

# 2016-11 Member In Focus: Rajesh Nayak



"Let's do a 40 mile ride on the Schuylkill river trail with the kids" said my brother-in-law, in April 2013. For someone who hasn't been athletic nor owned a bicycle for the past 20 years, I just shook my head and dismissed his idea. My 13-year-old daughter did have a bike then and my uncle volunteered to bring along his friend's hybrid bike for me. I reluctantly agreed and to my disbelief we actually enjoyed riding from Valley Forge national park to the Philadelphia Art museum and back! This is how I contracted the cycling bug.

Growing up in Mumbai, India I learned to ride a bicycle during my elementary school years when bicycles were available for hourly rental and they had kid's bikes. It was an amazing feeling as a kid to ride on the open road independently and take in the sensations of doing so. My dad had a big steel single speed Norton bike (most dads in the 70s did) as an affordable means of commuting to work and getting around. Between 1991 and 1993 I rode a bicycle while completing my Masters and used it as my primary means of transportation between where I lived and the institute and getting around Pune.

Fast forward to 2013 and I bought my first hybrid bike, a Trek 7.3FX on Labor day weekend in 2013 and researched bike friendly roads in Monroe, South Brunswick and rode every weekend on my own. I did a solo ride from Nyack to Ft. Lee and back on 9W after a social event and that's when I saw riders on fast carbon bikes and Lycra clothing passing me as if I were standing. I was intrigued by this and decided to buy a road bike with drop handlebars. It was a used Cannondale CAAD9. I learned to ride clipless pedals and the use of Shimano 105 gears by watching YouTube videos and practicing on my own in Thompson Park. Van Delfino, the owner of Bicycle Rack, helped me during this time and recommended joining Princeton Freewheelers. I joined PFW in Nov 2013 and started riding solo on Rt. 518 from where it meets Rt 27 all the way west till it meets Rt 31 and back, since it has a dedicated bike lane. I practiced until I could ride 30 miles comfortably at a 13 mph average speed. The first PFW group ride was a C ride in March 2014 led by Sue Moser out of Bruno's. I graduated to the longer and eventually faster PFW rides. I rode my first metric century alone during the 2014 PFW event, gained a lot of confidence, and targeted to ride a full century during the 2014 Twin Lights ride. I completed that ride in 6 hours 15 minutes of pedaling time and was ecstatic at what I could accomplish in 2014.

I rode the 107-mile Gran Fondo NJ in 2015 with 9,000 feet of climbing, and a few other centuries, and then earlier this year I completed two 200-kilometer brevets organized by the NJ Randonneurs. I rode the 75-mile Gran Fondo NJ this year and then completed the 180-mile Bike MS: City to Shore on 24 and 25 September. The number of bikes I own has increased as well!

This is just my third year of cycling and it has been an amazing journey so far and thanks to a lot of help and mentoring by PFW ride leaders and riding friends, I have been able to enjoy this hobby that I aim to pursue as long as I can. I really love cycling and actively promote it in my social and work circles. You can find me on B or B+ rides out of Etra and Cranbury. I wish all of you safe riding. Keep challenging yourselves, enjoy the ride, the moments, the camaraderie, and the simple pleasure of riding a bicycle!