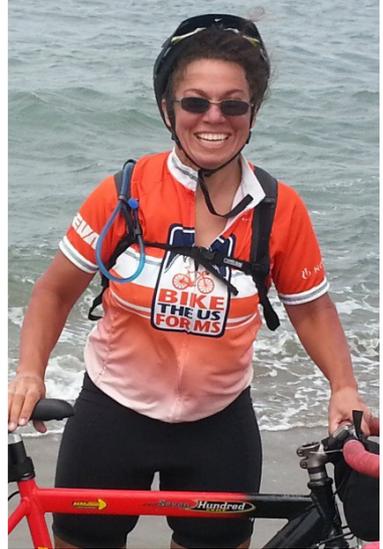


2015-05 Focus On Members

Our Focus this month is on Gina Raimondo, recently completing a cross- country ride for a good cause.

Early in the summer of 2014, twenty-four cyclists ranging in ages from 18 to 75 and coming from various regions and cycling clubs across the country departed from the beaches in Yorktown, Virginia, on an adventure across the United States with one mission in mind...to increase awareness and to raise funds that would go to support research and treatment for patients and their families living with multiple sclerosis. Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a disease of the central nervous system that destroys the protective layer that surrounds nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord. It can paralyze a person, can take one's eyesight, can make one dizzy, and can cause one to slur his speech. The disease affects every individual differently and the cause of multiple sclerosis is unknown.



So, for my 40th birthday, I decided to partake in this worthwhile cause and ride with the organization Bike the US for MS. We rode from Yorktown, Virginia, to San Francisco, California. The journey took us 62 days, 3,780 miles, and through 9 states. I can remember days when I cycled from dawn to dusk, climbed mountains that I thought would never end, and endured endless roads that went for miles and days without a single turn. There were times throughout the journey that the ordinary daily things most people take for granted became the highest priorities, such as food, water, clean clothes, and dry shelter. Participating in Bike the US for MS changed my life as it offered me the opportunity to make a difference for people inflicted with this incurable disease. Throughout the trek, the organization put together community projects to help the local people who are affected with MS. The organization also donated to the local research centers and facilities along the way that support MS patients.

The overall experience of traveling across the United States made me realize how beautiful the country is and it's amazing how every state I crossed had its unique landscape. But most of all, I met kindhearted people who enriched my travel experience. People of all faiths, races, and backgrounds went out of their way to help us with our cause. I was amazed at the overwhelming support and hospitality we received as we biked through town after town.

While riding through mountains of Virginia, I found myself on a steep hill struggling to climb it. The hot June sun beat down on my back and the sweat crept up my arms and neck; I kept pedaling, but was slowly running out of steam. Ahead, I saw a small dilapidated house with an old lady sitting on her front porch fanning herself with a paper plate. I approached the old lady and asked her for some water; my throat was so dry. I introduced myself and explained to the lady my mission. She went into her house and came out with a half-gallon of water, and insisted that I take it with me. I sipped from the

container; this is just what I needed to rehydrate and to make the climb to the rest area several miles ahead. Once at the rest stop, I told my fellow riders and locals the story of the old lady who helped me out. Although, I didn't realize it at the time, I learned that this old lady lived in a house without running water and that she had given me the last ounces of bottled-water she had on hand. This incident epitomizes the selflessness and the generosity of the people I met along the way. Others opened up their local churches, fire houses, homes, etc... so riders would have a place to stay at night. Local folks cheered us on as we rode through their towns. The camaraderie, both from fellow riders and townspeople, is what fueled my desire and is what gave me the inner strength to complete the 3,780 miles trek. Not only did I have a chance to see how beautiful our country is, but I also had the chance to learn how beautiful American's are inside and out.

Now, I don't consider myself to be the fastest or strongest cyclist, but I would encourage anyone with the desire, passion, and willingness to go for it. The experience of helping people with MS and meeting wonderful friendly Americans while doing something you love makes the journey more rewarding and worth doing it again. This year, I'm a segment cyclist on the Bike the US for MS Northern Tier team, which will be starting in Minneapolis, Minnesota and ending in Seattle, Washington. I credit much of my training rides to the Princeton Freewheelers organization, and I have met some of the most amazing people in the 15 years I have been a member.

I would also like to add the website on the bottom just in case people want more information on the ride or would like to make a donation. The website is www.biketheusforms.org. Thanks, Gina