

**Pedaling for Peace of Mind**  
**Lessons from A X-Country Bicycle Ride**  
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Greg and Susie were the first ones to respond. My posting on the cycling website seeking partners and accommodations for a cross-country bicycle ride was short and similar to many others. But within a day Susie and Greg wrote to me –we cannot ride with you but if you are following the Northern Tier Cross Country Cycling Map our home in Libby, Montana is right on your route. Join us for a meal, stay overnight. Stop by... By the time I reached Libby I had pedaled more than 500 miles from my starting point in Seattle. I was ready for a home cooked meal. I knocked on their door and entered their world. They wanted to know all about route I followed out of Seattle, the climb into the Cascade National Park, the five mountain passes I had already crossed. We talked biking gear, road conditions, local rides – yes it was a weekend – yes they loved to ride - but no they could not join me. They did not have to tell me why. That was clear when after dinner we walked three doors down the road to the home of Susie's mom. Suffering from severe dementia, mom could not be left alone for more than a few hours. I learned that mom had been like this for years. At this point in their lives Susie and Greg took every opportunity to live vicariously through people like me who passed through Libby. I was impressed. Spirits up, they were making the best of a tough situation. What a wonderful, loving couple.

So what if Montana is a red state. Family is family. And we were part of the road family. Sharing the adventures of the road spans many differences. They knew the excitement I felt when I hurled down the east side of Washington Pass – a 43 mph free fall for 15 miles! They told me about what was ahead in Glacier National Park - and before I left they called a former Libby police officer – now border guard in Havre, Missouri – and lined up another home stay several hundred miles down the road.

And so it went –I was gently handed off by many kind and diverse people for the entire 3,903 miles from Seattle WA to Portland ME. I had dinner with a traveling salesman who sold aerial photos of family farms in Eastern Missouri; I stayed in a sleeping room at a hotel serving railroad workers and listened to stories of fires the trains were causing along the hot dry roadbed; I kept an elderly motel keeper up late with worry when I did not show up until an hour after dark in N. Dakota; and when I complained about the bad beer along the way – a proud Minnesota barkeeper beamed as she pored a pint of Moose Drool – now that is a beer! Where have all of these wonderful people been? Why was I only meeting them now at 54 years old?

Of course they've been at home all along. But I was finally going slow enough to meet them.

And what about the countryside? Picture this. In fact, *ride with me*. Priest River, Idaho has a campground with bicycle sites right in town. Last night we visited with the crowd at the Grill during the Texas holdem tournament. It was great. It was a late night but it is so beautiful in the morning that we are ready to pack up at first light. This may be a road trip but we are not disorganized. Everything has its place as we pack the panniers and strap on the load so the bike is balanced. Strap our sign to the back. We

roll out of the campground silently and fall in along the Pend Orielle River. The mist is rising from the water; we can see an osprey feeding its young on a nest high atop a dead snag. Our load is tight and the bike does not make a sound. We are gliding along the smooth road. The only sound is from the morning birds. Then in a pond on our right we hear, then see, a beaver family playing tag and water wrestling. Now we are alone again –the sun is peeking up in front of us - and it is fabulous. And so are the grain fields, the Milk, Missouri, the Mississippi rivers, the bike trails through woods and nature preserves, the shore of Lake Michigan- Even Chicago, as we pedal right through the Loop along Grant Park. We have a beautiful country.

Last week I sued the City of Cleveland for framing an innocent man – Daniel Hines – with the brutal murder of an eleven-year-old girl. I believe that Cleveland police officers planted evidence in Daniel’s basement and lied about statements made during their five interviews of Daniel. In March I go to trial against New Vienna, Ohio where an officer shot an unarmed man at point blank range in front of his wife and children. In January we will go to trial against the post office for discharging rather than accommodating a long-term employee after she was struck in the head on the job by a careless coworker. In December I will go to trial against doctors in Toledo who misled a woman into having an abortion that she did not want. As a civil rights attorney I often see people at their worst. Abusing power, taking advantage of wealth and position.

The ride served as a sabbatical from all of this– reaffirming our seventh principle – respect for the interdependent web of all existence – the ride gave me a chance to turn everything on its head and experience relationships from entirely new perspectives. I met Greg and Susie’s police officer friend when I reached Havre, Missouri – we had a few

beers – talked long into the night as he told me about his work as a detective and now as a border guard on the Canadian border. I slept peacefully at his house in a bed under his wall mounted gun rack. I spent every day outside – some under cloudless skies; others in the rain – sometimes struggling against head winds, other times letting the wind push me along from behind. What a change from my days inside at a desk where the weather and wind are irrelevant. I spent much time alone – often reflecting for a long time on the expanse before me or the stranger I just met at the diner. I was taking the time to let the sky, wind, and strangers along the way enter my life and ride with me. I was not multi tasking - talking on the phone while reading my email and writing a brief. I often listened to books on tape – 18 in all – everything from eastern religions to politics – to poetry. Reading things unrelated to work – simply to learn and to pursue other interests was wonderful and renewing.

Sharon challenged us in a sermon in September to try something new every year. When we start over, when we continually experience beginnings, we have a chance to celebrate our dependence on nature and on all the others who share this earth. The web of all existence is so much more fascinating when we experience a broader portion than that presented through our normal routines.

