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12-1-2003

**Wandering Wheels Newsletter, December 2003**

Wandering Wheels

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THIRTY-NINE YEARS AND COUNTING!

It's either a phone call, letter, or personal visit from a former participant, but once or twice a week these wonderful “bouquets” come our way. For example:

“I think of my bike trips with Wheels often with fond memories. They truly helped to strengthen me in my faith and taught me many lessons of life. I have now been married 14 years to a wonderful person and have two children who have filled my life completely. I will never forget you and your ministry. You have made a difference in my life. Thank you! I have come a long way since the bike accident in Israel! I try daily to reach my kids to live their faith by example. God’s peace and blessing be with you now and forever. Signed Myra”

Another young friend wrote, “…but even though you might not think so you had a big impact on my life. I haven’t always had the easiest time making friends. I always find myself trying too hard to impress people and, make them laugh that I end up making a fool of myself. But you always seemed to make me feel like I was actually wanted around. You made sure I knew I had a lot of growing up to do but you made me feel loved never the less, and for that I thank you.”

FLORIDA

We start each new year with the Florida bike trips. Prior to our two adult tours we take the Franklin High School students on a one-week trip down the coast. Over the years our January in Florida has served hundreds of riders, always with wonderful cycling and leaving a good Wheels’ spiritual residue. We’re looking forward to a new start in 2004!

SOuthWEST SCOOTER RUN

This was a pretty ambitious tour. Wheels trailered the scooters 2,000 miles to Las Vegas where we met the riders who flew or drove in for the rendezvous. Vegas flights are cheap and the hotel rooms are cheap. Once you are a couple of miles from the strip, the neighborhoods feel like any other town in America. Before we knew it, we were in the Red Rock Canyon west of town and headed for Palm Springs, Nevada. Not much traffic out there. Death Valley was a great ride before going on to Zion and Bryce. The weather held, up to this point, with just a little snow in Bryce Canyon. It was a two-day ride to Page, Arizona. Page is the home of Antelope Canyon. What a find! We then headed east to Kayenta, Arizona, Monument Valley, and spent the rest of the tour in Arizona. We went to the Grand Canyon (always spectacular!), where we were snowed on, and then on to Flagstaff, more snow, and, finally, slipped down into Sedona and clear weather. It was a great mountain run to Prescott en route to Wickenburg. The rest of our tour was desert riding. Lake Havasu City aimed us back to Vegas via Laughlin, Nevada. All in all, a real hoot! It’s amazing how much you see and feel at 35 miles an hour out in the wide open spaces. Some of God’s best stuff belongs to just you!

SUMMER COAST TO COAST

We are still in the coast-to-coast business. The summer of 2003 was our last summer crossing, but we will continue our spring runs. The 2003 summer crossing was a great benediction to 40 years of summer crossings! A former coast to coaster, ’78 trip, phoned today asking for the route of her crossing. She’s doing a framed cross stitch and wanted to trace her trip on the fabric. Right on the heels of her call came a mom’s visit. She had two boys that crossed in ’83 and ’88. She commented on how much the crossing meant to them. One is a principal and the other a United Methodist Church pastor.

We are experiencing the wonderful “trickle down” effect. Not many days go by that we don’t have someone visit or call just to tell us how important his or her crossing was.

So many former riders helped financially with our teens who crossed this past summer. Their dollar help was usually accompanied by a brief update from years past, some as far back as 1966.
One of the hardest parts of our final summer crossing was saying "goodbye" to communities and local church congregations. Many of our old friends shared that the bikers not coming through will leave a real void. God has certainly given Wheels and the multiple of cyclists a genuine ministry to America as confirmed by the following quote from a letter from the St. Martin’s Evangelical Lutheran Church in Annapolis, Maryland, following the team’s visit: "On behalf of St. Martin’s Church I would like to thank you for the generous donation towards the use of the facilities. As usual, it was very nice to have your group with us. I am going on my fourteenth year at St. Martin’s and I remember the first visit with Wandering Wheels. It was a pleasure then, and continues to be a pleasant visit. We are happy St. Martin’s meets the needs of your group. God bless and have a safe journey."

