



FREEWHEELER NEWS

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My First 60 Years of Biking

by Jack Brohal

Bike Angel Number One

Way, way back in 1950, I was a tall, skinny, but not very happy kid of 13. At age 5 infected tonsils had done some serious damage to my heart valves and left me with rheumatic fever. The standard treatment for rheumatic fever in those days was 6 months of bed rest and then severely restricted physical activity. For me that meant no sports of any kind! In fact I was not even allowed to take gym class in school. So while all the other kids were playing ball, I had spent eight years only able to watch. Now as an adolescent 13 year old, my self esteem was in the dumpster. My school marks were barely passing and, no doubt, I was probably headed for big trouble. The one exception to the physical activity ban was that I had a bicycle. I often rode my third hand Sears Elgin bike up to the local park and hung around while the other kids were playing baseball or something. This park had been constructed with a road around its perimeter and often on warm evenings a strange little parade of bike riders would be circling the one mile loop. Now don't forget this was 1950 and in those days it was very rare to see adults on a bicycle. At most, I might see some woman my mother's age, wobbling around the block on her daughter's balloon tire Schwinn. However for me to see this string of 4 or 5 guys dressed in colorful jerseys and black tight shorts, on these *racing* bikes was mighty unusual to say the least. If I tried to ride that one mile circle, they would buzz by me two or three times before I had done even one lap. Their bikes were amazing to me. They seem to fly compared to my Elgin and my Elgin was actually a **two** speed! The Elgin also had thinner tires than the other kids' "fat tire" bikes, but my tires certainly didn't hum like the ones on those flying racing bikes. I began making more frequent trips to the park, just to try to get a better look at those magic machines. I started fantasizing that if I had a bike like that, I would be faster than anyone. It was not a very realistic fantasy, considering my thus-far non-athletic life, but kids are often unrealistic and *some* do a lot of dreaming.....

As the weather grew colder the bike riders dwindled and then finally there were none. I did not stop thinking about them though. One evening I was dividing my attention between homework and listening to Jack Benny on the radio (no TV yet). My father sat in his easy chair under his vile omnipresent Chesterfield cloud, reading his Newark Evening News. Out of the blue gray haze he said to me, "How'd you like to go see a bike race?" I nearly choked on my pencil eraser and was now more certain than ever that he could read my mind. How else could he possibly know of my secret bicycle fantasy? That Wednesday night we drove over to the next town and walked into the high school gym. As I sat in the bleachers, I wondered just how they were going to race bicycles on this little basketball court. Then some guys started bringing in some big treadmill-like rollers and a large clock-like dial. There were a set of red rollers and a set of blue ones and the big dial in-between had two large hands, one red and one blue. Then the same guys started wheeling in their bikes and my eyes were glued on those shining machines. A helper held a bike on top of the red set of rollers while a rider climbed on. He started pedaling and the two rollers under his rear wheel also turned the roller under his front wheel, by means of a belt. These rollers were about a foot and a half wide and around 10 inches in diameter. The helper let go and the rider was balancing on his own. The same thing was happening over on

the blue rollers and soon the heavy wooden rollers began to rumble with the two bikers pedaling fast but going nowhere. The blue rollers were attached by a thin rod and gear system to the blue hand on the big dial, likewise the red one, so as the rider pedaled his corresponding hand turned as well. There was an announcer who told us that the race would be one mile from a standing start, or ten laps of the hands on the big dial. Since the riders feet were strapped to the pedals they had to be held up, when they were not pedaling. Helpers stepped up to the riders and held their bikes. The announcer fired a starting pistol and the two riders started pedaling furiously and the helpers stepped back. For nine laps the lead see-sawed back and forth and beads of sweat started flying off the heads of the hard working riders. On the tenth rotation of the dial hands, the guy on the red rollers grimaced and his legs became a blur as his red hand surged ahead to victory. There was a whole series of races and even though I was a little disappointed in not seeing a "real bike race," I was still very excited to be that close to all those great bikes. It turned out that my dad worked with one of the riders. This guy had won his race on *the most beautiful* of all the beautiful bikes there. It was all polished chrome and it sparkled like silver jewelry. My dad walked me over and introduced me to his buddy from work, Walter Crawford. Walter asked me how I liked the races and I of course said, with great enthusiasm, that I loved it. Walter then asked me if I thought I would like to try it. I blurted that I would love to try it, as soon as I could save enough for a racing bike. Inwardly I knew the chances of that were less than slim. These were obviously very expensive hand-made machines and my income that winter was limited by how much snow fell and needed to be shoveled for the more elderly of our neighbors. It was lean times back in those post-war days. My mother and father both worked hard, but there was barely enough money for essentials, none for bicycles of any kind, especially not this kind. Then Walter Crawford, a man I had just barely met, said that if I wanted to try bike racing he would sponsor me. He said that the bike game was in dire need of new riders, since many had been lost in the war (WW2) and some like him, were retiring to raise a family. I was already worried that I might be dreaming, when he said the words that changed my life forever. "Why don't you take this bike home with you?" That night I didn't get much sleep. I sat on the side of my bed and listened to our big old cherry trees rustle softly against the side of our house in the winter night wind. I still was having a hard time believing it wasn't just a dream, but I went down to the basement, checked and there really *was* a beautiful track racing bike hanging up in my cellar!

