## Wandering Wheels Newsletter, December 2004

Wandering Wheels

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Sitting in the local clinic waiting to get my shots for our China trip, I came across an article in Psychology Today. It was about circumstance

## Suchology Todal

and coincidence. Several pages long. the material gave a positive view of the God side of coincidental happenings in our lives. Not to be expected, we can learn to be ready recipients of the blessings of such happenings.

Over the years I have, three or four times a week, while on a ride, offered devotions-inspirational thoughts. They have become part and parcel of what we do at Wheels. Sometimes devotional material is scarce. Most importantly, it is a real blessing when it is meaningful stuff that happens to come by unexpectedly. By "meaningful", I mean devotional ideas that are relevant to the group and the ride we are on.

On our Mexico-to-Canada trip this past summer, I shared from a book, "Ruthless Trust", by Brennan Manning. It's a no-nonsense writing about our trusting the Almighty. In his chapter, "Thinking Big", Manning talks about seeing God's back. The following is a quote from that chapter:
"How do we deal with a glimpse of God's back? What happens in the wordless, empty, but shattering collision with the glory of God that such a glimpse entails? Can we gaze even momentarily into the precipitous dep ths of the crushing majesty and unapproachable holiness of the living God? Do we have any inner resources at the moment when we are accosted by the Holy One, when we are brought not only in thought but in the totality of our being before the great Mystery which touches the taproot of our existence and encircles our spirit. even before it is brought home to us with overwhetming force?"

It was just a few days before reading the above quote that I received a phone call from my niece, Chris, saying her mom had passed away. Bev, my sister-in-law, was a precious soul. She had been "hanging by a thread" for many years. It was only last year that she lost her tough cop husband, my brother, Ed. During the course of my conversation with Chris she related the following details: The family was gathered at mom's side as she slipped in and out of consciousness. They all were startled when
mom recognized her deceased husband standing in the doorway and told him to come on in. (Spooky!) Later, on a couple other occasions, she did the same, speaking to Ed as clearly as if he were really in the room. What a blessing for the family to know Mom and Dad were being united...kinda like seeing the back of God!

## TORCH!

In our last newsletter, we reported that Bob was training on his new high tech "tricycle" with an optimistic goal of hand cycling coast to coast. He wanted to test his wings on the January Florida trip. The team left Cocoa Beach early Monday morning headed for a campground north of Vero, a 50 -mile ride. Janech rode with Bob most of the day. He clipped along at a good pace. He arrived in camp, high spirits, and even volunteered to help with dinner! He got his tent up and went to shower. The park attendant gave us a call; Bob was having trouble in the shower. We got him back to his tent and shortly after rushed him to the Vero hospital emergency room. Things went steadily downhill. We phoned his wife, Margaret. She arrived the next day. Within a short period of time Bob was GONE! We all were shocked! The jury is still out as to the cause. Needless to say, it has left a gap in our community and a huge opening in his family's lives.

FOOT NOTE: We continued our Florida trip south, headed for the Keys. Our last night of camping was 20 miles north of Key West. The campground is an upscale KOA with numerous high-end motor homes. We had Bob's "riderless" threewheeler still with us. One of the motor home campers took an interest in the tricycle. He was a double-leg amputee. We asked him if he'd like to take


Six days after Boh Hincolin passed away lis "riderless mount" waspassed on to: doyble amputee domble amputee closure
 tweaking his "three-wheele"

Bob Lincoln and Jahech tweaking his "three-wheeler" Bob had a great day? guy by the name of Cunningham find you?" Finally, I got a phone call and, sure enough, it was Cunningham, George Cunningham! George goes way back to 1970 when he was 15 years old. I had been persuaded to scholarship him as a deserving kid who could really benefit from a coast-to-coast ride. He had a tough background. He successfully cycled across the U.S...end of story. Not so, because, here he was 35 years later beaming like a kid sharing with his dad a "straight A's" report card! I wish I could put his verbal enthusiasm into print!