Coast-to-Coast 2003 started in Seattle, Washington, and ended at Rehoboth Beach, Delaware, a well-established Wheels' route. The team was composed of newcomers, vets, and a great group of high schoolers. One major blessing was the safety! Most of our spills came from the high schoolers, and all involved were boys. My ongoing walk of faith is bolstered by the wonderful safety record that has been a part of the program. I tell people that if there were a way of putting the image of our 3,000 coast-to-coast cyclists on a screen and showing the close calls, bumps in the road, surprise weather conditions, vehicle/ bicycle scrapes, high speed coasts, malfunctioning equipment, etc., an ever so faint image of God would show on the screen! I breathed a real sigh of relief getting the 2003 gang across in one piece, especially the high schoolers!

This was Janech's 20th U.S. crossing! She did a super job and felt it was her best ride. She made it very clear, no more coast to coasts! No other gal in cycling history has completed 20 crossings! "Congratulations, Janech!"
fellowship and community of Wheels’ people. When we launched the SCOOTER program, wham! What a marriage! It was “duck to water”! One of the first to sign up, she’s done all our scooter runs plus some.

Her brother, Frank, at age 76, decided to do the coast-to-coast trip this past summer, having already completed three previous coast to coast. Audrey enjoys Frank’s company and thought she’d also like to do the coast to coast, not cycling, but scootering. Why not? Long story short she started with the bike gang in Seattle on her 50cc Yamaha Zuma scooter and traveled coast to coast! To my knowledge, no one else has done this. Do you know how big the cylinder on a 50cc engine is? It’s about 1 1/2 inches in diameter and about 3 inches long! This tiny little motor gets about 85 miles on 1 1/4 gallons of gas! Audrey traveled 5,000 miles on the scooter and we cyclists did 3,200 (some extra sightseeing for her)! Any way you cut it, she did quite a marvelous thing.

Three generations; grandfather, Bob Kiser, and grandson, Bill Steadman, both rode the 2003 coast to coast. Mom, Jane (Kiser) Steadman, rode in 1975.

"Spread" at Red House!

Circleville, Ohio, home of former coast to coaster, John Stout, pictured here with his wife, Cheryl, and Coach. They provided a great meal!

Marilyn Lehman, cook par excellence! She has done several spring coast to coast rides. Summer 2003 was her first northern crossing.

AUDREY COBURN

Let me tell you about Audrey. She is a former schoolteacher who became a top female bowler and owner of a bowling alley...kinds like "Ed" of TV fame. Audrey became a part of Wandering Wheels when her brother Frank took up cycling. She became a reluctant cycling participant. The bike just never quite fit, but she liked the

spite of a serious spill in the Rapid City, South Dakota area. A hospital visit and several "Boy, are you lucky?" sightings seem to turn on some lights. Of course, there was the week of nursing wounds with dressings and his caring cycling friends that helped contribute to a growing motivation to finish.

The executive and kid continued to relate on a daily riding basis. I asked the Jersey businessman what they talked about. "Nothing," he said. "A lot of times we just ride." Something's happening! I'm sure the teen was a good observer. The executive was no nonsense--"If you're going to ride with me, get your $#&! over here!"

Upland, with only ten days to the Atlantic Ocean, and it's still ifty. Will he head home? The gate is wide open; the animal can either walk out into open country or stay with the herd and complete the journey. Come Monday morning, after a day off, it's encouraging to see our non-motivated teen saddled up and ready for the Atlantic! When we dipped our bike wheels into the Atlantic Ocean and celebrated the dream, now realized, it was a good team feeling to rejoice with everyone over their accomplishment! And, there was our fifty teen a part of the celebrating team!!!