My First Club and the Bikes We Rode

And so began my life on two wheels. Thanks to Walter I was quickly absorbed into the bike fraternity and became a member of the Bay View Wheelmen in Newark, NJ. Hard to believe, but Newark, NJ in the early 1900's had no less than three velodromes and was considered "The bike racing capital of the world!" Bike racing as a sport in this country was at its peak at that time, and professional racers from all over the world came to Newark to compete for big money. The Bay View Wheelmen's grand old clubhouse was a ghost from that almost forgotten era. Located on South 6th Street, it was so named because when it was built you could see Newark Bay from its windows. But by 1950 when I joined, the neighborhood had declined severely, to say the least. Those bay view windows had been boarded up and would have only looked out on the depressing decay of urban blight anyway. But when you walked up the front stairs and entered the foyer of that grand old club house, there were many big cases filled with huge old tarnished victory cups and medals with faded ribbons. Then as you entered the spacious ball room, you were greeted by a peloton of 8 foot tall, old faded black & white photographs of every great rider that ever rode in those golden years. Famous guys like Frank Kramer, Mile-a-Minute Murphy, "Iron Man" Reggie McNamara, Major Taylor, etc. etc. etc. lined every wall, all posed on their bikes, even though most had ridden away to that big bike track in the sky years before. Their bikes still lived on though! Indeed in 1950, I and my fellow club members rode and raced those old track bikes on the road. This was partly due to the fact that in the post war years there was not a lot of new equipment available, and a lot of us couldn't afford to buy it even if we could find it.

So at that time, most of us were riding old fixed gear track bikes with sew-up tires and one inch pitch chains. While our bikes of today all use ½" pitch (a tooth every half inch), the track bikes of that time had a tooth only every inch. I guess the bigger chain was thought to be necessary for the stress of track racing, but it certainly was heavy and bulky. There was almost no aluminum in use then either. The frames were all steel, crank sets were cotted three piece steel and handlebars and extensions were also steel. Track bikes generally have no brakes! We simply wore a heavy fingerless glove on our right hand and used it to grab the front tire, as we back pedaled as hard as possible. You see with fixed gear your feet are always turning and there is no way to coast, so in order to slow down you try to retard the pedals as hard as you can. Although we often climbed steep hills, we tried to avoid going down any real steep ones, especially if they had busy intersections or other obvious hazards on them. My wheels for training had wooden rims! They too were relics left over from prewar racing days. I did however have a pair of wheels, for racing, which had aluminum Fiammi rims from Italy. On those we sometimes did use a front rim brake and in fact were required to do so, in races like the Tour of Somerville, etc. Our tires were all sew-ups, also known as tubular tires. They were hand made from two or three plies of very light silk or cotton fabric. Sewn up inside the fabric casing was the tube, which was made from super thin rubber. Sew-ups hold very high air pressure and because the whole tire/rim combination is so light, they corner and accelerate much faster than even the lightest clincher. Putting one on the rim was a long process that started with a trip to the hardware store to buy a bag of dried bugs! You see we glued the tires on with shellac, which is made from dried shellac bugs! So I would mix these bug carcasses with alcohol until I got a very thick sticky paste and then brush a coat on the rim and another on the base of the tubular tire. The next day rim and tire would receive another coat. After four or five coats, I would put the tire on and pump it up and let it sit for at least a week. Tires put on in this fashion did not roll off on turns and in fact were only able to be removed with a screwdriver carefully forced between tire and rim and worked slowly around the whole circumference of the wheel. If we flatted while out training, we put a spare tire on with sticky double faced tape (we always carried one or two spare tires as they roll-up quite small). This tape was not secure enough to do any sharp turning, so once home it was back to the shellac can. The main difference in mounting tubular tires nowadays is that there are fast drying synthetic glues that can be used instead of shellac, so today a sew-up tire can be mounted and ridden immediately. However, I understand that the old shellac system is still used even now sometimes, on steeply banked indoor tracks for instance. Some other big differences in equipment should be mentioned. Our pedals were all fitted with toe clips (those infamous little baskets) and straps. Our shoes also had cleats with deep groves that really locked you to the bike. In order to get out of your pedals you had to reach down and release the strap. You got pretty quick at doing that. No one wore helmets while training, or on so called "pleasure rides". During races we were required to use them, but they were just skinny tubular leather things, stuffed with horse hair or something and offering almost no protection at all. They were euphemistically known as leather hair nets. In bike racing, if you didn't have a crash or two a season, you might be riding too timidly. It's amazing we survived, but most of us did (although *some* of us do show the sad effects of too many crashes without a hard hat, daah).

