



Late Start

BY **WILLIE WEIR**

Kat and I sat at a table in a gorgeous geodesic home in Crows Landing, California, surrounded by walnut orchards and fruit trees. Hummingbirds flitted about at flowers in the garden outside the window. A thousand-piece jigsaw puzzle lay almost completed on a bureau. The woman preparing our meal of fish tacos while her dog sat patiently nearby was slender, with long, white hair. At first glance, she reminded me of Georgia O'Keefe.

We were in the home of Beth Peters; we'd met Wes and Judy, her son and daughter-in-law respectively, while on a bike trip in Hawaii.

"My mom sure would like to meet you," Wes had told me over beer and homemade pizza.

"Why is that?" I asked.

"She's been a member of the Adventure Cycling Association for 25 years."

Then the stories poured out. I knew I had to meet her.

Kat and I flew down to visit family in Sacramento, and we borrowed my mom's car to drive down to Crows Landing.

We complimented Beth on her stunning home as she delivered our lunch and sat down with us.

She looked around and said, "I love this house because it's kind of like a barn. Outside I'm fine. I just don't like to spend time inside."

Her husband, Clyde (whom everyone called Bill), built their home. Beth married him at the age of 18, and they raised a family together. He passed away a couple of years prior to our visit after a long career of running the orchard and managing several others.

We admired her substantial old-fashioned cookie-cutter collection.

"The boys said when I started collecting cookie cutters I stopped making cookies," she said.

She collected many of those cookie cutters on bike trips. Most of her long-distance touring has been along Adventure Cycling Association's routes. She pedaled the Pacific and Atlantic Coast Routes. She's crossed the country three times on the



ILLUSTRATION: DONGYUN LEE

TransAmerica, Northern Tier, and Southern Tier. She might have cycled every route Adventure Cycling had to offer ... but she got a bit of a late start.

Her sons had introduced her to cycling.

“The boys — I started riding their bikes. And then I got my [Schwinn] SuperSport. Rode it to church and to work all the time. I worked in Crows Landing. It was only two miles. But sometimes I worked at other post offices, and I would ride my bike, or take it along and go for a ride.”

It was the 1970s and the oil crisis loomed. Beth thought everyone should be riding a bike.

Those rides got longer and longer, and then she began to sign up to ride organized century and charity rides. She didn't say how many, but she showed us two road bicycles and said, “That one has 50,000 miles on it, and the other has 60,000.” I figured she rode her fair share.

Her youngest son had introduced her to the idea of bike travel.

“Wes graduated from high school,” she said. “Just had an old bike. Took off for Yosemite, Death Valley, ended up in San Diego.”

That planted a seed. And then there were the articles in *Adventure Cyclist* magazine about the TransAmerica Trail. She announced, “I think I need to do that.”

Her son Wes told her to go for it. And she did.

She signed up for a tour with Adventure Cycling in 1995. She had a custom Caylor bike that wasn't outfitted for touring so Wes helped his mom mount racks using Adel aircraft clamps. The group rode from east to west, and Beth celebrated her 65th birthday in Rawlins, Wyoming. There were nine riders including her. She's still in touch with many of them. In fact the day we visited she had received a card from the tour leader, Tim Carey.

“I just loved riding,” she said. “Seeing all the things — flowers and animals. Came around a curve and saw a fox in the middle of the road. Saw a badger. Loved seeing the old barns. So many old homesteads that are vacant. You can imagine the people that lived there.”

And she experienced the kindness of others that every bike traveler knows.

“One time I was lost. I couldn't find my way to camp,” Beth said. “A bike rider came by. He was training for Paris-Brest-Paris. He rode with me for the rest of the way and showed me where it was.”

Beth loved touring, but it was really hard for her to be away from the love of her life for that long. So Clyde, who wasn't much of a bike rider, retired from managing the orchards and accompanied Beth on her next four adventures. She pedaled and he drove his camper trailer. They each had a set of maps, and every morning they would go over the route and decide where they'd stay. Then Clyde would drive ahead to set up camp and often swing back and meet up with Beth along the route.

While pedaling through San Diego, she broke her chain. So she took the trolley and ended up in a different place than where they'd planned. She got to a pay phone, but Clyde's cell phone wasn't working. She went into a fast food restaurant and used the hand dryer to warm up. He walked into the same restaurant to get a cup of coffee. That's the only reason they found each other.

While on the Northern Tier, they were in North Dakota and had planned to stay at a certain park, but they didn't like it for some reason. They found another campground. There was a group of cyclists there and a couple finally came over and said, “Beth?” It was Pam and Don Morrison, sheep ranchers from New Zealand, whom Beth had met on her first trip.

Many of the antiques (and cookie cutters) that adorn her home came from shops around the country she visited on her bike trips. If she found something she liked, the shopkeepers were always happy to mail it to Crows Landing.

Her last long tour was the first part of the Great Divide Route when she was 74. Unfortunately she had to end her trip early due to a bout of sickness. But she continued to ride. She rode her age in miles on her birthday until she was 81.

After lunch we took a stroll in her garden and walked the dirt roads around her property. An early spring rain had brought up luscious, earthy smells from the flowers, trees, and soil. Her dog, Gabriella, romped out in the fields. Beth showed us the old hen house and the sunroom/greenhouse Clyde had built for her. I could have lingered for days in this paradise.

Beth is what I call a hidden hero — one of those people who do, and have done, amazing things but rarely speak about themselves. She's never had a blog or a fan page on Facebook. In an age where most of us post photos and boast about what we do on a daily basis (“Look, I mowed the lawn!”), her understated accomplishments are inspiring.

Last year, she parked her bikes. She hated to stop riding, but she had two dogs, and they both needed daily walks.

As we were preparing to leave, Beth gave us a large bag of shelled walnuts, and then we strolled out to the fruit trees that had been planted along the creek near the house (orange, lemon, pluot, apricot, plum, pomegranate, and grapefruit). She handpicked and filled a bag with the sweetest oranges we've ever tasted.

Kat asked Beth what she'd say to a young would-be traveler.

She thought awhile and said, “Just do it. And do the best you can. There will always be someone to help.”

As we said our goodbyes, Beth grabbed Kat's hands and said, “Think of the places you'll go.”

It took me aback. Most people comment about all the places they've been, but Beth referred to future trips. Then I realized ... Kat was currently 14 years younger than Beth was when she took her very first trip.

Her son Wes had similar feelings. “Looking back on her trips and thinking that I am only 62, I really should be just starting with adventures!” he said.

Back in our home in Seattle, I thought of all those miles Beth has pedaled and all the experiences she's had. Then I multiplied that by the thousands and thousands of travelers who have been inspired by the Adventure Cycling Association, and it adds up to millions of miles and countless travel memories.

Why do we all do this?

Perhaps Beth summed it up best.

“I just love to ride.” **AG**

Willie Weir is a contributing writer for Adventure Cyclist. You can follow him on Facebook or on Instagram ... where he promises never to post a photo with the caption “Look, I mowed the lawn!”