

Natural Healing Express Weekly

Column Volume 148 RAGBRAI – America’s Favorite Bicycle Ride, Part III

Well, yes, this article is happening a week later than I anticipated; and for a very good reason, but we’ll get to that in a minute. Let’s just start out with the fact that my participation in RAGBRAI (the bicycle ride across Iowa) filled me with a new perspective – on several levels.

The biggest reason for doing RAGBRAI was to spend time with dear friends and to learn about their love of this event. That part happened but certainly not in the way we had all hoped. In RAGBRAI, there are many folks who join a “team” to help better their chances of getting in the event (they limit riders to 10,000 participants) and to build camaraderie are a few reasons why. So, through my friends’ connections, I joined Team Pedal Faster. Sounds pleasant enough, huh? One of my other local team favorites was Team Cow and of course the G.O.A.T.S team from Galena. Those guys all rocked it!

However, the team where I did a lot of my riding was Team Air Force. Yep, the fast guys. I can’t really believe it either, but every day, like it was their job, they seemed to find me on the Route and we shared some of the ride. Pretty hilarious since there really are 10,000 riders, so finding an individual that you didn’t start out with is like finding a needle in a haystack. My point is that despite wanting to spend time riding with my friends, we only shared a few miles. My friends had duties and responsibilities with others and basically, my ride shaped up much different than theirs.

Each day you acquire a route map and begin your ride. And, that’s what it’s all about – making it your individual ride. That was my first learning – despite being with a group, biking is an individual sport. It’s very personal. I learned the mantra “Do what you need to do” to make your ride the best it can be. Some people ride fast, some ride slow. Some people ride in a group, some people ride alone. Some folks stop at each town and enjoy a cocktail or some food. Some ride straight thru and get to camp early. Probably because I had the luxury of training in God’s Country with these curious and rolling hills, I actually had a lot of stamina and my legs never did get tired. Why? Because Iowa is pretty darn flat – at least it was on this route and I trained hard because I didn’t want to be left on the side of the road. Because of that, I was picking up speed and endurance like crazy because on this route in Iowa, there simply were not that many hills. Plus, I kept pushing the cardio because I just didn’t feel like stopping at every town. So, on most days, I rode straight thru, stopping only for hydration and protein – and that’s pretty much how Team Air Force did it. I learned there were 137 of them on their team, but it was a group of 3 who kept finding me. And they helped a lot of people along that ride assisting with flat tires, etc.

Although my riding partner was about to kill me, we were doing 70 mile days like it was nothing. We had one day where the heat was so intense – it was 106 degrees with the heat index, that we had to stop more often but still not for long. On a few occasions I rode by myself. These were especially gratifying since it afforded me a lot of time to enjoy country roads, nature and the gentle peacefulness and awe of our land. We truly do live in the greatest country in the world. You realize that even more a bike. You realize it even more when you actually take the time to look. That’s what my ride was all about –being present in my surroundings and truly enjoying them. Well, except for the pig poop smell. EGAD.

I can’t even remember the last time I had a vacation, but it’s been at least 15 years ago and certainly never more than 3 or 4 days. It was incredible for me to even be on a bike for 6 days straight. Normally I don’t take that kind of time to do anything but research and run a business, but I learned I need to bring that into balance. Take the time to smell...the roses...and the gardens....and the see the views of fresh streams.

And, as for seeing Iowa, my favorite spot was Clear Lake. That town is a gem. It is also home to the Surf Ballroom which is well known in the music industry as being the last show that Buddy Holly and the Big

Bopper played. Tragic, yet such a beautiful location, and the Ballroom is majestic. Worth the drive if you've never seen it. And the town is absolutely charming.

So, let's get to the heart of this before we run out of ink. I had an absolute blast on this ride. However, I learned I am not the best camper in the world and I do miss luxuries such as indoor plumbing – pretty much in less than 4 hours. I did learn how to set up a tent; maybe more specifically WHERE to set up a tent - especially if it rains. Downhill is no Bueno. I learned to sleep in a cot and didn't whine too much.

I learned that while in a tent near several other campers you can hear a lot of shall we say, "personal" noises. One example is snoring and you can use your imagination from there. I learned that after riding hard and strong, a nap can be in order. I learned that such naps can be interrupted by random bagpiping and that is pretty normal for RAGBRAI. You see it all. I actually saw a man riding a uni-cycle. OMG.

I learned shammy butter is a GREAT thing. I learned true friends are happy for you if you had a great day, even if you weren't around them. I learned nature holds so much beauty and will speak to you if you take the time to look along the way. And, I learned that hard training pays off. I learned having a first aid kit is a great idea. And knowing how to use it is even better.

I learned that even further, God is in control, as my next lesson took a harsher tone. I learned that if you stick a bike tire in the middle of a hole in the median on a concrete road at 20 mph that your bike will stop immediately and you will go flying. I learned that such flying causes you to break your clavicle. Which hurts...As in A LOT. And I learned concrete is very, very hard to bounce off of. I learned that any contact between skin and concrete at that speed will cause the skin to rip right off your body and stay in Iowa. I learned that handle bars can crack lips. And, I learned that my helmet did its job and even though I hit my head, I was spared any further injury.

And, I learned that even after over 400 miles total and 64 miles in the day with only 3 to go, that one cannot ride when broken. And that's how my ride ended – Broken..Actually, Broken Open. And after talking it through with someone dear to me, it became apparent that there was still one more lesson yet to be learned. I learned sometimes God uses our greatest falls to teach us our greatest lessons.

I am aware that everything happens for a reason, but sometimes when God is trying to get your attention and make you aware that changes needed to be made, he starts with a whisper. However, if you don't acknowledge his first 3 or 4 signs, he reserves the right to afford you a much larger and more painful opportunity to hear him. After screaming over those handle bars and suffering what the EMTs called the "best of the worst", I learned even after all this this training and a big fat doctorate degree, I can still lose my way and miss the signs. And, signs are very important.

I learned that sometimes you have to be "broken open" to find your real source of strength. Or to make changes that need to be made. Or to really see the true beauty of who is standing beside you. Sometimes things need to be broken open in order to heal at a deeper level.

And, for the time spent with my dear friends, a new and incredible experience, greater wisdom and a good wake-up call, I am grateful to have participated in America's Favorite Bicycle Ride. RAGBRAI – be careful, I just might be back to finish your course. But, you can bet your sweet patootie that if I ever find myself in the middle of IOWA on a bike again, that my awareness level will be stuck on full alert.

Enjoy! Hope to see you soon and as always, please contact us via one of the following methods. Natural Healing Express: Phone 815 990 8732, email: skscham@aol.com 204 W Main St, Lena, IL 61048.

