Wandering Wheels Newsletter, December 2010

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FOOTBALL / WHEELS’ REUNION

What a surprise! What was intended to be an innocent, “Hey, Wheels is going to be open for visitors Friday and Saturday of Taylor University’s Homecoming Weekend,” ballooned into an all out reunion! Both Wheels’ vets and former TU “footballers” streamed in all day Friday and Saturday! The chitchat went non-stop! The great thing about visiting with old friends is how facts get muddled and mostly exaggerated! I think embellishment is one of God’s best gifts. The dictionary says that embellishment is “to improve a story by adding details, often fictitious.” We had a lot of that! The important thing about recall is that the more colorful the recall, the more dynamic the real story must have been!

Eleven years of football stories and over 40 years of Wheels’ stories pointed quite clearly to the Heavenly Father’s hand of blessing.

“Thanks, Geoff, for the cake!”

2010 COAST TO COAST (68th coming up)

“When are you going to quit?” or “Who’s going to take over when you quit?” Well, believe it or not, Janeth and I are calling the 2011 crossing our last coast to coast! Oh, we’ll keep a steady flow of trips going, but no more “seven-weekers”.

The 2011 tour will be our 68th time across the U.S. Our first was in 1966. We’ve been cycling coast to coast for 45 years! Well over 3,000 cyclists have made the journey with Wheels. We are the “grand-daddy” of long-distance group riding in the U.S. and the catalyst for spawning countless similar groups. Our youngest coast to coaster was 12 and our oldest 84! Our riders have ridden on every conceivable kind of bike you can imagine, from homemade to the latest high tech units. Tandems and recumbents are common. The trail fee for our 1966 coast to coasters was $100!

Quote from former coast to coaster: “Sometimes when I am having a bad day or dealing with a difficult problem, I tell myself that I rode over the Rocky Mountains once, and if I could do that, then I could certainly deal with a difficulty at work. It kind of helps to keep it all in perspective— even 38 years after my coast to coast with you.”

The 2010 trip had all the markings of success as our numerous previous coast-to-coast tours.

Over 3,000 have celebrated touching both oceans!

Small wooden crosses across America. The message reads: “If you find this cross in your hands PLEASE don’t throw it away! Please pass it on to someone and tell them ‘God loves you’. Ask that person to pass the cross on and keep it going. These crosses are placed in the ground as a sign to commemorate a morning or evening of prayer for our country. As I walk, I encourage differently-abled people to focus on their God-given abilities, not their disabilities.”
We have kept my grandson, Levi Williams, busy with several "Kitchen" projects. Dana, our "jack-of-all-trades" maintenance guy has supervised and pitched in, along with others from the Williams' clan.

What a variety of activities take place in the building. Our weekends are booked year-round with family reunions and church retreats. During the week we have a lot of birthday parties, special interest groups, small business conferences and college planning teams that use the building, as well.

One youth group from the Church of the Brethren in Roann, Indiana, stayed five days and did local community work projects.
**FLORIDA #1 AND #2**

Our yearly treks from Cocoa Beach to Key West have resulted in some enduring friendships. We have been hosted by the same church friends for several years. Our night’s stay the second day of each of the tours is in Fort Pierce at the Northside Christian Fellowship. We normally leave a donation for the use of the facilities. Pastor Jim Biles shared with me that our donation monies of several thousand dollars over the years have been passed along to aid in their church missionary projects.

**“ROADSIDE DOG”**

Janech and I have a riding workout routine of about 17 to 20 miles each evening permitting. We have settled on a lightly traveled secondary route, and maybe see half a dozen cars during the hour and quarter workout. About 30 minutes into the ride we are greeted by a black and white sheep or cow herding dog. By “greeted” I mean he gets down on his belly, squatted into the grass, trying to make himself invisible. As we pass him, he leaps up and herds us on down the road! His hair is flattened back against his body, and his ears are pinned flat against his head! After a brief sprint, he is satisfied and returns home. When at first he doesn’t see us coming, we whistle to get his attention and, shortly, we are escorted down the road. He then waits for our return about ten minutes later...same routine.

