



2015-08 Focus On Members

Our Focus this month is on Jim Brittain and Regina Brzek Two motorcyclists turn bicyclists.

Jim said, "I bought a motorcycle, years ago, as a response to a midlife crisis, and loved it. I was taken with the various motorcycle cultures and did much of my own maintenance. But after walking away from my second motorcycle accident in fifteen months, my wife and I decided that the motorcycle was not for me.

"As a consolation, I bought a bicycle, the first I'd had in decades (a coworker was into cycling, and it sounded like a good idea). I didn't take to it right away, until a few years later, when my doctor noticed my weight and general condition, and started making a number of impertinent remarks about blood pressure and pre-diabetes. I got the bike back out, and this time, I just took to it.

"That was about seven or eight years ago. Since that time, I've been taken over by bicycles. Except for racing (about which I don't give a hoot), I'm fascinated by bicycles, by the culture, the history, the mechanics and materials. I'm fairly handy, and I've gone from doing some of my own maintenance, to doing pretty much all of my own maintenance, to building my two road bikes from parts (including building the wheels from hubs, rims, nipples and spokes). I tried volunteering at the Trenton Bike Exchange, but I live at the northern reaches of the Princeton Freewheeler territory, and I was spending more time traveling than I was turning wrenches. But now there's a fledgling Bike Exchange in New Brunswick, and I'm a regular there. I've been a mechanic at a bike maintenance station at the past several New Brunswick Ciclovias, and, in my neighborhood, the kids all know to bring their bikes to me to fix their dropped chains and pump up their tires. And friends who've gotten bikes in boxes for assembly have been known to call on me - I usually get a free dinner out of the deal.

"I'm not one for the latest-and-greatest technologies. I like the almost steampunk feel of a geared road bike, with the levers and cables. I like that you can see all of the mechanics. Leonardo could have looked at it, and figured it all out.

"Some of you will know my blog, seemingverb.blogspot.com. It's mostly bike-related stuff (my rides, nifty bikes or gear, bike-related stories or news), although I also put up anything else that takes my fancy, especially if there is a good picture. When I go to Freewheeler events, I like to get pictures, and I link them on the blog, as well.

"I ride a lot, mostly (but not always) with the Freewheelers. I don't lead many rides; on a number of rides, either officially or not, I sweep - partly because I'm geographically-challenged; I can get lost in a bathroom, and following a leader gives me a place to go. A couple years ago, The Excellent Wife (see below) and I went on the Freewheeler trip to Martha's Vineyard; that was cool. A good day for me is about 45 miles at a fairly stiff pace, or 55-60 miles at a slower pace (although I like to knock out a century every now and then, if only to remind myself that I don't want to do them more frequently)."

Regina said, "I bought a hybrid, a clunky, Giant Cypress nine years ago with the idea of running the occasional chore while minimizing my carbon footprint. Eventually, I integrated five-mile rides into my exercise routine.

"By 2012, I had become a bike widow, as Jim had gotten the bike bug. My goal became to ride with Freewheelers so as to increase the odds of seeing my husband during daylight hours. I gradually increased the length of my rides, hitting 20 miles that fall. The next year I started group rides with the Freewheelers, the first out on Martha's Vineyard. At the end of that summer, I invested in a Cannondale road bike. I knew I was going to stick with it.

"I ride C groups these days, as well as solo, meditative rides along the D&R canal. Sometimes, I even ride with Jim! I enjoy the camaraderie and support of other Freewheelers. I remain grateful to those experienced riders who led D/D+ rides, allowing me to gain confidence riding in groups. Next on the agenda: a better hybrid for canal towpath rides."

Jim Brittain & Regina Brzek