



The Rest of the Story

BY JOELLE BUFFA

→ WHEN people ask how long I've been cycling, I say it probably started in the womb. My love of cycling is undoubtedly genetic. My parents met on a group ride of Chicago's Crystal Cycle Club, an affiliate of the League of American Wheelmen, in 1939. Growing up I listened to dinner-table stories of their courtship days sharing bicycle-train and bicycle-ferry rides. These excursions carried riders and their wheels to scenic riding spots outside the Chicago area. They had jumped on the bicycle bandwagon's renewed popularity of the 1930s.

Their riding dates notwithstanding, Dad was a more hardcore cyclist than Mom. He liked to travel and couldn't afford a car during the Depression, so in the 1930s he did a number of long-distance bike tours. In 1937, 23-year-old Joseph Buffa rode around Lake Michigan — a distance of 1,350 miles — in two weeks. I have a yellowed newspaper article about this journey showing him on a single-speed racing bicycle with his touring gear: a blanket rolled around some extra clothes strapped on top of a rear rack. His bicycle had wooden rims. Lightweight and rainproof touring gear hadn't been invented, but I remember Dad demonstrating how he could pick up his 22-pound racer with one finger.

One of my few regrets in life is not having had the opportunity to develop a relationship with my father as an adult, as I have enjoyed with my mother. That changed during the summer of 2010 when my husband Clyde and I rode the TransAm Trail from Neskowin, Oregon, to our home on the Eastern



Shore of Virginia.

New perspectives and transformed relationships aren't uncommon results of a cross-country tour. My story is unusual since Dad passed away 30 years ago.

During my early grade-school days, Dad would meet me at noon on the corner near school. We would walk home and eat lunch together while listening to *Paul Harvey's News and Comment* on the radio. Paul Harvey's way of delivering the often quirky news bits in folksy language with dramatic intonations was my Dad's favorite. Paul would begin each program with, "Hello Americans, you know what the news is, and in a minute you're going to hear," and after a dramatic pause, "the rest of the story." Paul would set the hook for each story — a blend of mystery and history — at the start of the "Rest of the Story," which always contained an unexpected twist or poignant ending to be delivered before he signed off with his iconic clipped, "Good Day."

Before leaving on our cross-country adventure, we paid a visit to Dad's grave in Chicago. My father taught me how to ride my first bike — a bright red one I got for Christmas just before my fifth birthday. I'm not a religious or spiritual person but it seemed appropriate to ask Dad to be on our side during our ride across the U.S.

I started holding him to that as we rode through Oregon in late May. Locals assured us that it was the soggiest spring in memory. Dad seemed to be listening, though, because small patches of blue sky usually followed us around. Warm, dry cafés full of friendly, welcoming folks unexpectedly materi-

alized in the middle of nowhere during the worst downpours.

By the middle of July we'd hit the flatlands of eastern Colorado and its 100-degree plus temperatures. We would ride in an oven for the next month. How was Dad going to protect us now? Were we on our own? We congratulated ourselves about our decision, made when we were planning our trip, to sleep in a bed whenever possible and eat most of our meals in restaurants. Although we carried camping gear and used it when motels or cyclists' lodging were unavailable along the TransAm, we slept in air-conditioned bliss most nights.

One day, as I was sweating and puffing up one of the endless roller-coaster hills in the Missouri Ozarks, it hit me. I began to laugh. Clyde, worried the heat was getting to me, sent me a questioning glance. "The banana didn't fall too far from the bunch," I grinned. Concern growing he replied, "Here, if you're out of bananas, you can have one of mine — but in this heat you should probably drink more water."

Excited about my startling insight, I babbled, "You know, we're doing this tour exactly in Dad's style." I recited a remembered quote from that yellowed newspaper article, "I don't camp out nor do I cook my own meals," Joe Buffa had said. "The former is too uncomfortable and latter takes too much time."

Making our way through Kansas, I recalled that one summer during the Depression Dad rode from Chicago to Kansas and back to work on a farm. I never learned much about that trip, but I hoped he'd had the good sense to avoid July. I also wished he was still around to ask about the route he had taken, and if he'd resorted to camping in the pleasant small town parks like we did.

It was in Kentucky, a state that Dad had never mentioned cycling through, that I felt the strongest bond with him. It was August 14, our 66th riding day and our fourth straight week of riding in 100-degree heat. We'd dubbed that day the "Tour de Mini-Mart" because we stopped at every small gas station/grocery/deli along the way to buy a cold drink, snack, or sandwich; anything for an excuse to seek refuge from the heat. Then at 5:00 PM, a downpour and

Wheels Away Vacation



JOE BUFFA

A regular summer visitor at Tomahawk, Buffa, weary of spending the summer in the customary manner, hopped on his bicycle and pedaled from Chicago, his home, around Lake Michigan and through Tomahawk on his way back home. Buffa made the trip in two weeks, covering 1,300 miles and averaging about 100 miles a day.

snapped gear cable stopped us in Sonora, Kentucky. We were 12 miles short of our intended destination. Our Adventure Cycling maps indicated that Sonora had neither motel nor campground. We found shelter under the awning of the Blanchard's Family Salvage Grocery. I went inside to buy a snack while Clyde worked unsuccessfully at removing the broken-off bit of cable with his emergency tool kit.

Upon hearing our predicament, the store's proprietor Al Blanchard called his wife Ann to ask if he could bring home stranded cyclists for dinner and the night. It was our first home stay of the trip. After a wonderful dinner, which included vegetables from their garden, Al — a retired tool-and-die maker — set about fixing Clyde's bike problem. He had a full shop with the tools of his trade in his garage. Al un-jammed the broken end of the cable from the housing in a

few minutes, allowing Clyde to replace the cable with the spare from our tool kit.

So, what are the odds of breaking down on the road in front of a retired tool-and-die maker's store? How did it happen that someone who had never invited cyclists into their home, even though Mr. Blanchard said he'd, "seen plenty over the years and had wondered about their travels," would do so on that day?

Dad was a tool-and-die maker for over 40 years. And now, as Paul Harvey would say, you know the rest of the story. 

Joelle Buffa is a retired wildlife biologist. Her self-supported bicycle tours have included New Zealand, part of the Northern Tier, and the Great Parks North Route from Missoula to Jasper. In 2012, she cycled around Lake Michigan, with husband Clyde Morris and friend Ken Wild, to commemorate the 75th anniversary of her father's 'Round Lake Michigan ride in 1937.