Wandering Wheels Newsletter, December 2007

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We date our newsletters by year, only. We have about six years of past newsletters on our Wheels' literature table. I can pick up year 2000 newsletter and read it like it was just yesterday. Time flies when you're having fun! "Fun" maybe isn't the right word, but God has certainly blessed us with work that joyfully fills up days and weeks and years! The question pops up often. "How much longer are you going to keep doing Wheels?" I guess when it is no longer fun. The operative word might be "meaningful". We often meet people who, after seeing a team on the road, ask Janech or me, "What do you do for a living?" "This is our work," we remark, "No," they say, "how do you make a living?" "We ride bikes!" Sounds simple and easy, which it isn't. Our Wheels' community has allowed us the pleasure of encouraging people in their growing faith in God. We wouldn't be in the "business" were it not for the spiritual linkage.

RODNEY BURTON - Circle America 1987

Living near a major interstate, we were reminded of how dangerous driving these thoroughfares can be. Our local news reported a semi truck accident in which the driver had been killed. We later learned the driver was a Rodney Burton. Sue said, "Didn't we have a Rodney Burton on one of our trips?" We pulled the files and, sure enough, a Rodney Burton was a member of our second Circle America trip back in 1987. Closer examination matched the home address of the semi driver and our Rodney... both from Hannibal, Missouri. A phone call from his family confirmed the fact--it was our Circle America rider! What a blow! The accident happened right in our back yard. His mom said that he still talked about his Circle America trip. His fellow workers spoke highly of him and were confident he was ready to meet his Heavenly Father. If those of you who knew Rodney would care to send a note to his family, the address is: Mrs. Arsene Burton, 4401 Hwy. MM, Hannibal, MO, 63401.

HAROLD MOLONEY Long-Time Vet

Harold Moloney, a Wheels' vet of several trips, went to the big "rails to trails" ride in the sky. Harold was a terrific cyclist, a real example of "riding to the end". He always brought life to the party. "Thanks, Harold, for your friendship!"

KITCHEN-RETREAT HOUSE

The "Kitchen" is a real hit for family reunions. The reunions come in all shapes and sizes. It's hard to imagine a facility being more maximized than when used by family reunion groups. The Cox family holds the "Kitchen" record for distance traveled to unite their family. When their travel miles are combined, they travel nearly 5,000 miles to be together. And do they ever enjoy being together!

WINYARD'S BOOK

I received a wonderful book, Shore to Shore: A Father and Son Journey Across America, written by David Winyard. Dave is a former Wheels' coast to coast, a very avid cyclist. Combining his love for biking with an engineering background makes for a great read. To make the reading even more colorful is that he is riding with his 14-year-old son on a tandem. Has a little ring of Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance. Dave laces his story with spirit and insights, making the reading even more enjoyable. I would especially recommend the book for any future long-distance riders; in fact, good for all adventurers. Great Christmas present!

The online web site for the book is: www.lulu.com/dcwinyard

FALL BREAKAWAY

This year's trip was number 23! We started in Port Huron, Michigan, and rode The Thumb of Michigan. We wound up in Flushing, Michigan, with a camping night the last night in Frankenmuth. Frankenmuth was a delight! Really, the whole route was a biker's paradise. We were just behind the summer vacationers. Our nightly homes warmly ministered to us. The first night was in an "old church", now a YFC complex. Dick Case is the director. He has held the position for several years.

Our gang was able to witness a real grass roots Christian operation that was making an impact. The third night was spent in Harbor Beach at a United Methodist Church. Paula Timm is the pastor, a real go-getter. She brought sparkle to the party. She is a "biking" preacher. We had a Wheels' "first" at this church. We rented porta-pots...a big hit! We had an overnight with the Baptists in Caseville. Mike Goforth, full-time pastor/part-time fireman and full-time high school soccer coach, was our host. The Christian leaders in small lake towns are so encouraging.
They provide real "goo". Bay Shore Church Camp, a huge campground in Sebewaing, made us feel at home. They pulled out all the stops in making us comfortable. Most of the year-round staff are volunteers. Once again, our teachers were wonderfully placed people and places along the way. In Frankenmuth, the Yogi Bear Jellystone Park staff hung out at our camp, greatly inspired with our mission.

I'm always impressed with the number of miles the Fall Breakaway team members travel to start a trip and then return back home. John Ruckman is our marathon man. John is from Albuquerque, New Mexico. He drives almost 3,000 miles round-trip to do the ride. In fact, I added up the combined miles of car travel for the Fall Breakaway participants and they added up to 17,000 miles! What a tribute to this group of people who have been coming together for 23 years!

