

"WOW -- WHAT A RIDE!"

by Glen Hanket



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This book is dedicated to the Peter Jenkinses, Dave Kunsts, John Steinbecks, and William Least-Heat Moons who inspire people everywhere to follow the roads less traveled the Slow Way, and to those adventurous souls who follow their dreams, if only through other's accounts...

And to **Steven Newman**, who has served as an inspiration and a mentor to us ...

And to Joe Hurley, who has continued following in the footsteps of others who set out to discover America.

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PROLOGUE: A Silly Idea

from *Underwear by the Roadside*

THE ADVENTURE HAD STARTED one sunny October afternoon in Orange County, as we sat in our car dealing with some freeway PTS (Permanent Traffic Syndrome — a California highway version of PMS). Seeing a pile of trash at the road's edge, I quipped, "If we want to walk across the country, why don't we pick up trash along the way? That way we could do something productive, not just do it for ourselves."

Sue glanced at me, a skeptical frown contradicting a gleam in her brown eyes. "You've been reading too many of my books."

"All those seditious adventure books you keep checking out of the library? About people who take a break from chasing a dollar to travel?" I laughed. "I confess, guilty as charged."

Blue Highways. WorldWalk. Miles From Nowhere. The books had planted a seed. Sue started with a dog-eared copy of Peter Jenkins' *A Walk Across America* she'd found in my bookcase, and soon sought other titles. With each book read, our fascination with the notion grew. What a way to see the country, to meet people and experience folk culture! However, we'd never breathed a word of doing it ourselves — until now.

"I don't suppose the timing of this has anything to do with Dave Kunst's slide show last week?"

"Well, he didn't strike me as an athlete, and he walked around the world. As he said, 'If I could do it, so could you — if you have the desire'." I paused, then added, "It was just a thought."

As traffic started moving, I lapsed into silence, gazing out the car window. It's a silly idea, walking for trash. The stuff daydreams are made of. I don't even own an orange plastic vest. No, it's just not practical . . . is it?



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... and that's how it started, this crazy notion of walking across the country. The idea had sounded so romantic: a way to escape from the rat race, a chance to chuck the day planner in favor of days spent in unscheduled bliss.

A chance to truly live!

That dream turned into four thousand, one hundred thirty-three miles of ups and downs. For every night spent with new-found friends, we suffered through days of boredom. We had glorious days of wonderful walking weather, we had days filled with rain or parching heat. Celebrations of our first two anniversaries were tempered by bitter fights that threatened our marriage. Through it all, we kept plodding forth, one step at a time...

from *Underwear by the Roadside*:

TIME FOR THE LAST STROLL.

With Sue's good hand in mine, we walked into the park. A bike path broke off from the parking lot, plunging us into a coastal glade. The surrounding trees muted traffic noises, and we imagined ourselves miles from civilization. Alone together, we strode the last quarter mile.

We hit the beach at noon, right on schedule. Directly above, a Coast Guard helicopter buzzed the beach. When the pilot saw us, he dipped his rotors, then headed south. "I called them this morning," Dave [the reporter] explained. "They had training exercises planned for noon, but wanted to salute your trip. They postponed their exercises for an hour."

That left our long-awaited stroll to the sea. To the south the beach stretched endlessly, a ribbon of yellow fringed by tufts of grass. To the north, the skeleton of the Peter Iredale — a British four-mast bark which ran aground in 1906 — silently watched the waves. Behind us lay a continent worth of litter, scenery, and wonderful people. Ahead of us, the surf crashed, the drum roll of our finale.

I stepped into the water, Sue by my side, to an indescribable mix of emotions. With the surf foaming about my feet, I reached into my pack and pulled out a small coin. The token advertised an arcade in north-central Massachusetts.

Facing Dave Pastor's camera, I held the coin so it glinted in the Oregon sun. "Eighteen months ago in Townsend, Massachusetts," I said, "a little girl named Caitlin gave me her lucky coin. She said it was her only gold one, and she wanted me to have it."

With a surge of pride, I added, "If you're watching, Caitlin, I made it!"



RETURN TO REALITY

We didn't conquer the road, we survived it. Though our lives were never in danger, our health suffered. Our enthusiasm for cleaning litter waned at times under the barrage of filthy roads. The tedium of living in a tent for months on end wore on us. In the end, though, we did persevere. The injuries Sue endured only served to make our accomplishment even more bittersweet.

Despite the costs, we termed the trip a success. We discovered the greatness of our country, and met the people that make it so. Despite our quarrels, Sue and I forged a bond that would help our marriage survive the coming years. In addition, the walk left us with:

- an appreciation for simple things,
- a heightened awareness of the unimportant things with which we surround ourselves,
- close friends that continue to enrich our lives,
- and feet that burned every morning when I got up.

Now, after nearly two years of eating, breathing, and sleeping LitterWalk, we had to return to 'normal' life. First up was packing those 'unimportant things' and moving from southern California. Before starting our adventure, we had decided to use the walk to audition other places to set down roots. In the end, our choices narrowed to two: Colorado or Oregon/Washington. With no job leads and a depleted bank account, we now faced the challenge of finding jobs before going broke.

To stretch our meager savings, we moved in with my parents in Colorado. That decision ensured we would stay in the state for the long haul. It took little time to find jobs in the Denver area, while our resumes sent to Oregon were dismissed – the prospect of paying relocation expenses scared away any west coast firms. By the start of 1995 we had paychecks arriving, a house to rent for several months, and our goods en route from California.

It would have been so easy to slip back into a life of anonymity, to again surrender to the rat race. That taste of adventure in which we reveled for so long, though, lingered. We still received interview requests, including one from a freelance writer working for American Media Inc. When his article came out in the *National Enquirer*, it set off another round of radio interviews.

The return of steady paychecks from my engineering job helped pay our bills, but my hunger for adventure hadn't disappeared. When I saw the want ad for a river rafting guide, I knew I had to apply. The company offered instruction in guiding, so (lack of) experience didn't disqualify me. In a class of eighteen, I had done



more rafting than most of the others, even having helped friends guide years before. What set me apart from the others, though, was my age. I was nearly twice as old as the average guide; only one seasoned guide and the company owner claimed more years than I.

For two chilly May weeks in the Rockies, I studied paddle technique, learned to read the waves, and practiced CPR. The week featured camping in late-season snow storms, days beginning before dawn, and hours spent drenched in icy river water. The nights weren't nearly as fun, though, as most of the young singles headed out to the bars to scheme on the opposite sex and down a rafter's rasher of beer. I had never drank much in my youth, and saw no reason to change at this late date.

When finals came around, guiding paying customers down the river, twelve students failed their first chance at winning licenses. Eleven of them got a second (and third and fourth as needed) chance at certification. For the twelfth – me – they claimed I would do better guiding oar boats than paddle boats. Since this company used only paddle boats, they dismissed me.

I talked little of the experience back home. Instead, I turned my energies to our new home. After five months of searching, we'd found a house. A key requirement had been a big yard, our reaction to years of living in apartments and condos. In early April we'd found our gem, a 1980s ranch house on a large lot in Broomfield. By the time we closed, though, a soggy spring had transformed the primitive back yard into a half-acre jungle of chest-high weeds.

We happily hired the ambitious local teen who had passed around flyers asking for yard work. When he showed up with his parents' mower, the weeds closed ranks on him. The pitched battle lasted only fifteen minutes, and ended with him pushing a broken mower home, rethinking his choice of summer jobs.

We did finally get the yard whacked down, and settled in for a summer of holding actions in the war against weeds. Landscaping we had to put off; with two mortgages hanging over us, we had little cash for anything but necessities. Our condo in California continued to cast a shadow over our finances. Not only was it unsold, it was currently unsellable.

NIGHTMARE ON HERITAGE STREET

People often asked us how much the trip cost. Surprisingly little! With no recurring bills for cable TV, electricity, gas, cell phones, or mortgage, we kept our expenses low. For the most part, we got by on \$1000/month, most of that going for food. Early and late in the season our expenses increased with motel rooms, but we still tallied only \$15,000 in direct costs.

Of course, that figure ignores the indirect costs we suffered due to the trip. Before the walk we had strived to end our obligations in California, but failed to sell our condo. Knowing we planned on quitting the state, we had put it on the market for \$162,000, looking forward to gaining eleven years worth of equity in the sale. Unfortunately, the California real estate market had just entered free-fall, and it attracted no buyers. As the start of our walk approached, we rented it instead.

The first tenants gave us no problems, and our property (mis)manager Ray-J collected the rents on time. When they moved on, Ray-J advertised the unit, attracting Anthony and Antoinette and their brood – call them the 'Ant' family. When Ray-J mentioned that they could

afford the unit only by collecting Housing Assistance (HA) money, we voiced doubts, but he assured us that Anthony was 'a good risk' as a Marine from the local base.

Even good risks can go sour. Anthony decided the Marine life didn't suit him, but welfare – ahhh, there's a career path he could identify with! He must have notified Ray-J of his 'job change', but Ray-J figured we had enough concerns with the walk – why bother us with that trivial bit of information?

Still unaware of our welfare tenants, we asked Ray-J to serve them notice at walk's end so we could try again to sell the unit. Before he could do so, the Ants sent him an 'Intent to Leave' – the standard form for HA families looking to move. Believing them, Ray-J opted not to spend his time serving them papers. Five months later, they still Intended to Leave, as soon as they could find another home to destroy – er, rent.

Though looking for new housing and cashing welfare checks undoubtedly kept the Ants busy, they still longed for a way to repay our kindness in providing them shelter. What better way than leave us with memories that we could cherish? Like reporting us to the city for running a slum? Of course, Ray-J didn't wish to bother us with the first notice from the city inspector. Only when Anaheim Housing sent the second, final notice directly to us did we have an inkling of the trouble we'd inherited.

In late May the Ants finally found new landlords to treat to their special brand of gratitude. Once they departed, we got our chance to see the skills they had perfected in our condo. We assume Antoinette had the interior design revelation that the sliding closet doors blocked the light coming in from the windows much better than the provided drapes, which then disappeared. Maybe Anthony could take credit for the plumbing expertise that let him decide the overflowing upstairs toilet had value as a reflecting pool, while they could attend to bodily functions in the spare bath. Their crowning achievement came in animal husbandry: their success in breeding cockroaches resulted in population pressures that forced scores of the adorable little critters to migrate next door.

We spent over \$5,000 to repair the unit, preparing it for sale (at least, according to Ray-J's standards). It listed in late July. August saw no takers. September attracted no activity. In early October Ray-J forwarded the electricity bill to us. That bill, covering only two months for a unit that had been vacant but for a few home showings: \$485.

By the end of the week we had hired a new manager and realtor. After another cleaning job to bring it up to sellable condition, we listed it again. The new realtor warned us that, in keeping with those darn truth-in-advertising laws, he had to add a disclaimer to our MLS listing: "NOTE: unit has an unexplained odor." What a selling point!

It took another six weeks to attract a buyer, pushing the closing date into 1996. The closing went just as well as our other experiences with the condo: a power failure kept the brokers from completing a title search; Orange County's bankruptcy kept the government from appraising the unit. In the end we lost all our equity in the unit, selling for only \$108,000 – a \$54,000 drop from our 1992 asking price.

At least we shared the hurt. Later that year we sued Ray-J for his mismanagement, winning \$2500 for our troubles.

TORCH

from *Underwear by the Roadside*:

IT APPEARED AN UNLIKELY spot for our springboard into fame. On one side of the dirt field trucks hurtled past on U.S. 33, heading downhill to Elkins, WV; on the other, wildflowers blanketed the slopes. The field itself resembled the staging grounds for a tent revival, or maybe an ad hoc meeting of Overdresser's Anonymous. A dozen or more men and women milled about in suits and ties, sweating in the summer sun. A photographer kept busy checking his exposures, and one man checked names off a list.

As we approached the group, decked out in our best 'Litterwalk U.S.A.' tees and shorts, one casually-dressed man greeted us. "I'm Fred Clark," he said, "district honcho for the Department of Highways." He introduced us to several others: Tom Staud, District DOH Engineer; the Randolph County Commissioner; a local AAH rep; the Randolph County Litter Chairman.

"How'd you like that title on your resume?" I whispered to Sue.

... Tom Staud, looking less comfortable than [the previous speaker], left his jacket on. He gave a short spiel on the importance of volunteering, then he got into the giveaway business. "We'd like to present you with litter sticks," he began, handing us two poles with plastic nails in one end. "We also have gloves, so you won't dirty your hands, and a pair of orange vests so you're visible on the road." He handed us the gifts and the spotlight, melting back into the crowd.

All eyes turned to us. "Thank you very, very much," I said, shocked by the gifts. "We hardly feel worthy of this. We can't clean the roads we walk — we don't have time to get it all. No, the people who deserve the thanks are the Adopt-A-Highway crews who come out three or four times a year, and clean — really clean — the road." I paused, then held up the two nail sticks. "In fact, since we already have litter sticks, we'll donate these to the AAH crew we're helping today."

I handed them the new sticks, then grabbed my well-worn picker. As a group we moved down the road, picking trash as the photographer snapped away.

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By 1996 we had fully faded back into obscurity, enjoying our return to private lives. No radio deejays called to joke with us; no newspapers looked to put us on their front page (except for the *Broomfield Enterprise*, which included me in a story on local Leap Year babies). Things were again quiet.

Then Sue saw the ad in the paper. "The Olympic Torch is coming to Colorado!" it read. One-third of the relay runners had been chosen from current or former Olympians, and another third from volunteers active in the community. The sponsor had reserved the remaining spots for 'local heroes', people nominated by the public at large.

I had no idea she nominated me until the envelope arrived in the mail. "You have been tentatively chosen to carry the torch! Please return the enclosed questionnaire, so we can determine if you are eligible." I read and re-read the letter, looking for the catch. After the bad results I'd suffered through with renting and rafting, my skepticism ran high, and I wouldn't get my hopes up.

Still, I sent in the questionnaire. Within two weeks I got another letter with more details, then another, and yet another. Finally it sank in. *The Olympic Torch. I'm going to run with the Olympic Torch.* I remembered seeing it in 1984, when its route took it down Katella Ave, one block from the condo on Heritage St. I remembered the electricity in the crowd as it passed by, heading to L.A. to kick off their games.

Soon the big-time publicity machine rolled into town. After our catch- as-catch-can efforts playing at PR from the road, I now saw how professionals garnered attention. They arranged a press conference with the governor, accompanied by seven torch-bearers (including yours truly). They arranged a Rockies game, where we stood on the sideline as our names came over the loudspeaker. They arranged a picnic attended by noted guests.

And in the end came The Run. On Mother's Day I met the other torchbearers at a car lot south of the tony Cherry Creek district. There we received our official running shirt and shorts, and got last-minute instructions on passing the flame. They then handed each of us our own torch, and shuttled us to our starting positions.

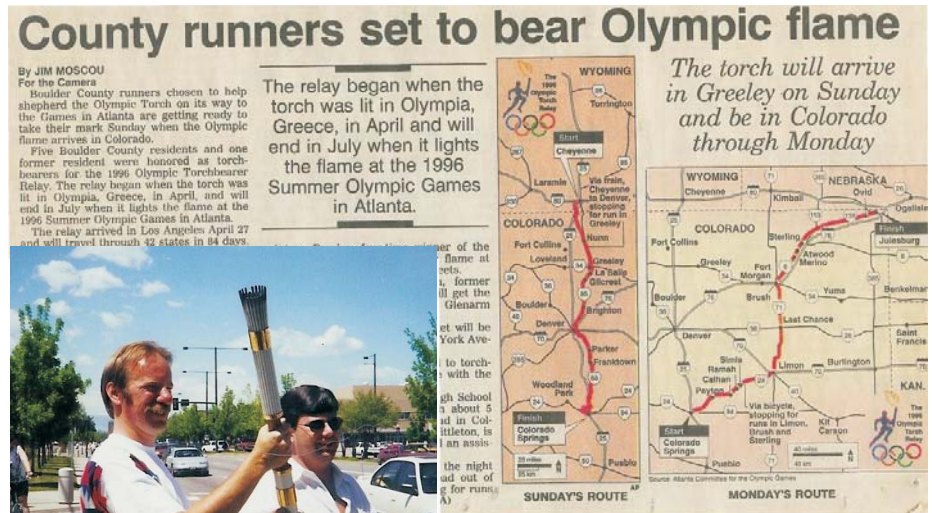
Anticipation rippled through the crowd. Around me, people passed on updates of the torch's progress. "They've passed Clayton St." "They've just turned onto York." Finally the advance vehicles passed, and then I was in the street, accepting the flame.

My half-mile passed in a blur. On the sidewalks, people came to life as the procession passed by. Cheers. Flash bulbs. Applause. Then, far too soon, it was over. As I hit 1st Ave, I dipped my torch to light the next one. The new runner took off for her moment of glory, and I stepped back into the crowds.

from *Underwear by the Roadside:*

AS THE DAYS DROPPED away, our St. Louis-in-September goal looked more and more certain. The weather cooperated, staying cool and dry — a far cry from the torrential rains behind the Great Flood of '93. We lost only one day to rain, a wet and cold Wednesday we greeted from a motel room. Fortunately, we already had plans — we would finally talk to school kids.

Persistence had paid off on our sixth attempt. Two days earlier I'd seen a phone listing for the luka, Illinois, grade school. My call had found a receptive principal, who invited us to talk to grades kindergarten through fourth.



luka was a tiny village, barely a hundred souls. A few businesses lined the railroad track, and a diner down the road hosted a crowd this rainy morning. The school stood another block down the main drag, a two-story brick building towering over its residential neighbors.

I honed my speech on the kindergartners. To involve the kids, I made it short and asked them questions: "What kinds of trash do you think we found?" "What animals do you think we've seen?" Their answers gave new meaning to the term 'stream of consciousness:'

"Did you see — a deer?"

"How about a cow?"

"My uncle has cows on his farm."

"We went on vacation to a farm in Vermont!"

The first and third graders stayed more focused, and we finished them early. Since fourth grade was still in gym class, we waited for them in the cafeteria. Soon, fifth-graders passed us on their way to gym, and seeing my backpack, asked what we were doing. "Wow! Are you going to talk to our class, too?"

After repeating our 'lesson' for the fourth- and second-grade, we returned to the principal's office. Before we could thank him, he asked, "What are your plans for the rest of the day?"

I looked out the window to see the rain still pelting down. No walking today, I knew. "Trying to stay dry."

He followed my gaze. "Not letting up, is it. As long as you're stuck inside . . . I know you've talked to all the classes I set up, but the fifth graders heard about you. They asked if you could visit their class, too."

So we went back upstairs for an encore performance. This class, if possible, showed more enthusiasm than the others, peppering us with questions. "What do you carry in your backpack?" (Clothes, rain jacket, sleeping bag, toiletries, news clippings, camera, journal, book, towel, and the coin from Caitlin in Massachusetts.) "Where do you eat?" (Convenience stores, cafes, or we cook at our camp.) "Are you going to hit all the states?" (No, only twenty-three.) "What do you do with your free time?"

"We try to do things particular to the region. In Maine, for instance, we learned how to make maple syrup." I hesitated, then added, "One thing I want to do in Illinois is milk a cow."

Several hands shot up. "There's a dairy farm near here," one girl said, "where second grade goes every year on a field trip. You could try there!"

The teacher, Patricia Timm, promised to give us the phone number. The class then finished with two requests: "Can you leave us an address, so we can write you?" and "Will you have lunch with us?"

We did and we did. The hot lunch — turkey, mashed potatoes, Jell-O, and milk — surprised me. Though the portions were tiny, it tasted far better than I remembered from my school days. It must have been the atmosphere.

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My saga with the torch did not end on that May day. Like most runners, I purchased my torch, a lasting memory of that special moment. In the following months and years, I took it into schools as I taught Junior Achievement classes, telling the students about the relay and

passing the torch around. For many, the weight surprised them, and they asked how I could run carrying it. "When you're swept up in the moment, trust me, you don't notice it," I assured them.

Late that summer, we heard good news from friends we'd made on the road. Steve Newman, whose Worldwalk had inspired our walk, and his fiancée Darcy had set a wedding date! In late September they would walk down the aisle. Unfortunately Sue could not take time off work, but I had vacation saved, and so planned my first road trip in two years. Along the way, I'd also visit others we'd met on the road.

Late September in Ohio was a grand time and place for an outdoor wedding. Hardwood trees had begun showing colors. Wispy clouds scattered about an azure sky. Temps lingered near 70, underlining the perfect day. Steve darted about, expending his nervous energy, but he found time to welcome me into the fold.

At the reception afterwards, I told him about my torch run. "You got to take part?" he asked. "That's wonderful. Darcy submitted my name, but nothing came of it."

"I have the torch in my car," I told him, "if you'd like to see it."

"That would be great! Why don't you bring it in to the clubhouse?"

I balked at this. "I don't know, Steve. This is YOUR special day, yours and Darcy's. I don't want to horn in on your attention."

"Nonsense," he assured me. "I'm sure everyone here would love to see the torch. Go ahead and bring it in." He did guess right – people quickly noticed the torch, and it passed through many hands. Again I saw the spirit that it brought out in people, a kindred feeling that could turn strangers into friends.

I spent that night outside Cleveland, visiting the Gates family. They had hosted us during our darkest hours of the walk, when a second injury to Sue had threatened our trip. Now three years later, I saw them in their new home. One young son vaguely recalled our last visit, but to the others I was a stranger. Todd and Ginny stayed up late with me, and we caught up on each other's lives, reminiscing over the changes the years had brought.

The next day I aimed my car toward the road I walked an eternity before. As I hit US50, a calmness fell over me. Speed no longer mattered, and I eased my foot from the accelerator. *I remember crossing that bridge, seeing kids play in the creek below.* On other trips I had resented the small-town stoplights, a hindrance as I rushed to tomorrow; now I used them to really see the land I crossed, to reconnect with the walk. *Isn't that the park Sue and I enjoyed a picnic in, watching the white squirrels?* As I drove on, memories flooded back.

The route I planned took me back to Iuka. In 1993, an invitation to speak there had ended a long streak of rejections. Though I had spoken at several schools since, the Iukans remained a favorite. During our winter break, Patricia Timm's fifth-graders had sent us letters, and the school sent us a giant home-made *Congratulations* card when we finished the trek. Now I would return, thanking them for their notes of inspiration.

The town had changed little. I recognized the café where we'd eaten, and the school – how could I forget the school? Patricia Timm greeted me warmly when I arrived. "I'm so glad you took the time to stop by. Will you have time to talk with two classes?" She then led me to her fifth-grade classroom, where the second-graders we talked to during the walk were now learning fractions and anatomy.

After that warm-up, she led me to the trailers behind the school (yes, Iuka was growing). Here the fifth-graders that had 'adopted' us three years earlier now slogged through their final year before high school. These students remembered me well, and asked me if I recalled their letters. "I do," I replied, "and they were wonderful. Thank you for keeping in touch. By the way, is Jimmy Fatheree here?" A boy in the back nervously raised his hand. "Thank you also for the pencil you sent. I used it when my pencil ran out." He beamed with pride.

Of course, I ended both talks by passing around the torch. The children crowded around for their chance to handle it, holding it gingerly as if it were likely to break. After everyone had hefted it, the teacher led them outside for a photo op, another memory to add to my growing collection.



BIRTH OF A BOOK

from *Underwear by the Roadside*:

AN HOUR LATER, AS we traversed more lush farmland, we passed a ranch house with an antique railroad crossing sign in front. Two minutes later, a young man on a small tractor raced up behind us. Jared Dobbins, clad in blue-and-white-striped overalls, was in his early 20s, and wore a smile beneath his engineer's cap. "You just passed our farmhouse," he greeted us. "Would you care to come back for a cold drink?"

He led us back to the ranch house, where his father James — also decked out in railroad coveralls and hat — waited with lemonade. "We saw you in today's [Topeka] paper," James said, "and then saw you walk by. We couldn't let you leave without meeting you."

Inside, railroad memorabilia decorated the house. "We're getting ready for a weekend trip with our railroad wagon," Jared said. "Every year we get together with twenty people and three other railcars, and ride a hundred-mile stretch of track. This year's trip runs from Osage to Emporia."

The conversation quickly turned to litter. "We clean the highway a mile either side of our house," said James. "We've found a lot of unique junk in years of doing this; I'm sure you have too. Here's one thing I've saved." He handed me an all-wood clipboard, vintage 1950s.

"We haven't really seen much litter in Kansas," I said. "People here seem more concerned about it. Or maybe it's because there's fewer people. What's it going to be like when we get in the middle of nowhere?"

"That's funny," said Jared. "I thought we WERE in the middle of nowhere."

We laughed. "Not even close. The suburbs of nowhere, maybe, but not the middle."

"I read one thing in the paper that I wondered about," said James. "Do you really find underwear by the roadside?"

"Every few days, normally," said Sue. "For the past week, though, we haven't seen any."