I rode through very few big cities. After weeks on empty rural roads I was not sure how I would fare in the cities. As I rolled toward South Chicago, an African American man came up alongside and said simply, “Thanks.” He had seen my sign announcing the ride as a fundraiser for criminal justice reform and was grateful. He told me about his son and his own passion for justice. Later that day I rode with the police Chief of Gary, Indiana and he described the struggles of his town, of drugs, crime – we

also spoke about how exhilarating and peaceful it was to ride on a Sunday morning – and it was this tough, hardened man who directed me to a beautiful spot on Lake Michigan where I could take a swim. As I pulled into Cleveland I was bucking headwinds, terrible road conditions and heavy traffic. As I entered the downtown an ominous looking black SUV came up close behind me, the tinted glass started to come down on the passenger side leaving me a bit apprehensive but then a bottle of Gatorade was handed out the window along with a hearty “Good Luck.”

The ride seemed to span many generations. I often stayed in small motels that have been in the family for generations. I took layover days with my 97-year-old father in law and my mom’s nursing school roommate – now 90. We went on a date – in a taxicab – to a neighborhood restaurant and she told me stories about parties and adventures as she and my mom set out on their lives together.

How do I hold onto these images? How to savor? I ended the ride last month but already those 54 days seem like a fleeting moment. A number of us in this church have run or trained for marathons. I was thinking of Alice Schneider and Steve Olden who have worked so long for social justice. This is work that has no clear finish line. This ride was much like a marathon – there are easier, more efficient ways to go 26.2 miles rather than running; there are easier, more efficient ways to get to get from Seattle to Portland, Maine than riding a bike.

When we tackle these efforts we are not focused on the destination – it’s really all about the journey. And the images from these journeys blossom over and over again. Often just when you need them. . I may never see police relations with the AA community dramatically improve in this city – but I will be renewed if I view the success

of a CPOP problem solving team as a milestone worth as much celebration as passing the 3300 mile mark along the peaceful Erie Canal towpath near Rochester, NY. *It's the journey.* I may not see reproductive health expand for poor women and rural women but if I can just win an order holding one portion of the restrictive abortion law, HB 421, unconstitutional that deserves as much recognition as reaching that spot in the Adirondacks where water and boulders merged into a stunning river. *It's the journey.* I may not see prisoners offered any real opportunities for personal rehabilitation – but we just won an order dramatically improving prison health care statewide – surely that is comparable to standing at the summit of Kancamagas Pass in the White Mountains after a long ascent on the bike. *It's the journey.* The ride served as a fundraiser for the Ohio Justice and Policy Center. I read the papers and heard the news across the country – often about crime. And I thought about the fear felt by so many people in this country. Our leaders have convinced us that we need to be afraid of each other and if we elect Joe he will protect us from each other – generally by locking up someone even longer. Convincing people that they can stay safe by smart policies, not just tough policies, is slow, hard work. Very much like the ride on a hot afternoon. Set small goals – and celebrate when you reach them. Eventually we get to the next hilltop, the next town. So it seems with criminal justice reform. *It's all a journey.*

Sabbaticals like the ride make it easier to recognize milestones in our journey through life. Images, phrases, faces, and smells (I'm recalling the narrow lane in New York state where the smell of apples was overwhelming) from the ride are returning at unexpected times and they are so welcome!

Greg and Susie are still at home. And Susie's mom still doesn't know where she is. But they are all present in my life and I am better for it. The ride itself is still present.

It emerged at a professional meeting two weeks ago – I was a presenter at the Midwest Labor Law Conference– 500 employment lawyers – I was preceded by a management lawyer who railed against the protections workers have under current law and he pined for the old days when workers could really be hired and fired at will. The crowd – 80% management and defense lawyers sat there nodding their heads in agreement – I was upset but what could I do? I was not scheduled to talk on his topic. I followed with my mundane talk - retaliation under the Sarbanes Oxley legislation – but I could not let his words go unanswered. I pushed through my presentation and then, referencing the previous speaker, shared with the crowd a Carl Sandburg poem critical of the legal rights afforded to workers that I had collected during the ride. It went in part -

Stocks are property yes  
Bonds are property yes  
Machines, land, buildings are property yes  
A job is property  
No, nix, nah, nah

I simply read the poem and urged the previous speaker and the audience to reflect on the pro worker message of Sandburg. Reading a poem that made hundreds of management lawyers uncomfortable was like riding down a hill on a bicycle – great fun!

I need to learn what so many of you already know. The power of poetry – the power of music (which my bro in law Bill Sample does so well) – the renewal that comes from time outdoors. My smile comes easier and my step is lighter when I make room to imagine – to wonder – during the day. It was so fitting when I slogged through a rainy day in the Vermont hills toward the end of the ride and came across Ripton, a small town

that served as home to Robert Frost. The store in town still had a post office, dry goods and food – a true general store. As I lingered over a cup of coffee and watched the locals I was struck by how calm and unhurried they were. All of them had time to visit and reach out to each other. I started out again and came across a park built by the town in honor of Robert Frost with posts along the way bearing portions of his poems. Even in the rain this was an inspiring place. Toward the end of the path Frost reminded me to seize the day in his poem, “Carpe Diem.”

Near the Maine border I stopped at a B&B and spent an afternoon gazing at Mt. Washington and the White Mountains. I wanted to hold onto these images forever. On my last day, Ben (who is here today from Washington DC) and Mimi joined me at the Atlantic shore as I ceremoniously dipped my bike into the Ocean as I had done at Puget Sound when I started 54 days earlier. It was great to extend my journey with family and now with all of you – our church family. I hope we can all recognize the milestones in our journey and savor them as we continue on toward the land we seek to build – “where justice shall roll down like waters and peace like an ever flowing stream.” Amen