We look forward to this little foray and would feel our evening ride not complete without our black and white dog entertaining us. We’ve named him “Shep”! Doesn’t take much to bring a smile when on a bike!

**“Shep”**

**MOTOR SCOOTERS**

The motor scooters help keep many of our older, long-distance bicycle riders on the cutting edge. Rather than riding off into the sunset, they keep the adventure fire burning, straddling a 200cc scooter! Last spring’s trip was a re-run of our 2009 trip, Kentucky, West Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee provided a roller coaster ride that would rival any two-week ride in America.

We received word last summer that Ron Valutis, a member of our 2006 coast-to-coast scooter trip, passed away. Ron, a retired Detroit school teacher and faithful servant, used much of his retirement time to encourage people in things sacred.

Rosalie Valutis, Ron’s wife, had accompanied Ron on his own scooter, coast to coast...real “scooter buddies”. Their red and blue scooters were ridden to the funeral parlor by two grandsons and left near the casket during the two-day viewing. After the memorial service, Ron’s blue scooter was left with the casket and the two grandsons rode the red scooter back to the Valutis home. Brings tears to one’s eyes!

I guess it goes with the territory; as a program ages, so do its participants. What a joy to have known the ones who have passed in the last year!

**CHINESE VISIT**

Members of the Wheels’ sponsored Chinese 1988 coast-to-coast tour asked if we could design a short U.S. trip for them. They wanted to re-live some of their trip experiences from 1988. So, Janech and I created a four-day trip. They really wanted to visit in American homes, so each night, arrangements were made for American host families to pick up the Chinese and take them to their American homes...a blessing for both “the hosted” and “the hosts”. Wheels picked up the team of 25 at the Indianapolis airport at 1:00 A.M. and bused them back to Upeland for a short night’s rest. The following day, Saturday, we did a short tour taking in a covered bridge, snacks at the Epworth United Methodist Church in Matthews, Indiana, and then a visit to a 4,000-acre farm operation. The Chinese couldn’t believe three men farmed the whole 4,000 acres. Boy, were they impressed with the size of the equipment!

As you would expect, our friends were loaded to the gills with cameras! Janech guessed that they took over 5,000 pictures. They loved standing in front of classy homes and having their picture taken. One of the American families said, “They even went into our closet and took pictures!”

On Sunday, many of the Chinese went to church with their host families, and then we headed for Van Buren, Indiana. On the way a fur trapper...
friend invited the gang to visit his home. Mike Huber, the trapper, had bobcat, raccoon, coyote and skunk skins...some even made into blankets. Mike showed them some fox furs, as well. They wanted to buy them. I’m sure our friends purchased at least ten pelts! On down the road, a visit to an underground railroad house used at the height of the slave period. The hosts in Van Buren welcomed the riders. The Van Buren Lions Club provided dinner, and soon thereafter, the Chinese were whisked away by their U.S. hosts for the night.

Van Buren, IN, Lions Club put on real spread.

Berne, Indiana, was our next overnight. Of course, we had to see the Swiss clock! Lunch was served by an Amish family who operates a world class sulky stable. The Chinese were given a fast trot around the track and then a chance to watch two Amish boys break a horse!

Berne, IN, with new Swiss clock in background.

What a show...Amish boys breaking a young horse!

Our “whirlwind” was dying down! The Berne families picked up our friends for their overnight and then returned them early the following morning in time for a departure to downtown Chicago and on to O’Hare airport.

Great four days and a departing wave!

Our Chinese visitors.

The group had started their visit to the U.S. in San Francisco, visited several of the National Parks and other highlights before arriving in Upland. William Su, their guide, said that they all agreed the Mid-west biking and homestays were the best part of their visit to the U.S.

Garfield greeting Chinese in Van Buren, IN.

“East” meets “West”!

“Foxy” Chinese ladies with trapper’s furs!

Taking in a local Chinese cuisine.