Newark in the fifties was starting to look like WW2 had occurred right there. There were blocks and blocks of burnt out buildings and it was hard to believe this place had ever been anything else, but if you knew where to look, there were still some remnants of its former days as a bike racing Mecca. There was Mrs. Selinger on 13th St. who worked in the crowded back pantry of her house and made great wool shorts and jerseys from some nylon-like material. She would often repair these with new panels after you had a spill. If she liked you she would fix them free. There was Paul John who made Pye tires in his garage over near the Irvington line. These tires were the absolute best you could get and he only charged fifteen dollars a pair for his cotton six day tires and twenty a pair for the lightest silk ones (about 180 grams each). But the most unforgettable person of all was Pop Brennan, who with his two sons ran a bike shop. Pop was a grand old gen-

tleman who was never too busy to help us kids with bike problems, or anything at all relating to biking. He was a guru that had been a racer himself, then a famous mechanic at Madison Square Garden six day bike races. He built frames to order and could do anything and everything. He made me a set of oversized handlebars for my extra large hands while I watched. He also saved me from making a very big mistake once, but you have to ask me about that one, it's not for publication.

Racing in the Early Fifties

The governing body of bike racing in the US in those days was the Amateur Bicycle League, or ABL. The US did not belong to the world cycling federation until much later. Some people, at that time, erroneously thought we would never be able to compete with the Europeans, so why bother joining their federation. I started racing as a "junior" and there was actually a younger class known as "midgets" that rode scaled down bikes, with 24" wheels. You became a "senior" when you turned seventeen. There was also a so called "old timers" class which started at age 35. The women's class was all age inclusive, but I don't think I ever saw a race with more than three women. There just were not many women riding back then. As far as pure recreational riders, there were not too many of them either. With a few notable exceptions, like Bob Geddis, most of the pleasure riders I knew, were actually retired racers. Incidentally Bob Geddis was one of the first guys I ever saw on a derailleur road bike. He had a bright yellow Bartelli and rode with me on my first century, from the Bay View Clubhouse in Newark to Princeton and back. Some of the old retired racers along on that ride were former pros. However we were not professionals and we were not allowed to race for cash. Some races got around that, by having "merchandise certificates" on the prize list. Of course we always quietly cashed them in. The loss of amateur status would have been fatal though, since in 1950 there just were no professional races anymore at all in the U.S. Likewise all the old board track velodromes in the east had mysteriously burnt down, or were bulldozed for parking lots or some such thing. We mostly raced on public roads and dirt horse racing tracks, Johnson Park in New Brunswick for instance. My first race was in Brookdale Park, the very same park I had first watched my four phantom riders circling around. It was sixty years ago, but I remember it like it was yesterday.....

It had only been a few months since Walter had so generously loaned me his beautiful bike. He had spent his Sundays riding along with me on another old beater bike of his, while teaching me as many things about bike handling and such that he could. After only a few months of tentative riding, I was still a very uncertain, timid novice, to say nothing of actual fitness, or more correctly, the lack of it. Long before I was anywhere near ready, I was entered in my first open race. After a restless night, race day was upon me. I got dressed in my black wool shorts and bright shiny racing jersey. Then I got that beautiful chrome track bike out, pumped up its silk tires, and rode gingerly up to the park. The roads had just a hint of dampness from an early morning sprinkle, but the sun was shining down brightly through the new leaves of May. The people in my little town were still having their second cup of Sunday morning coffee and the aroma wafted out open windows and mingled with the wonderful fragrances of the springtime of my 13th year. My emotions were ranging wildly from boyish optimism, to utter fear and trepidation..... I reached down often to brush off those very light silk racing tires. They were humming along on 150 lbs. of air pressure, pinging over gravel and minor street debris. It wouldn't take more than a little piece of glass to puncture them, and I surely didn't want to have a flat at a time like this. When I got to the park loop road, there were lots of riders already warming-up. Now the smell of wintergreen rubdown oil overpowered and pervaded the clean crisp morning air as each rider zoomed by me. Boy, these guys *are* really fast, I thought. I found Walter and my dad standing with the crowd on the top of the hill near the finish line and I waited anxiously for my race to be called. As I stood there, I couldn't take my eyes off a table that was filled with a dozen or so big gold plated trophies. Surely one of them would be going home with me today..... Finally the loud speaker crackled and squeaked out that the juniors should line up. I glanced around at the other guys, trying to size them up with-