ITALY

Overseas travel is wonderful but especially difficult to coordinate. Our style of marking roads and playing the protective "mother bear" role make for a ton of concern on behalf of the leaders. All things considered, Wheels in Italy was a great tour! The cycling couldn't have been better--weather, terrain, motorists, etc.

Wheels has experienced its fair share of foreign travel. Italy created a warm, calming effect. There's something about the pace of life there. It's easy to fall in step with it. The day starts with a casual breakfast. Make sure you get lunch before 2:00 P.M--the country shuts down after two in the afternoon and re-emerges after seven in the evening! After 7:00 P.M., the people fill the streets. They seem to stroll, families hand-in-hand, just peacefully looking into shop windows, or sit on benches talking, enjoying others slipping on by. The restaurants aren't in full swing until 8:00 P.M. You can feel your heart getting in step and slowing down a beat or two. Places like Italy have earned their stripes...so much history! If it "ain't" 500 years old, it "ain't" old!

One of our night's lodging was in the walled city of Siena. The hotel sign and address were hidden near the entrance. When you walked through the almost cave-like entrance, your mind could think of nothing but a horse stable for the night's lodging! We were led up a spiral staircase to our rooms. The inside of the hotel was like an Indiana Jones' treasure discovery. Unbelievable! The ceilings of the bedrooms were dome-shaped and you'd swear Michelangelo had personally painted the angels looking down at you. Every day had special surprises. Italy, with its making sacred the past, was a plus to one's own 2003 Faith!
Italy was as refreshing as new flowers and as sacred as 1,000-year-old buildings!

Venice, our furthest point north on Italian bike run.

The artisan still very much alive in Italy.

Italy's art work—hard to comprehend.

FALL BREAKAWAY
This was our 19th Fall Breakaway. Our numbers were down but the fellowship was great! Our motto on the team shirt read "The Magic of Being Together". I don't think I've been around any other group that can see each other maybe only once a year yet still pick up where they left off so fast. Recent retirements, becoming new grandparents and great grandparents, relocations, the passing of friends, spin on politics, unhappiness with the stock market, all get discussed during our week together, along with stories that celebrate the Faith.

Our route was designed to accommodate those who don't need an overly aggressive ride in distance and terrain. Our days were short with no serious winds. This will be our plan for future Breakaways.

My favorite teacher while attending UCLA was an education prof. In a lecture one day he said, "Be kind to the old men in your life." That has really stuck with me over the past 50 years. What a tribute the Breakaway group is to getting older. Our average age was 68. Ed Slaybaugh keeps helping the upper end out; Janech keeps the lower end in check. Ed is almost 90! Last year he put in 1,500 hours of volunteer help! What a tiger! He continues to ride his old Schwinn Voyager, almost 30 years old, and, to top it off, he rode in front the whole tour! The Fall Breakaway has a way of celebrating "aging".

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It would help if you could speak the language!

Brian, standing outside the door of one of our prettiest hotels. Inside was like a treasure chest!

SMOKY MOUNTAINS SCOOTER RUN
The Smoky Mountains Scooter Run was our last tour of the 2003 season. I had gotten a little lax and wasn't prepared for devotional input. I took a couple of books along in hopes of getting some inspiration. I read, but nothing clicked.

We were busy enough on the Smoky's trip that I rested in the fact that someone or something would serve as a basis for our devotional times. A few days into a trip the quizzes starts, especially of those who are new to Wheels. In one of our lulls, I asked Rohrer, a new member, a few questions the answers to which became the basis for our scooter devotions. Come to find our, Rohrer Eshleman (his friends call him "Doc Rohrer" as in a lion's roar) served as a missionary doctor in Ethiopia for 20 years in the '50's and '60's. At age 81 he is living proof of some kind of miracle pill! His wife bought him a mo-ped several years ago and he proceeded to put 40,000 miles on it! HE LOVES TO SCOOTER and he rode like a pro.

