

Get Your Guts In Gear

By Bob Weinstein

As the new year rolls in, we are all certainly taking stock of what we want to accomplish during 2009. News of today's economic situation is continuing its assault on our senses, seeming to dominate the media and not giving us a chance to escape – adding to our everyday stresses –although our passion for cycling is a great way to fill this need. I wanted to take the time to write to the membership about a charity ride that I have had the pleasure to participate in for the past four years, which provides me a tremendous amount of personal fulfillment and raises awareness for a group of illnesses that is both debilitating and little known.

Get Your Guts In Gear is more than a ride. It is a community of people that are dedicated to raising awareness for people affected by Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis — as patients, caregivers and friends. Many of you know someone who is afflicted with these illnesses and as you will be aware, they are typically “silent sufferers”, handling the effects of the disease alone or in a very small close knit group of family. Reflecting on what I want to accomplish this year, participation in this event and supporting this organization heads my list. Rereading what I wrote to my financial supporters after my first event in June, 2006, it still reflects my feelings about the people, the event and my hope that there will be some among you who will join me on one or two of the events in 2009,

“June 2006 — There were 78 cyclists who started and completed the 220 miles from Manhattan to Saratoga Springs and 40 dedicated crew members who supported us through weather that was described by one cyclist as “rain, wind, hills, hills, hills, wind, cold and more hills”! The most amazing thing is that amongst these cyclists were those who were suffering from one of the vast plethora of IBD afflictions. I knew going in that these “silent sufferers” were the real ‘heros’ raising awareness and funds for those who could not do so — but to participate with this group of folks was a privilege that I will both never forget and will fortunately have the chance to relive next year.

I could not have imagined that I would have cycled for three days with a man a bit younger than me who was diagnosed 5 years ago with colitis — ending an amateur run at ski and cycling races — we became great friends. Or that a man about my age was cycling with his son and brother, that he no longer had a colon and was not only a ‘colon cancer survivor’ but declared to me that he was “...cured, because he was never going to be sick like that again, ever.” And he said it with a smile. There were four “osteomates” those who had full colonectomies and had bags — you would never imagine that this was the case at all. All of us were just spending time together joking, eating, cycling and chatting about intestinal systems. You all know me, so to talk about farting in open company is a real pleasure. There were mothers cycling for their sons and daughters as they felt that they had to do something, anything, for their children who were too sick to do it themselves, awaiting surgery or a new drug therapy. Wow!

I do not know what comes across ones mind that goes from a ‘why am I doing this’ to a ‘I can't believe how good I feel’ and it isn't a physical feeling. As a scientist turned manager, there is no logic to this. I cannot describe what it felt like to be with this group and to see the accomplishment on our collective faces.

At Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs on Sunday afternoon we celebrated with a bbq and many words of thanks for the organizers, the fact that raising awareness is perhaps the most important thing we can do. We wore ‘NY Met blue and orange’ Get your Guts in Gear stuff all weekend, answering questions of those along the way who wondered what this group was doing, and mostly thinking that this is just the beginning of the journey. Putting “IBD” on the map is extremely important and the goal of the Get your Guts in Gear non-profit organization.

And there was cycling! Just a little about that, since it is a great experience too. The longest ride I had done previously was 62 miles on the Sunday before the ride started. On Friday, we left Manhattan and wended our way through traffic over the GW bridge and into New Jersey through the Palisades park — the only time I had ever been there was to go to "Palisades Parkway Court" to pay an immense speeding ticket! Hills and rain...oh well. Then over the Bear Mountain bridge, and up to Beacon. Some really beautiful areas, but I was happy to have completed the first day — there were 4,100 ft of ascent, not too bad, and the wind was OK. Saturday was 84 miles from Beacon to Earleton (near Coxsackie), over the Newburgh Beacon Bridge, and the Rhinebeck bridge as well! The wind was 10-20 mph with gusts up to 30-35 mph, unfortunately out of the north, directly in our face. It was really difficult, 8,100 ft of ascent, and it was so windy even the descents only felt like 'flats'. I finally understood "Granny Gear". Sunday started at 50 degree F, kind of October weather and I had not really planned for it. Oh well, one warms up pretty well once you get started. It warmed up to about 65 F later in the early afternoon, the ride was hilly for the first 10 miles and last 15 miles, but the middle 45 were nice and flat. We went through Troy, Albany, Watervliet before arriving in Saratoga Springs which was beautiful. 2,300 ft of ascent, and not too bad. I felt amazing and could not believe that it was over. Marcy, Amanda, Sarah and Josh were at the finish waiting for me, and then we hung out for the closing."

The June 2006 Get Your Guts In Gear charity is the reason that I purchased my first road bike and started cycling — all to support those afflicted with these illnesses. My oldest daughter, Amanda, was diagnosed with Crohn's when she was 10 years old and has been part of the crew on the three NY rides I have done. I have also had the pleasure of going to Austin, Texas for another "GYGIG" ride. It is a unique opportunity to combine great cycling with a camaraderie that will last a lifetime.

For 2009, Get You Guts in Gear is planning on the NY ride from Manhattan to Saratoga Springs on 12-14 June, 7-9 August ride in the Pacific Northwest and a Fall ride in the midwest with a date 'tbd'. Each ride averages about 70 miles each day, with two overnight camp stays, participation with a great community of folks and am in the process of planning my participation for 2009. I would be pleased to have one or more "Freewheelers" on the ride(s) and guarantee that these events will change the way you think about cycling and charity. The website for "Get Your Guts In Gear" is <http://www.ibdride.org>.