

Chapter 3

Day 3:

August 16, 2006, Fryesburg ME to somewhere on rte 201 ME, 77 miles. 10am to 6.30pm.

This morning was the worst yet. I woke with such a weight of despair I didn't think I was going to make the rest of the trip. I was in a beautiful B&B overlooking this little vale with the mountains in the distance. Breakfast was being served for one. The proprietor brought scones with juice, as well as, choices of entrees, I asked for the eggs and home fries. The scones had been enough but I still had the main course coming. My hunger was not back, but I thought I should have at least one good meal along the way. I had to force myself to eat. Between the despair and the aches, I was feeling terrible. I wrote a little while eating just to stay out of my head.

Breakfast break over I set about loading the bike for the day's journey. I had a package of things to send back to myself. I was taking my time today as I thought I would only ride 40 – 50 miles. I went to the post office and mailed away those things deemed least critical. There probably was a lot more stuff that wasn't critical but at that point rational thinking seemed like too much work.

I did speak with my support group, without whom I would have returned early I am sure. It was more than just support they gave, but also love. They were with me enjoying the journey vicariously. I was riding with them and the VCAS and those others who gave of themselves. It was not just my ride; it was a whole cadre of people. I could not let them down.

With the despair, the worry, the consummation of thought energy on the lack of those stupid little pills, I was proving to myself I was stronger than I believed myself to be. I was going into myself, pulling from places what I needed, and God was giving me what I could handle. Trish had questioned whether I was putting too much energy into not having the Ativan. I thought about this and did notice I was basically exhausting myself so I didn't have to think about all the apparent lack. On the road though, all one has time for is thought. Was I facing my fears? I was on a vision quest and I wasn't sure if I was standing up to the task or failing miserably. I was moving forward, not quitting even though that emotion turned up frequently enough. I was questioning my life, what I wanted, who I wanted to do it with, who I was in general. These are the big questions with the ever-illusory answers if they're ever found at all.

Many people said to me how great a thing it was to travel like this, on a bicycle. I was beginning to press the red line, hell, I had everything pushed to redline. I was at the point where everything was going into some state of profound mental, physical, spiritual intensity. I was hurting all over; my mental state went from sheer rage, to acquiescing to the thought of throwing in the towel, to states of just numbness with the occasional awe of the beauty I was traveling through. But was I truly living up to the challenge? Was I being the heroic figure I aspired to? Was I still running from fear and not facing it in some way? But we all face what we can in our own time and I was learning some important things about life and myself.

The morning ride was through quiet roads in the pines. Not much in the way of traffic and my mood improved as I went. It felt good to have the woods on either side of me though because this is Stephen King country, I did have the odd thought of something jumping out at me from the trees (little noises in the woods helped to reinforce this

thought). Memories from my youth started coming back to me as well. At one point a woody smell brought me back to YMCA camp, swimming, archery and riflery. That was eons ago when I was in the 4th grade and went to summer camp. Yet there was the scent and I was however old one is in 4th grade once again. Maybe we never really grow up, we just have bigger bodies. Our memories pile on top of one another and maybe we get stuck in some, making it hard to live in the here and now.



One thing about New England, it is not flat! In a car one just does not appreciate that fact, cannot appreciate it when just a little more pressure on the gas pedal gets the car up and over. I found myself walking just as much as riding. Scream down one side only to take 10 to 20 minutes to climb the next rise. Up and down, up and down while the emotions are going back and forth, back and forth. The psychotic rollercoaster was in full swing today. I felt like I was getting beaten up. The leg muscles were weakening so it was taking me longer to get up the hills. My enthusiasm for the trip had begun to wane. My anger at the Adventure Cycling map grew. I understood the route because of the beauty one rides through but there is a bit of masochism in it as well. The route is designed by madmen, ease sold to the cost of beauty. Great route if one is riding supported, totally different affair if one is fully loaded. And another thing about the map, there aren't many places to stop overnight along the route. Better planning may have alleviated some of these trials, live and learn.

About mid-afternoon I had had enough of the up and down scenic torture route so decided to pick up a main road. That changed the mood quickly. Going from quiet and peaceful to loud and dangerous was almost as bad as the hills. I still had the hills but without so much of an incline. I made better time and decided to head for Lewiston ME and look for a motel there. One lovely small town along the way, I had walked mostly through to enjoy the shops. One gentleman stopped me and we chatted about riding. He rode over a thousand miles down the west coast and here I was complaining about a few hundred. He of course biked with friends so I felt vindicated. I should have looked for a place to stay in that town because...

As I entered into the greater Lewiston area the traffic picked up and just everything went into a different mode. The heat of the day pressed harder and the energy became more intense. I kept biking down the main road believing there was going to be a motel somewhere, yet feeling at the same time I did not want to be there. As I came into the center of the business district there was a high-rise hotel, but something seemed wrong about the whole area. Not bad, just like I didn't belong there. I was on the road, on a bicycle, and there is a mindset that begins to take hold. I was looking at things from 10 mph and experiencing travel through my own power. The mind begins to change its perspective. This is how I began to really understand deeply how everything is perspective. The perspective of the hustle and bustle did not fit the ride I was on.

