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WHEELS' FRIEND - JENITA PORFILIO

I'm easily knocked out of any sense of "all is well" when I have a cycling team on the road and hear an approaching siren. If the emergency vehicle is coming at us, chances are good none of our riders has been involved. I always look at the ambulance driver, maybe he will indicate whether or not one of our team has been injured. If the ambulance is coming from behind, then I know it might be one of us, and I don't relax until I know we have traveled far enough to know that none of us has been involved. Occasionally, other vehicles on the road will stop and indicate an accident has taken place and that one of our team members is down.

Our coast-to-coast alumni, alone, number over 3,000. When you multiply 3,000 riders times the multiple thousands of vehicles that have passed us, the sheer statistical weight of possible mishaps is always present. Compound the vehicular confrontation with road hazards, pot holes, gravel, high speed coasting, and extreme weather conditions such as snow, rain, fog, and 112 degree heat, and you have the ingredients for heartache.

We all have a type of fuel source that encourages us in our God confidence. For me the miracle of FORTY YEARS of highway safety, with many close calls, spotted with some accidents, has been encouraging evidence of God's watchfulness!

First, a police car passed Janech and me, siren blaring! It was my hope he would not turn in the same direction we were headed, but rather continue straight down the road, but he turned! Shortly after the police car, an ambulance passed us headed the same direction as the police car. It was such a lonely Canadian back road that the odds seemed stacked against us. It had to be that one or more of our riders was involved in whatever was up in front of us. Up ahead we could see the "road block", and the clincher, the whirling sound of a helicopter's motor! Now there was no doubt our riders were involved! We were halfway through our Best of Ontario Canadian adventure. This back road was as safe as a Rails to Trails bike path, weather perfect.

A young driver misjudged a corner about 100 yards in front of two of our riders. She shot perpendicular across the road, made a second correction, shot again across the road, a third time she made the same maneuver, only this time the side of her car slammed into two of our riders!

Janche and I eased up to the scene. We knew all our riders well, having ridden with them on several occasions. Hearts in our throats, we were told it was Jenita and Ginny, both were alive. Ginny Springman was sped off to the Peterborough Hospital; Jenita Porfilio was being prepared for the helicopter ride. Dan, Jenita's husband, stood nearby, having witnessed the whole mishap. With so much good help, and the short copter ride to a major hospital in Toronto, we felt Jenita would soon recover. In fact, as she was being loaded into the aircraft, one of the riders remarked to her, "You are going to get a helicopter ride!" Jenita remarked, "Oh goody, goody gumdrop!" Dan Porfilio, Jenita's husband, wasn't allowed to fly to Toronto with his wife. A stranger standing nearby volunteered to drive him to Peterborough to rent a car.

News trickled in that Ginny was going to be alright. The rest of the team were in limbo waiting for word from Toronto. Word came...Jenita didn't make it!

What a calm settled over the group. No words, just numbness! This was our first accident related death in 40 years! Oh, the number of people who have cycled with us coast to coast, and even more on our shorter trips...thousands!

Jenita was always the life of the party. She had cycled more than 35,000 miles over the past 25 years! She and hubby Dan had recently retired to Florida. They were major players in their local Habitat for Humanity. Dan told us that she had just purchased her uniform for volunteer work at a local hospital. She never wore the uniform that would have helped her to comfort others.

The Wheels' community will dearly miss HER. We continue to remember Dan and his extended family.

A footnote to the tragedy. The morning after the accident, during our devotional time, a lone figure was standing nearby. Janech slipped over to see what she wanted. It was the mother of the driver of the car. She came to apologize on her daughter's behalf. She was standing there, willing to take any hard feelings we might have toward her daughter. A lot of tears followed. She lost her first daughter in a car accident in which the passenger with her was also killed.

So, like a bolt of lightening out of the sky, one of ours was picked off. Seems so arbitrary. So many philosophical, theological and heartfelt lines of reasoning are bantered around regarding a tragedy such as this. The bicycle seems so innocent. For most of us the bike is still remembered as our most treasured of early gifts. Jenita Porfilio continues to recover! She's been on the phone numerous times. She didn't need any surgery and rehab is helping her to heal.
**KITCHEN-RETREAT HOUSE**

We had eight executives from New Jersey drop in recently. They flew in on a private jet. They came to check out the "Kitchen". One of the committee of eight is a former Taylor professor. He has a ministry out East and, along with the other committee members, was exploring the possibility of building something like the Wheels' Kitchen on the East Coast. It's a warm compliment to see the extended ministry of the "Kitchen".