out being too obvious. I was 13, they looked much older and there was a mob of them! The starter's gun banged and we surged forward as though we had been shot from the starter's gun ourselves. I swallowed my fear and tried to hold my little place in that tight field of charging, aggressive, intimidating guys. They were pushing and cutting here and there, and some were even yelling stuff like "Watch out jerk! Get out of my way or you're going down!" I started slipping back in the pack. Now we were blasting down the hill elbow to elbow! There was total disregard of what seemed like a certain, very scary crash, to the blacktop! I threw all my remaining caution to the wind and spun the cranks as hard as I could..... It didn't seem possible, but they were still pulling away. I struggled with all my might, but felt my strength waning and my legs turning to overcooked macaroni..... Off the back and slipping into no man's land, I watched the pack speeding away from me. My despair was almost unbearable, and I straggled in dead last. Walter came over and told me not to worry. He said that I really should not expect to start doing anything in open races for quite awhile. He said that juniors of 15 up to 17 had the big advantage and I was lucky having started so early at age 13. Slowly he got me to understand what it was going to take. He had no formal degrees but he was the best coach I could have ever found, and in no small way he had changed my life forever.

Although I spent every spare minute riding, my first years of competition in open races were somewhat disappointing to me. I had managed to become club champion and was very adept at winter roller racing competition, but open road races were another story. I seldom got better than third or fourth place. Then fate was kind to me again and one day while I was out putting on those endless training miles, I bumped into a rare local rider, who just happened to be looking for a training partner. His name was Jim Lauf and he had a tremendous wealth of experience that he had gained while living and bike racing in Belgium for a few years. He had ridden many track and road races over there and later was a member of the US Olympic team to Helsinki Finland. Jim and I would do sprints two or three nights a week and the surprising thing was, that even though he was light years better than me, not to mention he was 28 and I only 16, I was occasionally taking him (in practice at least). Therefore Jim could not understand why I wasn't winning my open junior races. He finally figured out that I was not a come from behind kind of sprinter. Generally in the final sprint, the second or third place rider uses the draft of the leaders to his advantage and then slingshots past them in the final meters. I was just not too good at doing that. Jim thought my strength was better than my jump. He thought I had the stuff to hold off my rivals if I got my big gear cranking and went out hard at precisely the right moment. I did as he said and lo and behold, I started winning races and in 1954 became NJ State Junior Road Champion, Eastern Dirt Track Champion and won quite a few other races as well.

My doctor, who had been totally unaware of my bicycling, happened to see my name on the sports page and was extremely irate that I had disobeyed his ban on physical activity. He told me and my parents that I would most likely have a heart attack before long. I told him that I felt fine and planned to continue riding. He said, "Well get a new doctor then". I did! When I finally started winning races, my self confidence started climbing up out of the cellar it had been in for so many years and my school grades started soaring! From a kid who was barely passing last year, I was now a member of the "National Honor Society!" My new found confidence also did amazing things for me in other ways too. I found that I had a sudden ability to hit a baseball farther than most of those kids who had never before wanted me on their teams. In retrospect, it wasn't just winning some bike races that awakened my self-confidence and self-esteem; it was also my sudden ability to travel far and wide on my own. By age fifteen I had ridden up to Niagara Falls with three other guys, just for a training/pleasure ride. I often would travel out of the state and sometimes to Canada to compete in races, while most of the other kids I knew were not traveling anywhere yet on their own. I now had an after school job in the next town and would ride to work on a Rudge three speed that I had won in a race. The bike store owner, Matt Engle from Germany, was Amateur **World** Sprint Champion in 1938! Matt ordered me my first road racing bike from Fritz Kutke in Cologne Germany. At that time it was a state of the art eight speed,

with double steel chainrings and a four speed Huret derailleur in the rear. The frame was double butted steel tubing with beautiful fancy lug work and the Weinmann rims were aluminum outside, but had wood cores under the aluminum. The wheels had wing nuts; quick release had not been invented yet.