George went downhill in his late teens...alcohol, drugs, the whole nine yards. Over the course of years, he became a very unhappy man. Sometime in the early '90's he hit rock bottom. With a silly grin on his face, he told me how he had become the "butter knife robber"! He held up a convenience store with a butter knife! He looked the store video camera in the eye, gave the police his name, address and phone number. The police didn't take him seriously so George literally went to the police station and turned himself in! The judge sentenced him. He was out in a few months...out a changed man!

Eventually, George went into the counseling business wanting to help men and women, as he'd been helped, get a second chance. He handed me his business card. He runs a rehab program and has fout buildings in Jackson,

$\stackrel{A}{\nabla_{\text {Bet }}}$ Mississippi. He has spent time with Betty Ford at her clinic in California, and has instituted many ideas from the Ford Clinic in his own program.

I sat for an hour listening to George's wonderful account of a changed life! He seemed to be saying that a lot of people influenced him and helped create the turnabout. He was very careful to say "thank you" to me and for the influence of Wandering Wheels. I never stop being amazed at the good things in which God allows us to share!

As I have shared in the past, our spring crossing and the multiple of friends we have made over the years make "California to Georgia" feel like


The 2004 coast-to-coast riders standing on the Pacific Ocean ready to launch their $2,600-\mathrm{mile}$ crossing.
family!
A little boy in Texas had his bike stolen. Janech found a new bike and shipped it out to him...that was Jaggur! A Ma Kettle-type gal who ran a country gas station became a Wheels' legend. She closed shop and we didn't expect to see her again. I gave her a ceramic cross on a nice chain one year. Her husband had left her, things looked pretty bleak. We were setting up camp in Artesia, New Mexico, when around the corner comes our old gas station gal, a long lost friend. She still
 had her cross! She's moved Welcome sight! into town to help her daughter with the grand kids. Boy, was she happy to see us! She's the one who, on an earlier trip, told me to get all four legs of my chair on the floor while I was drinking a coke in her store! :


Bathing in the Colorado River.

In Escondido we saw evidence of the California forest fires. Many of our friends had been spared while others were not so fortunate. The owners of Motel 6 in Alamogordo, New Mexico, always leave the light on! Mayhill, the small village on the east side of Cloudcroft, is a special refuge. We cross a 9,000-foot pass to get to Mayhill and almost always bump


Nine thousand feet on top of Cloudcroft! Everything froze!
into snow. Last spring it was a blizzard! If it were not for Mayhill and its warm Community Building, we'd be stuck. The fire chief in Mayhill told the locals, "Well, it's going to rain." They asked how he knew and the chief said, "When the Wheels
come through, they bring rain!" Albany, Texas, has a restaurant that is run by two brothers from Houston. This is ranching territory. The ranchers from miles around feed here. Driving through town,


Our first 1,000 miles! you'd
never know the place exists--THE BEST FOOD on the whole 2,600-mile run! Our Breckenridge, Texas, stay is at the Ridge Motel. They are recovering from a major fire. All of the "ups and downs" help, and hurt, as we visit "old friends" each year.

importantly, the home of Braums Ice Cream-the best priced and best tasting ice cream on our long ride! Mineola introduces us to the long, friendly stretch of highway that reaches to the Louisiana border. Remember the church that built showers for us? That's in Mineola. What
a proud group as they show off their showers. Keep in mind this is a country church in the middle of nowhere. They have kept the same preacher for three years, a new record for our Wheels' gang. We get free Coke and Power Aid in Minden, Louisiana. The local Coke bottler is a bike geek and church member. Vicksburg, Mississippi, has its Civil War history, but, more importantly, it has one of the most generous
 motel receptionists, an African-American gal

Don't have a birthday gal during a Wheels' trip! who couldn t show kindness more to our riders. The barber, Ed, and his wife host us in Luverne,
 Alabama--literally open their home and we camp on their lawn. Abbeville, Alabama, has Monie's Steak House, only eating

Coach presenting John Wessels with his silver medallion-five times across! John took a spill out of Vicksburg, Mississippi. He was unable to finish the trip. The Wheels' gang made up his miles for him. John is bound and determined to complete his journey this coming spring. What a spirit!
place around, as well as a great motel owned by a couple from India. Wheels has watched the owners' daughters grow up. Quite a shock to listen to these kids from India speaking with a deep southern accent! Janech's turtle is Looks like their prayers always a hit with the were answered. gals!