He shook his head slowly. "We don't throw away our underwear in Kansas. We wear 'em until there's holes in 'em, then we use 'em for rags."

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My trip to the Newman wedding refreshed memories of the walk. At home I dove into writing and editing my book with new vigor. With the manuscript almost finished, I knew I must settle on a title. I liked *Litterwalk*, but it didn't seem memorable or catchy enough. *What could I use, I wondered, that catches people's attention? What always caught their attention while we walked, and newspapers interviewed us?*

With the question framed that way, the answer came easily: underwear. Most of the papers mentioned that particular bit of litter; indeed, I reveled in telling people, "We picked up underwear in every state except Kansas." Since people across the land had read about the

couple spending their honeymoon picking up discarded unmentionables, I decided (much to Sue's dismay) to title the book *Underwear by the Roadside*.

As the book took on its own life, I strove to attract a publisher. As early as May 1995, with only a few chapters committed to paper, I had begun sending query letters to book agents and New York editors. Round after round of missives followed, allowing me to assemble an impressive collection of form-letter rejections. Though a few interested parties wrote back, in the end even they agreed: travel essay was a *hard* genre in which to sell, and they didn't have the marketing muscle to push the book.

Eighteen months of rejections severely shook my confidence. Then I saw a local Free University catalog, which offered a *Publishing Alternatives* class. Intrigued, I signed up. The instructor made a strong case against traditional publishing, waiting for the NY conglomerates to make you the next Grisham or Clancy. "Over 90% of the books they publish don't earn out their advance," he explained. "Those books NEVER earn a royalty check. You're lucky they won't ask for your advance money back!" He added that the big houses will generally give you only three months of promotion (if, indeed, they promote you at all.)

If you really want to make it in publishing, he maintained, publish it yourself! The proliferation of PCs and desktop editing programs put publishing within the reach of everyone. You retain all control of your book – editing, cover design, etc. – and can market it for as long as your enthusiasm (or money) holds out. Even with traditional publishing, the job of selling the book will fall to you. If you must do the work, why shouldn't you reap the profits?

His words made sense to me. By early 1997 I had given up on finding someone to publish my masterpiece, and convinced myself to give self-publishing a shot. My failures at rafting and renting still smarted; I had to see if 'riting could be my key to a better life. In late February I called the instructor, hiring him to help me get started.

"You need to move on it NOW," he explained as we met over lunch. "You're almost too late to get your book in the stores by Christmas."

"But Christmas is ten months away!" I protested.

"True, but the chains make their decisions for the season by June. You'll need to get in your distributor's catalog by May. To have a book by then, it needs to be at the printer by April 1. Have you had your book edited? Is the cover designed? Do you have your ISBN numbers yet?"

With his help, I tackled the myriad tasks necessary to change my manuscript into a book. Upon his suggestion, I convinced Hefty Bags (who had generously donated unlimited trash bags for our walk) to underwrite the design of the cover. The consultant then directed me to Melody Morris at Gilliland Printing in Kansas, who held my hand through the process of printing my tome. Finally, he offered to edit the work himself, providing the final polish on my years-long work.

from *Underwear by the Roadside*:

"RANGE WARS!" PAM FRANK hissed those words. "This area erupted in them one hundred years ago. Cattlemen hated sheep ranchers, and vice versa. The moods were so tense the foes wouldn't even stay in

the same hotel. Guide Rock had two, one for each side. You saw the hotel down the street, getting restored? Cattlemen stayed there.”

The hotel was only one sign of the revival sweeping the town. Elsewhere, workers squeegeed the windows of the lounge. Foot traffic plied the sidewalks, ducking in and out of shops. “In the last sixty years, hardly anyone stayed here. Five years ago you could barely tell us apart from Burr Oak. Now the town is coming back.”

We had wandered into the Tin Roof Sundae Shop, where we’d met the owners. Newcomers to town, Pam and Henry Frank had jumped into the revival. “Take our shop here,” Henry said. “We opened two weeks ago, after a lot of work. When we redid the false front, we found the whole building leaned. We hired a bulldozer to push it upright, and a lot of folks came to watch, expecting the whole thing to topple. I’m sure they walked away disappointed when one good shove righted it.”

“We’ve met people who come for ice cream all the way from Red Cloud,” Pam said. “A few said they grew up in Guide Rock, and want to move back. Maybe people are finally getting tired of the stresses of city life, and miss having roots.” She smiled at her husband and laid her hand on his arm. “We came from the east coast, and would never go back. People are so friendly here!”

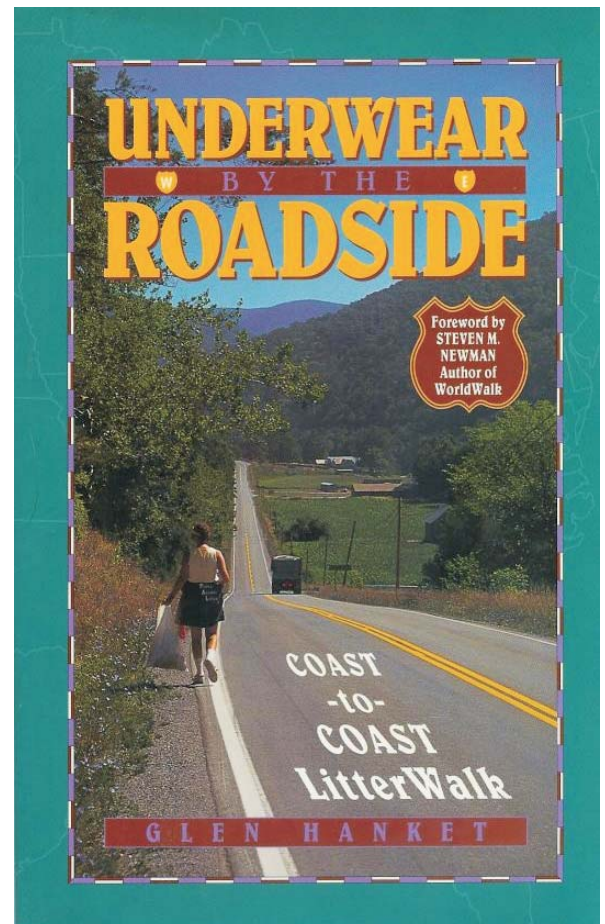
Again, we’d found the heart of the country in the rural landscape. Guide Rock set the tone for the area, and Red Cloud expanded on it. At 1200 people, it qualified as a major town, with all the amenities — such as laundromats. After so long on the road, we had become connoisseurs of coin-ops, and Hometown Laundry got our highest rankings. The TV didn’t surprise us, but the exercise bike did. We got the biggest kick from the name-tags stuck to each washer, saying, “Hello. My name is Betty,” or Susan, Mary Lou, Mom, etc. The dryers went further, with labels stating, “Lotty does well with fluffy things (curtains, panties),” or “Agnes handles heavy clothes best (like overalls),” or “Hilda likes the general run of clothes.”

Sue chatted with the woman using the adjacent washer. “I ate at the cafe across the street,” she said, “and mentioned to the waitress I was moving here. ‘What day?’ she asked. ‘I’ll help you unpack!’ I hope everyone’s that friendly here!”

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So much to learn, so little time. The next few months served as a crash course in publishing: from marketing plans to distributors; from ISBN numbers to BISAC codes. I read the standard guides to self-publishing, and pored over the articles the consultant provided. Before we knew it, Sue and I were doing last-minute proofreads, trying to eliminate the final typos before shipping it off to Melody at Gilliland.

With the book now out of my hands, I turned my full attention to preparing for my publication date. Anxious to give this business my best effort, I made plans to drive to Chicago to attend Book Expo America. BEA, the annual convention for the publishing business, attracted all manner of industry players: New York publishing houses, printers, university presses, publicists, distributors,



wholesalers – it ran the gamut. For novices like me, a college held the two days beforehand introduced us to the intricacies of the business.

Two days before I drove east, the books arrived. The driver, less than thrilled about the residential delivery, rolled up the back gate of his truck to reveal them: pallet after pallet of boxes stacked high – over 130 cartons in all. After stowing them in the garage, I opened a few so I could leaf through the book. A sense of wonder and awe swept through me, colliding with a cold fear – *How can I sell this many books?*

In Chicago, the college bombarded me with information, swirling through my head, overwhelming me. The convention added to the overload, and I numbly walked dozens and dozens of aisles, gazing at the displays, grabbing flyers and business cards. The key, as I heard at the college, was to have a plan, an objective. For me, I set a goal of arranging a distributor, a company that could guarantee my book a spot on the shelves of Barnes & Noble and Borders. With that in mind, I visited the booth of every distributor on the floor, and had a solid lead (confirmed a few weeks later) before leaving the show.

On the way home, I again left the interstate to ply the road we had walked years before. Heading south from Lincoln, NE, I aimed the car toward Guide Rock, intending to trace our route through Nebraska. The first item of business, of course, involved ice cream at the Tin Roof Sundae shop.

The storefront was much as I had recalled – no longer brand new, but showing the signs of a regular clientele. When I walked in, Pam Frank was busy chatting with customers, so I ordered a sundae and sat back to wait. Eventually she came over to deliver my treat. “Just passing through?” she asked.

I nodded. “Again.”

“So you’ve been here before? I thought you looked familiar.”

“Yeah, three years ago, with my wife. Of course, we were on foot back then.”

A look of surprise clouded her face for a moment, before a smile crept in to replace it. “Wait a minute. Weren’t you the folks walking across the country? Doing something weird?”

“Picking up litter. Yes, that would be me.” I pulled out one of my books, and flipped the page to the day we entered Nebraska. “I just published a book about our walk, and your shop is mentioned.”

She eagerly grabbed the book and read the entry. “Oh, this is marvelous! Are these for sale? I’m sure several people in town will want a copy!” She bought five copies – my first sales! – and took my card in case she needed more.

I made a few more sales as I drove west, stopping at the libraries of the small towns in which we’d stayed. In a few hours I’d gotten all the way to Arapaho, a distance that had taken two weeks on foot. As I left that town, I noticed two bicyclists on US136, sitting on the shoulder with a plaintive look about them. After a moment’s hesitation, I stopped and asked if they needed help.

“Actually, yes,” they admitted. “We’re from Germany, and we’re touring the states. One of our bikes has broken down, and this town is too small to carry replacement parts.” I knew it would take many miles along 136 before they could get spares, so with mixed feelings I gave

up tracing my route. "Stick your bikes in back," I said, "I'll take you up to Lexington. That town should have a good bike shop."

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From *Los Angeles Times* book review, 22 Feb 1998:

... I luxuriated in this step-by-step story of a couple's trek across America. How blissful to simply put one foot in front of the other from Maine to Oregon. How un-L.A. to have long, unhurried conversations with strangers ... The author's straightforward prose and heartfelt appreciation of life's simple joys separate this tome from the weaker examples of this genre that litter bookshelves. – Bob Sipchen

Outside, I could see people milling about, waiting for the store to open. On the table sat several stacks of *UBTR*, awaiting my signature. I glanced about the room, noticing the posters displaying my book cover, with my photograph near the bottom. Idly I picked up a copy of *New York Times* bestseller list, which I had broken into just last week. *Everything is perfect, I thought, ready for the big event. Except for that buzzing noise. It almost sounds like the bell between school periods...*

... or an alarm clock, I thought groggily as I reached over to hit the snooze button. As I swam up into consciousness in the strange bed, it took me a moment to get my bearings. Where am I? Oh, right. Connecticut.

Bestseller? Yeah, in my wild dreams, I reminded myself as I dragged myself out from under the covers. Not only were the books not flying off the shelf, they weren't flying onto them. Computer problems at the wholesaler had hampered my efforts to get the book into stores. While I had collected several newspaper articles lauding my first effort at 'litter-ature', the book remained largely unknown.

I had heard, repeatedly, about the Psychology of Buying – how people needed to hear about a product seven times, on the average, before purchasing it. A typical thought process:

1: *Yeah, right.*

2: *Haven't I heard about that fool before?*

3: *You know, that could be interesting. Strange, but interesting.*

4: *I'll have to think about that . Now, where was I?*

5: *Boy, that guy's all over the news. Let me write that name down.*

6: *Next time I'm at the store, I'm going to look for that.*

7: *Let me order that on Amazon. Honey, where's my credit card?*

The secret, then, lay in getting publicity. How better to attract success (and press attention) than to act successful? To that end, I arranged a book-signing tour in New England. It took only a few phone calls to snag a spot as a guest speaker at the Appalachian Trail Users Conference, held that October in New Hampshire. Soon I added signings at Eastern Mountain Sports stores in Connecticut and Massachusetts, and contracted with a local company

(Marketability) to generate PR leads. Tami Depalma then went to work, arranging TV, radio, and newspapers to cover my tour.

I ran through that history as I showered at my in-laws' house, preparing for my TV spot. I had made it on the small screen a few times during the walk, with cameramen filming Sue and I as we walked the highways, but this ranked as a first for me: an in-studio appearance. *The Exchange*, a talk show on the local cable channel in Norwalk, CT, had invited me to talk about the walk and the book.

After an initial bout of nervousness, distracted by the camera, I settled down and enjoyed the interview. The host and hostess put me at ease, drawing me out with their questions. Sue watched from the green room, willing me to relax.

The next day I visited a radio station for another in-studio interview. The drive-time deejay plied me with questions, entertaining his commuter audience. For the first time, I actually took phone-in questions. (To entice callers, we offered a free book to the first person dialing in.)

Then, of course, came the booksignings. Savvy authors know that a little preparation can go a long way to making signings a success. Depending on your energy and enthusiasm, doing any of the following would insure long lines of people waiting to see you:

- Winning a presidential election. (Presidential autobiographies make big money.)
- Changing your name to Stephen King. (Or John Grisham, or Tom Clancy, or ...)
- Becoming a sports icon, like Michael Jordan or Tiger Woods.

Unfortunately, I didn't have time to win the World Series, so I had to muddle through as an unknown. Luckily the stores set my table up near the entrance, giving me a front row seat. (I have heard tales of authors given tables in a far corner, never to be found until the store runs inventory months later.) For the next 90 minutes I peered over stacks of my books watching people enter the store, all studiously avoiding eye contact with me. The few whose eyes I caught mumbled an excuse about an urgent appointment in the archery department as they rushed by. If not for the parents who used me as a *de facto* babysitter for their pre-teens as they browsed through the season's selection of one-piece ski suits, I'd have had no one to talk to. *No wonder people snickered when I told them I'd set up several booksignings...*

RETURN TO TOWNSEND

from *Underwear by the Roadside*:

THE GLOW OF THE warm day spurred me forward to Highway 13 then south toward Massachusetts. I crossed the state line and reached Townsend shortly after classes had let out. Ahead of me, students swarmed out of the school, running, playing, yelling.

Several houses down from the school, kids played in a fenced yard. One girl looked up from the swing set, saw me approach, and pointed me out to the others. They ran to the fence and called out questions. "Where you going? Are you camping? What's in your pack?"

"I'm walking to Oregon!"

Their mouths dropped open. "WOW!" gasped the group's only boy. "Can I have your autograph?"

When the other kids echoed his request with a chorus of "Me too!", I took my turn at looking surprised. My John Hancock? No one had ever asked me to sign anything more exciting than credit card slips, escrow papers or traffic tickets. Chalk up another first for the trip. "Of course I will."

They scampered inside and rushed back out with scraps of paper. Crowding around, they each handed me one, waiting politely as I filled them out. Asking them their names, I personalized each off-the-cuff note urging them to take chances and to live their dreams.

After all the girls had gotten their notes, the boy stepped up with his paper. "My name's Jason Scofield," he said. Though he looked only ten years old, he seemed to lead the group. When I finished his note, he pointed to the pole hanging from my pack. "What's that thing?"

"A litter stick," I replied. "With this, I can pick up trash as I walk along without bending over. See, when I pull the trigger, the jaws grab the trash." I showed them by plucking a crumpled cigarette pack from the gutter.

The girls asked questions until the novelty of the stranger faded. One by one they drifted back to the games I'd interrupted, leaving only Jason and a girl a few years younger standing near. "Go ahead, Caitlin," Jason urged, pushing her toward me.

Her auburn ponytail bobbed as she shyly looked up at me. Something glinted in her outstretched hand. "This is my lucky coin," she said, revealing an arcade token. "It's my only gold one. I want you to have it."

"Thank you, Caitlin. I promise to take good care of it." A tingle ran through my body as I carefully stashed the coin in my pack. If only Sue could have shared this with me.

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At least I had an attentive audience at the conference. Over twenty hikers jammed into a Dartmouth College classroom to see my slides and hear about the walk. Perhaps they wondered what insanity would grip a man to spoil a perfectly good hike by picking up unmentionables along the way...

But I had never assumed the conference would rank as the highlight of my trip. Scheduling a speech in New Hampshire in early October struck me as a wonderful way to justify a drive through a vibrant New England autumn. It also gave me an opportunity to revisit a town I remembered fondly.

I drove up Hwy 13 into Townsend, looking for landmarks. The sight of the village green, where I had whiled away the afternoon glowing from the encounter with the kids, brought back memories of that day. *It should be a short distance farther along this road*, I thought as I slowly drove north, looking for a house I wasn't sure I'd recognize.



By the time I reached the school, I knew I'd missed it. I turned around and headed back south on the highway, creeping along as I examined each yard. Suddenly a glimmer of recognition flashed through my mind. I abruptly pulled onto the shoulder, prompting a honk from the drivers queued up behind me. *That fenced yard. It MUST be the one. I know it wasn't far from the school.*

After another long look trying to convince myself I had the right house, I walked to the door and knocked. A teen-aged girl answered the door, looking up at the unknown stranger. "Can I help you?"

"This is probably going to sound strange," I began, "but I met a young girl here four and a half years ago. She was playing in the side yard after school let out."

Confusion clouded her face, so I gave her more details. "The kids all ran up and asked for my autograph. After I signed slips of paper for them all, Jason Scofield" – I remembered his name – "and one other girl kept asking questions. I think he said her name was Caitlin."

She gave me a tentative smile. "Yeah, my mother ran a day care for a while. There were a lot of kids that came by. One of them was Jason?" She pondered for a moment. "You may be talking about Caitlin Murray."

"Does she live near here?"

At that she stepped outside. "She lives right across the street," she said, pointing to the house opposite my car. "I'll walk you over."

Together we walked across the street, and I rang the doorbell. A teenage boy answered the door, his gaze moving from his neighbor to the strange man standing with her. "Is Caitlin here?" I asked.

Her father, whom I could see down the hallway, now came to the door. "Can I help you?" he said. *Translation: "Why are you, a middle-aged stranger, asking about my daughter?"* I gave him the capsule summary, and it must have satisfied him, for he turned around and called, "Caitlin! Someone to see you!" He then opened the door and invited me in.

In the family room several kids milled about, preparing for a camping trip they would leave on within the hour. As I looked around, I saw Caitlin come out of her room. Now 11, she had straight dark hair down to her shoulders, and wore a tee shirt with a large flower printed on it. She looked up at me with no trace of recognition.



"You probably don't remember me, do you?" She shook her head. "Four and a half years ago, I came through town on a coast-to-coast walk. I met a group of kids next door, who all asked for my autograph..."

Awareness burst onto her features. "Yeah, I remember you! I was even thinking about you a week or two ago, wondering whatever happened to you." Her smile had become incandescent. "I can't believe you actually remembered me!"

"... and one of the girls handed me a coin."

"That was me!"

With that I pulled the arcade token out of my pocket. "I still have the coin, and I thought you might want it back. Being your lucky coin, and all." I handed it to her.

She examined it, amused that I had kept it all these years. "My brother gave this to me. Back then, it felt like real money. From the Townsend Arcade." She handed it back to me. "But that's okay, you can keep it."

"Thank you," I said as I returned it to my pocket. "I do have something for you, though." With that I produced a copy of my book. "You're mentioned in here. If you have a pen, I'll autograph it for you." Within moments several kids pushed pens in my direction.

Afterwards we stepped outside so her father could take pictures of us. "The Worcester paper wants to do a story on us, and I told them I'd send them photos," I explained. The family followed us outdoors, delaying their camping trip a few more minutes. Caitlin and I stood as her father snapped several shots, she holding the book, me holding the coin. Finally I bade her goodbye, and tucked her father's business card into my pocket next to the coin. *Now the story feels complete*, I reflected as I drove off into the colorful autumn scenery.



BACK TO THE LITTERED LANES

DATELINE: Boulder, Colo, summer 1968 –

"Mom, I'm home!" The screen door slammed behind the twelve-year-old boy as he tracked dirt into the house. "Is it lunch time yet?"

He found his mother in the kitchen putting finishing touches on a ham sandwich. As she cut them in half, she asked, "How was your morning? Were you out at the Swamp?" In later years condo villages and strip malls would cover this area, but in 1968 these vacant lots were overgrown with weeds and filled with numerous ponds. A kid's nirvana, replete with scores of tadpoles and crawdads to capture, and ample material to experiment with building rudimentary rafts.

"Yeah, Charlie Barton and I were exploring the whole area. There are a mess of trails through the Swamp, winding everywhere." As the boy took his seat at the kitchen table, he pulled a wrinkled sheet of paper from his pocket. "I mapped out all the trails. See?"

She glanced at the paper he'd unfolded as she added a Twinkie to his plate. "You did a heck of a job," she said with motherly pride. "Sounds like you must have had fun."

He nodded as he took a big bite from the sandwich. "Tons," he agreed as he swallowed his lunch. "I was thinking... are we going anywhere this weekend?"

She shook her head. "No. Why?"

"I think I'll take my bike Saturday and map all the streets here in Boulder."

If that ambitious news surprised her, she did not let on, simply nodding as she humored him. Of course a 12-year old boy would have no concept of how many streets you could fit into a town of 60,000 people. Realizing this, she drove to town hall that afternoon and picked up a city map. When she handed it to him that evening, she simply told him that she "decided to save you a bit of work."

Ahhh, such were the fantasies of youth. Now thirty years later, I had resurrected that fantasy, dusted it off and polished it. The prophetic words I had spoken in my childhood would come back to present me with a new challenge.

As I again grew accustomed to life in the shadow of the Rockies, I relied more and more on my bicycle to keep me fit. With the region's mild winter weather, I could ride year-round. Long miles on two wheels let me clear my mind of stresses, allowing me to leisurely examine problems facing me. Like – *what should I do with my book business? Is it fated to fail also, or can I yet find success outside of engineering?*

It seemed a shame to not build on the experience I had gained with *UBTR*, not to capitalize on the lessons I had learned. Sales of that first book had slowed, and I had yet to hit on any way to reinvigorate them. Even if I could, it would take a miracle to make a business prosper on only one title. I needed a larger catalog...

Though the solution first occurred to me prior to my trip to Townsend, I managed to resist the obvious for several months. As I went out on my bike rides, I kept hearing about the great trails scattered throughout the Denver metro area: the Platte River trail; the Cherry Creek trail; Highline Canal. Interested in sampling the region's best, I visited bike and book stores, looking for a trail guide.

They had none.

Not that the stores carried no bicycle books. They had a wide selection of such. However, all the available books addressed the mountain bike market, and normally listed trails an hour or more drive distant from Denver, up in the foothills. I could not find a single guide which mentioned any of the outstanding trails that had helped Denver win awards as one of the nation's best cycling cities (as recognized by *Bicycling* magazine).

Even as I tracked down the trails, I resisted committing to another book project. As I began uncovering the wealth of trail options, though, I grew convinced of the need for a comprehensive guide. Finally, in the first days of 1998, I knew the time had run out – I had to accept the challenge at that time, or pass on it for another year.

I think I'll take my bike Saturday and start mapping all the trails throughout Denver.

The thought of scouting close to three hundred miles of trails in the dead of a Colorado winter seemed daunting, but I had to tackle it to have books ready early in the biking season. Luckily the weather cooperated, as the state had just entered a seven-year drought. With little snow to hinder me, I bundled up and headed out every Saturday and Sunday for the season. By mid-March I had scouted enough trails to fill a book.

None too soon, either. As the calendar passed the Ides of March, I began feeling a familiar, queasy sensation in my bones – a feeling that life had taken off on the 4:42 express, leaving me behind at the bus stop carrying a grocery sack full of unrealized dreams.

Yes, I found myself struggling with yet another mid-life crisis. As mid-life crises go, I considered myself fortunate, as I felt no urges to buy a sports car or seduce a mistress. The downside, though, came with realizing that these crises recurred regularly – every four years, to be precise.

Though this yearning to experience life more fully had visited me like clockwork since I turned twenty-one, it took me until '89 to recognize the pattern. That year the desire to escape the rat race drove me to spend fifty days wandering across Europe, traveling by bicycle and Eurail pass. Four years later Sue and I took a break from our hectic lives, spending 18 months walking across the land. Now nearly four years had passed since we left the road, and that special insanity I suffered from had returned.