The Bay Views were unfortunately falling apart and I felt I had to move on. At age 16, I joined the French Sporting Club in NY City. They were a much more present day club, rather than the Bay View's antique leaning on the past. Sometimes I would ride my bike from my home in Bloomfield, NJ to Central Park, Manhattan to compete in their club races. My Sunday morning route took me down the shoulder of busy state highway 3 to Weehawken, where I took the old ferry to 42nd St., then rode right through Times Square and turned up 5th Ave. to Central Park. I would compete in the club races and ride back home. Once or twice I did this while carrying a pair of lighter racing wheels strapped over my shoulder. There was less traffic in those days, but I still can't believe I did that. My dad was very good about driving me to races though, and we raced every Wednesday evening over in Flushing at the old World's Fair Grounds. Sundays in May, June and July there were events all over the Eastern States and often my dad would drive me, as I at 16 was still not yet a legal driver. When I won the States I was given train fare by the ABL to Saint Louis, MO to ride in the Nationals. I took the train out, but drove home with the NY State Junior Champ. We had tied for fifth place in St. Louis and had a ball on that road trip home. It was my summer of '54 and the end of innocence. Some of my French Club mates were into driving way up to Delhi, Ontario to ride a board track up there. It was a tiny thirteen lap to a mile track that was built inside of a big old barn. In the winter the track came down and the barn became a hockey palace. The problem was those pipes for freezing the ice-rink remained and became a nasty place to land on when crashing off the fifty-five degree walls of the track. Most of the races were 6 day style team races, so with 7 teams there were fourteen riders zooming around in that tiny wooden bowl. Crashes were frequent and often bad. But the races were very exciting and the local tobacco farmers, mostly Flemish people, loved it and bet on us heavily.

Around age twenty I became disenchanted with bicycle racing. Probably the lack of women riders didn't help. I realized now how foolish that was and know I should have continued to ride on "pleasure" rides at least. But fast cars and fast motorcycles seduced me away from the bicycle sport. It turned out, not for long though. I had a Vincent Black Shadow motorcycle, highly modified, and was racing on it now. One day I was out tuning it up as I rode along a quiet road in the next town. So great was my stupidity, it did not enter my mind that I was going way too fast, and I tooted around like I was totally alone and could do anything I wanted. The police clocked me at one hundred and fifteen miles an hour and it was a school zone. Needless to say and rightfully so, I was back on my bicycle and riding it to work every day, a twenty five mile RT commute. After a few weeks I decided since I was riding a bike anyway, I might as well get back into racing. It was another lesson in humility. It's not easy to come back to competition after you lay off a season. I had a few small successes, but my fleeting days of minor glory were obviously gone forever. And like so many other minor athletes, "the name died before the man."

Bike Angel Number Two

By age 30, I was married and deep into the struggle of trying to support my growing family. I had become grossly overweight, I had high pressure jobs, a stressful marriage and I was definitely a heart attack waiting to happen. Soon after getting married I had sold all my old racing bikes and spent the money on furnishing our first house. Years later I had a Snap-On Tool route and one of my favorite stops was a bicycle store. While selling the bike mechanics tools, I stumbled on three Schwinn Paramounts, including the very same track Paramount I had won the state championship on many years before! The store was on its way out and over the next few months, I was able to get a fantastic deal on those three bikes. In the ensuing years, I would drag the chrome Paramount out every once in a while and ride over to my aunt and uncle's house about six

miles away. They were amazed that anyone could do that, but I felt very bad that was all I could do and barely do at that. It seemed like there just was no time for such frivolous stuff as bicycling. Since we had a third child we needed a bigger house and moved to Sparta, NJ. That Christmas we were at a neighborhood party and I met a guy from the next street. His name was Al Bergeron and he was one of Sparta's many pilots, actually a captain for TWA. Somehow he knew I was a former racer and he persuaded me (he was a great persuader and a great person) to get my rusty bike down off the hook in the garage and go riding with him and a doctor friend. They took me up to hilly Vernon and I came very close to needing the good doctor's help. I was all right on the way out, but after lunch it became obvious that I was in big trouble. Al, who was in great shape, rode alongside of me and literally pushed me up every hill on the thirty mile route back home. I was quite mortified and vowed silently to get back into shape, just to punish him. I had basically been off the bike for over ten years, unless I count the little six mile rides I did once or twice a year to my aunt's house. I was also way too heavy and my health was the worst it has ever been in my life. There is no doubt in my mind that Al by "recycling" me, saved me from an early death. I started riding regularly, just so I could stay with him on our little rides around Sparta. It took me a long time before I was even close to that goal [*Sadly in August '05 leukemia took Al away from us. I think of him many times each day and miss him very much*].

It was now the late seventies and bicycling had changed dramatically since I was a teenage racer. There were many clubs springing up that just did pleasure/recreational rides. There were also lots of century rides that attracted both men and women to ride a hundred miles for a patch or tee shirt. Al and I did dozens of them and then we both got tandem bikes so we could take our kids along. We went to rallies and we both joined bike clubs.