Edison, Georgia, is where our famous church, with the "deep fried everything" feed, is located--always a looked-forward-to visit! We do the evening service for them. The Sylvester Chamber of Commerce greets us
 with a feed when we pull into town. The Keenagers of Waycross, average age 65 , do a major potluck and listen to our war stories. Our last day's ride is to Brunswick, Georgia, where a dear friend, Marilyn Proper, has arranged for our celebration of yet another U.S. crossing!

in Texas there is a town 22 miles east of Lamesa called Gail. We normally get a great westerly wind that day and decide to ride on to Gail. We then transport the gang back to Lamesa for the night. We phoned "the powers that be" in Gail and the gal who took our call wound up being the one who, over the past several years, has housed our bikes for the night. She has become a real friend who brings a sparkle to our crossing!

## RODNEY...LIKE A SON!

It's difficult to have taken so many people on tour and not have some sadness. The older I get the more friends I accumulate and thus the greater possibility of some sad stories.


It was 20 years ago when I met Rodney Baccus. I was a visiting speaker at a school in the Dominican Republic. Rodney was one of the students, about 17 years old at the time. He later came to Taylor. Rod was a member of the 1985 Circle America team and soon became a Wheels' "groupie", helping staff several Wheels' tours. He lost his father early on and I became a surrogate dad. Rodney's recent Christmas card gives you a glimpse of his feelings for me, as well as Janech:
"Hope all is going well with your recovery. Just know you're never far from my thoughts and prayers for Happiness and Safety. I can't put into words how much you mean to me and how thankful I am for so many ways you have touched and blessed my life. It seems so vivid, the day I first met you. I can't believe how the time has flown. Just know in your hearts I love you both as big as Texas. Love always, Rod"

This last spring, during our coast to coast, Rodney was to meet us in Dallas where he planned to join us to finish the second half of the 2004 Coast to Coast. I couldn't get him on the phone a few days prior to Dallas. I wanted to tie up loose ends. Come the day I would pick him up, still no word. Like a dad, I was ready to jump all over his case. I expected to meet him on a particular street corner...no Rodney! Then I received word he was in the hospital and on shaky ground. He'd had an aneurysm! Long story short, within a few days he was gone... 38 years old and much yet to give! Wheels lost a friend and I lost a son!

I know many of you rode with Rodney and would appreciate this update. I'd encourage you to remember his mom in prayer. They were especially close. In fact, if so inclined, send her a note maybe recalling a special memory of Rod. Mom's address: Mrs. Patricia Baccus, P. O. Box 2064, Arlington, Texas, 76004.

## MEXICO TO CANADA

The 2004 Mexico -to-Canada team.


It's no small deal just moving all our equipment 2,000 miles from Upland to near the Mexican Border, plus returning it back to
Upland in one piece!
We touched our feet in Mexico and proceeded toward the Canadian Border some 2,000 miles away. The spirit of this trip was to maximize "the pretty" by biking it and by busing "the not-so-pretty". Sometimes we didn't know what to cut out! One rider wrote: "Thanks for a wonderful, gorgeous trip up US 89! This was the most beautiful collection of nature's scenery that I have ever seen. I told several people that it would be unfair to the other parks and other scenic spots if I were to try to pick the one I enjoyed the most; they were all magnificent." Others wrote,
 feelings. As beautiful as the route was, the day-to-day coordination made the staff "pull out all the stops" early morning to late night!

## The Great Salt Lake on

Mexico-to-Canada ride


Hard to improve on the beauty of the Border to Border.