As I pounded away at the bike book, I schemed on how best to surrender to my travel bug. This time I had to limit any excursion I might plan. It would have to be a short trip, only a week long, since I had less vacation time saved. I must also tackle it alone, as Sue had just started school and could not miss classes. Slowly a plan came to mind.

from StorageTek company newsletter, April 20 1998:

People have reported seeing a man hiking with a backpack around the StorageTek Louisville campus for the past few weeks. Did he take a wrong turn off the Colorado Trail? Is he checking the facility for wilderness designation? No, employee Glen Hanket ... will celebrate Keep America Beautiful Month and Earth Day by bagging trash from Ft. Collins to Denver, April 20-25, stopping to talk at schools along the way.

I knew I couldn't make a dent in our litter problem in only one week. By talking at schools in every town, though, I hoped to make a far greater impact. Maybe I could inspire the children, getting them to dream of their own adventures. Maybe I could warn them of the true costs of litter, from endangered wildlife to lost public lands. Maybe, just maybe, I could encourage them to take better care of this land granted to us.

From start to finish, this MiniWalk would differ from the LitterWalk. Arranging schools forced me to follow a schedule, which ruled out spur-of-the-moment invitations or exploring unexpected sites. Once I contracted with Tami Depalma at Marketability to handle the PR duties, I also had to compromise on my aversion to electronics. For the first time in my life, I had to carry a cell phone. (Thank you, VoiceStream, for donating a cell phone for the week!)

As I made cold calls to schools along my route, memories of our early attempts to visit schools on the LitterWalk – rejection after rejection – came flooding back. A few schools jumped at the chance to bring me in, but others hesitated or declined. This time I could oblige the schools that requested references, and that made a difference. By the time April 20 arrived, six schools had invited me in.

from the Broomfield Enterprise, April 22, 1998:

As commuter traffic whizzes north on Highway 287 toward Loveland, a man wearing a blue sun hat and backpack snags trash along the roadside.

"There's another one," he shouts as his long-handled 'litter picker' latches his sixth gardening glove of the day...

Monday, April 20, Ft. Collins-Loveland: 10 miles, 6 bags

It felt so strange, hoisting a loaded backpack for the first time in 3½ years. Last night, at another lonely Barnes & Noble book signing, it still hadn't sunk in: I faced a week on the highways, rooting around in roadside garbage. *I am crazy, spending my vacation doing work that they sentence people to do? Well, yeah...*

As I laced my hiking books, my friend Bill reminded me again how to get from his house to the highway. "Take a left, then another left, then a right, and one more left –"

"You sound like an announcer at a boxing match," I kidded him. "Don't forget the uppercut!" By now I had committed the directions to memory, knowing I had to escape his culdesac-filled subdivision to reach US287.

After a light breakfast, Bill headed for work and I hit the road. It took only fifteen minutes to reach the highway. Monday morning rush hour was in full swing, with the street full of groggy,

caffeinated drivers. As I crossed with the lights at Harmony Rd, a few of them did double takes, their eyes following me with interest – and possibly a touch of longing?

South of Harmony, the traffic quickly lightened as signs of the city fell behind me. Soon the sun peeked out to burn off the morning mist, removing the chill from the air. As I unleashed my litter stick and opened my first orange bag, my steps grew lighter. *Freedom – no cubicle farms, no project specs, no endless status meetings. Just sunshine to warm me, a goal to aim for, and a sense that I could make a difference.*

The morning rushed by as quickly as the traffic on the highway. But for two reporters sent by the Denver TV stations to track me down, doing brief interviews as I bagged trash, I talked to no one. (That evening I would see myself captured in two fifteen-second spots on the 6:00 news, a short mention of my trek and a fleeting clip of me bagging garbage.)

After a quick lunch, I walked to Monroe Elementary School. For my program, they herded their young charges into the gym, squeezing most into the bleachers and the rest on the floor. For the first and only time this walk, I took the handful of slides I'd packed and loaded them into the projector, beginning my talk with a slide show.

After piquing their interest with the pictures, I asked them questions: "Who can tell me what types of trash we find on the road?" "Why do you think litter is so bad I would spend my vacations fighting it?" "What are the benefits of traveling slowly, by foot or by bicycle?" Rather than preaching to them, I hoped to inspire their thoughts, so that they might conclude what I had long ago discovered.

Tuesday, April 21, Loveland-Campion: 4.5 miles, 3 bags

Campion-Berthoud: 3 miles, 2 bags

Bryon Caver found me as I headed south out of Loveland shortly before 8:00. Bryon, a reporter from the *Broomfield Enterprise*, had written of my antics in the past, and the paper had assigned him to cover my latest trek. He popped from his car all geared up, with notepad – and water bottle and hiking boots?

"You're right where you said you'd be," he greeted me. "Care if I walk with you for a while?"

"I'm happy to have the company," I answered. After he locked his car, we took off down US287. For the first mile he grilled me about the previous day's stroll: How many miles? How much trash? Any oddities among the offal? ("Yeah – there were a slew of those little airline liquor bottles.") The traffic roaring by, much reduced from yesterday's crush, slowly tapered off as we wandered south.

"I have a question I'm sure people are wondering," Bryon said, taking a new tack. "Why would anyone bother to take time off work, only to pick up trash?"

I let the question linger as I framed a response. "It gives me a chance to reconnect with nature. After all, picking up trash is pretty mindless, and it allows me to think about life, to observe the world around me." I stopped walking, and held up my hand to keep him quiet. We had a gap in traffic, and silence ruled. "Listen. Hear that? A bird singing. How many times do you hear – or notice – that in your daily life?"

He nodded, dubiously at first, then a smile turned the corners of his mouth. "Nice," he agreed as we moved down the road. "But couldn't you do that sitting on a beach somewhere?"

"Sipping a margarita? That's a real common question," I admitted. *One that I've heard oh-so-often before.* "Believe me, at times I'd love to leave all this –" I paused to snag a Big Gulp cup – and forget about the rest of the world. And I do take trips like that." I lapsed into silence, trying to distill my emotions into a pithy answer. *Sure, those vacations are relaxing, but they're rarely fulfilling.*

"I guess I like the unexpected. If you vacation at a resort, life is pretty predictable – maybe not boring, but you usually have a good idea what'll happen every day. Here, I have no idea who I'll meet or what I'll find a mile down the road. Like this," I remarked as I caught the morning sun reflecting off a plastic disc. My stick grabbed the CD, and I looked at it before dropping it in the bag. *"Electric Larryland by the Butthole Surfers. Want to buy some music, cheap?"*

We shared a chuckle as he recorded my latest treasure in his notebook. Glancing at his watch, he saw that we'd been walking for an hour. "You're talking at the school in Campion at 9:30, right? I'll walk with you that far, and stick around for your presentation." He paused, then added, "Maybe someone at the school can drive me back to my car."

It took another thirty minutes to reach HMS Richards Academy in Campion. By that time I had filled three bags with the mundungus of our modern world: a temporary license plate; a yellow foam toy rocket; the head of a Barbie doll; and of course, an unending stream of pop cans, fast-food wrappers, and cigarette packs. "I can't believe how much you've collected in, what, four or five miles?" Bryon remarked. "I never noticed it, driving by."

At the academy, principal Dan Hoskinson greeted us warmly. "I'm glad you put us on your itinerary," he said. "It gives the kids a chance to see someone giving up their vacation to do something worthwhile. That should make an impact." He led us into the gymnasium, where sixth graders finished their PE class. "The rest of the students should start arriving in five minutes. Is there anything you need before we start?"

I waited in the corner, sipping from the bottle of cold water the principal provided, as over a hundred kids filed in. Once they calmed down and took their seats, I moved to the center of the room. "Before I get started ..." I pulled from my pack one piece of trash I'd saved. "Did anyone lose a toy rocket?"

from Rocky Mountain News, April 22, 1998:

You say one man can't clean up this town?

Glen Hanket says, "Rubbish."

Like a frustrated dad picking up after his messy kids, Hanket hits the road again this morning...

Wednesday, April 22 (Earth Day), Berthoud-Longmont: 11.5 miles, 10 bags

After two days of breaking in my legs, trekking through the urban sprawl that threatened to turn the Larimer County towns into one linear city, I now faced the countryside. In Boulder

County, the miles north and south of the Longmont city limits remained rural. I looked forward to trading the stores, business parks, and taverns for mile after mile of farms and ranches.

My PR efforts had yet to hit it big. The CBS and ABC spots on Monday disappointed me, and I had yet to see what the Denver papers wrote. When KUSA (the Denver NBC affiliate) called to arrange an interview on the road, I expected another quick treatment before they rushed off to more important news.

As I soon discovered, the KUSA news team hadn't won three Edward R. Murrow awards in one year by doing 'quick treatments'. Channel 9 hadn't earned ten national Station of the Year Awards by doing anything but a thorough job.

When Gary Wolf pulled up in his Channel 9 truck, I looked forward to a short break and began to take my pack off. "You don't have to do that," he stopped me. "I can wire you up as you are."

"I'm sorry, I thought you were going to ask me questions here, and take a picture or two."

"Oh, I've got plenty of questions for you. If we just hook up this microphone –" he passed a wire beneath my belt and clipped a recorder on my pack "– I can do the interview without holding you up. That way I can get action shots, too."

He did a quick sound check, then gave me the go-ahead to start walking. Squeezing beside me on the highway shoulder, toting a massive camera, he began the interview. "Tell me, what exactly are you doing out here?"



As he peppered me with questions, he looked for the best camera angles. From behind, from in front. Zooming in, or outlining me against the backdrop of the Rockies. Crouching on the ground for a litter-level view. At one point he even placed the camera in my trash bag, started it running, and got film as I filled the bag.

He had cleared his morning to focus on me. After covering a quarter-mile, he would hurry back to his truck, pull forward, shoot more footage, and ask more questions, again and again. "What point do you hope to make about litter by taking this walk?"

"It's so unnecessary!" I replied, waving my hands in frustration. "I mean, it's so easy to have a trash bag in your car. And litter IS a problem, even out here. It doesn't just disappear when it leaves your car – it piles up, and someone has to get rid of it. Really, it's everyone's problem ... and everyone can easily have a part in solving it."

For nearly two hours he tailed me, thoroughly documenting my trek. When he finally called it quits, reclaiming the microphone that had captured my comments, we had come within a mile of Longmont. I bade him goodbye, wondering how much footage would make it to the 6:00 news, and resumed my trek toward town.

Minutes after he left, my new Underwear-by-the-Roadside Tour logged its first (and only) pair of skivvies as I rescued a soiled piece from the clutches of weeds. *If only Gary had stuck around another five minutes, I mused. He laughed so at the Kansas story – what footage would he have shot if he had seen this?*

My reverie was interrupted when a packet of ketchup hit my leg and fell at my feet. I looked up in time to see a Jeep full of teenagers speeding past, heading into town. “How kind of them,” I tried to convince myself as I bagged it. “My next stop is lunch, and the ketchup will complement the French fries. But how could they know that’s where I was headed?”

After lunch, I headed to Mountain View Elementary. With the city in the midst of its ‘Longmont Green-Up’ campaign, the staff at Mountain View had grand plans for my visit. Instead of lecturing to the kids, I would lead them in a pick-up around the school.

By 1:15 seventy students from the kindergarten, 1st, and 2nd grades had assembled on the lawn beside the school. The principal spoke a few words, then introduced me. All eyes turned to me as I stepped up, dropped a nearly-full orange bag on the ground, and shoved my litter-stick inside. When I removed it, the jaws held the BVDs I had found before lunch.

“I was wondering if any of you lost this?”

The kids giggled and squealed as I waved the unmentionables in the air, then returned them to the bag. Now commanding their full attention, I gave a short talk about my campaign, getting them to think about litter. “Can anyone guess why I hate litter so much that I would spend my time walking around and picking it up?”


“We could lose our whole environment and never get it back,” offered one boy.

“Animals eat the trash and it could kill them,” said another.

After several responses, the kids began squirming, so I closed my talk and had them grab their bags. Soon they swarmed over the park next to the school, scouring the grounds for trash. With the teachers monitoring the activity, I wandered back to the school where a local reporter fired questions at Sue (who had come up after her classes let out).

Our plans for a quiet night in Longmont, enjoying the company of my aunt and uncle, died a few hours later when I received an Earth Day invitation to appear on Boulder’s community access cable TV channel. Jan Scott, host of *Jan Scott Live*, had read of me in that morning’s *Denver Post*, and saw a perfect fit.

“Amazingly enough in every state we passed through we found underwear on the side of the road, except for Kansas.”
Glen Hanket



Times-Call photo by Jeff Haller

GLEN HANKET, author of “Underwear By the Roadside,” wasn’t campaigning against bad fashion but against litter. His appearance at Mountain View Elementary School on Earth Day wasn’t a coincidence. Hanket was in the middle of a weeklong walk from Fort Collins to Denver, picking up trash and raising awareness of Earth Day.

Crusade against litter

Author of ‘Underwear By the Roadside’ talks on Earth Day

So after an early dinner, the four of us piled into Sue's car and rode into Boulder, to the studios housed in a former dairy. As 8:00 arrived, I sat in the green room, watching Jan's opening monologue. He touched on several timely topics, spending most of his time skewering the Boulder police on their handling of the Jon Benet Ramsey murder, voicing his opinion on the guilt of the parents.

As he neared the end of his spiel, his assistant sat me in the only other seat, out of sight of the active camera. The studio bore little resemblance to the one I had visited in Connecticut. Whereas the Connecticut studio resembled someone's living room, this studio was stark: two chairs, a long table, a microphone, and a black background that provided nothing to distract the viewer.

Jan sat by the microphone, smiling into the camera, in his element. He wore a pink dress shirt and tie, looking informal with no matching suit jacket. With his facial expressions, he reminded me of a favorite uncle, telling stories to the children gathered around him.

In an interview lasting twenty minutes, he covered a wide range of topics: how the trip came about; the proliferation of underwear; the highways we cleaned; how we disposed of the trash. When I mentioned how we had spent our first two anniversaries on the road, he erupted in laughter. "You mean the first year you were married, you went on the road walking?"

"That's correct."

He shook his head, deeply amused. "That's like trying to run away, but you can never get away... If you can stay together through that, you can survive most anything." He smiled, shaking his head in disbelief. "Any more trips planned? What are you going to do this summer?"

I shrugged, looking for the right words. "I don't know. My next adventure hasn't been planned yet. Who knows? There will probably be another one, in the future. Once it gets in your blood, there's always an urge to get out there and do something like this..."

"When I read about you in the paper this morning, I had to have you on. We have the Ramseys going on, and all this craziness, and then here's this story about a man and his wife that are actually making a contribution to society. You talk the talk and walk the walk! It's inspiring... unlike me, because I sit around and, you know, chat..."

Thursday, April 23, Longmont-Louisville: 13.5 miles, 12 bags

"Hey! Aren't you the guy I saw on the news last night?"

It took less than five minutes to run across the first person who had seen the 9News spot. It shouldn't have surprised me, as the spot ran over two minutes – an incredibly long story for the 5:00 news, and repeated on this morning's newscast. (It must have been a slow news day.) It became the story of my day, with people honking and waving as I made my way south. By midmorning I found that my two minutes of fame would last longer, as Tami Depalma called with surprising news. "Channel 9 got such a good response, they want to have you as a guest in-studio tomorrow morning! Is 6:00 a.m. too early for you?"

That word added a spring to my step as I trudged the long miles. I faced my longest day in weather that slowly turned from warm to hot, with the sun beating down from a cloudless sky.

As every mile brought me closer to the Denver metro area, the trash grew heavier. The day's haul included a rose-shaped candle and a checkbook for Clovis Valdez.

At least I had no time pressures today. The mileage facing me precluded me from scheduling a school, though I made up for it by scheduling two for Friday. That gave me time once again to enjoy my escape, to focus on the little things. One woman stopped to offer me a ride as noon approached, and a pastor on a motorcycle stopped to meet me and thank me for my efforts.

Friday, April 24, Louisville-Broomfield: 6 miles – 10 bags

"He's a Johnny Appleseed for the 90s, except that instead of planting apple trees everywhere he goes – Glen Hanket picks up trash!"

That's how Kyle Dyer and Gary Shapiro introduced me at 6:26 a.m., beaming over the airwaves. For the morning, I had forsaken my hiking shorts and 'People Against Litter' tee shirt for a dress shirt and tie. This time, they brought me into the news studio, sitting with the anchors, surrounded by monitors lining the walls.

I brought along several items from my four days of trash pickup – the doll's head, a three-dollar bill, the license plate, the rose candle. They got a chuckle out of the collection, and asked if I really found underwear. Said Kyle, "Why would people throw their underwear out the window? I've never seen that."

"Glen, you feel very passionate about this," Gary observed. "Why did you decide to walk around and pick up litter?"

"Partly, to highlight the costs associated with litter," I responded, again mounting my soapbox (or should I say mounting my litter bag?). "What I really rail against is that, if people litter in a public area, that area may be closed off to our enjoyment. National Park campgrounds have been closed due to litter. I remember a beautiful pullout along a West Virginia highway, overlooking a lush valley, with a picnic table so you could enjoy the scenery. Once people started dumping their trash there, the state removed the table and erected a guard rail – you couldn't stop anymore to enjoy that."

My additional two minutes of fame passed quickly. By 6:30 I had said my goodbyes and headed back home to prepare for the day's walk. This time I would not trash-pick alone. A co-worker and his wife had adopted the next stretch of highway on my route, so I met Doug and Patty Nugent on the edge of Louisville. Together we scoured the road's shoulders, collecting eight bags – nearly fifty pounds – in two-and-a-half miles. To cap the week, that afternoon I entertained the students at schools in Broomfield and Louisville.

Saturday, April 25, Denver: 5.5 miles, 4 bags

The last stretch was almost an afterthought, far from the roar of traffic and the attention of the press. Despite inviting the public to join me during my numerous interviews, my last miles ended up as another solo outing. This time I returned to the bike trails with which I had grown so familiar, beginning at Globeville Park in north Denver.

The morning started out cool, and cottonwood trees shaded long stretches of the Platte River Trail. A few early-birds passed me as I headed toward downtown, out for their morning jog or

bike ride, barely giving me a second glance. In place of the roar of traffic, I listened to the gurgle of the river. The water flowed over the sandbars, bloated by the early stages of the snow melting in the Rockies.

As I entered Confluence Park, the skyscrapers of downtown loomed near. I crossed the river and headed up the Cherry Creek Trail, a narrow strip of trees, grass, water, and concrete, sunken below street level and encased with high brick walls. By this time traffic had increased, with city dwellers and suburban visitors mingling on Denver's most popular stretch of trail.

I continued upstream, into the heart of Denver, unnoticed by the throngs of roller-bladers, dog-walkers, bikers, and joggers. Lost in my thoughts, mindlessly shoving stray litter into yet another orange bag, I mused about the week gone by: the arcane litter; the TV spots; the people I met. In a far recess of my mind, I considered one question put forth by Jan Scott: *Any more trips planned?*

Where would the future take me? Especially four years from now?

HOLLYWOOD CALLS

I think I'll become a great writer. I have everything I need – a ream of paper and the delusion that I'm talented. – from a 1970s comic strip

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My second book *Take A Bike* came out in early June, with the bicycling season well underway. I soon rediscovered the prime rule of the book business: Now matter how much work you invest in the research and writing of a book, marketing it takes even more.

My distributors picked up the title, knowing they could place it in bookstores throughout town. That left me to crack the bikeshop market. For the next two weeks I placed cold calls to every store in the metro area, over the phone and in person. By the time I finished, twenty shops had stocked my book.

Through the summer, sales stayed sluggish. The mountain of *UBTR* books still lining the garage had made me conservative, and I printed only one thousand copies of *Take A Bike*. Still, I wondered if I would ever make money. Even as I researched a second bike guide, this one covering trails throughout Colorado, the business continued to bleed red ink.

As summer faded into fall and the Back-To-School sales came and went, I struggled to pump up sales. Finally a friend made a helpful suggestion. "People love Top Ten lists," she said. "Why not compile a list of the best trails to see fall colors?"

A quick call to Marketability got the ball rolling. "That's a great idea, Glen," Tami gushed. "The media loves stories about fall foliage. They should eat this up." Within a week she had lined up TV, radio, and newspapers interested in the list.

This time, the publicity worked. For my second TV spot, I appeared in-studio as a guest on the noon news program. By the time I hit the front lobby after my segment, callers had already lit up the switchboard asking where they could find the book.

By the next day every bookstore in the Denver area had sold out, and the industry's largest wholesaler had run through their stock. Within days special orders from every Barnes & Noble in the metro area flooded my mailbox.

I couldn't believe it – I had a 'bestseller'!

Though the brisk sales lasted only as long as the falling leaves, the stores restocked for the upcoming Christmas season. By mid-November I could see that my dwindling reserve of books would not last into next summer, so I called back the printer: *Give me another 700!*

I then turned my attention back to *UBTR*. Publicity is the key, I now knew, and TV the best medium. Better yet, I had a new opportunity to spread the word. In early September I had received a call from the producers of a cable TV show, *Travel Daily* on the Travel Channel. National exposure!

The drawback: the show operated on a small budget, and couldn't afford to cover my travel costs. I had to get to California on my own dime. Of course that was a major consideration

for a homebody like me, who hated to travel – yeah, right. Not having returned to L.A. since suing our property manager in 1995, I extended the trip to visit friends we had left behind.

The Travel Channel studios in Hollywood resided in a nondescript building on Seward St. Inside, the studio was opulent, richly appointed with globes, clocks showing different time zones, and decorations obtained from exotic lands. The main room resembled an Italian villa, with faux marble floors, tiled walls, and arched windows. Host Peter Greenberg, though, passed by the comfortable couches of the main room to interview me standing behind a semi-circular table, on which he had spread the trashy treasures I had brought along: the checkbook, license plate, and doll head from the Mini-Walk; a \$500 Monopoly bill; the Ray-Ban sunglasses which I wore for much of the LitterWalk; Caitlin's coin.

After introducing the spot, Peter got right to the heart of the matter. "Glen, I guess I've got to ask the most obvious question: Why?"

"After getting married, we really wanted to get out and see the country, and we knew there was no way to see it zipping by at 60 mph."

"So this was your honeymoon trip?" he asked. The conversation flowed smoothly, talking about the displayed garbage, laughing about Kansas, considering inspirational moments, and discussing our route. When we ran out of time, he took my litter stick and grabbed a bag of trash hidden beneath the table. "What you did has inspired us to be cleaner travellers. We didn't want you to go away empty-handed, so we chipped in to give you your own bag of trash to take home."

Chalk up another six minutes of fame. I enjoyed the return to California, but it did nothing for book sales. The business didn't clear a profit in 1998, though the loss was a fraction of that from the year before. I could see the wisdom in the sage advice, *expand your catalog*. A little profit from several books could offset the fixed costs of running a business. With another mild winter at hand, I continued to scout trails in cities north and south of Denver, assembling them into my third book, *Trails Away Colorado*.

Again, I hoped to have the book ready for the start of the cycling season. Again, the challenges of completing a book while working full-time drew out my efforts, and I didn't receive *Trails Away Colorado* until July 1999. This time, the PR efforts fizzled. Though Marketability again sent out press releases, we lacked a hook as compelling as fall foliage. A few community newspapers announced the new title, as did a scattering of radio stations, but the major media ignored it.

Both bike books sold steadily if not strongly through the rest of the summer. In June I introduced a website, www.bikepaths.com, to complement the books, posting updates as major new trails opened, hoping to establish myself as the *de facto* expert on Colorado trails. The trails continued to cast a spell over me, and I scouted them regularly, trying to settle on my next project.

The business took a hit in September. The distributor that sold my books into the major bookstore chains, seeing my new focus on Colorado books, transferred my account to their wholesaler arm. "Our sales force represent books we can sell across the nation," they explained to me. "Barnes & Noble or Borders can still order from us through our catalog, but we will no longer push your titles."

Despite this setback, sales from the two bike books cut my mounting losses. By year's end, I barely missed showing a profit. As 2000 opened, I knew I had to grow my catalog further. But how?

Take a chance, boy. Again.

With the explosive growth of trails in the metro area, I knew I could not fit them all into one book – a 350-page edition would cost too much. Perhaps, perhaps ... if I divided the metro area into seven regions, each covering a handful of cities or a county, I could review all trails in that region within a small book (80 pages or less).

But would they sell? And would they cut into sales of my flagship book, Take A Bike?

I decided to test the market with two of the seven titles, the ones closest to home. As the drought served up another mild winter, I directed my energies to surveying all the nearby trails. Once again, I headed for a publication date of May or June.

Then – something snapped.

Call it a crisis of confidence. Call it loss of interest. Call it real life intervening.