Our devotional times on the Fall Breakaway are always special. One morning I handed out a two-page story on Johnny Cash. The team members sat quietly and read, almost like school kids with an assignment. Part of the story line read: "A few months before his death, Johnny Cash said about God, 'See, He's my counselor, He's my wisdom. All the good things in my life come from Him.' Those words were said in earnest during an interview with MTV—yes, that MTV—and they demonstrate the far reaching ability Johnny Cash had on a secular level to invite people into the fold of Christ. After selling over 50 million albums in his nearly 50-year career, it's not surprising that the multi-Grammy Award winner and recipient of the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award made such a mark on our society, but what has sometimes been downplayed by the media was Cash's unwavering faith in Jesus Christ."

**ED AND FRANK**

Ed Slaybaugh is 92. He has ridden twice across America. In 1995 he made the crossing at the age of 80, the oldest to have gone coast to coast with Wheels. He is a legend and a hero. Ed just finished the 2007 Fall Breakaway at age 92. Well, "young buck", Frank Coburn, has set his sights on Ed's record! Frank will be 81 for the upcoming spring trip. If he completes it, then he will be our oldest coast to coaster! The challenge is on! Frank put his deposit down a year ago! He remarked, "If I don't live that long, consider the deposit a donation!"

**FLORIDA 2007**

**Cocoa Beach to Key West**

The nearly 400-mile stretch of highway from Cocoa Beach to Key West is a cyclist's dream come true for January/February riding. The weather is near perfect. The roads are like bike paths for 80% of the ride, and, of course, the scenery and "well-keptness" of the 400-mile stretch brings nothing but smiles! We have enough church visits along the way, coupled with quality camping out of doors, that the feeling of a "God Presence" is always near.

**Conclusion: Bet that God (Christ) exists—always!"**
The 2007 coast-to-coast team walking down to the Pacific Ocean to officially start trip.

We had the biggest "mood swings" in weather during the 2007 coast-to-coast. Wind seemed to be in our faces all trip long. One major bridge repair early in the crossing threw us for a loop.

The detour route early on 2007 coast to coast.

The detour added 30 miles and a major mountain pass. The desert heat made the detour even more challenging! The smell of mutiny was in the air. The day before Phoenix our overnight is in Buckeye, Arizona. Our host pastor, Jim Wesley of First Baptist Church, informed us that there would be a concert pianist performing the same night we were there. When you’re on a coast-to-coast bike ride, listening to a concert pianist isn’t high on your list of things to do after a hot desert ride. What a surprise! Sam Rotman, a Christian Jew, was the performer. He was a Juilliard grad, child prodigy, and, by age 11, on his way to stardom.

Our youngest rider, age 14, felt the "snow day" was his best!

After his conversion, he started playing church music along with the traditional concert music.

One of the highlights of the evening was his insightful information regarding the history of the music he played. Sam said, “Every good thing and every perfect gift comes from God.”

I’m belaboring the point because the last place one would expect such a performance would be in a small Baptist Church in Buckeye, Arizona. Wheels was looking for a place to sleep and received a most unforgettable blessing! Such is the ongoing draw of Wandering Wheels.

Our last five miles approaching new bridge into Brunswick, Georgia.
SCOOTER RUN

The spirit of offering motor scooter trips goes back several years. Janech and I used a couple of motor scooters to route a bicycle trip in Italy way back when. The little scooters were such a hoot! Why not scooter tours in the U.S.?

In 2002 we scootered Highway 66 from California to Missouri with good success. In 2003 we did Arizona Highways and the Smoky Mountains. West Virginia was next (2004), then Missouri (2005), followed by the 2006 coast to coast. We just finished a trip from Windsor, Ontario, Canada, to Quebec City and back home to Indiana. Our next run in 2008 will be traveling in the South Dakota Badlands and points West.

As I’ve mentioned before, the little scooters are a great diversion from cycling. We never lose our love for cycling; however, the scooters provide a little icing on the cake. In keeping with our desire to simply enjoy the pleasures of touring, an equal part of our purpose is the group fellowship and spiritual perks that come as a result of the scootering.

Perk #1 - Ron and Rosalie Valutis, former scooter riders, met us in Detroit with a great lunch to send us on our way to Canada. Perk #2 - We were hosted by the Grace United Church in Port Dover, Ontario. Perk #3 - Another host church in Webster, New York, warmed our hearts. Perk #4 - In Trois Rivieres (Three Rivers), Quebec, the St. James Anglican Church opened its doors. Great city! St. James is oldest church in area. Perk #5 - Sherbrooke, Quebec, served up an English speaking Baptist Church--couldn’t have been more open. Perk #6 - Back in the U.S., after a half dozen border crossings and headed for the Western part of New York state and the beautiful village of Springville, a great United Methodist Church hosted us. Perk #7 - Conneaut, Ohio, and the Christ United Methodist Church (really off the beaten path after a couple of miles of back road travel out in the middle of nowhere), a gorgeous country church. They fed us and we shared our exploits. Great time! Perk #8 - Our final church visit was in Findlay, Ohio. Steve Walburn, a senior Wheels' staffer, set us up with the Gateway Church, a big mega complex. They fed us and oversaw our stay. Perk #9 - Back home in Indiana 18 days later. We had minimum mechanical problems, great group chemistry, and safety. “Thank you, Father.” Staying out of harm’s way while experiencing great adventure is a FINE BALANCE!