One surprise visit was just north of Tucson, Arizona. Friends in Tucson had put us on to visiting St. Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery, which was en route for


Riders enjoy church sign.
the day's ride...located "smack dab" in the middle of the desert...hardly any highway signs indicating where it was located. It's only 20 years old; quite literally a garden in the desert! It is run by monks, who have taken the oath of silence. The grounds covered several acres and every inch cultivated to the max. Our girl riders had to wear long dresses provided by the Monastery, and head coverings. The men wore long pants and long sleeve shirts. Wonderful variety for that day! We were seldom without each day having its own special story.

One young guy wrote: "Thank you for organizing such incredible trips as this one and bringing them to within reach of younger riders like Billy, Jason, and myself. I hope other young riders continue to gain interest in touring and all that it has to offer."

## "MOUNTAIN MOMMA"--WEST VIRGINIA SCOOTER RUN

Our love is still bicycling, but a wonderful diversion from biking is riding the 50 cc motor scooter. We just finished our fourth major scooter run, our first being Highway 66, then Arizona Highways National Parks run, Smoky Mountains run, and just this past fall our run in West Virginia. The scooter is a natural step from biking. All the controls are on the handlebars and the speed allows for plenty of looking around at scenery. Most onlookers are more impressed by what we're doing on scooters than on bikes. There's something about the innocence of the scooter..."You mean you rode those things all the way from there to here?"

I don't know what your opinion of West Virginia is, but we traveled 1,200 miles of back roads and the roads were as good as, if not better than, any we've traveled in the U.S. Our route had so many curves that I can't remember a straight stretch much longer than a quarter mile...better than any roller coaster ride in America!

Hand in hand with the West Virginia run, eight scooters traveled with the cyclists on the Mexico-to-Canada run last summer. They put in 3,000 miles a piece. They did a lot of exploring on their own and always had some great stories at the end of the day.

## 19th FALL BREAKAWAY

You've heard of the movie, "The Perfect Storm"? Well, we ran into "The Perfect Weather"! With nothing but storms all around the Midwest, major flooding in Pennsylvania, and the unbelievable hurricanes in Florida, our Fall Breakaway team cycled for seven days down in an alley of $100 \%$ perfect weather! And just about the time we couldn't believe the great weather we were having, we were hosted by five wonderful Lutheran Churches. The warmth of the people and the immaculate care of their
property made for good recovery for our next day's ride. The terrain and road conditions were also major pluses.

The route for this most wonderful run started in Port Clinton, $=$

Ohio, and "snugged" the Lake Erie coastline until the last 30 miles, which took us south to Chautauqua, New York. A major surprise was passing through Cleveland where we rode marked bike lanes and bike paths across the whole city!

If you haven't visited the downtown area of Cleveland, you're in for a real surprise. The Rock and Roll Hall of


Cleveland's Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.
Pennsylvania....what a gorgeous downtown area! Our church home was in the middle of the city, a real ministering church to the inner city. Erie is clean, and dozens of church steeples pierce the sky. Some of the churches are over 100 years old. Many of us visited the churches. These buildings would rival many of the "old-timers" in Europe. The homes along Lake Erie are beautiful. The whole route was "manicured"!

We had a team of 42 , including great staff who knew the ropes. The support equipment ran well, there was little bike maintenance and minimal number of flat tires. The veteran riders celebrated being together and were great hosts to the new riders. Our Fall Breakaway theme was worked around Mattie Stepanek, the young poet who recently died of Muscular Dystrophy. We read each day from his latest book. Our team shirts had a quote from that book on the front of the shirt, which read: "Always remember to play after every storm."

We're going to take a shot at cycling Route 66 through Missouri next year.