On past trips riders would say, "It's going to be nice to have my own bathroom again!" Oh, the joy of your personal toilet, your own private sleeping space, no more food lines. The great thing about the pure toughness of a coast to coast is the way it creates a balance. The "givens" of daily life become blessings. The dynamics of a 3,000-mile crossing make all the conveniences worth it. When a peanutbutter and jelly sandwich is the best, an outdoor shower is looked forward to like a spa, and a 2" foam pad as anticipated as a water bed, something is right in the formula.

**FLORIDA 2006**

The January Florida trip tradition continues.

We never know what you'll see! Dan, Mike, Betsy, and Jim. The fearsome foursome: Dan, Mike, Betsy, and Jim.

Jan Briese, a former Wheels' participant, lost her life two years ago in Illinois on a club ride. We failed to report this in our newsletter. Jan, like Jenita, was a special person and a real plus to all that is good. Most of her friends learned of her accident via e-mail or phone. Wheels slipped up not including her tragedy in the last newsletter.

The sign reads, "if you're in a hurry, you're in the wrong place."

A Florida sky writer over Miami talking "Jesus".

The smallest boat to cross the Atlantic. Makes biking look easy.

Camping out in Jack Jehlma's back yard in Key Largo...gracious friend!

Canadian cyclists gathering outside roadside chapel, our home for the night.

**SPRING COAST TO COAST**

Hard to believe this past Spring's crossing was our 63rd! As always, it was the best, as well it should be if things get better with age. I'm constantly reminded how wonderful the crossings of the past were by the number of visits we get and the number of letters and phone calls received. Many of those in touch with the office speak of the dream of yet another coast to coast. If they can pull it off, they want their next crossing to involve a loved one, either a son or daughter or even a grandchild. One of my daughters wants her daughter to realize just how easy she has it at home. She said, "Dad, she needs to get out of her comfort zone and learn to be thankful for all the wonderful things she has at home."

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Our church friends are such a blessing. Up on Julian, in California, a small congregation shares their facility, simply a small haven. We slip down the mountain into Brawley, 100 degrees many times, to be greeted by a largely Spanish congregation who share their air conditioned building. At
Buckeye, just west of Phoenix, a gracious Baptist preacher (the church is his life's calling) couldn't be more cordial. In Globe, Arizona, a dying mining town, the Methodists open their building to us. Safford, Arizona, and Lordsburg, New Mexico, are always given for fellowship. Both are Baptist Churches. Our home in Las Cruces, New Mexico, is with the Presbyterians. They are building a new church on the other side of town and look forward to our using their new building. Artesia, New Mexico, an old oil town, is a welcome sight. The wind normally blows like crazy and the comfort of the Methodist Church is anticipated. On the New Mexico/Texas border, Hobbs is our home. The church people invite us in for the Wednesday night dinner. The Methodists share their facility in Lamesa, Texas, and Roby, Texas, is another blessing, a refuge in the middle of nowhere.

A major visit is Weatherford, Texas. The Christian Church shares its new Fellowship Hall with us. A fabulous ice cream shop is just across the street!

In the Dallas area the Lutherans give us an overnight, and 80 miles down the road we're in a small Methodist Chapel. They're the ones who built a shower for us. Marshall, Texas, home of East Texas Baptist University, plays host next. Louisiana Gumbo is served in Minden, gracious hosts ala la the Methodists. Our hosts in Mississippi are Baptists in the Jackson area, and the Methodists in Luverne, Alabama. The last church home is in Waycross, Georgia. What a fitting closure. The Keen-agers, 65 and above, at the big Methodist Church, shower us, feed us, and insist on our sharing God's blessings of the past six weeks.

Finally, the top! Great visit at the White Sands. We're looking forward to our 2007 crossing!

TAYLOR TRIP

Eighty plus bikes used for Taylor University Student Affairs Staff Retreat.

WHEELS' STAFF DORM

The ministry of the "Staff Dorm" continues. A mom and five daughters have been living next door for a full year. Things have not improved much, so we have extended their stay for another year. All things considered, the family is "snug as a bug". Wheels takes care of all the yard work. The maintenance of washer and dryer, and the multiple of other typically male jobs, are cared for by Dana, our mechanic. Even the mom's auto needs are cared for by Dana. Mom and the girls really appreciate the HOME!!