For reasons quickly lost to history, I walked away from the project. Deadline after deadline flew past. Ignoring the books, I concentrated on other activities. To keep bicycling, I signed up for another MS150 bike ride, raising \$1100 for the charity. My mind knew I must complete the books, but my heart wouldn't hear of it.

By mid-June I faced the facts – if I truly wanted to make money in publishing, I had to follow my plan. Belatedly I finished the books and sent them to the printer. By the time I got them back, much of August had passed. Even at that late date, I persuaded several stores to carry them, though sales stayed low through the bicycling off-season. As summer faded into fall, however, I had another dream on which to focus – one more chance for coast-to-coast fame ...

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*"My name is Glen Hanket, and four thousand miles is walking distance for me." – from **To Tell The Truth**, episode 139A*

After my first book came out, my name found its way onto several websites catering to TV- and radio-show producers. These sites (which placed me in the company of such cultural icons as the 'Presiding Goober' of The Andy Griffith Show Rerun Club, Jim and Tim – the Duct-Tape Guys, and Puppet the Psycho Dwarf) listed characters available for interviews on short notice. In the late '90s, those sites attracted regular calls from deejays, and I did phone interviews with over one hundred radio stations across the country and as far afield as South Africa and New Zealand.

By 2000 the phone calls had tapered off. Thus, when I answered the phone in late May and heard an unfamiliar voice along with the familiar long-distance static, it took me by surprise. "I'm calling from Burbank, CA," the voice said. "By any chance, do you recall an old TV show named *To Tell The Truth*?"

"Sure. That was the show where the panelists tried to guess the guest's job – no, wait. It was the other show, where three contestants all claimed to be the same person, and the panelists had to figure out who was lying."

“Very good!” he agreed. “Well, I’m calling from the NBC studios. We’re bringing *Tell The Truth* back to TV in syndication next year, and are looking for guests with original stories...”

Oh, don’t tempt me. He took my information, getting details on the long-ago LitterWalk. After explaining that they had not yet started filming, and had a large backlog of shows already scheduled, he said he’d let me know when they could fit me in. “It might not be for a while,” he warned me.

The thought infiltrated my dreams all summer. *To Tell The Truth. To be on a national game show.* The allure was strong. (Now I know how the networks so easily find throngs of people willing to embarrass themselves on the glut of reality shows.) As Sue chided me, “You’re just a ham at heart. Train a TV camera on you, and you’re happy.”

Every several weeks I pestered my contact, checking on my status, seeing if I could provide any further information. Each time, I got the same answer: “We’re working through our list. As soon as we get to your name, we’ll let you know.”

I had nearly given up when I finally got the call shortly before Thanksgiving. “Are you available on December 16?” I eagerly agreed. “Great! We’ll mail you your plane tickets this week, along with all the other details. We’ll see you then!”

I felt like royalty when I landed at LAX on the 15th. Minutes after I collected my bags, a limousine whisked me away to Burbank in luxury. After checking in at the Hilton Hotel (all paid for), I had a couple of hours to relax before catching the shuttle to the studio.

At NBC, I got the chance to meet my impostors, a lawyer (Peter Diamond) and an aspiring actor (Wayne Oldford). The two of them, both slim, tall, and outdoorsy, had received my book from the studio the previous week, and had spent time preparing to be me. The staff put us into a room where the impostors grilled me further, and I coached them about likely questions and snappy answers. David, the producer for our segment, then joined us, explaining how the show would go. Before we called it a day, he ran us through a sample game, throwing questions at us rapid-fire.

The next morning the shuttle driver collected me from the Hilton and returned me to the studio. Again the impostors and I went over their stories, and I threw more questions at them: What was your route? What did you do with the trash? Who were your sponsors? Why did you do it?

We tired of that by mid-morning. Since we weren’t scheduled for filming until right after lunch, we sat in the hall and watched the morning segments on the monitors. Several staff members and other contestants joined us, trying to identify the real celebrities. Finger food flowed freely, keeping hunger pangs at bay as we waited our turn on stage.

Finally our turn arrived. We donned our backpacks, and grabbed the orange bags and litter sticks I had brought from Colorado. Dave led us behind the backdrops onto the stage, where the studio audience watched with interest. In the darkness he showed us where to stand, where to look as we introduced ourselves, and where to move downstage when the lights came up. As we stood in the darkness, the panelists took their seats: Meshach Taylor from *Designing Women*; comedienne Paula Poundstone; Dave Coulier from *Full House*; and *Baywatch Hawaii*’s Brooke Burns. Then it was our turn, as the spotlight shone on Glen #1.

“My name is Glen Hanket, and 4000 miles is walking distance for me.”

Then Glen #2 had the spotlight. "My name is Glen Hanket, and 4000 miles is walking distance for me."

The spotlight turned to Glen #3. "My name is Glen Hanket, and 4000 miles is walking distance for me."

We stood at attention as the announcer introduced the panelists and John O'Hurley, the host. "Four thousand miles is walking distance for you, hmmm?" said John, chuckling. "That's nothing. Yesterday I walked eighteen holes wearing brand new golf shoes!"

I no longer noticed the studio audience, so focused was I on living the moment. I listened as the announcer read my short bio, still barely believing I was *actually there*. *On stage*.

Before the panelists started with their questions, the director yelled, "Cut!" and the crew quickly brought out our seats. They moved with clockwork precision, making sure the lights in front of each of us would light up each time a panelist voted for us after questioning.

Meshach Taylor started the questioning. When he bypassed Glen #1 to hit me with the first question, I wondered if he already had an inkling. I answered him quickly, and he spread the rest of his questions about. Glen #1 received a question about sponsors, and he listed three of them with no hesitation. *Good job, Peter*.

Paula Poundstone also directed her first question to me, asking about my route, then following with, "Did you find a thick, high-waisted, banded underwear somewhere with a gold safety pin on it? Anywhere near St. Louis? Because that was mine... It flew out the car window. I didn't throw it out." *The three of us had expected something like that from Paula*.



Dave Coulier spread his questions around, giving us all a chance to show off our knowledge of the walk. Then came Brooke Burns, with more seemingly innocent questions. One caught me off guard: "Would you do this again?"

After a moment's hesitation, I replied, "I would probably bicycle."

With the questioning done, we had to wait through a commercial break to see how we had fared. Meshach revealed his vote first: Glen #2 – *all right, one vote for the wrong guy – chalk up our first \$1000!* Our luck didn't hold, though, as Paula fingered me "for no good reason," and Dave followed her lead. When Brooke reasoned that "you'd have to have someone in your life that understood this type of passion to do something *crazy* for twelve months out of your life," she pointed to the person that admitted taking his wife along – namely, me.

The audience's votes ended up in a landslide – 66% gave me the nod. As a result, we would split only \$1000 among us. Not that missing a big payoff made a whit of difference. I had just lived out a dream, and nothing could take away that memory.

BACK / LIST

from *Underwear by the Roadside*:

ONLY SUE COULD INJURE a rhyming body part.

"My lateral collateral ligament is sprained due to hyper-exertion," she reported. Seeing our blank stares, she added, "In other words, my knee's messed up."

"You're the original bad luck kid, aren't you?" joked her brother Jim. "Maybe walking 'cross the country's not your forte."

"Not at all," I teased. "She only does these things so we can visit you." For the second time this trip, reclaiming Sue's car had taken us near Jim and his family. Again we'd spent the night, and in the morning I'd prevailed on Sue to have their family doctor check her.

"So what's the cure?" Jim asked. "Amputation?"

Sue smiled. "Yeah, and start over with a new leg. I'm about ready for that."

I thought back to the comment Sue had made in March, before leaving for the east coast. "It's going to be a fight between me and my body," she'd predicted, not knowing her body would get in the best punches. Still she kept fighting, setback after setback.

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I returned from California and jumped right into preparing for the holidays. For the first time we would host the events, with Sue's parents driving in from Connecticut, and Sue's sister and her family flying. Wreaths adorned the front door, battery-operated singing Santas staked out space on the counters, and the smell of fresh-baked Christmas cookies scented the air. The centerpiece, dominating our living room, was a majestic Christmas tree – actually two trees, cabled together to hide their bare spots.

The family shared a grand week together. Dad treated us to a *paella* dinner, showing off skills he had learned the past year in culinary classes. The spouses of the Armstead sisters ventured into the mountains for a day of powder skiing. For the nieces and nephews, we staged sledding and snowball fights. For a week, the world beyond our gathering seemed far away indeed.

As always, good times end too soon. By the time New Year's Eve rolled around, our last guests bustled about, packing suitcases and boxing presents for the long flight home. In the controlled chaos, with people running about, Sue slipped outside unnoticed to clear the driveway of the dusting of overnight snow. When I next saw her, she was coming through the door, stepping gingerly. "Right when I finished shoveling, I hit an ice patch. Bam! Right on my back. Man, that hurt."

With the in-laws safely back home, our life returned to normal. To treat Sue after the work she had gone through, and to celebrate my book business logging its first profit (albeit tiny),

we spent the next weekend away. In Colorado Springs, we indulged ourselves with a night in a bed and breakfast, window shopping, and an expensive dinner. The stresses of holiday entertaining melted away, leaving us with magical memories. The only complaint: the bed must have been too hard, as Sue noted niggling back pain.

In the coming weeks, we forgot about the hard bed and assigned the blame to her fall on the ice. By February her back hurt constantly, and she began cutting back her activities to accommodate it. She tried a doctor or two, but they quickly urged her to see a specialist.

The doctors in the office where she worked referred her to a doctor in Boulder who specialized in sports medicine and back problems. Dr. Y, challenged by the situation, set a goal to cure Sue. Slowly, methodically, she diagnosed her as having multiple crushed and herniated discs. Full of purpose, she then tried a variety of procedures to eliminate the pain.

Unfortunately, *tried* was the operative word. It took months for us to realize that Dr. Y was working beyond her abilities. When the standard treatments didn't work, she tried experimental ones – procedures in which she wasn't accomplished, and for which insurance refused to pay. Winter glided into spring, and spring into summer, and Sue's back continued to worsen. The pain had gotten so bad, and so constant, she had to quit her job in June.

Even as Dr. Y continued to use Sue as a human guinea pig, we sought out second and third opinions. Each time, we came away more depressed. One doctor even told her, "Backs are like old tires – they wear out. Get used to it." (We decided he wouldn't get our vote for the Best Bedside Manner of the Year Award.)

As fall rolled around, we had given up on Dr. Y – the bills had turned as oppressive as Sue's pain. By year's end we had grown despondent. Then we received a glimmer of hope like a present in our stocking: a close friend, who had been suffering from back pain nearly as long as Sue, had just been cured! "There's a doctor north of here," Marion Sundberg told us. "He fused my discs, and within days the pain disappeared."

Full of hope, we traveled north to Fort Collins in mid-February. The doctor saw us promptly, asking after Marion's health. He took Sue's medical history, and examined her x-rays and MRI scans of the past year. After twenty minutes, he gave us the bad news. "There's no way to fuse that many discs without decreasing your mobility, and even risking paralysis. You should give up any notion of surgery. I would recommend an exercise/therapy regimen to get the pain under control."

Sue immediately plunged from the heights of hope to the depths of despair. She said nary a word on the long drive home, staring with unseeing eyes out the window, a tear trickling down her cheek. Deep within herself she withdrew, trying to summon the strength to continue facing the hostile world.

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The book business provided the only bright spot in the dark year. I had finally stemmed the red ink in 2000, and in 2001 the rest of the small-book series found a ready market. Tami and the crew at Marketability again did a wonderful job of PR, getting my name in the papers and my face on TV. The new books and extensive publicity pumped up sales, starting to chip away at the deficit I had recorded my first two years in business.

It provided small consolation. I would gladly have forfeited all my profits to cure Sue's back. When the constant pain forced her from her job, she spent countless hours at home with nothing but time and pain on her hands. Her days ranged from mostly functional to difficult-to-get-out-of-bed. One of her few joys was the hour each day she spent with Oprah.

One evening she could hardly wait for me to get home from work to discuss the day's program. "She had on a guy, younger than us, who nearly died from an accident. As he lay in the hospital, recovering, he got to thinking about all the things he'd never had a chance to do – like skydiving and hang-gliding. He made a list of all those things he'd like to try, and now he goes around doing them."

The idea struck a chord with me. *A list! A scorecard, a measure of a life well-lived.* Was it a guy thing, wanting to keep score? Did it appeal to my logical, engineer side? Or was I a repressed geek, digging anything with numbers?

Whatever the reason, I adopted the notion, assembling my own list over the next few weeks. Entries ranged from the adventurous (travel to Antarctica, climb Mt. Kilimanjaro) to gaining new skills (learn a musical instrument, take a German class), from ambitious goals (write a novel, win an award for my books) to volunteering (be a Big Brother). Some items I could knock off with one well-planned vacation; at least one I had already worked on for years, and expected to take another decade or two to complete it (visit all the U.S. National Park Service sites). Not surprisingly, neither skydiving nor hang-gliding made my list. (After all, I had assembled a Life List, not an end-my-life list.)

By the time new ideas had dwindled away, and I had deleted a few cherished dreams (win a Nobel Prize, get elected President, discover a cure for cancer), my list numbered fifty items. *How depressing!* I thought. *I'm behind 50-0 in the game of life.* Thus motivated, I compiled a second list, this one of experiences and accomplishments from my past: of course, it included walking across the country, writing a book, running the Olympic Torch, *To Tell The Truth*. Having nearly evened the score, I slept easier.

Ah, but what good is a list unless you use it?

Having put my thoughts, my goals, on paper made them more real. Now, instead of dismissing these notions with a simple *maybe someday*, I could address them, could plan to accomplish them. *Play an instrument? Okay, what instrument? Where could I take lessons? When can I fit it into my schedule?*

As 2001 segued into 2002, and Sue's hopes for pain relief ebbed, I again started battling those familiar pangs, right on their four-year schedule. This time they hit with greater force – I had felt so helpless for so long, unable to help Sue, I keenly felt a need to accomplish *something*.

I now had the Life List to refer to, looking for a new challenge. Though several items caught my eye, I kept returning to one intriguing possibility. As much as I resisted it, the idea grew on me until I knew I wouldn't rest until I gave in.

My response to Brooke Burns's question had turned into a prophecy: I wanted to bicycle across the country.

Correction: I *thought* I wanted to bicycle across the country. My logical side still entertained serious doubts. Our world had changed in the past year – no longer could Sue consider

joining me. Could I handle the physical challenges of crossing the Rockies in my late forties? Could I take the emotional toll of biking 3700 miles by myself?

I struggled with those doubts for weeks. Slowly, very slowly, I formed answers to my concerns. *I have nothing to prove here. Nothing demands that I do the ride all at once, I reasoned. If I break it up into three or four pieces, no one leg should take more than two or three weeks. That way, if the challenges prove too great – or I simply don't enjoy it – I could take the item off my List.*

After sketching out that plan, the theme came easily. I couldn't collect litter from a bike, but I could talk to schoolkids, perhaps inspire them. If I arranged to start each day at a school, it would give the ride a purpose, give it meaning. Better still, it may combat the loneliness I would battle otherwise, starting each day in front of friendly faces.

I soon had a dream and a plan – but no commitment. Life is about priorities, and mine still lay with Sue. As long as I held hope that she could best this beast of a problem, I couldn't see leaving. To stay and offer any possible help, no matter how slight, appealed more to me than taking off on a lark.

Then the doctor in Ft. Collins shattered our hopes. With no relief in sight, thoughts of riding again sprang to mind. With the calendar bellying up to March, I knew I had to commit right then to have time to arrange schools. When I broached the subject with Sue, she voiced no objections. She also offered no encouragement. After recovering from Ft. Collins, she focused all her energies on searching the Internet, looking for information, for a doctor – for anything! – that provided hope of a cure.

As she made contacts via the web, I lost myself in planning the trip. I knew the biggest challenge of any ride would entail crossing the western US, cycling across the Blue, Wasatch, and Rocky mountains. *So why not face the challenge head on, and bike the worst part first?* I could start my 'return trip' outside Astoria, where I finished the walk. To cycle back to Denver (1400-1500 miles) would take 23 days. Carefully I traced a route, finding towns large enough to host schools a day's ride apart.

Thankfully the first two contacts I made at schools responded with enthusiasm. Sandi Christensen and Sue Fox at Jemtegaard Middle School in Washougal, WA, jumped on my invitation, promising to okay my visit. Dustin Hoehne at the high school in Arlington, OR, couldn't promise anything when I called, since a regional band competition had reserved all large rooms at the school, but he spent three weeks juggling his schedule, examining alternatives until he found a way to accommodate me.

That early enthusiasm helped me weather the inevitable rejections. In some towns I called five schools before finding one that would have me in. By the time mid-April arrived, I had arranged only ten schools for the three weeks, evenly split between elementary, middle, and high schools.

Sue's mood lifted also. From the web, she had found a doctor specializing in spinal pain, and we paid for a phone consult. He confirmed her diagnosis, and referred us to Dr. Kaplan in Laramie, WY, two hours north of us. On our first visit, he charmed us, proving knowledgeable and capable. After a consult, he scheduled a second visit to run diagnostic tests. Those tests, involving an injection in her back, worked a miracle – for the first time in sixteen months, the pain disappeared!

That relief lasted only a few hours, but showed us we had finally found a doctor with answers. With that promising result, he scheduled her for a more lasting treatment. Several day before I left on my bike ride, we took our third trip to Laramie, then crossed our fingers and waited for the cure to kick in.

I now turned my focus to my pending adventure. Living in the Internet age, I decided to add a new dimension to my trip. For the first time, I would keep a web log ('blog'). Every few days I would visit a local library, access the web, and download my journal. Now friends and family from around the country could follow my progress, could share in my adventures. (The complete, unedited blogs are still available on the web – you can find links at www.bikepaths.com.)

Now all that remained was testing myself on what I called ***the Great West Bike Tour***.

THE GREAT WEST BIKE TOUR

Friday, May 3

(from the blog) Ahh, the thrill of departing, the agony of leaving. It's hard to begin a solo trip, leaving your loved one behind. If only it were a perfect world, with Sue out of pain and able to join me in some fashion ...

Now I'm waiting for the Portland-to-Astoria bus, hoping this idyllic weather lasts a few more days - warm but not hot, sky filled with broken clouds (and I hope no one fixes them).

Saturday, May 4 - Astoria/Peter Iredale Beach, OR to Longview, WA (70.0 miles; 47°-60°; mostly cloudy)

It felt strange to return to the beach that hosted the walk's climax. So much was the same, triggering memories - the soccer fields where the kids greeted me eight years ago; the forested road that made all the news clips; the rusting remains of the shipwreck that still stood sentinel on the beach. Today, though, the feeling was entirely different. Then I felt elation, excitement, a giddiness - the end of walking 4100 miles! - that came with challenging myself and succeeding. Today, I felt excitement, tempered with unease - am I truly up to this, eight years older? By myself? On a bike?

Adventure travel, when you boil it down to its essentials, is about discovery - of yourself, and of the world around you. To that point, I discovered two new things today:

#1: The deli sign appeared at a fortunate time, since my stomach had just begun demanding lunch. I scanned their menu, and settled on the daily special of burger, fries, and drink. I handed over my \$2.99, and the clerk tossed something resembling a round, cold, brittle, flattened waffle on the counter. The confusion must have shown on my face, so the clerk explained, "If you cook your burger now, it should be ready when the fries come up."

"Cook it?"

"Oh, you haven't used a self-service burger machine before?" She then directed me to the side of the store, where the peculiar equipment sat. "You put the frozen patty on this conveyor belt, which cooks it and pops it out here. Now grab a bun and put the top and bottom halves in these slots, to toast them. They come out on the bottom."

At least they DID have someone cook the fries!

#2: In the hotel room (my camping nights come later), I looked forward to a hot, soaking bath. Problem: no drain plug! I ambled to the office to ask for a rubber plug, with no success. "So there's no way I can take a bath?"

The clerk hesitated. "Well," he said, pointing to the brochure rack, "some people tell me that if you take one of those brochures and put it over the drain hole, the water pressure will hold it in place. No, not that thin one, the one on card stock." With no other option, I tried it - and it worked better than some installed plugs. Who'd've thought?



Sunday, May 5 - Longview to Washougal, WA (75.5 miles; high 54°; rain and drizzle)

Long, taxing, wet day... Despite the wet, I enjoyed a special morning. As I biked south, striving to avoid I-5, my frontage road suddenly ended, with no choice beyond a road that climbed up the mountain to my left. After struggling for a mile, I stopped at the first house to ask where this road led. Before I knew it, Barb and Dan had invited me in and fixed me lunch. We had a nice talk - long enough for the roads to dry - and exchanged addresses and phone numbers. I've always believed that the people we meet - the ones that touch our lives in some way - are what make life (and travel) so special. Today, it was Dan and Barb that made my day memorable.

I quickly discovered the major difference between bike treks and long walks - on walks, I rarely worried about equipment failures. After a high-speed downhill ride leaving Dan and Barb, the wet roads kicked up enough grime to affect my shifters. For several miles I worried that I would get stuck in only one gear - a nasty problem, considering the hills lurking ahead. Luckily the problem cleared up, and the bike performed well the rest of the trip.

At least I knew I had free lodging for the night in Washougal. Sue Fox, one of my most enthusiastic school contacts, had invited me to spend the night at her house. That took a leap of faith, since she would be gone with her family for several days. She had emailed me instructions of where to find the key she had hidden, and of which bed to use. *Small town hospitality*, I mused as I let myself in. *Would I be as trusting of a total stranger?*

Monday, May 6 - Washougal to Cook, WA (41.4 miles; high 50°; cold, wet, and drizzly)

Agony and ecstasy, highs and lows, pleasure and pain, all blended well and served - a fit description for the day. One moment I'm straining to climb another hill, cold wind chilling me, trucks kicking up a fine mist of road grime from the wet highway; the next moment a vista of forest-clad mountains cloaked in clouds, rising thousands of feet above the placid river, steals my breath away.

Not that I'm complaining about the rain - I fully expected to get wet until I get well into the gorge, and the wet abets the greenery that makes the land so unforgettable. My gripe is with the unwelcome arctic air mass that has parked itself over Washington and Oregon, dropping temperatures 10 degrees below normal what they expect for May. The snow level last night dropped as low as 2000'. In May!



The late start this morning was due to speaking at Jemtegaard Middle School in Washougal. Teachers brought two groups of 6th graders in to see my slides and listen to my tales of the country, and ask questions of my motives. I also challenged them to look at litter and traveling through different eyes - with luck, maybe I reached some impressionable minds today.

As it had for the walk, the terrain limited my choice of routes. The first half of this tour would follow the same general path we had taken eight years earlier. That route passed friends we had met on the walk, so I scheduled the short day to end at their house. Waldo and Phyllis Zaugg opened their home to me, helping me dry out after two drizzly days. That night they

cooked the same type of fantastic meal I remembered from the walk, refreshing me and priming me for several more days of riding.

Tuesday, May 7 - Cook, WA to Arlington, OR (87 miles; high in the 60s; sunny, tail wind)

What an incredible day. I know I must have been dreaming - if so, may this dream last 19 more days!

After a delayed start due to a flat tire, I headed up to White Salmon to speak at Henkle Middle School, ^{UP} being the operative term - close to a mile of steep and steeper hills. The climb was worth it - the two classes I talked to recharged my batteries. The first class, after hearing me talk, went outside and spent recess cleaning up the school grounds. After entertaining K-S's class, the students swarmed around, clamoring for my autograph (that hasn't happened since the first month of my walk!). After signing over twenty papers, a few kids came back to present me with a hand-made card thanking me and wishing me well. Finally, as I biked away, the kids lined the school yard, chanting, "Litter is bad! Glen is good!"



Because I stayed west of White Salmon (many thanks, Waldo and Phyllis!), my school visit started late - and after autographs, ended even later. By the time I hit the road, it was nearing noon, with 74 more miles to my destination. Oh well, I consoled myself, even if I must ride until 6:00 or later, those kids made it worth it.

I needn't have worried. The hills which slowed me down for three days thinned out, growing shorter and farther between. A stiff wind blew at my back, speeding me along. By the time I crossed into Oregon at The Dalles, I had averaged nearly 18 mph for 22 miles. Then I hit the interstate, and really hit my stride - for 2 1/2 hours, I averaged an unbelievable 21 mph! Once I hit Arlington, I wondered if I should be wearing a red cape and blue tights.

Wednesday, May 8 - Arlington to Pendleton, OR (80.0 miles; 50s; sunny, cool breeze)

SMALL TOWN SIGNS: in the Skamania General Store/Cafe: "Sorry, the cafe is closed today - Blanche is sick. Please join us for a cup of coffee." In an Arlington eatery: "AHS scholarship fundraiser: Flamingo your friend's lawn! Imagine their surprise when they wake up to a migrating herd of plastic pink birds!"