Oh, by the way, our first Fall Breakaway was in 1986 to Vermont and each successive year since then we have had a "Fall" run. We just finished our nineteenth. There is hardly a place east of the Mississippi we haven't hit--Washington, D.C., Florida Panhandle twice, New England, northern Michigan, Mississippi River, Kentucky, Four-State tour, North Carolina Outer Banks,

Door County, Illinois, two Canadian runs and south shore of Lake Erie. Over 6,000 miles have been rolled up in cycling these combined trips, not to speak of the thousands of miles traveled getting to and from the rides. I never stop thanking God for the success of the Fall Breakaway rides!

FOOTNOTE: Ed Slaybaugh rode again this year. He is just a few months from turning 90 !

## CHINA--A SURPRISE!

The phone rang and from "out of the blue" a familiar voice, Jeff Powell! Jeff had been a part of our program for several years back in the late '70's. He rode on all our major trips and
 then served as staff. L

China tour biking team. Long story short, Jeff became a successful businessman and through his travels became interested in China. He leased (kinda like owning) a small hotel in Yangshuo, about an hour's flight out of Hong Kong. What a surprise when he said, "Let's go to China and ride bikes!" With a "kinda like owner" of a small 22-room hotel inviting us to China, it sounded good to me. I sent out invitations to several of our "old faithfuls" and bang! We had a team of 20! So, in early October, we were on our way... 16 days in China!

It was a surprise! Wheels has been to China several times, we escorted 30


A major draw of Yengshuo are the giant stone pillars. Chinese across the U.S., so we had to be really "wowed" to top our previous visits, and "wowed" we were! So many highlights! We used the White Lion, Jeff's hotel, as headquarters and spoked out from there each day. Being in the same room most nights was a plus. Most days we took short bike rides into the country. We rode "Specialized Mountain Bikes"- great for most of our off-road travels.


There can't be a harder working people than the Chinese country folk. Most of the rural work is still done by hand. Road crews breaking up highway with pick and shovel, women working
right along side the men, still a common sight. We climbed up 886 steps to a beautiful viewing! It was a rough climb, but following us every step of the way were little Chinese ladies in their 60's fanning us as we struggled upwards, and they were babbling away like school girls, hardly noticing the climb. Of course, we tipped them. Saw some gorgeous caves! The bamboo raft river rides were one

Our famous bamboo raft ride. We're headed over a
 small water fall!
of a kind; great flea market visits; spectacular night show on the river that would rival any New York production. We bused high into the mountains for an overnight with a minority group. They were a people unto themselves, no government intervention.


Feel guilty yet?
For most of us the highlight was a 10 -mile dirt bike ride to a country school. We pulled up to


Rocky schoolyard 10 miles off beaten path. Enough money was raised to pave the area and put in basketball backboards.


Kids singing to he enters the collitry schogly the walled-in elementary school and were welcomed by a couple hundred K through 6th graders. They were neatly lined up, youngest to oldest, and serenading us as we rolled our bikes into the courtyard. The court/playground area was about 75 feet by 100 feet and the playing surface consisted of large gravel stones. Some of the kids were
barefooted. They played on it as if it were grass. Janech shared her now famous animal balloons; we gave them some Frisbees and other game equipment.


Chinese kids with lanech's balloon animals.

It was brought to our attention that a slab of concrete could be laid to cover the area for about $\$ 2,500$. Our gang raised nearly $\$ 4,000$ for the concrete and basketball backboards, plus two

concrete ping-pong tables. Watching the teachers teach and seeing the love the staff had for the rural kids were such blessings!


Our five English-speaking guides brought a wonderful flavor; they were hard to leave behind.

Janech and I didn't know what to expect, but are now READY for our second visit next fall. Yes, this is an invite to any of you who might be interested. You'll not beat the price, but, more importantly, you'll not beat the experience! You know how to contact us... let us know!



Kids from Muncie, Indiana, that Wheels sponsors, using the KitchenRetreat House pool. The pool gets a work out!


Lynda Barker, our hostess for the "Kitchen", and faithfuil housekeeper at the "Kitchen", receiving long-awaited congratulations upon receiving her bachelor degree from Taylor University.