ROHN MC PHERSON

Our Wheels' staffer, and long-time "Mr. Sag Wagon", is not well...just hanging on. I phoned him the other day and he said that he had one good rally left. He's been down for the count for this past year. Rohn has put up a good fight for several years. He's been pretty tough, considering the multiple of physical obstacles he's had to overcome. Anyone who has been on a trip with him knows the special flavor he brought to the tour. He asked me the other day if he could have his ashes spread across Janech's and my little lake. We'll name the lake "Rohn's Pond" or "Lake Rohn". If you care to write to him, his address is: Rohn McPherson, 818 W. Riverside, #A-5, Muncie, IN 47303.
COAST TO COAST MOTORSCOOTER TRIP

Ed Slaybaugh -- Fall Breakaway

We just finished our 22nd Fall Breakaway. Many of the gang on this year's ride were with us way back when! Conspicuous by his absence was our dear friend, Ed Slaybaugh, who turns 92 in December. He continues to be a high watermark. He took a spill last year, so we encouraged him to wait a year before rejoining us.

This year's ride ran from near Vincennes, Indiana, to Southern Illinois and back up to Evansville, Indiana. We bumped into some great "southern hospitality", hosted mainly by Methodist churches, thanks to Larry Curtis, a former Methodist pastor and coast to coaster. Janech said that we made something out of nothing. Beall Woods State Park is not listed as a camping area, but it wound up being a real pleasant surprise. The greenness in the Mid-West this year is to die for...lush, lush, lush! On to New Harmony for Sunday where we dovetailed with their big German Festival. What a historical town, a MUST if you haven't experienced the area. Shawneetown, Illinois, is a depressed area, but who can't want to visit a town with a name like Shawneetown? Great Baptist pastor, Jack Hall, hosted us. He's been there for 35 years and has had a real impact. He made arrangements for our visit to Old Shawneetown, three miles east, and for an enlightening historical lesson on the oldest bank in Illinois right on the banks of the Ohio River. Our teacher was dressed in full costume. Garden of the Gods...look it up on an Illinois map! What a surprise! Tough ride, but worth it. Our home for the night was Equality. A pastor, Ron Johnson, with three churches, was our host. He called in the service of one of his three charges. This tiny country chapel group fed us and then together we had a good country church meeting, with some very rich and personal sharing. Wheels had sponsored one of our riders who was working out some medical problems. Her goal was to ride 100 miles. She had done that since her coast to coast 20 years ago. Mission accomplished! She offered a wonderful witness as to her "coming out".

Janech, walking with Jesus!

We really "wow" them in out-of-the-way places across America!

Scooters loaded and headed for California.

Start of history making 50cc scooter run.

Check it out!

Elvis' grave--very impressive visit in Memphis!

Lynn Kueppers helping Lewis and Clark to find their way!

Oldest bank in Illinois.

Called "The Roofless Church", New Harmony, Indiana.

Jim Jelsema and son looking like two mountain pillars.

Snow in New Mexico.

She had to stop at weigh stations!

Sally, age 80, and Darlene were real wonders on the scooter run!

Great ride in Southern Illinois from Harrisburg to Vienna (pronounced "Vi-en-ny"). This ride is on a Rails to Trails route called Tunnel Hill...worth the trip south! We bused northeast to Mount Vernon, Indiana, where the Methodists did a super job of feeding and sleeping us.

Evansville's Trinity United Methodist Church was a highlight. Here's a giant church smack-dab in the middle of town a stone's throw from the Ohio River. The church is so representative of some of the great churches in Europe. What a historically worshipful edifice! Sadly, it has gone from a congregation of 1,500 to about 250. Makes you want to remind people of these sleeping giants waiting to be awakened.

Beautiful window in Evansville Trinity United Methodist Church.

Garden of the Gods in northeast Illinois.
Picked up some rain on our last day and shortened the trip. One other visit in Evansville was the Angel Mound Indian Village. It's well restored and serves as a wonderful reminder of our Native American Heritage. As Janetch said, we had all the right ingredients for making something out of nothing!

"Thank You, Father, for 22 years of fellowship and a bottomless world to explore!"

It looked like we had all the ingredients for disaster! Six were women and the rest men, average age about 30.

We finished the trip late October. Every inch of the 3,000 miles was a major miracle in the works. Of all the 63 U.S. crossings, this was our toughest and most rewarding.

In my dreams I wouldn't have expected such wonderful results! Our lodging and logistics, while in Canton, were arranged by William. We stayed in wonderful hotels and were fed like kings. I asked William what the extra charges would be. He smiled and said, "No extra fee! We could never repay you for all you have done for us."