I heard that the Central Jersey Bike Club had this "LONGEST DAY RIDE" and in '83 I joined up with them just to ride it. It became an annual event for me and I rode it yearly to '93, sometimes riding back north the next day too. I skipped a few years and did it for the last time in '96. I had become a mileage junkie and couldn't seem to get enough. Two Jersey Doubles were also done and when I heard about Paris-Brest-Paris, I knew I wanted to ride that one too. It was necessary to do a series of qualifying "brevets" just to be allowed to ride the main event in France. The first brevet was 200K, a mere 126 miles, no problem. The next one was 300K, than 400K and finally 600K which is 375 long miles. These events were all timed and you ride around the clock, so lights are required. The year was 1987; I was fifty that year and maybe it was a symptom of my age, but I went to France and rode the 750 mile PBP event with 3,000 other riders from all over the world. That ride is another whole story, so I'll skip the details here, but to say the least, it was a tremendous experience.

The following year 1988, I teamed up with Muriel Mota and we rode tandem on the Longest Day together. I remember starting out from the Holiday Inn in Port Jervis on that June morning. It was still predawn black as we pedaled my old Gitane tandem slowly up the north face of High Point Mountain on the shoulder of route 23. Once at the top we waited at the Monument for the first glimmer of dawn. With five AM as our official start time we blasted down Route 23 south and turned right on 519. After struggling up some steep little hills we got into Newton and picked up Rt. 206. In those days we stayed on the shoulder of 206 all the way into Princeton. Now of course 206 has become way too busy to do that safely. We were flying and got up over fifty on some of the downhills. When we got to the lunch stop in Crosswicks before 9:30, I said to Muriel, "Do you realize we just rode 100 miles in four hours and twenty minutes?" I asked her if she wanted to see how fast we could do the whole two hundred in, and she said let's go for it! Well there are rumors I didn't allow bathroom stops, but that's just not true. The second hundred is flat, but not surprising, it is harder. After all, you've already done one century, the next one is bound to be a little harder..... We were still making great time and were only fifteen miles from the lighthouse when we got a flat on the rear wheel. The rubber rim strip had broken and I had to wrap the rim with electrical tape to take its place. I quick put in a new tube and pumped it up and got the show back on the road, but we had lost around fifteen minutes. We pedaled furiously and reached the lighthouse in eleven hours and three minutes. It was two hundred

miles even, to the tenth! It was also my fastest Longest Day ever and at that time, Muriel and I had a combined age of one hundred and ten! What a woman and what a rider she is!

Early MAFW Trips

Back in '82 I had also joined The Morris Area Freewheelers. We were a new club then and had only a handful of riders. It was the nice trips they took that interested me. In '84 they were going to England and France and I wanted to go too, but since Jackie my first wife was not a rider, a tandem was the only solution. Jackie was too tall for my old Gitane and custom tandems were scarce then and unaffordable to me anyway. So I set to work building my own frame from an Ishiwata tandem tube set that I had purchased from Bike Warehouse (later renamed Bike Nashbar). I spent two months brazing the frame together and barely finished it the day we were leaving! We hadn't even test ridden it and it was time to dash off to England and France! Arriving in Gatwick airport, we 18 Freewheelers all put our panniers and camping gear on our bikes and rode directly out into Merry Old England. Wobbling around roundabouts in the wrong direction, dodging a myriad of little ant-cars that were all dashing around the anthill on the wrong side, with a stoker that was not at all a biker, was me frantically trying to control an overloaded, untried homemade tandem, whose paint was still wet! It was a very shaky, almost disastrous, start to a trip that soon became fairytale wonderful and beautiful beyond dreams!

The following year MAFW went to Scotland and I took the tandem over again, this time with my ten year old son as my stoker. We rode through Highlands and Hebrides and had a great time together. After two weeks of tandeming in Scotland, my son Glen and I did another week in Ireland. The year was 1985; leaded gas was banned, Rock Hudson died of AIDS and my first doctor, who said riding would kill me, was long dead too. I was nearing fifty and still going strong, doing double centuries, etc. One of the rides we did every year back then was the Pocono Century. It started at Scranton U with a mixed-message from the ride chairman to the 200+ eager riders. "Now this is not a race! Obey all traffic rules, keep to the right, stop for red lights" and incidentally the first riders in each class get these great big trophies! Before you were even out of Scranton there was a seven mile mountain and it's a mighty steep mountain too. In 1987 I was in good shape, due to training for PBP, doing the qualifiers etc, so I finished first over fifty, first over forty and seventh overall. They asked me what trophy I wanted and since I could only have one, I took the one for seventh overall and was proud to get it.