One of many U.S./Canada border crossings on scooters.

We really enjoyed the friendship while with the Canadians.

Bill and Jan Mark celebrated their “50th” wedding anniversary on Scooter Run.

The old familiar “Mail Pouch” sign on red barn.

One of the great church sanctuaries in Canada.

The Canadians really hang out their wash!
ROHN - Master Fisherman

Our last newsletter mentioned the waning health of Rohn McPherson. Rohn passed the last day of December 2006, just after the Wheels’ newsletter was sent out. People still ask about him, surprised they hadn’t learned of his passing. I mentioned in the 2006 letter that he wanted his ashes put in Janech’s and my pond. His wish has been granted. In fact, we have named it “Rohn’s Pond”. Since then, a friend of Rohn’s was fishing and hadn’t had any luck. Rather frustrated, the friend said, “OK, Rohn, I need some help. Get me a fish!” True story! Shortly after speaking to Rohn’s “spirit in the sky”, his friend had a strike and hauled out a beautiful large bass! (The request hasn’t been granted recently!)

Rohn McPherson’s family and friends at Coach’s place.

“Thanks, Rohn, for the fish!”

THE “POSSUM” STORY

The apostle Paul writes in I Corinthians about God choosing the common man to communicate the wonders of God. I Corinthians 1:27 says, “But God chose the foolish things of this world to put the wise to shame.” I’m taking some theological license, or stretching the point a bit, but, recently, Janech and I received a visit from two baby possums. While on a bike ride we passed a dead, “mother”, possum. (No, she wasn’t “playing” possum!) Perched on top of her were two of her children. Janech insisted on rescuing them. I said, “Let Mother Nature take her course.” You’re right, they came home with us! I have never been so captured by a wild animal such as I was with these “two little guys”. They looked like little pandas. They cuddled, playfully nibbled and crawled up our sleeves and nestled in our necks. We could hold them in our hands and watch a TV program without them making a move. I’m sure they liked the warmth. They were inseparable, really needing one another...a lot of lessons to be learned here...and always slept intertwined! We have passed them along to a wild life rescue gal who will transition them into their natural surroundings.

One never knows from where the next infusion of “God stuff” will come. “Thank you, Father, for baby possums and all the other wonderful things that can and will surprise us!”

“Do caterpillars know they’re going to be butterflies, or does God surprise them?”

The Bicycle Path of Blessing

Every vision born of earth is fleeting.
Every vision born of heaven is a blessing.
For people, the sight of spring warms their hearts.
For fish, the rhythm of the ocean is a blessing.
The brilliant sun that shines in every heart
For the heaven’s earth and all creatures,
What a blessing!
The heart can’t wait to speak of this ecstasy.
The soul is kissing the earth, saying,
Oh God, what a blessing!

Loose Change Can"
We bask in the accomplishments of days past, and here we are already sending out the schedule for next year. The years blend together. We have a lot of riders repeating the coast to coast this coming Spring, along with a nice response to the rest of the 2008 schedule.

Earlier I mentioned the “Kitchen”. Lynda Barker, long-time faithful caretaker of the “Kitchen” facility, with assistance from hubby, Garry, has retired from cleaning it and hosting the groups that use it. She has been an integral part of the “Kitchen” ministry for many years. We will miss them!

Like the “loose change can” story, we are still providing a home for a mom and her five daughters. We’re going on two years. With the increase in utilities, the monthly bills at the “dorm” at peak demand can reach $700, almost $6,000 a year. (I guess girls take a lot more showers!) Those of you who have helped support Wheels are a significant part of our providing a home for this family.

Thanks for helping us through 2007! Your gifts really go a long way!!

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2008 TRIP SCHEDULE

- Florida Keys Trip #1  JAN 13 - JAN 22
- Florida Keys Trip #2  JAN 27 - FEB 05
- Spring Coast to Coast  MAR 28 - MAY 09
- Motor Scooter-South Dakota Badlands  JUN 20 - JUL 11
- Fall Breakaway  SEP 12 - SEP 20
- Motor Scooter-Southeast U.S.A.  OCT 16 - OCT 25

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