On this trip, I understood the physical challenges facing me, and have thus far met them. However, I forgot to factor in the mental challenges. After another noon-time start, I again faced 70+ miles, but this time had no tail wind to push me. My speed dropped by a third. Four more hours of interstate riding, slogging through endless miles of featureless land and roaring semis, took nearly all the dedication I could muster. Thoughts of faking a flat and hitching a ride to town filled my mind. Finally, nineteen freeway miles from Pendleton, I took a chance - veering off on the old highway, which added an unknown length to my day (four miles, it turned out). Having lost both spare tubes yesterday, it was a gamble. On that deserted road, no more than ten cars passed me in two hours. Near the end, I saw a bicyclist racing toward me. It turns out Dan lives in Boulder CO (a short ride from my home) and works in Oregon a few weeks a year.

The high point of the school talks had to be meeting the Polish exchange student. Finally, I had someone to translate the headlines from the Polish girlie magazines from Nebraska that I'd copied in my book. I showed her the headlines, and she got flustered reading it. "I can't believe you printed this! Right out of CATS magazine!"

Thursday, May 9 - Pendleton to La Grande, OR (60.7 miles; 40s in the Blues; partly cloudy)

I often ask the students, "Why do you think I like bike touring?" In White Salmon, one boy answered, "Because you can feel good about accomplishing something?"



Today, I felt great. The task facing me was **THE CLIMB** - gaining 3000' to cross the Blues. For five days, I fretted about this climb. For five days, I mentally gauged each hill I climbed, wondering if Cabbage Hill would be steeper. For five days, I had been hearing about all the snow the Blues had gotten last weekend. Was I ready for this?

Was I ever. The tiger of a hill turned into a pussycat, and I powered up it with a gear to spare. For 100 minutes I pedaled up ten miles, gaining incredible views back down to Pendleton. Once atop the hill, the old highway wound through evergreen forests with snow in their shadows.

Temperatures hovered in the 40s, and the sun occasionally peeked through the clouds to warm me. And the best part - while I biked the old road, I saw almost no trash! (Of course, I also saw almost no traffic, which explains that.)

I guess I'm not the only crazy one out here. In Pendleton I stopped at the newspaper, and the reporter told me he'd interviewed a man the day before who was walking to Washington D.C. ... According to the reporter, Tom Beck expects to reach the east coast in three months. Now **THAT'S** insane!

Friday, May 10 - La Grande to Baker City, OR (52.5 miles; 55°; chilly cross-wind, sunny)

I had a blast at my first elementary school visit - the younger kids show such enthusiasm! Since one class at Willow Elementary was preparing for a camping trip around Oregon next week, they took particular interest in my trek and gear. A reporter covered the event, so I hoped for a good news clip. Afterwards, I accepted principal Charlotte McLaughlin's offer to stay for an early lunch.

Another day of riding through scenic valleys, ringed with snow-capped mountains, followed. In Haines I stopped for a quick break, and within moments a grizzled local - gray beard, black felt hat, leather jacket - came out to meet me. Eric had worked eighteen summers in Fairbanks, Alaska, riding his bike to work every day. We chatted for a half hour, on overpopulation, uncontrolled growth, interstate highways, and slowing down the speed of life.

Saturday, May 11 - Baker City, OR to Parma, ID (100.0 miles; high 60s; tail breeze, sunny and clear)

With an early start, I churned out the miles - only the second time I've ever accomplished a 'century' ride ... Outside Payette ID, I had a roadside chat with Tim Connelly. He and his wife were planting trees as I sped by, and called out a question, asking how far I was going. I grabbed the brakes and rolled back for a nice talk. Minutes later, an A&W sign in town convinced me that a root beer float would be a perfect complement for another spectacular day.

Sunday, May 12 (Mother's Day) - Parma to Mountain Home, ID (63.0 miles; low 80s; sunny)

I figured today would test my mettle, seeing families celebrate Mother's Day - all laughter and smiles - while I missed my family in Colorado. I remembered from the walk how the holidays always proved the hardest to get through. Today, I lacked the energy I had drawn upon the first 560 miles, and my speed dropped 20%. The miles passed slowly to Boise, first through farmland, then semi-rural, then industrial, finally city.

My day brightened when I hit Boise. First I stopped a cyclist for directions, and he gave me a guided tour along the city's riverside bike path to a restaurant for lunch. Back on the trail, Austin saw me looking at a map and stopped for a long chat. Further along, other friendly faces cheerfully directed me along my way. Once out of the city, though, I faced thirty ugly freeway miles to Mountain Home (for a day's total over ninety miles), up hills with a head wind. Since I had nothing to prove by trying to bike 195 miles in two days (and could risk my health by doing so), I stopped at the first rest area and finagled a ride into town.

The miles had beaten me down - the non-stop pace had sapped my energy, and I had only one school arranged for the next four days. The news from home did nothing to lighten my mood - Sue's back pain had not abated, though the treatment should have kicked in by now. Another night in a motel room passed very slowly.

Monday, May 13 - Mountain Home to Hagerman, ID (60.1 miles; high 80s; sunny, strong head wind)

In the end, it all boils down to attitude. If you are mentally tired, if you're down, the miles seem empty. If you instead choose a positive outlook, you can enjoy even a miserable day.

I confess, my attitude hit the skids yesterday. If I'd felt the same way today, I may have given up on this trip. First, I failed to arrange a school talk for today or Wednesday. Then I hopped on my bike and ran smack dab into an unrelenting 30- to 40-mph head wind, with the temperature headed for the 80s. As I left Mountain Home, the scenery degenerated to a stark, flat landscape populated only by rabbitbrush and tumbleweeds (and a sign, "FOR SALE: Five-acre home site". Who would want to live here?). The relentless wind kept my speed under 9 mph, with twenty miles before my first town.

Don't ask me how or why, but I still enjoyed riding, eking out the miles.

SMALL TOWN SIGNS: a diversified business in Hagerman: "Trader Jack's Sporting Goods and Floor Coverings." Maybe they sell bearskin rugs?

Tuesday, May 14 - Hagerman to Rupert, ID (75.5 miles; 60s; sunny, tail wind)

Today was the 'rest' day I expected yesterday. Since my Hagerman High talk didn't start until 11:15, I took the opportunity to sleep in, reaching the school in time to type in my web logs. The talk went well - close to 200 students in the bleachers, listening to my anti-litter evangelism. Afterwards, I launched myself and bike down the road, aided by a stiff tail wind...

I had survived the roughest portion of the trip: except for the break with Waldo and Phyllis, the last eleven nights I had whiled away in lonely motel rooms (or a vacant house). Though I carried a tent and sleeping bag atop my panniers, unseasonably cold temperatures had discouraged me from using them.

I now had a break from the isolation. Four of the next five nights I would spend with friends or friends' family. Tonight I stayed with Joan Saario, a close friend for twenty years dating from our single days in California. She had escaped the bustle of that state after us,

forsaking the urban life for more relaxed living with her beau Ron Holder in small-town Idaho.

Wednesday, May 15 - Rupert, ID to Snowville, UT (84.8 miles; low 60s; filtered sunshine)

Today I struck off into unknown territory. From Rupert I finally left the track of our long walk, heading southwest toward Salt Lake City. High thin clouds kept the day cool, and the tail wind that gave me a speedy start died as the road turned south. The road climbed slowly through a broad valley, hemmed in by snow-dotted peaks. And it was deserted! At one point, I rode seventeen arid miles without seeing so much as a house.

Thursday, May 16 - Snowville to Ogden, UT (79.1 miles; 77°; sunny with breezes)

As I pulled off the freeway, the exit sign said "Thiokol". My map showed no town along the road, so I wondered ... Could it be THE Thiokol? When a sign at the bottom of the ramp mentioned 'Rocket Exhibit', I knew it was - Thiokol, the company which makes the rocket boosters for NASA that sends the shuttle into orbit. The huge facility spread over five miles north-to-south and disappeared into the surrounding hills. As I neared the far end of the plant, I spied a jogger and called out a greeting. Dan Cooper jogged over to ask about my trip, and to tell me about the rocket company he worked for. "We have 3000 workers here," he said, "that commute from as far as Salt Lake City and Pocatello, ID." He also talked about the area, famous for the 'golden spike' that completed the first coast-to-coast railroad in the 1860's.

SMALL TOWN HOSPITALITY: It seems at times that life in a small town centers around the C-store or the cafe, and my visits propel me into the midst of it. Yesterday in Malta I stared at the displayed menu, checking out the (limited) offerings, when a local clued me in. "The best thing is to make yourself a taco. Go around the corner and grab a tortilla, and spoon some mixture from the crockpot. There's a bowl with lettuce, one with cheese, one with tomatoes, and a bin with chopped onions. The other crockpot has some great soup."

This morning I grabbed breakfast at Mollie's Cafe, a Snowville haunt full of atmosphere. When Mollie heard about my bike trip, she comped my pancakes, taking a chunk out of my bill to start me off on a high note.

Friday, May 17 - Ogden to Salt Lake City, UT (42.8 miles; 74°; sunny)

After another wonderful night with company (this time, cousins of a friend in Colorado), I started with another elementary school talk. Horace Mann Elementary had over 300 kids pack the gym to listen to my message. Once on the road, I fought unexpected hills at the base of the Wasatch Mountains, heading south to the state capitol. Again, I pedaled through a long strip of suburbia, a far cry from the remote, quiet stretches I had grown used to in Idaho and Oregon. I lacked the energy to power through the miles, so I stopped often - at a bakery for a scone, again for lunch, later for ice cream. In the city I played tourist, stopping at the capitol dome and at Temple Square, before riding (more hills) to a friend's house. All in all, a very short day to cap off two weeks of non-stop biking.

I had forgotten the toll long-distance trekking took. After two weeks, I longed to put aside the bike for a day. What better place to rest than with friends who understood the rigors of travel? While Sue and I tackled our long walk in 1993-94, Rick and Melody had quit their jobs and left southern California to tour the country for months in an RV. After finishing, they put down roots in Salt Lake City,



where they invited me in. Now I got the chance to meet their young daughter, who took an immediate shine to me.

On Saturday I negotiated a day off. My friends invited me to stay longer, and Rick offered to drive me to Heber City on Sunday morning so I could stay on schedule. With that settled, we spent the day visiting the Golden Spike National Historic Site. This park contained a few miles of track, old rail beds, and working reproductions (gaily painted) of the engines that took place in the original meeting of the rails. Park rangers showed off the engines, explaining all the valves, levers, and pulleys. Later, they ran both trains down the tracks.

Sunday, May 19 - Heber City to Duchesne, UT (68.9 miles; 80s; gusty cross- and head-winds)

Today the wind didn't cooperate. Gusts to 30 mph tried to push me from the road, or blasted me head-on as I climbed another in a series of hills.

The day began with a scenic two-hour, sixteen-mile climb to Daniel's Pass. After a lunch break, the rogue winds slowed me as I inched along Strawberry Reservoir, surrounded by low hills mostly barren of trees. After 3 1/2 hours of biking, I'd covered under half the day's miles, and worried about exceeding six-hours in the saddle. Thankfully I then started losing elevation, and my speed shot back up. I got my first views of the landscape I will spend several days crossing, views that could have been lifted from a John Wayne movie: red-dirt buttes, rocky canyons, miles of scrubby brush.

Monday, May 20 - Duchesne to Vernal, UT (63.5 miles; 78°; partly cloudy)

FIRST SIGHTINGS: a road sign: "Roosevelt 5 mi.; Vernal 35; Denver 367".

SMALL TOWN SIGNS: a cute business name in Vernal: 'Shivers and Jitters' for a shaved ice and espresso stand.

I started my day with an assembly at Duchesne High School. This time, the students filled an auditorium, and I stood on stage with a microphone and a projector screen. The students asked many interesting questions, some thoughtful ("What inspired you to do this?"), some curious ("How old are you? What do you do for work?"), and some off-the-wall ("Did you ever try on any of the clothes you found?"). I think my message connected with a few of the young adults - one boy came into the office several times before I talked, asking me about my journey.



By day's end I had befriended another bike tourist. As I wheeled around Vernal checking out businesses, I noticed a heavily-loaded cyclist headed for the library to check his email. His trek dwarfed mine, having logged three thousand miles as of today. After starting near Palm Springs on March 30, he had ridden through several national parks in Arizona and Utah as he worked his way to Montana...

Tuesday, May 21 - Vernal, UT to Dinosaur, CO (37.1 miles; 60s; partly cloudy, bitter wind)

ANEMOPHOBIA (uh - nee - moe - foe - bee - uh) noun - intense, unreasoned fear of wind. Symptoms may include rapid pulse and difficulty breathing when blown upon.

This was no weather for anyone suffering - even slightly, like me - from anemophobia. Leaving Vernal, gusts straight into my face threatened to stop me cold. Up one hill, winds literally pushed me ahead,

lifting me up the slope. Many times gusts caught me from a rear angle, lifting my sunglasses off my face. Luckily, I had scheduled this as my shortest-mileage day.

Every school I talked at had its own distinct personality; every school left me with matchless memories. In Vernal, Deena Millican ranked among the most enthusiastic backers of my trip, and she worked to arrange several schools for me to visit. In the end, she set up a full morning at Vernal Middle School, talking to several of Michael Jedin's classes.

Deena attended my second class, then presented me with a thank-you card and a medallion. When noon approached, Michael treated me to a lunch in the school cafeteria (my first since the walk), giving me fuel for the windy ride into Colorado.

Wednesday, May 22 - Dinosaur to Craig, CO (89.2 miles; 50s; partly cloudy, tail wind)

I joined the students at Dinosaur School for breakfast: graham crackers, a bowl of Trix and milk, and orange juice. After finishing, as I waited for the others, one youngster approached me. Without a word, he moved my arm so he could lean over and give me a big hug. Then, while the other kids rose to be led to class, he took my hand and said, "C'mon. Let's get in line."

For bicycling, the weather cooperated. Alternating clouds and sunshine kept the day cool, and steady winds (less violent than the day before) from behind gave my speed a big boost. (My luck has been incredible - on the three days I've faced the longest miles, tail winds have boosted my speed.) I cruised 87 miles in a hair over five hours of biking, through remote terrain (only one town) with majestic scenery - rolling hills, red cliffs, dry canyons. And mega-hills, up, down, up, down. On the first steep downhill, my



speedometer hit 43.9 mph - the fastest I've ever cruised on a bike. After two more hills breaking 40 mph, I let it rip down one final hill into Maybell. I kept a white-knuckle grip on my handlebars, too petrified to look at anything but the road whipping by. At the bottom I checked my maximum speed - 46.6 mph!

Thursday, May 23 - Craig to Steamboat Springs, CO (41.5 miles; low 50s; clear morning then overcast)

The route was flat and scenic, up an irrigated valley broken by narrow, forested canyons. Luckily the going was easy, since I quickly noticed that the rough roads on this trip (and my thirty-pound load of gear) had shredded my rear tire, and I prayed that the day's ride wouldn't cut through the little remaining tread. I did reach Steamboat with no problem, and replaced the tire at Sore Saddle Cyclery, where my cousin works.

Looming ahead of me now are the high peaks of the Rockies, which I must start crossing tomorrow - and a cold front threatening snow is already dropping the temperatures ...

As the trip winds down, a poem keeps popping into my mind. I received it via email a few days before I started. I don't know the author, but I can identify with the sentiments:

DUST IF YOU MUST

Dust if you must.
But wouldn't it be better
to paint a picture, or write a letter,
bake a cake, or plant a seed.
Ponder the difference between want and need.

Dust if you must.
But there is not much time,
with rivers to swim and mountains to climb!
Music to hear, and books to read,
friends to cherish and life to lead.

Dust if you must.
But the world's out there
with the sun in your eyes, the wind in your hair,
a flutter of snow, a shower of rain.
This day will not come round again.

Dust if you must.
But bear in mind,
old age will come and it's not kind.
And when you go, and go you must,
you, yourself, will make more dust.



As the trip neared its finish, my thoughts turned to the uncertain future. Though I spent the night with my cousin Sandra Hogrefe and her family, my attention wandered. I had looked forward to Sue driving up to see my last school talk, but her back prevented it. She had returned to Laramie Wednesday for a follow-up treatment, which had sent her back into worse spasms. I could hear the fear and frustration in her voice, wondering if she had again raised her hopes only to have them dashed. *Hang in there, my love, I'll be home soon...*

Friday, May 24 - Steamboat Springs to Walden, CO (58.2 miles; 30s-low 40s; most cloudy, afternoon blizzard)

Nothing like packing a whole trip's worth of thrills, spills, and chills into one day...

My last school talk served as a fitting finale. First, my cousin's son was in the grade I talked to, so the teacher let him give me an introduction. When I finished the presentation, my school host Marty O'Leary stepped up and asked the children to consider what they could do to help fight the litter problem.

I'm commonly asked by kids, "Have you ever crashed the bike?" Now I can answer, "Yes." I started the day's ride on the Yampa River Trail through town, one of my favorites. Three miles into it, I came up on a woman pushing a jogging stroller, with her dog just off the trail. I slowed down and got her attention, and then SLOWLY passed her, maneuvering between her and the dog. At the last instant, the Labrador burst onto the trail. My wheel hit the dog (or was it vice-versa?), dumping me to the ground.

The jogger apologized profusely, but the slow speed contributed to a gentle fall, which only twisted my handlebars. By the time I stood and brushed myself off, a friend of hers happened on the scene, and I chatted with them as I straightened and tightened my handlebars. Then it was on to **THE PASS**.

Rabbit Ears Pass, that is. 7.3 steep, twisting miles, lowest gear most of the way as I climbed up to and past trees wearing a new coat of winter white. Temps in the 30s kept me from overheating, and scenic



vistas distracted me from the grind. After hitting the west summit, the terrain rolled with two more short uphill before finally heading down. After cresting the east summit, I sat luxuriating in the day's last sunshine, eating a sandwich and waving at the cars and trucks passing by. "You know," I told myself, "life just doesn't get any better than this."

However, it does get a lot worse. Following a too-short downhill to highway 14, I turned north toward Walden and promptly biked into a nasty snowstorm. Wind drove the frozen pellets horizontally across the road, and snow

quickly stuck to my flimsy biking gloves. With little traffic to flag down and no homes for refuge, I debated whether to surrender to the elements - and whether I could. Just before my concern turned to panic, I biked out of the storm. I remained wary, though, with storm clouds surrounding me and snow falling far ahead of me - and thirty miles to town.

A few miles later I weathered another snowfall, but when the third one attacked accompanied by thunder, and visibility dropped dangerously low, I decided not to compromise my safety or my health. Instead, I tried 'hitchbiking'. As I continued pedaling, I listened for cars behind me and stuck my thumb out as they passed. (Considering I could average a mile pedaling between each knot of traffic, it kept me moving - and warm - in case no one stopped.) It took another six miles, but finally six miles outside of town a short-haul trucker stopped. After loading my bike on his flat bed, he surprised me by saying, "I suppose I should have stopped three miles back and picked up that other biker, but he didn't have his thumb out." Fancy that - I'm not the only crazy one!

In Walden I faced an entirely different problem - on this holiday weekend, all the motels sported 'No Vacancy' signs. Spying the Chamber of Commerce offices, I stopped and asked for suggestions. The woman inside made a few calls, then stepped outside and pointed across the street. "That's a private home. Dustin Rabas will take care of you." I rolled over and knocked on the door, and a college-aged Dustin answered. "You can take any room you want, upstairs or down." As far as price - "I'm not sure. My mom takes care of that, and she's in Kansas until Tuesday. We'll work something out."

I settled in, freshening (and warming) up with a hot shower. After chatting with Dustin for a while, he announced, "I'm going to drive up to Laramie. Here's a spare key - lock up if you go out." Now I'm home alone, hoping that tomorrow's weather improves for the trip's last challenge - Cameron Pass and the Continental Divide.

ADDENDUM: I found a great local landmark for dinner. Friday night was Catfish Night - a heaping platter of fried catfish, french fries, and hush puppies, along with a soup and salad bar. For dessert, I overheard the waitress telling three women behind me of the homemade pies available - the standard apple, peach, cherry, blueberry, and chocolate, and a house specialty - banana split pie. "Everything

you'd find in a banana split - including nuts, strawberries, and chocolate sauce - with Cool Whip instead of ice cream." It held too many calories for them, but they perked up when I ordered one a few minutes later. They peered over my shoulder as the waitress brought it out, and solicitously asked how it was.

Saturday morning, May 25 - Walden to nowhere, CO (12.9 miles; 44°; sunny)

One final challenge for the trip - crossing the Continental Divide at Cameron Pass. I looked forward to working my legs on one more climb, and even more to sixty downhill miles, dropping 5300 feet into Fort Collins. However, the bicycling gods that had smiled on my trip for three weeks had other ideas.

I biked out of Walden more slowly than expected, proceeding up a slight grade. An hour out I noticed the rear wheel 'thumping', indicating a problem. I stopped to check the tire, which looked fine. Two miles later the thumping worsened, and I stopped again to discover a slow leak. Pumping it up did not help, so I removed the panniers, took off the wheel, and grabbed the spare tubes I had bought one thousand miles ago in Pendleton OR.

It took only a few seconds to discover the tubes were for a wide mountain bike tire, not for a skinny road bike tire. Cursing the fool who sold me the wrong tubes, I grabbed my original, hoping to patch it. No chance of that - the stem had separated from the tube. Stranded! Knowing Walden had no bike shop, I had but one option - stick my thumb out for a ride over the pass and into Fort Collins, ninety miles away.

It took only ten minutes to catch my ride, in the back of a pickup with a camper shell, keeping an Irish Setter named Hogan company. When we finally reached town, I chatted with Eric Thayer and his wife and son as we unloaded my gear. As I talked about repacing my rear tire in Steamboat, I mentioned my cousin Andy worked at the bike shop. "You're kidding!" Eric said. "We're good friends with Andy and Sandra. Our son ski races with their son Graham. In fact, Andy gave us a season ski pass to Crested Butte a few years ago, when he was recovering from cancer and couldn't use it. I guess that's just 'Pay It Forward' in action!"

That, and another example of how small a world we really live in!

Saturday afternoon, May 25 - Ft. Collins, CO to home? (37.2 miles; mid-60s; mostly sunny)

By the time I bought two new tubes and had lunch, it was well into the afternoon. Ahead, only fifty miles separated me from home. My original plans called to do that on Sunday, but with the beautiful day and easy terrain, I knew I could finish it today. Driven by visions of sleeping in my own bed, I set out.

Four miles later, not yet out of Ft Collins, I sat by the roadside, once more removing my panniers and changing a rear flat. Cheap blankety-blank product! With fingers crossed I set out on my last tube. I let out a big sigh as I passed another five miles, then ten. I cruised through the countryside, slowing down for traffic lights as I passed through Loveland, Berthoud, and Longmont. At 5:00, after leaving Longmont, I called Sue to let her know I'd be home in just over an hour. Then I hopped back on the bike, rolling down the same road I'd walked four years earlier.

My triumphant return was not fated. Twenty minutes later I felt the rear wheel thump. I hopped off and quickly pumped it up, hoping the 'self-healing' tube would fix itself. That got me three more miles before it went totally flat, halfway between Longmont and Lafayette.

Sometimes you're ready for a trip to be over. I wasn't, but it sure seemed my bike was, so I bowed to the inevitable and called Sue to pick me up. It was nice to finally be home! The ending didn't live up to my dreams, but it didn't detract from the wonderful trip I'd had. Now it's time to catch up on the 'real world'...

... and the best news of all: Dr. Kaplan had finally delivered on his promise! The follow-up had done the job, chasing the pain once the spasms ebbed. For the first time in eighteen months, Sue again had a chance for a normal life. We now had to make the most of it - the doctor warned us that the offending nerves often grow back in six months, bringing the pain along.

Monday, May 27 (Memorial Day) - home

The poem I quoted a few days ago deserves another couple of verses. I still do not know the identity of the original author, but I claim credit for the following stanzas:

Dust if you must
off the top of your shoes
There's adventure out there, if only you choose
Many places to see, and people to meet
Savor a victory, maybe taste a defeat

In the end all that counts
is the daring to try
Life is for living, don't let it pass by
So take a chance, leave that comfortable place
Live with panache, mark the world with your grace.



TWO MOVING EXPERIENCES

from *Underwear by the Roadside*:

We spent the last week packing, getting everything ready for storage. Outlandish prices in Orange County (\$120/month for a 10' by 20' locker) forced us to look forty miles away. In Riverside we found self-storage for half that cost.

To get there, we rented the 'Lemon Godzilla.' The 24' moving van sported special features such as bump-magnifying shocks, a steering wheel with one-quarter turn play, and brakes that could have stopped a locomotive. First gear sounded like a karate expert in labor, and fourth like a chain saw — shifting required an 'if you can't find it, grind it' philosophy. All this in a beautiful shade of Rental Truck Yellow!