Always looking for a theological discussion, I probed him concerning his beliefs. He said that he went to Ethiopia to share the GOOD NEWS! One day a group of Ethiopian students asked him to teach them English. Rohrer said that the only English material he had was the Book of John out of the New Testament. No problem! So, into English 101 they go, the Book of John their primer! The students learned fast and some became curious about the meaning of the Book of John. Soon they were sharing the Biblical story about Jesus with other students and all of this led to a church-type fellowship group's blossoming throughout the country.

Dr. Eshleman has been back in the States since the late '60's. He recently was invited back to
That's Big League stuff! I asked Doc if he knew Haile Selassie, the former Emperor killed by the Communists and he said that Emperor Selassie had been on his operating table a couple of times!

**Scooters on Blue Ridge Parkway.**

70 STUDENT LEADERS TO MACKINAC

The hall directors and Student Affairs staff from Taylor University continue their yearly fall pilgrimage north to Mackinac Island, Michigan. Wheels provides the equipment and logistical input. The gang bicycles two days and then heads back to the university for another year's leadership.

LYNN KUEPERS

"Miss Lynn", as she is known to Wheels, just finished her sixth U.S. crossing! She admittedly is not a "gung ho" cyclist and probably extends herself well beyond what most coast-to-coast cyclists have to do to get across. Caring for herself and her own personal needs would be all one would expect of her. However, she is a constant source of encouragement to hurting riders who have to recognize that her own pain is beyond theirs. Lynn is a nurse and, without being asked to help, is ready and willing to apply her trade. This past summer she helped fund her niece's trial fee so that she could ride coast to coast with Lynn. Lynn's dream for another family member to complete the journey came true when her niece doped her bike into the Atlantic!

IHOP WAITRESS

AND THE DONATION BUCKET

Those of you who ride with us know about our "white donation bucket". Normally, during an early devotional, we invite the team to put their loose change into the bucket and we then give the monies to a special person along our route. Some great stories have come out of this sharing.

The 2003 coast-to-coast team "anted up" about 100 bucks. Over the course of seven weeks, "the special person" slipped by us leaving us with a full bucket of money. What to do?

Janech and I were eating a fast lunch at a new IHOP in Muncie, Indiana. Our waitress was a perky young gal who seemed to genuinely care about her customers. Janech leaned over to me and asked if we had found "the special person" for the donations' money. "Nope, no one showed up," I replied. Janech commented that our waitress' glasses were on their last leg. When the waitress returned I looked at her glasses and, sure enough, they were shot! Electrical tape was holding both sides of the glasses to the lens portions. The glasses were cocked at about a 20-degree angle...really in bad shape! We both agreed we had found the recipient for the summer's donation. As tactfully as possible I told her about our donation bucket and that we'd like to give her the funds for replacing her broken glasses. She had the cutest "you've got to be kidding" look on her face! A tear came down from her eye! I handed her $100 and made her promise the monies would go for glasses. She came back with her manager and he was all smiles and gave us a big thank you! Earlier in the day, our waitress had made a boast to the crew that God works in mysterious and wonderful ways. What a joy to be the conduit for sharing a summer's nickels and dimes to encourage another human being! Wheels received a sweet card from our IHOP friend.

Bob, and his new "toy"!

"KITCHEN" BOOMING!

We're not sure what has happened, but the phone never stops ringing; people asking for information on the "Kitchen". They ask to rent "Wheels", or the "Lodge", or the "Cabin", or the "Building", or the "Recreation Hall", so it looks like we'd better get a name on the outside of the building! It is starting to get booked so far ahead of time that we don't even have calendars for some of the upcoming requests!

