, OR	Umatilla, OR	86	11
Wednesday	06/09/10	Umatilla, OR	Walla Walla, WA	56	12
Thursday	06/10/10	Walla Walla, WA	Pomeroy, WA	65	13
Friday	06/11/11	Pomeroy, WA	Clarkston/Lewiston, ID	34	14
Saturday	06/12/10	Non-Cycling Day			15
Sunday	06/13/10	Clarkston/Lewiston, ID	Craigmont, ID	48	16
Monday	06/14/10	Craigmont, ID	Lowell, ID	66	17
Tuesday	06/15/10	Lowell, ID	Lochsa Lodge, ID	64	18
Wednesday	06/16/10	Lochsa Lodge, ID	Missoula, MT	61	19
Thursday	06/17/10	Non-Cycling Day			20
Friday	06/18/10	Missoula, MT	Hamilton, MT	51	21
Saturday	06/19/10	Hamilton, MT	Sula, MT	41	22
Sunday	06/20/10	Sula, MT	Jackson, MT	51	23
Monday	06/21/10	Jackson, MT	Dillon, MT	48	24
Tuesday	06/22/10	Dillon, MT	Ennis, MT	56	25
Wednesday	06/23/10	Ennis, MT	Cameron, MT	53	26
Thursday	06/24/10	Cameron, MT	West Yellowstone, MT	31	27
Friday	06/25/10	Non-Cycling Day			28
Saturday	06/26/10	West Yellowstone, MT	West Thumb, WY	50	29
Sunday	06/27/10	West Thumb, WY	Moran, WY	59	30
Monday	06/28/10	Moran, WY	Dubois, WY	48	31
Tuesday	06/29/10	Dubois, WY	Lander, WY	74	32
Wednesday	06/30/10	Lander, WY	Jeffrey City, WY	58	33
Thursday	07/01/10	Jeffrey City, WY	Rawlins, WY	67	34
Friday	07/02/10	Rawlins, WY	Riverside, WY	61	35
Saturday	07/03/10	Riverside, WY	Gould, CO	70	36
Sunday	07/04/10	Gould, CO	Fort Collins, CO	77	37
Monday	07/05/10	Non-Cycling Day			38
Tuesday	07/06/10	Fort Collins, CO	Denver, CO	61	39
Wednesday	07/07/10	Denver, CO	Castle Rock, CO	36	40
Thursday	07/08/10	Castle Rock, CO	Colorado Springs, CO	45	41
Friday	07/09/10	Colorado Springs, CO	Limon, CO	70	42
Saturday	07/10/10	Byers, CO	Joes, CO	85	43

Sunday	07/11/10	Joes, CO	Atwood, KS	82	44
Monday	07/12/10	Atwood, KS	Norton, KS	61	45
Tuesday	07/13/10	Norton, KS	Smith Center, KS	61	46
Wednesday	07/14/10	Smith Center, KS	Belleville, KS	62	47
Thursday	07/15/10	Belleville, KS	Seneca, KS	84	48
Friday	07/16/10	Seneca, KS	Atchison, KS	31	49
Saturday	07/17/10	Atchison, KS	Kansas City, MO	60	50
Sunday	07/18/10	Non-Cycling Day			51
Monday	07/19/10	Non-Cycling Day			52
Tuesday	07/20/10	Kansas City, MO	Clinton, MO	74	53
Wednesday	07/21/10	Clinton, MO	Booneville, MO	73	54
Thursday	07/22/10	Booneville, MO	N Jefferson City, MO	48	55
Friday	07/23/10	N Jefferson City, MO	Marthasville, MO	65	56
Saturday	07/24/10	Marthasville, MO	St. Charles, MO	38	57
Sunday	07/25/10	St. Charles, MO	St. Louis, MO	25	58
Monday	07/26/10	Non-Cycling Day			59
Tuesday	07/27/10	St. Louis, MO	St. Genevieve, MO	67	60
Wednesday	07/28/10	St. Genevieve, MO	Cape Girardeau, MO	65	61
Thursday	07/29/10	Cape Girardeau, MO	Hickman, KY	79	62
Friday	07/30/10	Hickman, KY	Dyersburg, TN	87	63
Saturday	07/31/10	Dyersburg, TN	Covington, TN	73	64
Sunday	08/01/10	Covington, TN	Memphis, TN	61	65
Monday	08/02/10	Non-Cycling Day			66
Tuesday	08/03/10	Memphis, TN	Lula, MS	58	67
Wednesday	08/04/10	Lula, MS	Rosedale, MS	59	68
Thursday	08/05/10	Rosedale, MS	Lake Washington, MS	63	69
Friday	08/06/10	Lake Washington, MS	Vicksburg, MS	68	70
Saturday	08/07/10	Vicksburg, MS	Natchez, MS	88	71
Sunday	08/08/10	Natchez, MS	St. Francisville, LA	60	72
Monday	08/09/10	St. Francisville, LA	Baton Rouge, LA	31	73
Tuesday	08/10/10	Non-Cycling Day			74
Wednesday	08/11/10	Baton Rouge, LA	Gonzales, LA	50	75
Thursday	08/12/10	Gonzales, LA	New Orleans, LA	50	76
Friday	08/13/10	Non-Cycling Day			77
Saturday	08/14/10	Non-Cycling Day			78
Sunday	08/15/10	New Orleans, LA	Biloxi, MS	83	79
Monday	08/16/10	Biloxi, MS	Pascagoula, MS	65	80
Tuesday	08/17/10	Pascagoula, MS	Pensacola, FL	64	81
Wednesday	08/18/10	Pensacola, FL	Dufuniak, FL	81	82
Thursday	08/19/10	Defuniak, FL	Marianna, FL	56	83
Friday	08/20/10	Marianna, FL	Tallahassee, FL	70	84
Saturday	08/21/10	Non-Cycling Day			85
Sunday	08/22/10	Tallahassee, FL	Perry, FL	60	86
Monday	08/23/10	Perry, FL	Chiefland, FL	67	87
Tuesday	08/24/10	Chiefland, FL	Inverness, FL	55	88
Wednesday	08/25/10	Inverness, FL	Polk City, FL	73	89
Thursday	08/26/10	Polk City, FL	Sebring, FL	62	90
Friday	08/27/10	Sebring, FL	Clewison, FL	68	91

Saturday	08/28/10	Non-Cycling Day			92
Sunday	08/29/10	Clewiston, FL	West Palm Beach, FL	63	93
Monday	08/30/10	West Palm Beach, FL	Boca Raton, FL	44	94
Tuesday	08/31/10	Boca Raton, FL	Miami, FL	56	95
Wednesday	09/01/10	Non-Cycling Day			96
Thursday	09/02/10	Miami, FL	Key Largo, FL	52	97
Friday	09/03/10	Key Largo, FL	Marathon, FL	48	98
Saturday	09/04/10	Marathon, FL	Key West, FL	48	99
Sunday	09/05/10	DAY 100			100



My wish to all: “Have Fun, Do Good (as in what it right, and one’s best), and Be Safe!”