On moving day we had the pleasure of one last southern California traffic jam. After traveling only one block in twenty-five minutes, we turned to backtrack and got stuck for fifteen more. "We could have walked to Riverside quicker," I grumbled.

A crew of friends helped us squeeze the contents of our three-bedroom house and garage into 200 square feet. It sobered me to think we could contain our material goods in such a small space, with room to spare. So long, 8-to-5 life.

"What have we done?" Sue asked as we returned to an empty house. If the enormity of our task hadn't registered before, it did now. For eight months, we would have no place to call home. Eating out would grow old, and a home-cooked meal would be something to savor. We could no longer take for granted the joy of a hot shower, or the comfort of a soft bed. Our friends' lives would continue without us there to share in their daily dramas.

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As everyone knows, Nature abhors a vacuum. (Someone told me this cliché was coined by the person who invented the Hoover upright, who coincidentally had a cat named Nature ... well, maybe not.)

Our lives now had a vacuum for Nature to abhor: we faced a summer with no pressures, no deadlines, no distractions. I wouldn't update my bike books until the next year, and had only to fill orders and cash checks – tasks simple enough for even an engineer to handle. Sue had no back pain to keep her down, and no prospects of a job in the slumping economy. In short, we had the freedom to focus our energies elsewhere.

As the summer approached, we narrowed our search down to two alternatives:

On the one hand, we talked about celebrating our tenth anniversary with a trip to the British Isles. We dreamed of the possibilities: touring castles and fortresses; seeing London plays; drinking green beer in Irish pubs; walking deserted Welsh beaches; feasting on haggis in Scotland; hiking forested trails in the Lake District; attending services in magnificent cathedrals. Okay, scratch the haggis... the rest appealed greatly to us.

On the other hand, we could move. We dreamed of the possibilities: packing; switching utilities; dealing with realtors; haggling over prices; changing our address; hiring movers to

break our valuables boxes; filling out endless paperwork in triplicate, signed by the Trinity. All that fun, to relocate one block to the west.

We chose moving.

After all, traveling does fill your life with inconvenience – and why bother looking half the world away for inconvenience when it could come to us? Keeping the homestead spotless, fleeing during dinner hour when lookie-loos called to see the house – we figured that would fill our life for the summer.

Any realtor can tell you that three most important items in real estate are location, location, and location. Timing comes in as number four – and our timing stunk. The frigid economy had finally cooled off Colorado's red-hot housing market, and the backlog of available houses had begun growing. Several houses in our neighborhood, including the one we put a contract on, had gone unsold for months.

By late July, it looked like ours had joined the ranks of languishing properties. Though Jason, our realtor, had marketed it strongly, holding two open houses, we had yet to receive a nibble. As the prime selling season ticked away, our hopes faded.

One day, as I sat at work writing yet more incomprehensible software, I got an email from my company's PR department. StorageTek has signed on as a corporate sponsor for the Face Of America ride, it said, and the company needs to form its team. This ride, occurring a year after 9/11, would honor the fallen (from that attack and from terrorism world-wide) while celebrating diversity and teamwork. Organized by the non-profit World T.E.A.M. Sports (WTS, an organization with Greg Lemond and Christopher Reeve on its board), the ride would feature 1500 people bicycling from New York to Washington D.C. over three days.

"We thought you might like to apply," the email concluded.

What, do they think I don't bike enough already? Besides, I had already enjoyed my harebrained scheme for the year, and couldn't see pushing myself again so soon. After reading the email again, I hit the 'delete' key and sent it to the trash folder.

Though the email disappeared, the idea hung around in the dark recesses of my mind, challenging me, cajoling me. After a week of fighting the notion, I mentioned the email to Sue. My earlier ride had left her complaining about being a 'bicycle widow', with my time spent training or on the road. Surely she would nix this idea, and I could get on with my life.

She urged me to check into it further. *Hmmm. Is everyone trying to get rid of me?*

Still skeptical, I retrieved the email from the trash folder and asked for more info. "A three-day ride," the answer came, "covering over 270 miles. As a member of the company team, your fees are paid – you just need to get to and from New York."

We talked it over for a few days, and that weekend decided we could afford the break. Sue could relax with her parents in Connecticut while I abused my body averaging 90-plus miles a day on the bike (my best three day in May averaged 80 miles/day). We saw no problems with a vacation Sept. 19-24. "It's already August," I said. "It's not like someone's going to show up next week, buy the house, and want to close in six weeks." With the decision made, I officially joined the Storage Tek team on Monday.

On Wednesday, Jason called. "Good news! Another realtor showed your place this weekend to a couple who are very interested. They want to see it again tonight, and I suspect they'll put an offer in by Friday. One catch, though – they'll need a quick closing. They need to move out of their apartment by Sept 22."

Timing, after all, *is* everything.

After hardball negotiations, we settled on a price and a closing date: Friday, Sept. 13. (Superstitious? Us?) A flurry of activity followed, with inspections, loan approvals, title searches, the works. Whenever possible, I stole away for training rides, trying to harden the body for the task ahead. And quite a task it was – the Face Of America packet I received from WTS described more fully the schedule. The first and last day of biking, due to logistics, would log in under 80 miles. Saturday's ride, though, would tax everyone: 128 miles, broken up by a two-hour ferry ride from the southern tip of New Jersey to the Delaware shores.

Even with the tight closing dates, everything proceeded as planned. The professionals we surrounded ourselves with took care of all details, we had our mortgage approved well in advance, and the movers had a crew ready. Considering the endless hassles we waded through in selling our California condo years before, I wondered what we were overlooking.

Uh, the buyers, that's what. Unfortunately, their realty team didn't have the same can-do attitude. At 5 p.m. on the 12th, Jason relayed the news: their loan approval hadn't come through yet, meaning they couldn't close on Friday. Could they move it to next Wednesday?

We still had an outside chance to salvage matters, but it would demand a lot of fancy footwork. *May as well get started early*, I figured, and grabbed the phone to start calling banks and credit unions at 8 a.m. Friday.

And got no dial tone.

Yes, the phone company fouled up, switching our service a day early. Or maybe they just wanted to see how we would respond to yet another challenge, another hurdle in our path. Was it an example of their motto (*The Spirit of Service*) in action, serving us by building our character?

A quick call to Qwest got them working on the problem, and they promised to fix it promptly – "Would 1 p.m. be soon enough?" Leaving Sue behind to field any calls that may arrive (assuming the phone did get fixed), I took off with the cell phone to resolve the mess.

It took visits to two banks, pleading with loan officers, and driving the length of Boulder during the noon-time rush, to arrange a bridge loan. I then raced back to Broomfield, collected Sue (who had fretted for hours, unable to contact me), and rushed to the closing of the house we'd bought. Only after we signed the last form did I permit myself to relax.

We must have passed whatever test the fates had given us, because that proved the only hurdle. The move went off without a hitch, and by Saturday night we busied ourselves making our new abode 'home'. The buyers' loan approval came through on Monday, and we uneventfully closed on Tuesday. That evening we toasted each other over our packed suitcases, christening our new digs. The next morning we flew east.

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THE FACE OF AMERICA

Sept 20, Friday morning, lower Manhattan: Sue and her father braved the morning commute in to NYC to send me off on my trek. The hotel serving as HQ swarmed with people wearing red, white, and blue bicycling shirts, lugging duffel bags and reading last-minute instructions. Outside, bikes were locked to every available surface.

After grabbing a quick breakfast, we wandered over to Ground Zero, where the ride would begin. Across the street from the vacant hole where the twin towers stood sat the church that had served as staging grounds for the rescue workers. Though a year had passed since the horrific attacks, reminders of that terrible day still covered the wrought iron fence around the church: 'Missing' posters; thank you notices; photographs of beloved victims; articles of clothing. The display silenced us as we reflected on the horror.

Slowly we worked through the gathering crowd, heading for the street where the riders had assembled. Soon I found myself on the edge of hundreds of cyclists, waiting for the dignitaries to officially open the tour. As I stood with Sue and her father, I wondered aloud, "My company had seven people sign up for the ride. I don't suppose there's a ghost of a chance that I'll find any of them among the 1300 riders on this trip – and if I did, how would I know? If only StorageTek had sprung for our own jerseys..."

The biker next to me whipped his head around at my words. "StorageTek? You're from StorageTek too?" Rich Messier introduced himself as a support engineer from the company's Boston office. We chatted while waiting for the speeches to start, promising to ride together and share a tent our two nights on the road.

Finally the speeches came, setting the mood for the ride. Officially, they called this ride a 'moving memorial', dedicated to "those who ride for those who can't." The assembled group included riders from every state and from numerous foreign countries – the combined Israeli-Palestinian team stood out as an example of unity. Leading the pack, dozens of victims of various terrorist attacks provided inspiration, including paraplegics riding hand-cycles and a blind man (injured in the attack on the embassy in Kenya) riding on a tandem.

Then the mass of cyclists moved. Slowly, wave after wave pedaled through the traffic light, beginning the long ride. We wound for several blocks through downtown streets, then hit the walkway heading down to the Battery. At the tip of Manhattan the group halted, ready for the ride's first logistical challenge: ferrying 1500 people (including day riders) through New York





Bay and the Verazzano Narrows to New Jersey. Hordes of cyclists, all wearing matching jerseys, slowly boarded the boats.

By late morning the teeming mass had landed. I followed the crowds as we pedaled south from Sandy Hook, riding through a succession of seaside villages. In Asbury Park the organizers handed out box lunches, fueling the hungry riders for the long afternoon. Shortly after lunch I found myself in a pace line, drafting

the leader as we sped through yet another resort town. It took me a while to identify the hunkered-down cyclist I strained to keep pace with, but I finally realized: I was drafting Tyler Hamilton, the Tour de France racer!

I quickly fell off that pace. By the next rest stop I met up with Rich Messier again, and we rode together for miles. At day's end we headed for the shower truck, then spent our time setting up tents for the late arrivals. After a filling pasta dinner (organizers served an estimated 3800 plates of pasta the two nights), we listened to live music until fatigue drove us to bed.



Sept 21, Saturday morning, Tuckerton NJ: Picture tent city: row after row of identical blue tents – 700 of them – crammed side-by-side on the grounds of a middle school. In the middle of that makeshift village, within earshot of dozens and dozens of sore, tired cyclists, lay at least one relaxed, slumbering rider, snoring loudly enough to set off seismographs.

We didn't sleep in this morning. Even if the morn had been silent, the anticipation – the fear? – of our long day would have woken us. In the pre-dawn dark we broke down the tent, dragged our bags to the luggage truck, and wolfed down pancakes (over 7300 served!). As the sky lightened over the horizon, we lined up, waiting for dawn and the okay to take off.

As we headed south along the New Jersey shore, the towns grew further apart, giving us glimpses of countryside. I soon discovered the value of pace lines, as I fell in behind one rider after another and allowed them to break the wind. At one point I trailed a paraplegic cyclist, and while his low profile didn't give me a draft boost, his efforts as his hands kept cranking the pedals inspired me. *Could I do as well in his shoes? Would I even consider such an lengthy journey without my legs?*

The mild temperatures, the lack of wind, and the boost of pace lines helped melt the miles away. I completed the morning's 75 miles in near-record time, ending up at the Cape May ferry terminal. Now we had another wait, time for a leisurely lunch, before they packed us all onto a large ferry for the ride to Delaware.

Sept 21, Saturday afternoon, Delaware/Maryland: As the group wended its way across Delaware, the sun burned away all traces of the morning mists. With the miles piling up, the temperatures rose to uncomfortably warm. The group, which left the ferry as one, quickly spread out over the country roads, providing a miles-long billboard of solidarity against terror.

I passed the one-hundred-mile mark, then 110, and still rode strongly. I sampled a few pace



lines, but quickly fell back each time to a more comfortable pace. At the 120 mark, I pulled up behind a single woman rider, plugging along. After drafting her for a mile, I pulled even with her to chat. "Have you ever gone bike touring before?" I asked.

"Not even close. The longest ride I've ever taken before yesterday was fifty miles."

"It sure doesn't show," I remarked. "You'll be done in less than an hour, now."

"I can't believe I'm still riding after this long! But everyone has been so great, I hardly feel tired." I knew what she meant, as I felt it too. No one complained about the inevitable delays with the ferries.

People happily shared duties,

leading the pace lines. Everyone pitched in at the camp, setting up extra tents so late-comers wouldn't have to struggle in the dark. Everyone knew they were part of something larger than themselves...

I must have dawdled longer at the rest stops today. By the time I rolled into camp and reclaimed my duffel, the lines for the shower truck stretched across the field. The pasta dinner tasted even better than the day before, and I barely lasted to the live music before retreating to our tent – which Rich had set up far from any others.

Sept 22, Sunday morning, Tuckahoe State Park, MD: The road from Tuckahoe wound through a rural landscape. Morning mists filled the meadows and draped themselves across the trees. The fog muted sounds, and but for the whirring of bicycle gears, silence reigned.

Slowly the mists lifted, and the terrain gradually turned suburban. The small towns, mostly buttoned up on an early Sunday morning, had people waiting on each street we rode, cheering us on.

By midmorning we reached Chesapeake Bay, and our first roadblock. Days earlier, highway officials had squelched the plan for us to ride *en masse* over the Bay Bridge, leaving WTS scrambling for alternatives. Instead, they requisitioned a small fleet of buses and trucks, ferrying us and our bikes across the bridge, 60 people at a pop.

On the west side, we had a short ride through Annapolis to the Naval Academy, where the group assembled for lunch. Here numerous day-riders joined us, swelling our ranks for the last miles into the nation's capitol. We had a lengthy stay, waiting for all our riders to make it across the bridge.

Leaving the Academy, the ride ran through the urban sprawl surrounding Washington. The open lands had disappeared, replaced by strip malls, traffic lights, and heavy traffic. The sun beat down from a blue sky, raising the temperature well above normal. I followed the steady stream of bikers as we crossed the area, aiming for RFK Stadium.

At the stadium we had savored one last rest stop. WTS held us there until all riders assembled, letting us finish our trek as one. By 4:00 the last riders had filtered in to the stadium, and everyone returned to their bikes.

The few dozen hand-cycle riders led our group as we embarked on our finale. Slowly we rolled down Pennsylvania Ave, which the police had closed. People lined the street, clapping, cheering, holding signs, waving flags. Chills tickled my spine as the group swept me along to within sight of the White House. We then turned to ride past the Tidal Basin and the Jefferson Memorial, onto the interstate to cross the Potomac, then off to the finish line in the shadow of the Pentagon.



*How could I have ever considered **not** taking part in this event? I wondered as I listened to the concluding speeches, watched the riders reuniting with their families. How could I get so drawn up in my daily life to almost lose sight of things truly important? Life can be so much more than a mad rush to tomorrow – or a headlong flight from yesterday.*

HEART OF THE COUNTRY TOUR

The Face Of America ride colored my mood for months afterward, boosting my patience as I endure life's little hassles. Back in Colorado we worked on our new house, stamping our personality into its decorations, making it home. Sue's spinal pain returned, but another session in Laramie killed the nerves again. The bike book business cruised into 2003 with a significant profit, almost erasing the deficit generated in '97 and '98.

As the winter weather waned and the promise of spring grew, I turned my attention back to biking – specifically, phase two of the cross-country ride. This time I had several decisions to make, chiefly: *Where should I ride to?* Originally I planned to hew closely to the route of the walk, and aim for St. Louis. The urge to strike out to new lands quickly grew, though, and I considered other options – like Chicago. *That way I could end my ride with relatives, I reasoned, and finish by talking at the school where my cousin teaches.*

With that settled, I chose a route. Unlike 2002, where I had only two real choices, any number of routes would take me east through populated areas. I finally sketched out a route that would let me visit a couple of National Park sites: head south through Denver, then turn east to connect with US24. Take that road nearly to Kansas City, then follow the track of the walk halfway through Missouri. From there, cross the Mississippi at Mark Twain's hometown and angle north to the big city.

From there I got cocky and made a big mistake. Remembering 2002, when many schools put off confirming or declining for weeks because “your trip is weeks away,” I delayed well into March before calling schools. Thus, I got schools declining my visit much more quickly. Now, though, I found myself short of time to arrange replacement talks. Still I didn't panic. *I'll keep calling schools the first week I'm on the road,* I reasoned. How could I know that, in eastern Colorado and western Kansas, it would take me a full week just to find a cell phone signal.

This time, I looked forward to sharing the trek – at least its start – with Sue. She agreed to provide sag support my first three days, helping me get as far as Goodland, KS. After that, she had to drive to Laramie for another visit with Dr. Kaplan – yet again, her back pain had returned.

Thu Apr 24:

Since I ended my posts last year with a poem, let me start this year's with a Haiku:
The road calls to me
Aim my bike for Chicago
Catch me at the schools

The timing of any spring ride is, due to the season, a matter of luck. I wondered if mine had turned bad as I watched the news last night, as they cancelled school in Elizabeth, CO, due to snow. Elizabeth is my destination tomorrow! At least they forecast the storm to move on, leaving temperatures in the high 60s for my first day on the road...

Fri, Apr 25: Broomfield - Elizabeth CO – 61.7 miles. Foggy to sunny, 68°.

The trip had anything but an auspicious start. So many friends had commented, “It's all downhill!”, ignoring the fact that it's UPHILL the first day as I climb out of the South Platte basin. My speed

dropped throughout the day as I pedaled into a growing breeze. When I began struggling to even hit 10 mph, I checked the bike and discovered a broken spoke. Once I followed that with several miles on busy 2-lane Hwy 83 with no shoulder en route to a bike shop, I was ready to pack it in. Luckily the bike shop knew me from my books, and did a quick overhaul on the wheel and chain to prepare me for the road again.

Sat, Apr 26: Elizabeth - Flagler CO – 87.4 miles. Sunny, 74°.

Some days are punishments, some are rewards. Thankfully, today fell into the latter category. My refurbished bike rode like a dream, the cloudless sky promised a beautiful day, and I lost the elevation I struggled to gain yesterday. From Kiowa it was 40 miles of a roller-coaster ride, 19 mph average, through the terrain for which eastern Colorado is known: nothingness.

Sun, Apr 27: Flagler CO - Goodland KS – 50.2 miles. Headwind, 61°.

As I pulled up to Sue, waiting for me with the truck, we noticed a car speed by on the old highway then turn around. “Do you need help?” they asked. We thanked them for stopping, gratified again at the warmth of the people out here.

It's too easy to forget as we race around in our hectic lives: a little kindness can make a big difference.

Best comment of the day: As we finished lunch, the waitress noticed my banner (“Chi-town bound”) and asked, “Are you talking about Chicago?” Yes, I agreed, I'm bicycling that far. The other waitress, standing nearby, quipped, “Have you considered seeing a doctor about that?”

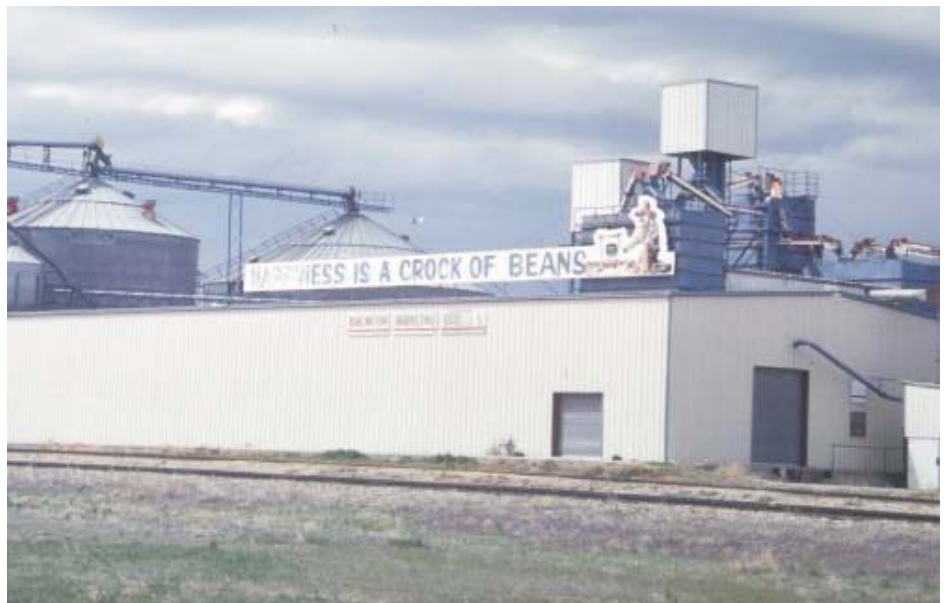
Maybe she was referring to the wind, incessant and in my face. I struggled all day to maintain 12 mph – so much for ‘downhill all the way’. It's the type of day that saps your energy and your enthusiasm.

After postponing our farewell for three days, Sue finally had to head back home today for a doctor's appointment. After getting me checked into the motel, we had a teary parting, and she left me to face the road – and the Kansas winds – alone.

Mon, Apr 28: Goodland - Hoxie KS – 76.8 miles. Overcast to cloudy, mid 60s.

Finally, a day of pure, unadulterated bicycle touring – just myself, the road, and the elements. Of course, there was a lot of the wind element, 45 degrees into my face. Thus, I relegated myself to a leisurely (if not relaxing) ride. My speed stayed near 12 mph until I tired near the end. Six miles from ‘home’, I had nearly cleared a farm house before the resident dogs noticed me. They immediately took off to greet me with their brand of Kansas hospitality. From somewhere I found an ounce of reserve, enough to momentarily boost my speed and convince the dogs I wasn't worth it.

After enjoying spectacular scenery and mountain backdrops through much of last year's ride, I could tell that boredom would challenge me this trip. Flat-as-a-pancake terrain offered little to distract me, and few towns provided a break from the miles of farmland. Thankfully I did have schools arranged on three of my first four days (in contrast to only one my second week).



Marcia Smith in Goodland ranked as this year's most enthusiastic fan of my trek. She arranged talks at both North and South Elementary Schools, assembling groups of excited youngsters at both stops. To spread my word, she also notified the newspaper in town, who covered the event. *Thanks, Marcia, for giving this trip a great start!*

Tues, Apr 29: Hoxie - Plainville KS - 72.4 miles. Cloudy, mid 60s.

Yesterday I went from the Mountain Time Zone to the Central. Today I entered Vacation Time Zone. The breeze, though lighter, started out directly in my face. So? You can't beat it, so ignore it. I also ignored my watch, stopping twice at historic parks for extended breaks. (Did you know people painted the ceilings above their patios 'sky blue' because it repels flies?) I took a leisurely lunch break also, ending with a short nap while waiting for an interview with the local paper. At every stop, friendly Kansans tried to make me feel at home.

Apr 30: Plainville - Lincoln KS - 71 miles. Foggy then overcast, high 60s.

What a difference a day makes. Once I finished my midday talk at Luray Grade School, the wind had died, with the little remaining breeze coming from the north - beside or behind me as the road angled just south of east. Days of struggling to hit 12 mph were quickly forgotten as I cruised the long flat stretches



at nearly twice that. Had time for a tourist stop, too, at the "Garden of Eden" in Lucas. Another eccentric soul (yeah, it takes one to know one) had decorated his property with dozens of self-made concrete statues: Adam and Eve and the serpent; Cain's wife and dog finding his body; the all-seeing eye of the devil; and more. Most of the figures were displayed, not at ground level, but on posts dozens of feet in the air.

The Luray School received me well, even though I arrived an hour late. They treated me to a school lunch, then asked endless questions of the walk and the bike ride. Talk about good timing - the third grade class project is to clean up the city park, and they asked me to read the letters they had written to the mayor asking permission.

Thurs, May 1: Lincoln - Junction City KS - 79.9 miles. Cloudy with a chilly breeze, mid 60s.

After speaking at Lincoln High, where I started the morning, I feared another long, barren day - 74 miles to Junction City. Only three towns lay along the route, with two barely large enough for a store. That left four segments of around twenty miles with nothing but green fields and rolling hills. It was a challenge to keep my mind occupied with nothing to concentrate on. Also, the overcast skies that keep hiding the sun until 5:00 are becoming tedious, and a breeze out of the north kept the day chilly.

Fri, May 2: Junction City - Topeka KS - 63.6 miles. Mostly sunny, maybe 70°.

Today had a bit of everything: weather custom-made for bicycling; picture-postcard towns to cycle through; well-maintained roads; two flats; a ten-mile detour; a lift past I-70; a mile riding on another interstate.

The morning didn't go my way. A piece of glass or sharp stone sliced my rear tire, ruining it. Unlike last year, I carried a spare tire (and many tubes), so it didn't strand me, but the bad omen worried me. One mile later, the road I'd picked entered Fort Riley, and the Army wouldn't let anyone through. I now had to backtrack to where I started and get on the interstate.

At the freeway, I asked at a convenience store whether I could catch a frontage road. “No way to avoid I-70,” one customer said. “Unless you want a lift into Manhattan?” The offer came from the chef for the Kansas State U. football team, so we talked Big 12 football on the ride.