Our Chinese visitors.
FALL BREAKAWAY

What a fun trip! Had to turn people away. The trip was centered around three reservoirs north of Upland. The spirit of the seven-day run was to visit places of interest en route. We traveled several miles of the Cardinal Greenway bike path from Gas City, Indiana, to Sweetser, Indiana. Aaron Clement made arrangements for us to visit the ethanol plant en route--great experience! Aaron and his wife Lisa hosted us. They live just north of Marion. We camped out in their backyard. Beautiful setting!

The second day we rode to Wabash, Indiana, the first U.S. city to "electrically light" its streets. Sunday we stayed overnight in Lagro where we visited a dairy farm--some even hand milked a cow!! Our hosts were old friends, Bob and Clara Swan. Our third day's ride took us to Huntington and our second reservoir crossing. We had over 30 major turns en route which made our staying on the Wheels' circle marks a necessity. Day four...a meandering sort of day...included a lunch stop in Marlde, Indiana, and a visit with Wheels' friends in Uniondale. John Legge owns a grain elevator in Uniondale so we got another dose of the farming community! Our overnight was in Ossian, Indiana.

Day five--it was on to Decatur, Indiana, home of the world's largest grain elevators. The St. Mark's United Methodist Church hosted us and did a great job--provided snacks and an evening meal! Day Six we followed County Road 100 East south which is a well-traveled Amish lane. (Everything slows down there!) We stopped off in Berne, Indiana, for lunch and experienced the noon "gonging" of the new, giant Swiss clock. A must see! We continued to run with Amish wagons to Bearcreek Farms for an evening meal and variety show. Camped out. Our last day was a straight shot to Upland. The route continued to be a blessing. I'd do it all over again tomorrow!

FALL BREAKAWAY--our third trip on the Cardinal Greenway.

JANICE'S BICYCLE FRIEND

A gal working at a local thrift store needed a rear rack for carrying groceries home. Janice to the rescue! A new rack was purchased, the local gal was ecstatic! Not end of story! Janice was not happy with the gal's "department store" bike. She found a close-out bike by an upscale manufacturer to replace the gal's department store bike. The department store bike was then given to Geoff Schwartz who refurbishes bikes and gives them to Taylor University foreign students in need of transportation. Sounds like the old "shell" game. It's always pleasing to see how much happiness can come from something as simple as a bike exchange!

Ham & Eggs:
it's a day's work for a chicken, but a lifetime commitment for a pig!

TRAILBLAZERS

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IN CLOSING...

God has certainly seen fit to watch over our program and, especially, our coast-to-coast bicycle trips! It was a hard decision to make...2011 our last transcontinental run! Keep in mind, however, we’ll fill the void with other exciting bicycling options!

Your gifts over the years have helped fuel our "ongoingness"! These days are tough on all the not-for-profit operations. We continue to operate in the spirit of, when it’s time to move on, we’ll thankfully make our next move. But for right now, you, our year-in-year-out support friends, are our bottom line!

The book, The True Power of Water, by Masaru Emoto, tells the story of conditions that affect the forming of water crystals. Water crystals are indicative of the quality of water. Emoto found that words can impact the quality of water crystals. When gratitude and love were shown to the water, perfect crystals resulted. The water would not form crystals if the word hate or kill was shown to the water. I know that’s a bit of a stretch. G.K. Chesterton says that gratitude is the highest form of thought. Gratitude is the only virtue that God expects. When our hearts are grateful, blessing is passed from one generation to the next.

Our long history is laced with nothing but GRATITUDE! Bob & Staff

You don’t know a man until you walk in his shoes!

2011 TRIP SCHEDULE

Florida Keys Trip #1 JAN 16 - JAN 26
Florida Keys Trip #2 JAN 30 - FEB 09
68th Spring Coast to Coast MAR 25 - MAY 05
Motor Scooter- Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York & West Virginia JUN 16 - JUN 30
27th Fall Breakaway SEP 09 - SEP 16
West Coast of Michigan