

2016-10 Member in Focus: Mena Abaskharoun



I learned to ride a bicycle on April 23, 2016 at 33 years of age.

Bristol-Myers Squibb (BMS) has an annual event with Stand Up 2 Cancer called the Coast 2 Coast 4 Cancer (C2C4Cancer) where 80 employees cycle 2800 miles across America, each person riding 60-70 miles each day for 4 days. In December, I submitted my request to join this great cause. The only confounding factor was my inability to ride a bike.

Nevertheless, I was selected to participate in the ride.

So, the journey began in April at the Trexlertown Velodrome with Bob, my coach. I showed up in two layers of sweats, two hoodies, and a bike we were given (Diamondback) in early April. I was prepared to fall, fall some more and drive home defeated. My first day played out that way, and I wrecked my favorite pair of running shoes. We worked on balance, getting my feet off the ground, learning the parts of a bike, and the proper clothes. I practiced balancing through the next week and met Bob the following Saturday. I don't think I cracked 5 mph that day. I gave him a big hug and drove home in tears of joy.

I spent the new few weeks trying to gain "saddle miles," and I finally made it over the 10 mph pace. Yes, I still posted this on Strava. I was proud!

I made the hike to Trexlertown once a weekend leaving the house at 5:30am to meet with Bob at 7am for an hour or two to learn and bombard him with many questions. After 1 month on the bike, I decided to do 25 miles in the Tour de South Brunswick on May 28th. At mile 16, I took a bad fall in a curve and suffered a mild concussion. I got up and refused to give up but my bike had a flat. I recovered and after my first few road rides with Bob decided to join the PFW in June. I wanted to join every D and D+ ride. I decided to join Ben's C ride one Saturday morning, a 40-miler. Next thing I knew, I was doing the C+ ride out of Etra Park on Fridays with the Social Security gang and Mary's Sunday ride. In August, I did my first metric at the PFW Event. Through the experience, there have many stories that have really left an imprint, from the local bike shop owner who is a lymphoma survivor going on 20 years, to a cyclist we met during the PFW Event where cycling saved his life (there was a doctor on one of the rides and he told him to get a lesion checked and they caught 3 early tumors), to a gentlemen we met during a charity lemonade stand who is one year post-lymphoma treatment, to numerous other stories of perseverance of the human spirit.

My C2C4Cancer leg is from Sept 20-23 cycling from Kansas City to Columbus, OH. By the time this is published, I will have completed this journey. If you would like to learn more and would like to support the cause, please use the link below until October 15th to donate.

http://do.eifoundation.org/site/TR/SU2C/StandUpToCancer?px=2620871&pg=personal&fr_id=1420