The ride Manhattan-to-Topeka was gorgeous – hilly for the first dozen miles, then a flat cruise through the Kansas River bottomlands, wheeling through towns lifted from Chamber of Commerce publicity brochures – St. Mary’s, Rossville, Silver Lake. If not for the goathead thorn that gave me a second rear flat, ’twould have been a perfect ride.

Sat, May 3: Topeka - Valley Falls, KS – 26.1 miles. Cool south wind, about 70°.

Time for a vacation day. After pushing so hard for eight days, getting behind on laundry, web logging, etc., I rented a car for 20 hours. It let me tool around Topeka last night, restock with a tire and tubes, stop at the library to upload my journal, and generally get caught up. This morning I drove to Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve and hiked in the Flint Hills.

After lunch I tackled the short ride into Valley Falls. Finally I enjoyed a wind at my back as the road headed north – and I headed back nine years. In 1994, our walk had taken us through Valley Falls. Now I got to see a Main St. that I recognized, but one that had changed. I chatted with the owner of the hardware store, who gave me the lowdown on the town, and entertained a 7-yr-old girl as I sat changing another flat tire. Then I headed off to set up the tent, finally using the gear I had portered for so long as I tried to recapture the flavor of the walk.

Addendum, Sat night – Yes, I recaptured the feeling, in spades. After reading until dark, I wasn’t tired, so I headed to the local watering hole. They had a live local band belting out 50s rock’n’roll and country-western until 2 a.m. – and most of the band was on the far side of 60 (the singer turned 70 today). I listened for a while, watching the locals dance and play pool.

Then it was back to the tent for major déjà vu. I remember a score of nights in MO and KS with thunder and lightning keeping sleep at bay as we cowered in the tent. Now I can add one more. It sprinkled, it stopped, it poured, it thundered, it stopped, it blew, it rained, etc, etc, etc. Just like 1994!

Sun, May 4: Valley Falls KS - Excelsior Springs MO – 62 miles. Overcast, low 60s.

For a week, this trip felt about as exciting as working out in a health club. Now, it’s memorable.

Twenty minutes after the last sprinkle (about 6:30 a.m.), I packed up the (nearly dry) tent, loaded the bike, and grabbed breakfast. Soon I rediscovered what I had forgotten – this area is anything but flat! I made good time to Easton, but my speed suffered as a headwind (and the hills) grew in Missouri. After lunch, another rear flat (the fourth in three days) delayed me outside Platte City – a fortunate delay, it turned out. An hour later, as I coasted down another hill, a car pulled abreast of me and the driver yelled, “You’d better take cover! They’ve spotted a tornado near Platte City!” With the sky darkening, I figured I’d best heed his advice, and stuck my thumb out for any pickup or SUV coming by. Soon Pat and Diane, coming home with groceries, squeezed me and my bike in and headed home to check on their kids. The TV showed the tornado on the ground only ten miles south of us, heading for my final destination. As we watched, the skies opened with rain pelting down. Thank heavens I wasn’t cycling in that!

We watched reports for two hours from the safety of their basement, until ‘all clear’ sounded and Pat could take me to my motel. They were quite a fascinating couple: he’s a stay-at-home dad, and she’s in line for a VP position at Harley Davidson!

TV stations across the country covered the deadly outbreak of twisters that began near Kansas City and continued plaguing the region for days. It took me three more days before I could find a place I could successfully update my weblogs after my close call. By that time, friends following my trip grew concerned with the lack of news, and bombarded Sue with phone calls and emails, asking if I had survived the storms.

Mon, May 5: Excelsior Springs - Salisbury MO – 89.2 miles. Sunny, 80° (hot!).

Not a perfect day – but very good. My eyes feasted on the scenery – mild hills with a road winding among trees and houses, mixed with miles of Missouri River bottomland tamed by farms. No clouds to block the

sun, and the temperature soared to 80°. A constant wind, this time at my back, helped me speed through the flats. Without a schedule, I rode further than expected, and considered knocking off a century ride in record time – but then I would have very little to ride tomorrow, when I have to stop in Monroe City. Later, I regretted not moving on: silly ordinances prohibited me from camping in town, on a perfect night for it (believe me, I would have gladly paid to miss this hotel room).

Tues, May 6: Salisbury - Monroe City MO – 69.0 miles. Partly sunny, high 60s.

If nothing else, I'm learning a lot about how to prepare for these trips. This was my ninth day of biking after Sue left me in Goodland, and it turned into a real low-energy, low-enthusiasm day – just like my ninth day of biking last year. Thankfully I finished by 2:00, before the rain moved in. Now I'm wondering if I'm talking at the high school tomorrow. The principal said he saw 'no problem' for that last time we spoke, but he was out-of-town today and his secretary knows nothing about it.

With every mile I rode, I grew more impressed at what we had accomplished nine years before. On a bike I covered as much ground in a day as it took us a week to walk, and it still challenged me to stay focused. *Have I changed so much in nine years, I wondered, that I've lost my edge?* I found it hard to conceive of ever doing such a long walk again – at least, I'd never consider doing it alone.

Wed, May 7: Monroe City MO - Augusta IL – 83.8 miles. Increasing overcast, 68°.

Today was an M day - magnificent, marvelous, magical - what a trip like this should be like.

I started the day talking with one class at Monroe City High – the principal arranged for me to speak to the 'Murder Mystery, and Mayhem' class. (Man, I never had fun classes like that during my school years!) One student asked plenty of questions. Have I inspired a new adventurer?

After class I enjoyed a high-speed (tailwind) ride east to Hannibal, where I lingered to see Mark Twain monuments: his boyhood home, 'Becky Thatcher's house', the drug store, and more. Then I crossed the bridge (imagine! an interstate highway signposted as a bike route!) spanning the mighty Mississippi into Illinois – and a whole different standard of friendly.

Exiting the interstate, I got directions that started me on 43 miles of unmarked county roads. I stopped in Payson for lunch, where I encountered the typical table full of locals, drinking strong coffee and swapping farmer fables. However, instead of giving me sidelong glances and talking about me after I moved on, this group opened up right away. "You can't bike to Hawaii!" one greeted, starting a conversation. Another told me about good back roads to the next town.

In Liberty, my stop provoked conversations with the clerk and all the customers wandering through, and a new set of back-road directions. This time they led to a road ominously posted, "Closed 7 miles ahead - Local traffic only." Two people I stopped, though, guessed I could get through, so I stayed straight – and found the bridge out when I hit the golf course.

As I pondered how long a detour this would cost me, a golf pro saw me consternating. "Looking for a way around?" he asked. "Just go down the cart path here, cross over on that little bridge, and walk your bike over the fairway back to the road."

As I pedaled the miles between the towns, my sky-high mood brought on a spell of creativity, and soon I had composed the day's theme song. Sing along to the tune of "I've Been Working on the Railroad":



I've been biking on the farm roads, I'm Chicago bound,
I've been biking on the farm roads, friendly folk in every town
Can't you see the clouds a-building, wind please stay at my back
Can't you see the clouds a-building, we're on the storm track

Nature won't you blow, nature won't you blow, blow good weather my way-ay-ay
Nature won't you blow, nature won't you blow, blow good weather my way-ay-ay

These roads sure have the ups- and down-hills, they aren't flat I know-oh-oh,
These roads sure have the ups- and down-hills, everywhere I go.
Singing fee, fi, pedally-bike, oh, Singing fee, fi, pedally-bike, oh oh oh oh
Singing fee, fi, pedally-bike, oh, they aren't flat I know

I've been biking on the farm roads, all the live-long day
I've been biking on the farm roads, singing to pass the time away
Miles and miles of farms I'm passing, waving at the cows and sheep
What a grand adventure to be living, what company to keep!

After the golf course, I had one more friendly stop, then a long stretch into a headwind (back on a highway), ending with six heavenly miles with the wind pushing me into Augusta. There I discovered that NO towns along this stretch of highway have motels.



It took only two stops in town to secure permission to camp at the Lion's Club park, where I set up my tent after dinner. While erecting my nylon castle, local kids wandered over to hang out. "You biking across the country?" they asked, amazed. After I updated them on my trek, one asked, "Are you good at basketball? You want to play?" No one would ever confuse me with a basketball player, but I joined in for twenty minutes until they lost interest. Then I headed back to the Dinner Pail and the Quick-Stop for pie and to while away the evening (and, of course, more conversation with the locals). Before the night ended, one man asked for my website so he could track my trip.

Thurs, May 8: Augusta - Monmouth IL - 64.8 miles. Overcast, rain for the last hour, chilly (high 50s).

The morning crew at the Dinner Pail in Augusta started my day with more conversation and a free breakfast (after a perfect night for camping - dry, no wind). The day went downhill from there. The sun never made an appearance, and the temps kept me from warming up. After lunch the rains finally caught up to me, following me into Monmouth. At least I had a warm reception at my cousin's home, where we watched the hail come down as we supped on steak, and on asparagus picked fresh from their back yard.

Fri, May 9: Monmouth - Princeton IL - 90.7 miles. Sunny and hot, 80° at 12:20.

Today must have been the reward (or the consolation) for suffering all those days of headwinds. Winds from the west boosted my speed to the highest average of this trip - 18.7 mph, over 20 mph in the open

country (for roughly 80 miles). At every stop, people asked how far I'd come – and then called their friends over to amaze them too.

Sat, May 10: Princeton - Oswego IL – 75.4 miles. Foggy then sunshine and oppressive humidity, mid 70s?

Not a great showing on the penultimate day of this trip, but not nearly as bad as it could have turned out... Clouds filled the morning sky, and the Weather Channel showed significant rain bearing down on us. Before I could pack the bike after breakfast, the drops started falling. No problema! I kicked off my shoes, pulled out a book, and waited it out in the motel. When the rain stopped at 10:40, I hit the (wet) roads. By noon, the sun had emerged and burned away the lingering fog, leaving a warm and sticky day.

US34 was a great road until Somonauk, when the traffic got too busy for my taste. Around the same time the farms disappeared, leaving strip malls, car dealers, stop lights, and the ilk. Still, I made good time, even with a breeze that blew mostly to my side.

Sun, May 11: Oswego - Elmhurst IL – 29 miles. Windy, overcast, chilly, end with rain; around 50°.

It's fitting, I suppose, that this trek nicknamed 'the Tornado Tour' should end with another tornado warning last night, and with wind gusts up to 60 mph during today's ride. The first 2/3 mile from the hotel had me pedaling into the wild wind, with gusts slowing me to 5 mph. Despite the leaden skies that spit rain before I finished, despite the thermometer that started at 48 degrees and didn't climb noticeably, despite howling winds, I had a good ride.



I took the Illinois Prairie Path from Aurora into Elmhurst. This trail, one of the country's first rails-to-trails conversions, got me off the roads in favor of tree-lined paths. Of course, the wind had done its damage – a dozen times I had to dismount to drag my bike under, over, or around downed trees. After the ride, I had time to relax with relatives, see the house in

which I celebrated my first five birthdays, and relish successfully finishing another long, satisfying journey.

Mon, May 12: Elmhurst IL - Broomfield CO (by plane)

Of course, the journey isn't complete until I talk to the last school. The Edison School in Elmhurst gave me a wonderful reception, juggling their schedule to fit me in. The students took a shine to my adventures, and asked many questions. The teachers and principal took an interest in my epics, and one teacher treated me to a delicious lunch. Now it's time to fly back to Denver, dive back into the work-a-day world ... and dream fondly on finishing this jaunt next spring, cycling to the Atlantic. Until then!



NORTHEAST TWO-WHEEL TOUR

We finally took that 10th anniversary trip, only a year late. For three weeks in August and September we rambled around Britain and Ireland, seeing the land of our ancestors. Having recently dabbled in genealogy, I planned visits to sites important in the history of our families. What a delight to spend such time doing things we really enjoyed!

That trip served as a contrast to the rest of my life – or lack of a life, it seemed. In June I had begun researching my next set of books, and quickly realized the explosion of trails in the region had made it impossible to cover them all in one year, part-time. I limited myself to trails in the northern half of the state, though even that would keep my spare time tied up until early January.

'Spare time' grew even rarer once we returned from Britain. The 10-hour, 4-day weeks I had enjoyed my last fifteen years of working had suddenly evaporated in the creaking economy. At first I lost half my 'day off'; by January I had surrendered to occasional Saturdays in the office.

The worst of the crush hit two weeks into the new year. I followed fifty-hour-plus work weeks with evenings spent writing trail reports, making maps, formatting seven new books. For two months Sue suffered as a 'book widow', seeing me only when I came up to eat. For two months I wondered what had happened to 'balance', to taking time for savoring life.

In the few minutes I could spare, I began planning the finale of my cross-country tour. One thought had lurked in the back of my mind since I embarked on this trek two years earlier, and I now had to try to arrange it. To pay homage to the walk so many years before, to 'tie up loose ends', I wanted to finish this trip in Townsend.

I wanted to give my final talk to Caitlin's class.

First I had to find her, again. Her father's business card, which I had carefully saved along with the coin since 1997, had disappeared. Thank heavens for the web! Bigyellow.com listed only one 'Murray' on Brookline Rd. The listed number was wrong, naturally, but it belonged to their renter, and she gave me the correct number.

One quick phone call, talking to her mother, verified that Caitlin would graduate in June. Armed with the phone number of her school, I called to arrange that talk early in February.

It took three weeks to get my talk confirmed. While waiting, I concentrated on defining my route. The abundance of towns between Chicago and Massachusetts gave me a huge number of options. Once again looking for National Park sites in the region, I chose a route through northern Ohio and south of Lake Erie, then angling south near Albany to join the route of the walk back to Townsend.

After sending the new books to the printer in mid-March, I redoubled my efforts to line up schools. Other than Townsend, I had penciled in fourteen towns where I hoped to speak. After three weeks of phone calls, I had only lined up schools in three of those towns, and exhausted possibilities in most of the others. In two cases, I found substitute schools by shifting my route ten-to-fifteen miles farther south. For the trip's last week, though, I scrapped the original route, instead turning *north* before Albany. That would put me over one hundred miles north of where we walked, crossing Vermont and a corner of New

Hampshire before heading south to Townsend. (In the end, even that detour sprouted another detour.)

As the trip neared, my thoughts again turned to the final talk. I knew how much inspiration Caitlin had provided during our walk, and I wanted to honor that. To that end, we purchased a medallion for her, inscribing it, "To Caitlin – Follow your dreams." Sue packed the gift in her luggage, so I wouldn't have to carry it through eight states. After all, she'd missed seeing Townsend (and Caitlin) in '93 and '97, and wanted to share it with me this time. She would fly out that Thursday and drive up from her folks' place in time for the talk.

In the meantime, she had plenty to keep her busy. With the back pain under control (though not eliminated), she had recently begun a new part-time job. On top of that, she had to cover the book business in my absence. This year, seven new titles made that a bigger task. The day before my flight to Chicago, the books arrived from the printer: nearly nine thousand books (including reprints on two older titles) that we had to move from the driveway to the basement.

That's one way to get in shape for bike touring!

Tuesday, April 27

Time is getting near to hit the road again - time to set up the new blog! Considering how hectic and stressful life has been, it will likely take me a good week to unwind...

Friday, 30 April

... and so begins the last stage of the coast-to-coast, with a flight delayed by an hour, rush hour Chicago traffic, and an uncertain weather forecast. It was snowing vigorously as the plane left Denver, and I watched crews de-ice the wings as we queued on the runway. This fast-moving storm threatens to meet me in Chicago to make my first day of riding wet, before a high-pressure system moves in for a week of dry days.

Saturday, 1 May: Elmhurst IL - Merrillville IN

71.8 miles; 12 noon-6:50 p.m.; mid-40s w/intermittent sprinkles.

This morning, shortly after a wrong turn sent me pedalling through a golf course on the cart path, I passed a school with an interesting name: 'The Institute of Basic Life Principals'. That got me thinking that I could probably teach there, lecturing on principals learned from the ride:

* Into every life, some rain must fall. (Oh, wait a sec - that's not a principal, that's a cliché.) Today featured occasional sprinkles, puddles, and temps that struggled to reach the mid-40s. No worry about overheating!

* People want to help. I caught up to a biker on a trail through a forest preserve, and asked for information on the trails coming up. Instead of telling me, Vic led me for miles through the preserve. We chatted, and he professed that he's dreamed of taking a long ride, but is currently committed to caring for his ailing mother. Thanks for the assist, Vic!

* Set ambitious goals for the best results. I hoped to clear the metro area today, figuring that sixty miles would do it (and but for a wrong turn, it may have). When I hit sixty miles, I bulled ahead another ten until I found my first farm road. Tomorrow — open country!

* People love to be noticed - so indulge them! As I pedaled along a quiet street, I saw a man on the sidewalk, working a large blue-and-red pedal-powered grinding wheel. I had to stop. "What are you doing?"

"What does it look like?" he shot back with a Polish accent as he sharpened another knife. "What are YOU doing?"

"I'm bicycling to Rhode Island!"

He gave me that look. "What, are you crazy?"

We talked for a few minutes before I again mounted my wheels. "Want to buy some knives?" he asked as I rode away.

Sunday, 2 May: Merrillville to Walkerton IN

62.1 miles; 10:30 a.m.-4:45 p.m.; sunny, 40s, chilly north wind.

The bright side of asking for directions: you may get clued in to a wonderful back road, with little traffic and lush surroundings, a welcome break from boring super-highways. The downside- those roads may not go where you think they will. When I rolled into Westville, I asked a bystander the best way to get to Walkerton. He replied, "I'd take highway 2 to Westville and get on US6."

"You mean I'm not in Westville?"

"No, you're in Valparaiso, nine miles southwest of Westville."

I now had two years of bike touring experience, ample time to figure out what made the trips special, and what threatened their success. It boiled down to one simple principle: connecting with people.

Thinking back on the first two legs of this journey, that fact shone through. The kids in White Salmon, WA, chanting, "Litter is bad! Glen is good!" as I biked away from the school; the young boy in Dinosaur, CO, who sought out the stranger at breakfast to give him a hug; the townsfolk in Augusta, IL, adopting me for a night and a morning - they provided the memories that I kept coming back to.

Realizing this, I took a different tack this year as I arranged my talks. At ten schools, I asked my contacts for help in finding lodging. Nine of them came through, usually finding me spots to camp, but two of them found faculty I could stay with. Thus, as I neared Walkerton, I looked forward to a warm bed and friendly faces to greet me.



I called Scott Hostetler a few miles before I reached town, and he met on his bike near the town limits. With his daughter sick, he couldn't host me, but he led me to the home of Pam and Ed Walz. Pam, a teacher retiring after this term, had a wonderful meal planned. A former student of hers, Sandra, joined us for the meal and for lively conversation. It turns out that, inspired by Pam, she now taught also.

"So you'll be there tomorrow for my talk, too?"

"Oh, no," she answered. "I teach at a school ten miles north of here, in North Liberty."

Fate acts in strange ways. "North Liberty? I originally hoped to speak there, but the schools had things planned. I had to veer south instead."

Monday, 3 May: Walkerton to Kendallville IN

70.2 miles; 10:50-4:00; partly cloudy, breezy, low 50s.

The cold snap continues, with temps 15° below normal. The mercury broke 50° for the first time, but the chill breeze forced me to stay bundled up, and when the sun hid behind the clouds... brrr! At least the breeze stayed mostly behind me, helping speed me to Kendallville at an average speed of 16.5 mph.

The kids at Walkerton Elementary shone, full of enthusiasm and questions. One girl had an endless stream of queries, still firing questions at me as the other kids filed out of the gym. One great question: "Have you ever made any lasting friendships?" YES - and I hope I've made a couple more in Walkerton. Other interesting questions: "Do you ever get homesick?" "Will you ride your bike around the gym for us?"

Tuesday, 4 May: Kendallville IN to Bryan OH

43.8 miles; 10:50 CDT - 3:40 EDT; up to 60°, partly cloudy, tail breeze.

It's refreshing at times to 'wing it'. In Kendallville the principal had me talk in the auditorium, a venue that often inhibits my interacting with kids. Instead of taking the stage, though, I talked from the front row while they set up the video, then I wandered up and down the aisles like a TV emcee, cajoling q's and a's from them. The best question: "Would you ever walk across the country again?"

Next I wandered across the street to St John's Lutheran School to a second warm welcome. The group was smaller but just as enthusiastic. Finally I got on the road, with directions to stop at the town's main tourist attraction - the Windmill Museum. Kendallville used to host a major windmill manufacturer, and the open-air museum held one of the world's largest collection of mills.



After putting in a fast cruise to Bryan and my brother-in-law's house, I got to do something new. My nephew was competing in a track meet, and they needed extra timers. I got pressed into duty - I had to time the 7th place finisher in every heat. Afterwards, I enjoyed a home-cooked meal with my Armstead relatives, relaxing in the company of family.

Wednesday, 5 May: Bryan to Pemberville OH

64.7 mi; 8:00-8:40, 10:35-3:00; 70°, sunny.

The Stryker Elementary kids amused me - again, they asked me to ride the bike around the gym. From there, I enjoyed a breeze at my back, speeding me along as the temp climbed to 70° - finally, I rode a stretch with no jacket!



Finally I finished my miles on US6. For 160 miles I had followed that main route, getting blown about by 18-wheelers. After lunch my route veered north into Bowling Green. This beautiful town impressed me, with its well-kept lawns, stately homes, and profusion of flowers. After stopping at the newspaper, I hit Highway 105 - a quiet, undulating road following the Portage River through farm country with a scattering of homes. After days of straight arrow roads and truck traffic, it was eye candy for a biker.

In Pemberville, I rediscovered Ohio hospitality. The school had arranged for me to

camp behind the fire station, but when I checked with the firemen, they knew nothing about it. Before I could say 'generosity', they had opened a closed storefront across the street (which still had 'Bike Shop' on the marquee) where I could spend the night with running water, toilet, lights, and a stereo; invited me to shower in the fire station; and warmed up a huge plate of spaghetti for me. Thanks, Larry and Mike!

One of the attractions of small towns is the old-time General Store. Pemberville hosts a great one: Beeker's General Store (www.beekersgeneralstore.com). On the edge of the (small) downtown district, it has the authentic feel - a narrow shop that extends well back from the street, with an old textured-tin ceiling. Shelves are jammed with candy, scented soaps, sewing supplies, and such finds as a commemorative Bicentennial 7-Up bottle, a Curious George lunchbox, and a large box of Rinso Detergent (can be used in wringer washing machines!). Wandering the aisles brings thoughts of how the old days must have been.

I got talking with Todd Sheets, the owner, who had worked there since age 12. Soon he busied himself making phone calls, arranging entertainment for me. First he cajoled the librarian to introduce me to the history of the town, then sent me to a historical society member who showed me the restored Opera House. Thanks, Todd! Egad, I love this state!

Thursday, 6 May: Pemberville to Sandusky Bay 'No Bikes Allowed' Bridge

54.0 miles; 7:40-8:20 & 10:10-4:30; 84°, sunny.

Thank heavens I'm in Ohio – if I were in a less giving area, today would have been a complete disaster.

The day began well enough. I woke up with music from the stereo, then Larry met me for breakfast – and of course, he grabbed the check. Then I had a delightful time at Eastwood Middle School – with extra time available, I started with the To Tell The Truth video. Picture a gymnasium full of 6th-8th graders, lights out, with the video projected on a screen. They cheered with the studio audience, and the boys hooted and hollered when they introduced panelist Brooke Burns. They responded quickly with answers to my questions, and I had time for all their queries. One boy asked, "Did you ever find any dead bodies?" I surprised him by explaining how we nearly had. Afterwards the staff took a picture with me, and presented me with an Eastwood polo shirt.



Not until I left did things go downhill. Three miles from school I suffered my first flat. No problem, I knew I'd get some this trip. Big problem, my tire mounting/dismounting tool had disappeared. I had to thumb a ride, or call... The principal drove out with a screwdriver so I could fix the tire and get motoring.

On to Port Clinton to catch the ferry. The delay meant I had to push hard, but with a tail breeze I again broke 17 mph. Somehow I missed the first ferry port – no problem, it wasn't running yet this season (despite the claims of their website). As I cruised to the next one eight miles further, a local in a convertible flagged me down. "You're the first one I've seen this year," he said as he rolled up his pant leg to show me a BikeCentennial tattoo. "I rode across in '76. I'm hoping to get laid off this summer so I can hit the road again." He drove ahead of me to the ferry port, and gave me last-minute hints.

As I left the ferry at Put-in-Bay, I asked where to catch the return ferry to Sandusky. "There is no ferry to Sandusky," the sailor reported. Big problem: if not, I would never reach Norwalk in time for my dinner invitation – especially since they allowed no bikes on the Sandusky Bay Bridge, and a detour would add 30 miles. So I went to the Perry's Victory National Monument to refill both empty water bottles, and checked the town piers for confirmation – no ferry to Sandusky (again, their web site had misled me).