The following came from one of the China team members after returning home from the tour:


| "Mu trix to China was without turmoil or strite, | Concerning my freedoms, J will be forever extolling, |
| :---: | :---: |
| Neverthelers, it affected nuy lite. | Atter deing how a govervment |
| Concerning my living conditions, J will never again holler, | can be so controlling. Concerring mis health, J will |
| After seeing how dome Chinese | never make a scene, |
| live in dqualor: | Having been to an orphanage |
| Concerning my food, I will forever | in Guilin. |
| be quiet, | I give thanke to God for each |
| Atter getting a glimpse of the | bealthy armn and lea, |
| Chinese diet. | After seeing thore crippled and |
| Concerning our water, I will drink |  |
| with cuphonia, | Thank you, Lord, for smuling on |
| Grateful that it doesn't give | me from above; |
| me diambea. | Now help me to dhow the |
| Concerning my jot, J will never Chinese nour low |  |
| bave a misgiving, |  |
| After seeing how some Chinese | By Jon Johnson |
| must eam a living. |  |

## WHEELS' "KITCHEN"

Our wonderful retreat house is almost 25 years old! It continues to grow in popularity. It's booked on a nightly basis through the Holidays. We had a scare last spring. A spark from the fireplace caught the wood shingle porch roof on fire. Fortunately, Sue was at her desk and had the fire department right on it. A beautiful red metal roof has replaced the old wooden one!

## GLEN AND SKIP

Glenn and Skip Day gave Wheels some wonderful years of service as cooks and drivers on numerous
Wheels' coast
 to coasts. We knew we were in good hands when they were on board. "Skipper"-small in stature, but a giant in work output! She asked very little in return. It wouldn't have been much fun doing the coast to coast in those early years without Skip and her husband sidekick. She had been hanging on for years with leukemia. She was given some wonderful grace years through an experimental medical procedure. She and Glenn visited Wheels often and she was her usual and loveable self even in her closing months. "THANKS, SKIP!"

## CLOSING

Having just returned from China is a real shot in the arm for celebrating the freedoms we have here in America! You can still feel the squeeze on practicing anything but the approved form of worship in China. Hand in hand with the lack of freedom in China is the fundamentalist Muslim push to eradicate any other form of worship than their own. What a blessing, our freedom of religion! I'm sure I'm not far off base when I suggest Americans would go down to the last man, woman, and child to preserve this most sacred of Rights.

Wheels' bottom line, still, is wanting to encourage our participants to find their rightful place with God. To this end, we encourage your continued financial help. I'm often asked when I'm going to retire. Well, in spirit I have. I stopped taking a salary a couple years ago and consider keeping this work alive my retirement. I'd be pretty lost if I didn't have Wheels to look forward to each day.

Thanks for your help cheering us on with physical and spiritual support!


Bob and Staff
P.S. "If God had a refrigerator, your picture would be on it. If he had a wallet, your photo would be in it. He sends you flowers every spring. And a sunrise every morning. Face it, he's crazy about you." (Submitted to Guidepost Magazine by Beryl L. Hendrickson)

## ENCOURAGING FEEDBACK:

"Thanks for organizing such a wonderful trip (China). It included biking but it was so much more."
"Wheels gave me some of the best memories of my life!"
"I have been way off track for a while. Those Wheels' trips that I went on changed my life, and I'm tired of wasting any more time."
"I still remember with great affection many of the events and people that came into our lives on that trip!'

What a thrill to have our boys riding with you this summer. I wish I were going."

## 2005 TRIP SCHEDULE

Florida Keys \#1
Florida Keys \#2
Spring Coast to Coast (62nd) Missouri Motor Scooter Run Colorado
Fall Breakaway (Route 66 )
China (tentative dates)

JAN 16-JAN 26
JAN 30-FEB 9
MAR 18-APR 27
JUN 7-JUN 17
JUL 9-JUL 28
SEP 16-SEP 24
OCT 11-OCT 27