Everything has its own personal perspective. We all have our own way to look at an event, other people or even oneself. How I interpret something is different than how

someone else will interpret the same thing. We have all heard how five people will witness a car accident and there will be five varying stories. All are varying perspectives on the same event. And here is something that will throw you...how do we know the event actually happened? Two people decided to have an accident. They created the reality that the rest of us have bought into. But did the event happen? Is it reality? I don't know if that makes sense? Am I having an event now, maybe an episode? Maybe none of this happened at all. Oh the mind boggles!

Because we are ever and always doing work on ourselves ('it really is all about me'), what is our perspective about ourselves? Think about people you have wronged. Most of them have moved on and forgotten about the event, and probably us as well. We remember because the huge majority of us want to do good, and that little something we did to little Johnny or little Jane way back when, is still very strong in our minds. How many of us remember when we were wronged? I have forgotten most if not all of those times, but I can sure as heck remember those things I did that were unkind. Talk about masochistic! To keep beating oneself up over and over for the same wrong is insanity. As I am learning, we need to forgive ourselves and move on with our lives to be the best we can be always.

That said, I did just that and moved right through Lewiston after refilling my water bottles and stopping at a RiteAid for a package of herbal stress relief. There is more than one way to skin a cat, as they say, and I now had an alternative that I could live with as a replacement for the Ativan. That left a dilemma as I was approaching the 50 mile mark and had no clear idea of a stopping place. As I was coming out of Lewiston I met four other touring bicyclists headed in the opposite direction. We talked of places along the route they had just come, which really didn't help much as there was not much there. They were talking of staying further along the AC map but were just as far off the route as was I. Maybe long distance cycling (or the AC map) causes a break with reality as we generally refer to it, otherwise why go miles and miles out of the way to get further down the map route? Maybe a few more days or weeks and I would have become a Forrest Gump, long hair and beard and tattered clothes. Bicycling and bicycling, longing for that life changing epiphany, but unlike Forrest, the AC map just made me lose all sanity. They will say, "We found him one day, babbling about hills, nothing but hills, one minute crying, the next laughing". This is not too far from the truth. I had many moments when I felt like I was about to break down into tears, especially at the sight of the upward slope after a previous climb. I had a lot of anger being vented that may have made me appear not quite right in the head. And I had taken to talking to myself. I actually did a lot of talking to God as well, but if you passed me on the road I would have appeared not quite right in the head. The truth will set you free and the open road will make you nutz,! Or free as well, depending on how one looks at it I guess.

I parted from the group of cyclists in indecision and a bit of sadness. I wanted the companionship so deeply, but didn't want to return the way I had come even more deeply. I had come so many miles now toward my goal I was not going backward. I continued on toward a campground on the map I hoped was still there. My mind started to go into a state of urgency; I was worried more about the night than not having the Ativan. A lot of praying and planning was going on in my mind as I biked and biked onward as the sun kept setting closer to the night. Every sign I saw from a distance that looked like a campground sign turned out to be advertising for some service or another.

The sun kept on its sinking path carrying my hope along with it. Did I mention there were hills along the way, always a hill to keep me company along the journey up route 201?



Finally, at the crest of one of the plethora of mounds of rocks and earth and worms and whatever else makes up that which gravity makes an effort to mount, there is the blessed sign announcing a KOA campground. Such relief flooded through me I felt like kneeling and kissing the post that held up this symbol of salvation. A little dramatic and a sure sign of losing all touch with reality but the lonely road and too many Stephen King novels can do that to a person.

6:30 pm and the sun would be setting in about an hour or two as I walked into the KOA office. I thanked God for the place still being there, and I thanked the woman behind the counter as well. She may have thought I lost touch with reality and not quite right in the head, but she was nice about everything. I had the site and a place to shower, and they had a store though the pickings were meager. It was lucky hunger was little and my demands were low because it was a can of tuna and a candy bar that became dinner. I had dry soup with me that I made along with bad camp coffee, so all in all it was a fine meal.

I called Trish, a half an hour away from her calling out the state troopers in an extensive search for a missing biker. I love her for caring. I was okay and really meaning it. I was still a little anxious but there is something about being in the forest that is calming. By the time I had set up camp and made dinner it was late enough to bed down for the night, it didn't leave much time for thinking. There was no campfire but I was camping and that felt good. Things were getting better.

Aches and pains: Everything getting better, legs and butt still ache. Arms and neck stiff.

Food: More Cliff bars, dried fruit, nuts, canned tuna, candy bar, soup, eggs, toast, home fries, scones, juice, coffee and lots of water and Gatorade.

Weather: Sunny and a bit warmer today, maybe high 80s.