One of the big draws is that it has become a great place for families to hold birthday parties, anniversary celebrations, and family reunions. Of course, we use it for all our special Wheels' activities, too, but our major emphasis is still church groups making use of it for retreats. My major point in all this is that we wanted the Kitchen-Retreat House to encourage people spiritually. The interior of the building is loaded with wonderful Christian symbolism. Nothing is placed inside without its having some kind of message. When you look at the huge original painting on the wall of the '57 Chevy, the thought is, "How does that Chevy have anything to do with Jesus?" I share the story of the original price of a '57 two-door BelAir. The price, $2,300! Now with all the old cars being restored, the '57 Chevy is the car of choice. The '57 Chevy restored can sell for as much as $30,000. The point is, when people are restored in Christ, they are much more valuable to themselves and to others. Basically, every painting, poster, carving, whatever, has a similar story behind it. The following excerpt is from a letter we received following a retreat by the Anderson (Indiana) First United Methodist Youth: "Thank you so much for letting us use your facility. I believe this retreat has been life changing for many in our group. Part of the experience was the very inviting atmosphere of this place."

SWIMMING POOL

We're going on our third year with having the swimming pool in operation. The people love it! The Taylor University ladies' cross-country team works its kinks out in it. Others use it for therapy. The biggest use, of course, still comes from retreat groups. Now with "Old Man Winter" coming on, it will receive its heaviest usage.

RICH HARTIKAINEN

It's always easy to report to you about the successes and accomplishments of the Wheels' gang. Every now and then one of our own doesn't quite make it and slips through the cracks.
Rich Hartikainen, a man who left a positive mark around Wheels for many years, passed away this past June. He had fought the demons for many years and, at times, seemed to be winning. For whatever reason or reasons, he lost it in a confrontation with a neighbor. Shots were fired, the neighbor was paralyzed, and Rich ended his own life. We at Wheels always held out nothing but hope for him... he was going to be our miracle story. In spite of the heartache, Rich left a warm spot in the hearts of many of us at Wheels!

MINI WHEELS' REUNION

John Boyle, veteran of several Wheels' trips, passed along the following reunion news: "Troy Yonkers and his wife Dee hosted a reunion for the Summer 1999 Crossing. We rode our bikes around Central Ohio, shot skeet, attended a Lab Retriever Dog Show, and had a band with good old country music. We shared videos, pictures, stories and many great memories. Many lasting friendships are made on our trips. Those on that summer crossing that attended the reunion are shown in the enclosed photo, left to right: Warren, Amy, Bob, Kim, Bill, Rosemary, John and Troy."

DAY-TO-DAY "OPERATIONS"

Upland kids, hanging around Janech's shop. She has a great relationship with the young ones.

My daughter, Dani, offering counsel after my second knee replacement.

CLOSING:

For several days, now, our office has tried to contact the Julian (California) United Methodist Church. This is the church that has hosted Wheels' groups since the late '60's. Julian is one of the areas hit hard by the recent California wildfires. We finally got through; power had just been restored! The church is in good shape! In fact, the party we spoke to said, "YOU STILL HAVE A HOME IN JULIAN!"

On our first trip in 1964 I learned that churches welcome pilgrims. There's something in the spirit of people traveling by FAITH that encourages church communities. This welcoming spirit has been serious fuel for Wheels' continued ministry. No one has slept on more church floors than our Wheels' gangs. Over a period of 40 years, Wheels has found a night's lodging in thousands of churches. It was a real source of encouragement for the Julian church people to say, "THE CHURCH WAS SAVED, and you still have a home in Julian!"

Just before closing out this letter I want to mention that Julian Gromer's son, John, phoned, recently, to tell us that his mom, Trudy, passed away. The Gromer family helped pave the way for many of our early successes by producing several travelogue films about Wandering Wheels' tours.

We are grateful for your support! We continue to depend on you, our newsletter friends, for financial help. We are a small fish in a big pond, and we thank God for our little sphere of encouraging people in the Faith!

2004 TRIP SCHEDULE

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Twenty of the families in this Methodist congregation lost their homes. Richard Burns' house was spared. Richard is our personal host when in Julian. Many of you who have stayed in Julian have phoned for an update. Some of you have wanted an address to which you could send donations. Make checks payable to BENNETT FOUNDATION, and mail to Valley Independent Bank, 2033 Main Street, Julian, CA 92036. Earmark your check "Julian Fire Relief Fund".