When I was doing that ride in the early 80's, I noticed the woman's class was won perennially by a NJ rider named Lili. In the 80's she was known as "Hilly Lili" and back then usually rode over 10,000 miles a year (how the once mighty have fallen)! Since we were in the same two bike clubs, we often rode together on various rides. Elaine Koplów, the creator of "The Longest Day" ride, was another close friend. She also organized a yearly Memorial weekend trip with twenty or so of us friends, and named it the "Tour de Friends". It was always in a different but nice place every year and we twenty friends all looked forward to it. Unfortunately my first marriage had by then become a case of amputation or the patient would die. It turned out that Lili and I were now in the same boat, so in 1991 we went off to France to ride Paris Brest Paris. Unfortunately after riding over 500 miles Lili had to abandon with both bike and body trouble. I however had a good ride and bettered my time from 1987 by six hours, finishing the 750 miles in 79 hours and 25 minutes. Just before the start we had met a guy named John Hathaway from Vancouver, Canada. John was a very remarkable rider, who was already in the Guinness Book of World Records many times for his extraordinary bicycle world tours. He told us he was planning a tour that would go through all the lower provinces of Canada as well as all the lower 48 states and Mexico in one winding, convoluted, 27,000 mile trip! We told him we would be honored to host him as he passed by. The following year he did show up and stayed with us on his way through NJ. While he was at our place I had the local paper come over and do a write up on this fantastic

guy. They did the article and mentioned me as an old bike rider too. Two weeks after the paper came out, I got a phone call from a guy with a very familiar voice that I hadn't heard for thirty years or more. I said, "Walter where the hell are you? I've been looking all over for you!" It turned out that Walter, that same guy who with one random act of kindness had changed my life forever, was living **right in Newton, less than** twenty miles away! He had read my name in the paper and when he called, he asked in his wavering old voice, "Are you the same Jack Brohal that used to race for the Bay View Wheelmen?" We both cried a lot, but it was a wonderful reunion.

Lili and I did the Canadian Rockies trip with MAFW and hiked and biked from Calgary to Jasper. A very beautiful trip and not extremely hilly riding either, since much of it was on the Ice Fields Parkway which follows the path that sliding glaciers have bulldozed for eons. In '96 we went to Ireland again. Another great trip that found Ireland's economy had improved dramatically since my first visit there in '85. I understand she has not been able to sustain all of it, but it is still a beautiful country and the sod of my ancestors.

From Sea to Shining Sea

In 1997 Lili and I started out from our home here in Blairstown and rode down to Sea Bright, where we did the obligatory wheel dipping thing with our rear wheels in the Atlantic Ocean. We then set out to dip our front wheels into the Pacific Ocean. Three months later we made it to Ruby Beach in Washington State and did just that. We had biked and camped, hiked and fished, visited lots of old friends and made many new ones on the most wonderful trip of our lives. I say that now, but when we were still in PA early in May, the wind was so fierce for days on end that I was ready to jump on a plane, fly out west and let the wind blow us home. Of course anyone who has ridden across west to east, will tell you the wind mostly blows from the east (not true). But after we got down to Virginia the wind was less of a problem and there were only mountains to climb with our 120 lb loaded for anything bikes. As we rode further west the trip just kept getting better and better. There was Jenny Lake and a gorgeous hike up in the Grand Tetons. The next day, **July 1st**, we were in Yellowstone and we camped at Lewis Lake. It was a primitive camp site in the woods at 7,000 feet and we woke up in the morning with an inch and a half of snow on our little tent. We couldn't bike anywhere, so we sat in the tent and Lili cooked grilled cheese sandwiches, which we ate in great numbers. Two days later on July 3rd my 60th birthday, I fished for trout in the famous Madison River in Montana. I caught a beautiful 4 Lb. wild rainbow and after naming him "Walter" we released him to hopefully live an even longer life. Later while Lili was cooking a smaller trout for dinner, a bull moose came charging right past us, narrowly missing our little green tent and leaving us standing there stunned with open mouths! There were eagles and grizzlies too, but thankfully none tried to take my fish. The page of my trip journal when we reached the Pacific reads:

We biked down and down through long green corridors of giant conifers with the snow capped Olympic Mountains looking over our shoulders. All of a sudden there were blue waves rolling up on a wild beach. Lili and I just stood there watching the late afternoon sun shimmering on the Pacific and could not find any words that were grand enough, to express what we were feeling. Over 6,000 miles through 14 states and 3 provinces, at least 5 national parks, dozens of state parks and forests, and many, many great people along the way. We had endured and enjoyed, suffered and delighted more than any words could ever say! We kissed, drank wine and put up our tent right on the edge of the ocean, watched the sun sink into the sea and fell asleep to the sound of the surf.....