We spent six days in Yangshuo in the middle of our trip. Jeff Powell, whom we wrote about two years ago, was our host on this trip, as well. His small hotel is booming. We visited the elementary school where the 2004 team donated money for a full basketball court. What a thrill to see them burning up the court! The two concrete ping pong tables were a favorite. This year's team donated money to buy new desks, chairs, and books. Jeff continues to have a serious impact on the surrounding community. His latest project is helping finance a medical clinic. And, he keeps on dreaming!

**CHINA**

Eighteen years ago Wheels took a real step of faith and invited 30 Chinese to come cycle across America. A young tour guide, William Su, provided much of the inspiration for such a bold move. William was our English speaking guide for Wheels' 1986 tour in China. We enjoyed our run in China so much, what would happen if a select group of Chinese could see and experience the U.S.A. by bike?

We set in motion all the hoops we'd have to jump through--State Department, visas, passports, shots, etc. Keep in mind, China was still pretty "tight" in 1988. We cleared all the hurdles after much paper work, and had only the small problem of raising $100,000 to finance their travels! The Schwinn Bicycle Company gave us bikes. Wheels purchased sleeping bags and other trip essentials. We were getting down to the wire and still needed $30,000 to reach our goal of $100,000. Janetch took a very valuable 16mm camera we'd been given and flew to Atlanta, Georgia, to find a buyer. She returned with a $30,000 check! What an answer to prayer! Long story short, 30 Chinese arrived early September of 1988.

We'd asked for athletes. Instead, they sent 30 people from the Travel Department thinking this would be a wiser choice of participants. After all, why not give their people some hands-on experience as future employees in the travel business? Very few of the 30 were in shape. They had just slipped from behind a desk and were about to ride a bike 3,000 miles across America!

We just returned this November from being in China with yet another U.S. cycling team. One of our highlights on the trip was to have a reunion with the members of the 1988 Chinese crossing. Twenty of that China team met our 2006 team in Guangzhou (Canton). What a celebration! Their crossing the U.S. in 1988 launched most of them into high ranking careers. Two have become Lieutenant Governors of major provinces, another is mayor of a large city (one million plus)! The hotel we stayed in, and where we had our unbelievable banquet, is managed by a China coast to coaster! I asked Sonny (his English name) what he does. He said that he has several thousand people working for him. He is an Amway bigwig! The number two man of their major airlines, China Southern, which we flew while in China, is a coast to coaster! On and on the story went. Everyone of them had risen to wonderful heights. William Su did our planning for us in Guangzhou. He is a manager, along with his wife, of a major travel company!

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Cement pillars with bronze plaque. The names of the 2004 Wheels' group are engraved on plaque.

Jeff Powell and team walking through line of cheering school children.

School kids at school where we built the basketball court.

Exhibit A.

A yard full of children!

Melt your heart!

You could eat them alive!

Exhibit B.

Janech took 500 balloons to make balloon animals!

CLOSEING

There came across my desk, recently, a "new kid on the coast-to-coast block"...another bike touring company. Its 30-day tour was priced at $10,000. Wow! To think our 1966 trip fee was $100!

Tough ping pong players!

Granted, we have to charge more now days, but the spirit of our tours is still trying to make it affordable to anyone who wants to ride coast to coast. The BIG thing is that we have never felt we had to compromise our desire to encourage people spiritually. Were it not for our ongoing practice of using churches and sharing Christian truths along the way, we would not stay in the business. Phone call, letters, e-mails and personal visits reinforce the impact Wheels has had over the years.

Like most not-for-profits, we are feeling the dollar pinch. I, personally, feel your dollar help to Wheels really goes a long way. Most of you have experienced our work and know you can trust us. Thank you for your faithfulness in helping support the Wheels' program!

On a more practical note, there are two ladies in our community whose cars our mechanic is always patching. We get phone calls all hours of the day to bail them out. Their cars need to be JUNKED! It crossed my mind some of you, our Wheels' friends, might have or know of vehicles that could be donated to Wheels and we, in turn, could pass them along to our gals in need. You could receive donation credit for such a gift.

I trust this year-end newsletter is encouraging. Drop us a line. We enjoy your Christmas cards and other forms of updates.

2007 TRIP SCHEDULE

Florida Keys
JAN 21-JAN 31
Spring Coast to Coast
MAR 16-APR 25
Border to Border
JUN 05-JUN 22
Motor Scooter
JUL 17-AUG 03
Fall Breakaway
SEP 14-SEP 22
New Zealand
NOV 27-DEC 14

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