

Spring/Summer 2019 Member Focus

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I don't have a powerful cycling story to tell. There was nothing Earth shattering that occurred to me while riding a bike. But the act of cycling has been empowering for me. I find myself returning to the sport after years of neglect. Kids and careers (especially those that focus on others) kind of get in the way, don't they? But cycling has found a way to sneak back into my lifestyle and I have had many life lessons reinforced to me from being back in the saddle again.

I don't remember not knowing how to ride and riding was a happy part of my childhood. As a kid, one of my favorite bike memories were when I was living in Utah and being old enough to cross over busy State Street in town by myself to the local Mom and Pop store to pick up milk and bread at the request of my parents. I felt so grown up that they would entrust me with such a big responsibility.

Another fond memory was after my dad moved us to Germany right at the brink of me starting high school in 1997 when he got a job as a private contractor working for the Department of Defense. We lived in a house in a German town that was 90 minute commute on the Autobahn away from the nearest American high school in Wiesbaden, so biking to class was out of the question. But as my family and I explored our foreign new surroundings, we did so on our bikes that that we had shipped to us from home. All five of us climbed on and explored the nearby towns. We soon discovered a trail that took us through a forest that we cleverly named 'The Dark and Scary Forest' because it was so dense with trees that it was constantly dark, even on rare sunny days. The hilly trail through the forest eventually lead to a lovely reservoir. We would often bring a picnic lunch on our bikes and sit and watch the ducks and enjoy some American style people watching of the locals.

And then there was a time in between semesters in college where I was still trying to figure out what I wanted to be when I grew up. I didn't have the guts to pursue art full time so I had to figure something else out. I was renting a tiny bedroom out of a stranger's home and had no vehicle and no real sense of direction. I had to borrow my uncle's bike to get to my job working as the produce girl at the local grocery. It was there that I saw the nurses from the nearby medical center coming in the store to pick up food on their lunch break. I saw them in their scrubs and imagined what their day and their life must look like: saving lives, being advocates for patients, being a smart and highly respected member of a hospital community. I wanted that too! I decided that was the career I wanted. I quit my job as produce girl extraordinaire and applied to be a Certified Nurses Aid. I rode my bike back and forth to that thankless job for an entire summer. It was on that bike to the nursing home job that I set my mind to pursue nursing school.

Then comes marriage and a baby carriage. I didn't own or ride a bike for close to 14 years and completely lost touch with it. I was married, having and raising babies, finishing nursing school and building my career as an oncology nurse. Who had time to ride?

But as my kids got older, I found myself being pulled back to it. I certainly would not describe myself as athletic, but this is one beautiful sport that I actually truly enjoyed. I bought an inexpensive hybrid from the sporting goods store; it was first bike I had owned since moving back to the States from Germany. I'd start out with just 20 minutes once or twice a week. It felt so good to get back on a bicycle. I had to time my short rides around when my husband was home and awake to be with the young kids. Then I began tracking my pace and distance. Over time, I pushed myself. Soon, I could go a whole 5 miles without stopping! The kids were getting older and it became ok to leave my now teenager and middle schooler home alone while I continued to ride farther and faster.

Then I discovered the Princeton Free Wheelers group. I had never belonged to this type of club before. It was after my first grueling (or what I perceived as grueling) group ride with Ira that I bought a gently used road bike in order to be able to keep up in the future. I fell in love. Because of my time spent with the group, I can now keep a C+/B pace, I know (theoretically) how to change a tire after a bike repair class with Jim, and I even know how to spell "derailleur". I have a new found passion for cycling. I regularly incorporate bikes into family vacations, I have completed two 5 Boro Bike Tours, and a PFW event. My love of cycling is starting to positively inspire my kids. I've even been accused of being "hard core". But that's ok though, I've been called worse...

The many hours spent on my bike are wonderful. I look for opportunities to ride as often as I can. It allows me to decompress after work, I can clear my head, get exercise and feel like I'm really doing something for *me*.

Cycling is also educational. Here are 10 life lessons my bike and time with the PFWers have taught me:

- 1. Be prepared.** Whether it be stretching before a long ride, planning for enough hydration, having the equipment in good working condition or knowing the weather forecast that day, preparation (or lack of it) can make or break a ride.
- 2. Acknowledge (wave!) those you pass on the same route.** This person is at this moment experiencing the same road conditions you are. The small gesture is encouraging. And polite. You will appear to be a jerk if you don't.

- 3.** There will always be someone who is faster, more knowledgeable, and is more experienced than you. Don't be so proud that you can't/won't accept help from them. These are the people you learn from.
- 4.** There will always be someone slower, knows less and is less experienced than you. These are the people you should offer to help.
- 5.** Don't ignore a quiet, squeaking problem so long that it eventually results in you being sprawled out on your back and embarrassed (or worse) on the side of the road.
- 6.** Don't underestimate people. Some guy twice your age and with a beer gut can leave you in his dust on the route.
- 7.** The most awful and challenging climbs often have the best reward, whether it be the view from the top or the exhilarating ride down the other side. So don't skip the hills.
- 8.** Give yourself realistic goals, attainable goals. No one starts out doing a century on their first ride.
- 9.** No matter how slow you feel you are going, you're lapping your couch pace.
- 10.** Relish the journey! You could always be at work...