Out of luck, I returned to the ferry back to Catawba. On board, I reached for my water bottles – and realized I'd left them at the monument. Okay – one disaster I can handle, two maybe I can grind through,



but three? Time to give in. I called ahead to the school in Norwalk, and the principal Sue Goodsite sent her husband Terry to rescue me at the foot of the bridge.

In Norwalk, Sue Goodsite waited with a wonderful meal, one she had planned for weeks. After inviting me when she confirmed my talk, she pored over my book, hoping to determine what food I liked. "Don't fret," I had told her, "this hungry biker will eat just about anything but beets." By the time I arrived, the table was set with mounds of delicious food – and next to my plate, specially prepared for my visit, sat a cup of beets.

The counselor at her school (Kathleen Robertson) and her husband Dan joined us for the meal. Afterwards, the five of us talked for hours as the hours melted away. By 9:30 I retired to the Robertsons' house for the night, where Kathleen and I chatted for another hour. Finally I retreated to my room for my daily call to Sue, and to rest up for another day.

Friday, 7 May: Norwalk to Cuyahoga Valley National Park

56.0 miles; 11:50-6:00; rain and 40s, then clearing and low 50s.

I guess I have to experience everything on this coast-to-coast ride, and that includes weather. 2002 threw windstorms and a blizzard at me, and last year I dodged tornadoes. It was now time to endure a steady, soaking, sodden rain. I didn't get started until nearly noon - Sue Goodsite and I kept chatting after my presentation. By 12:30 the rain had returned, lasting three hours. It's all about attitude, though, and I slogged through it knowing it would soon end.

Best question from today's talk: "Did you ever meet a drunk person on your walk?" Well, there was this fellow in West Virginia...

As I entered the National Park, I noticed a resident eyeing me. Stopping, I asked Chick for directions to the hostel. First he gave me a very detailed description of the route, then hopped in his car to lead me the short distance. Halfway there he stopped to introduce me to his nephew. More Ohio hospitality!

Saturday, 8 May: Cuyahoga Valley NP to Solon OH

21.7 miles; 11:40-12:40 & 6:00-7:00; 80s, sunny.

A bit early for a vacation day, but when I hit a National Park, I'm going to enjoy it! A friend joined me for the weekend, and Tim and I hiked to a waterfall, biked along the towpath, and took a train ride. With a hot day on tap, it was nice to put half the biking off until early evening. Still I found a bit of friendliness when a shop owner, hearing of my ride, told us about her town then walked us over to the neighboring bookstore/cafe and introduced me.

I enjoyed the break with Tim, who had driven down from Detroit. Years before, when we worked for the same company in California, we formed a strong bond with our love of National Parks, the outdoors, and traveling. We often spent hours discussing life and philosophy, a hobby we picked up again as we whiled away the weekend. "I really envy you, Glen," he said "You really share my outlook on life, how it's important to get out there and *do* things."

"It seems like it's all about priorities. I think most people would rather *have* things than *do* things. But things – possessions – have a cost of ownership. It takes money to own things. You have to repair them, replace them, upgrade them. Things end up owning you." I paused, then added, "How many of those things really *add* to our lives?"

He nodded in agreement, smiling. "But everyone tells us we *need* them, that we have to keep up with the Joneses... Unfortunately, most people don't think of what they're doing, they just get caught up in the lockstep consumerism."

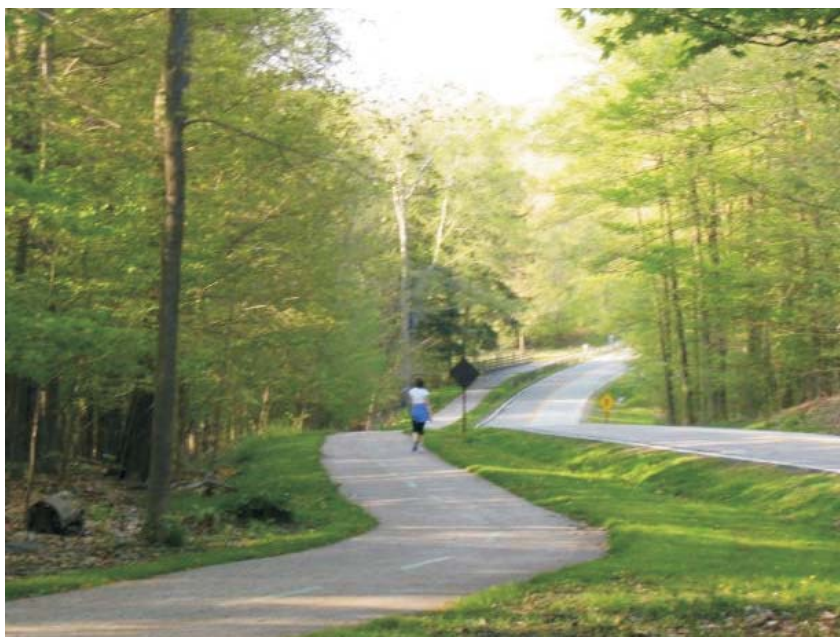
"And then they rush out to WalMart or Home Depot to get the latest must-have gadget," I added, warming to the subject, "and follow it up with a meal at McDonalds. I *hate* that – the generic-ization of this country. Do you know how many places I've biked through that look exactly like everywhere else?"

"Look at the bright side," Tim joked. "You won't need to bike cross-country anymore, because you can see everything right where you live!"

Sunday, 9 May: Solon to Conneaut OH

79.8 miles; 9:20-6:20; 80s, sunny, cool lake breeze.

How different two halves of a day can be! The morning I rode sans panniers several miles on the regional bike trail, then got directions for a country road heading north: little traffic (and lots of bikes!), stately homes, great scenery, and (unfortunately) a plethora of potholes. In contrast, after Tim left, the long afternoon featured fifty miles along US20, marked by numerous stop lights, heavy traffic, urban sprawl, and only two farms. Still, friendly faces again highlighted my last full day in Ohio, from the explicit and detailed directions from a fellow cyclist to the elderly couple I met at the ice cream stand, who offered to ride me the last ten eight miles into town (sadly turned down) and then drove ahead to locate a motel for me.



Monday, 10 May: Conneaut OH thru PA to Westfield NY

65.7 miles; 9:20-3:10; sunny, in the 80s

Let's call it the near-disaster day - repeatedly. I stopped in Erie, PA, at a bike shop to get another spare tube (yesterday's flat was not patchable) and to get the tires trued. The mechanic said I came in just in time - I had not had time to fully break in my new bike before this trip, and the spokes had loosened enough that one good pothole would have 'exploded' my wheel. Then I enjoyed another high-speed jaunt into Westfield - where I hit that 'one good pothole' coming into town. The wheel survived better than the rack holding my panniers - the mounting bracket sheared most of the way through. Thankfully the hardware store customized me a new one, of steel not aluminum.

Next, as I headed to the school, a bicyclist began crossing the street directly in my path. If he hadn't stopped when I yelled, I would have hit him broadside. On my way back to town later, I nearly got hit by a door suddenly opening from a parked car. Finally, as I hit the tent for my first night of camping, the showers and lightning began. And the 13th is still three days away!

Tuesday, 11 May: Westfield to Cheektowaga NY

67.5 miles; 11:45-6:00; foggy chilly morning, then light overcast, high about 70°

Today's school crowd featured only 9 kids in the gifted/talented program. However, they made up in enthusiasm what they lacked in numbers. With more time, I spoke longer about the walk, telling them anecdotes from my time on the road. When I finished, they all asked for my autograph. Then, as I changed into biking gear and packed up, they ran outside and picked up a garbage bag full of trash around the school. Finally, they raced me down the street as I got on my way.



Again, the day had a Jekyll-and-Hyde personality. The morning stayed cool, with the fog rolling off the lake and lingering in the numerous vineyards. After lunch, the fog lifted to a light overcast, and the quiet country road became a 30-mile, 4-lane strip of retail and residential sprawl heading into Buffalo. Then, trying to circle the city to reach Cheektowaga left

me on busy city streets with several miles of construction.

People – remember, that's the key. In Cheektowaga, Susan Cain and Kate Rudewicz had secured permission for me to camp behind the school. When I arrived at 4:30, people buzzed about the campus in a flurry of activity. I wandered inside to meet Kate and Susan (the principal and vice-principal), as well as the school superintendent, the principal of an adjacent school, several teachers, and the custodians. Though busy preparing for an open house for the parents, Susan took time to show me around.

She led me around to the back, and several students followed us. "You're really riding across the country? Wow!" they chimed. "Can we help you set up your tent?"

When the group effort finally succeeded in erecting the tent, Susan led us back inside. "Here is the locker room," Susan pointed out, "and here are some towels. If you want to take a shower, I'll make sure no one takes the parents in here until you're finished." She then showed me the computer labs, where I could type in my weblogs at my leisure, or I could watch TV. Finally she took me back to the office. "Let me give you a passkey," she said, handing me an electronic card like you get in newer hotels. "This way you can get back in the building after we close up, in case you need to use the restrooms."

Their hospitality made my day. Thanks, Susan and Kate!

Wednesday, 12 May: Cheektowaga to Bloomfield NY

78.5 miles; 11:40-6:10; 80s, sunny, humid.

This morning the kids again gave me a boost, with a handful asking for my autograph. Thankfully only a few - I couldn't have lasted through signing a hundred!

With a late start, I faced my second longest day so far this year, and despite a vow not to push hard in the heat, I still averaged over 16 mph for over fifty miles. After Avon, the hills worsened and slowed me down. The land is beautiful - rolling hills with woods and farms mingling - but the going is getting tough. And no more cool lake breezes!

Thursday, 13 May: Bloomfield to Skaneateles NY

59.9 miles; 12:40-6:50; 80s/sunny → 60s/lightning storm → 70s/humid.

I had marked the day for misery, but it surprised me - pleasantly. Two school talks kept me tied up until noon, and by the time I hit the road the temperature had broken 80°. After only two hills, I dreaded a long day. But then I entered the shadow of the thunderhead, with lightning surrounding me. By the time I reached my first town, the temps had dropped to the low 60s. The light rain ended in only 30 minutes, but the temps stayed mild and the hills disappeared for thirty miles. I enjoyed one mile pedaling along the trail beside Seneca Lake, basking in its beauty.

I got to try something new at Bloomfield Elementary School. Since the kids hadn't seen me arrive, I hid in the locker room as they filed into the gymnasium. The teachers then played the To Tell The Truth video, letting the kids guess which contestant I was. I walked in at the end to hearty applause. After my presentation, over thirty kids asked for my autograph.



Friday, 14 May: Skanateles to Rome NY

71.0 miles; 9:45-5:35; 80s, sunny, humid.

Today my route-picking skills left a lot to be desired. I branched from US20 onto NY175, enjoying a long, high-speed downhill run to Marcellus. I paid for that with a 1 1/3-mile-long relentless climb out of town. Next it was another cannonball run down into Onandaga, with an even steeper 1-mile climb out. Down into Jamesville, and a lowest-gear climb out. And twice - twice! - motorists turned right directly in my path, forcing me to brake.

By the time I coasted into Manlius, I needed a change of terrain. For lunch I took my chance on a door marked 'Italian Affair' in an empty strip mall. As I walked in, the waitress immediately asked how far I was riding - "We had three guys from England here last year, riding from - Jeff! Where were the Brits riding from?"

Soon the cook asked me questions, Jeff (the owner) listened in, and a regular patron waiting for friends told me of the road ahead. "If you head north five miles, you can ride the Erie Canal trail. Let me call my wife; she'll know if it goes all the way to Rome."

By the time his friends arrived, I had to repeat for them the tales of my travels. After I finished lunch and began telling them anecdotes, the waitress brought me a big bowl of their home-made soup. Then Jeff brought out a book about the Erie Canal (written and published by his neighbors) to look at while eating. By the time I left, they refused to take my money, so I left them a copy of my book. Thanks, Jeff and gang!

Back on the road, I took their suggestion and reached the 'Long Level' portion of the old Erie Canal: a 36-mile stretch with no locks - flat as a pancake! For twenty-five miles I rode on the multi-use path beside the canal, and rode another fifteen on adjacent roads. Nice to escape hills and escape traffic at the same time!

Saturday, 15 May: Rome to Johnstown, NY

65.7 miles; 11:00-5:20; high 60s, cloudy, some rain.

Today's ride was great, except it lasted ten minutes too long. The day cooled off as predicted, with temps in the high 60s under a gray sky, and the forecast showers only dampened me for 15 minutes after lunch. As I approached Johnstown, however, the skies grew foreboding and the wind picked up (to my back, fortunately). I averaged 20 mph the last six miles into town, racing the storm - and as I entered the town limits, the heavens let loose. Sheets of rain drenched me. By the time I reached downtown and the shelter of a convenience store two miles later, it had quit, leaving one very wet biker.

Sunday, 16 May: Johnstown to Glens Falls NY via Great Sacondaga Lake

58.0 miles; 9:40-3:30; 50s and 60s, partly cloudy - BEAUTIFUL!

If I classified riding through the suburbs of Chicago and Buffalo as a 'visual cacophony', I could extend the analogy and call the endless miles of farmland as 'visual white noise'. The Finger Lakes? Maybe an overture.

In those same terms, today's ride ranked as a full-fledged symphony. I dipped into the southern part of Adirondack Mountain Park, riding the west and north shores of Great Sacondaga Lake. Lush forests, shimmering waters, quaint cottages, and mild hills marked the day, likely the most scenic ride of this entire three-year epic. It felt like a grand finale as I began the last week of my coast-to-coast.

As I sat admiring the scene from the overlook at the end of the lake, a man my age and his father pulled up to look. The father said to me, "The last time we were here, an eagle flew over and landed on that rock right there... We're not leaving here until we see another one!" His son grabbed their ice chest, and



handed me a sandwich. Within minutes, as we visited over lunch, a young eagle appeared over the tree tops, riding on the updrafts. What a way to underscore the wonderful day!

Monday, 17 May: Glens Falls NY to Rutland VT

58.8 miles; 12:15-5:00; 70s, sunny

Another fine day for cycling - temps in the 70s, a wisp of a cool breeze, and sunny skies. The first five miles of climbing out of the Hudson Valley featured several hills, but then the roads followed the valleys, staying mostly flat all the way to Rutland. A slight but significant difference from places like Ohio: instead of farmland stretching to the horizon, I watched farms hemmed in by forested hills.

'T was my youngest crowd at the school this morning - I talked to the first grade classes. Still, they did better at answering my questions than some older kids. The cutest question they asked: "Can we see Caitlin's coin? Can you pass it around?"

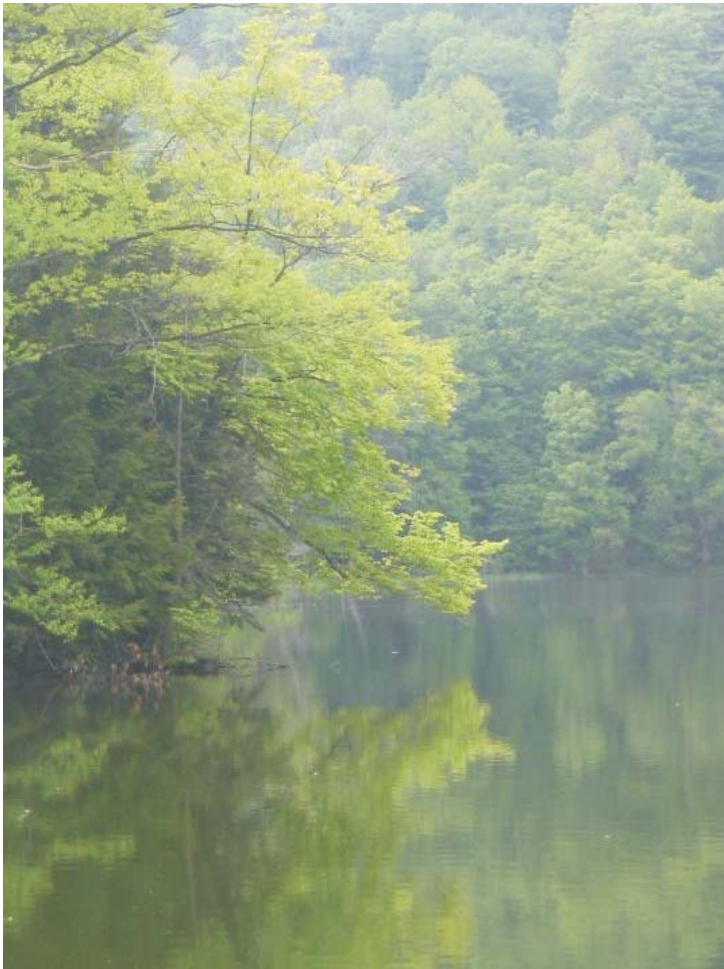


After class I headed to the bike shop for a final tuneup (my derailleurs were acting up) before tomorrow's big climb. When I told Bill the mechanic of my journey, his eyes lit up and he confessed to a desire to do the same. When I told him of my litter-fighting efforts, his smile grew broader - "I'm a devout litter-hater myself!"

Tuesday, 18 May: Rutland VT to Claremont NH

58.2 miles; 11:25-6:00; 60s, 70s, rain, shine, clouds, sun

"The longest journey is the journey inwards. Of him who has chosen his destiny, Who has started upon his quest for the source of his being."



That quote from Dag Hammarskjöld appeared on the 'Thank You' card from Karen McDonnell, who arranged my talk in Rutland. It came along with a bag of bagels and power bars to give me the energy to tackle the Green Mountains. Thanks!

While today may not be the high point of the trip, it was the highest point (in terms of elevation) since some forgotten hill in Kansas. The road east of Rutland rose for nine miles to cross Sherburne Pass, all of 2190' above sea level. The climb was far easier than my three big climbs in 2002, at least until the forecast showers arrived 15 minutes before I crested the pass. While I climbed, the rain was a minor irritation, which grew to major pain on the opposite side. Wet pavement and heavy traffic had me gripping on the brakes down to Killington, where I waited out the rain with a long lunch stop.

The remaining ride featured a long, terrific downhill run beside the Ottauquechee River through a forested valley to Woodstock. In town I took a biking break to hike for an hour through Vermont's national park, wandering through the verdant woods as the sun finally burned through the clouds. Then I tackled the last 25 miles to Claremont, with a short climb and a high-speed drop as I found a shortcut

away from the traffic on US4. Near the end, I experienced another first: bicycling over a wooden bridge. Specifically, the longest wooden bridge in the US, and the longest two-span covered bridge in the world. I maintained an iron grip on my handlebars, praying that no gaps between the boards would snag my tires.

Wednesday, 19 May: Claremont to Keene NH

44.2 miles; 1:00-4:50; 60s and sunny.

Another premier biking day - in the 60s, sunny skies, lush terrain, quaint villages. Hard to believe I'm nearly done...

Another warm reception at Stevens High School. During my third talk, they recorded my comments for a possible spot on NPR. After my fourth presentation, they gave me a Stevens HS shirt "to remember us by." (As if I could forget such friendliness!) Then before I could ride off into the noonday

sun, Paul Couture (the principal) invited me to eat in the cafeteria, and we had a nice chat as I downed a light lunch. Thanks, Paul!

As I continue talking at schools, the exuberant kids remind me of a favorite poem. An unknown author echoed my sentiments when he wrote ***One Hundred Years From Now***:

One hundred years from now
it will not matter
what kind of car I drove,
what kind of house I lived in,
how much money was in my bank account,
nor what my clothes looked like.
But the world may be a better place because
I was important in the life of a child.

Thursday, 20 May: Keene NH to Ashby MA

49.5 miles; 11:40-5:00; 73° at 3:00, sunny.

Another phenomenal day, as things definitely build to tomorrow's climax - and it seems as if each school provides a key for the day to come. Karen's bagels Tuesday provided a perfect breakfast Wednesday, when my early (7:30) start left me with little time to visit a cafe. The long-sleeve t-shirt I received from Stevens High helped ward off the evening chill that night while camping, since I had no other long-sleeves.

I couldn't have asked for a better night for camping, with temps dropping into the 40s and a campground in the woods of Wheelock Park. Symonds Elementary was adjacent to the park, where I gave a shortened talk to the second graders, then led them on a litter pickup in the park. They lit into their cleanup with glee, scouring the grounds for any stray trash. Afterwards, as I packed up, fifth graders showed up in the library, so on request I proceeded to show them my video and answer questions.

Following my talk, I headed east on the bike trail, where Eric quickly flagged me down. "I saw you bike by my house, but couldn't catch you. I'm an old-time bike tourist, and my son," he said, pointing to 5-year-old Tyler, "is a future bike tourist. In another couple years, we're going to bicycle to California!" He told me how to get around the trail detour, and asked if he could help in any other way.

The key that Symonds ES provided for me was directions to Townsend. Of three possible routes, they recommended the middle one - less traffic, more scenic, and (of course) more hilly. The road to Jaffrey was the second most strenuous of the trip. In Jaffrey, they urged me to stop at Kimball's for lunch - good choice! A popular spot with picnic tables, generous portions, renowned seafood - and



incredible homemade ice cream. I shared a table with Steve McCallum and friend, enjoying company and lunch.

The remainder of the day featured one short climb and a long downhill to Townsend, where I thought my luck had run out - no motels or B&Bs in town! It took a couple of phone calls to find a B&B in Ashby, 8 miles west (and above) Townsend. What a find! Jim Mayrand, who runs Woodside Farm B&B with his wife Karen, was into cycling big time (years ago, he took part in an effort to set the mark for most miles cycled in one 24-hour period). We swapped tales of cycling over dinner, until his kids Daniel and Caitlin stole me away to look at a tree they had planted for Arbor Day. Tomorrow for breakfast - eggs laid by their chickens tonight!

Friday, 21 May: Ashby to Townsend to Uxbridge MA

63.3 miles; 8:55-10:25 & 12:25-6:25; sunny, 80s.

"Timing is everything," Caitlin's father reiterated. "Caitlin needs a bit of inspiring right now. I think she'll really appreciate this medal."

Timing is everything, and my timing failed me. My final, climactic talk was well received, but Caitlin - the reason I had Townsend on my route, the reason I went so far north - was not there to enjoy it. She had fallen ill, and was at the doctor's office this morning. After speaking, Sue and I went down to her father's office (he works at the school) to say 'Hi' and to give him the medal we had prepared for his daughter. He was visibly touched, and apologized for her absence.

At times, life does not come in a nice, neat package, all trimmed up fancy-as-you-please, with a heartwarming climax and a punchy conclusion.

Instead, life oft leaves you with questions, regrets, disappointments. *Could I have done anything differently? Should I have called her last night, to make sure nothing had come up? Maybe she forgot today was the day...*

According to her classmates, the prospect of my visit had excited her. She had told her Leadership Class about how she'd met me so many years ago, and her amazement when I showed up at her door with book in hand. That book, by now well-worn from reading, she had loaned to her teacher Beth Hague, so Beth could experience the story. But as the months slipped by, did she get caught up in the drama of graduation, letting the date of my visit slip her mind?

I suppose there's a lesson to take away from this:

In the end, if you can't achieve "happily ever after," you may have to settle for "to be continued..."



Saturday, 22 May: Uxbridge MA to Providence RI

20.7 miles; 8:15-11:30; low 60s, overcast.

If a man rides from coast-to-coast, and no TV stations record his finish, did the ride matter?

Thankfully, I don't have to answer that question. I called the three network affiliates, and the CBS/Fox station showed up. The morning's ride was beset with problems - a flat tire and a bridge out on the bike trail put me behind schedule, forcing Sue to drive me the last few miles into Providence to the waiting TV reporter. In town, road construction left us lost so hopelessly that the cameraman had to come find us.

Andy Mihail proved genial despite our delays. We chatted while he set up, and he mentioned that he was from northern Indiana. "I rode through there. I talked at schools in Walkerton and Kendallville."

"Really?" he asked. "My mother teaches at Walkerton Elementary."

"You're kidding! That was the first school I spoke at this year!" Can we say 'small world'?

He filmed me from several angles, conducting a short interview. In closing, he asked if the hours I had spent cycling had left me time to make any great philosophic conclusions. I pondered that, and one thing occurred to me.

On this ride I was able to forget about time. Other than reaching the schools on schedule, I could amble along. If I reached town at 4:00 versus 6:00, who cared? If I chose to spend an extra hour at a national park, I could. Why do we allow our lives to be so ruled by the clock, rushing back and forth like rats in a maze? Are the things we clutter our lives with so important that we should lose the opportunities to enjoy the subtle, spontaneous joys of life?

Postscript

How appropriate. As we raced down I-95 en route to Sue's parents' home, we passed a spot where someone had lost a suitcase from their roof rack. Strewn for a hundred yards along the center median of the freeway was that poor soul's wardrobe. Shirts. Pants. Shoes.

And, of course...

Underwear by the Roadside!