We circled the Olympic Peninsula, ferried out to the San Juan Islands and just relaxed out there for three weeks. Our tent was pitched on the very end of a point of land that reached out into Puget Sound and the resident pod of orcas (about seventy then, but unfortunately now dwindling) came at least once a day to

frolic and feed right in front of us. They often were only yards away! The sunsets were absolutely, incredibly, beautiful. Sometimes we would ride down to Friday Harbor, stopping along the way to fill our water bottles with wild raspberries. Once in Friday Harbor we hit the ice cream parlor, put the razzies on homemade vanilla, sat on the deck and watched the boats coming and going for hours. We eventually ferried over to Vancouver, visited Butchart Gardens, rode down to Victoria City, had high tea in the extravagantly fancy, Empress Hotel in our biking clothes and then rode right up to SeaTac Airport. We flew back in one night, over what we had for the past four months, lived and enjoyed every inch of. Enjoyed more than my words can ever tell! If you're thinking about biking across and you can find the time to do it without rushing, do it! For me it was the ride of my lifetime.

The East Coast Trail

Two years later in '99, Lili and I took our bikes to Florida on Amtrak and biked north up the East Coast Trail. We hugged the coast for awhile and while we were out on the outer banks of NC were marooned by a fierce northeaster. For two days the storm lashed and pounded our little unheated motel room without mercy. Water poured in under the door, till we had to abandon ship and find a drier place a half mile down the road. After the storm we rode up into DC and I remember as we passed one of the dozens of tour busses parked in front of the Lincoln Memorial, the driver leaned out his window and asked where we had come from. We yelled back, "Florida" and the whole bus went wild and started cheering and applauding. I thought to myself how lucky we were to be able to do this trip. We had gotten here under our own power and everything we saw was the sweeter for it. We rode out of DC on the C&O canal tow path and got up to Martinsburg, WV where we joined one of our yearly "Tour de Friends" for a five day trip in Virginia. After that we continued north back home to Blirstown. We spent two days overhauling bikes and resting butts and then we headed north again. In Poughkeepsie, NY we were joined by Lili's son Lee and we then rode up to Concord, MA to Lili's daughter Susie's house. There were two important birthday celebrations to attend, so we parked our bikes and gear in Susie's basement and put the trip on hold for awhile. The first birthday was Lili's aunt's 90th. She lived in Kingston, NH only a short drive from Susie's, but the other birthday was Lili's mom's 95th. She lived in Santa Barbara, CA, so we all hopped on a plane and flew out there. It was the best of times and the worst, because it became necessary for Lili's aging parents to leave their private place and move into assisted living. It was very stressful and I was really more in the way then helpful. Lili said she would be joining me soon and I should continue on up to Nova Scotia as planned.

The northeast was sweltering under a killer heat wave. The ride up to Bar Harbor, ME from Concord, MA was like riding in a pizza oven and I had some close brushes with hyperthermia. It occurred to me that this might be my purgatory for leaving Lili in California, but I struggled along and finally reached Bar Harbor. While waiting to board the ferry to Yarmouth, NS I met a nice German couple that was biking with their 3½ year old daughter. On the boat ride over to NS, we became friends and we decided it might be fun to bike together. That way they could practice their English (which was already very good) and I wouldn't be so lonely. Once we started riding it worked surprisingly well too. I would circle out on every point to every lighthouse and Rainer and Bettina who were pulling a trailer with little Sophie in it, would short-cut up the direct route. We would meet at the campsite that we had agreed on and drink wine and cook our meals together. We sometimes laughed so hard I worried that we might be too rowdy for some of our quieter camp neighbors. What I should mention is that these folks are from Dusseldorf. That city is in what was for a time East Germany. Only a few years before, Rainer had been a Russian fighter pilot and if a button had been pushed, he would have been the enemy! Of course that was all blessedly unimportant now. I was calling Lili every day and she finally said she was able to fly back east. I bid happy trails to my friends in Peggy's Cove, turned my bike around and headed back to Yarmouth. I took the long ferry down to Portland, ME and then biked down to Kingston, NH where Lili and I were reunited. We had a great time biking home from there. Al-

though it would be hard to compete with the grandeur of the snow capped mountains, or the magnificent whales right in front of our tent on San Juan Island, this rather disjointed 4,000 mile trip was special in its own way too. Every bike ride is an adventure and becomes part of the chronicle of life.

Sixty years is a long time and I am sorry if I have rattled on too much. I must stop now even though there are many more tales I could tell. Biking is a wonderful life, be careful, be well and have a great ride.

Best Regards, Jack Brohal



Bay View Wheelmen's hall Newark, NJ 1952



Johnson Park New Brunswick, NJ 1953

AMATEUR BICYCLE LEAGUE of AMERICA



The National Championships—Complete Report in Next Issue

Walter Grenda Memorial Eastern States Dirt Track Championships

THIS popular event was run August 16th at Johnson Park, New Brunswick, N. J., site of the 1952 National Championships.

With a crowd of close to 2,000 spectators looking on under ideal weather condition, James Lauf sped to victory in both the mile and five-mile events but failed to place in the miss and out race.

Lauf finished with 14 points and Mertens, who was second in both the one and five mile races and Ernie Matteis, of the Somerset Wheelmen, who was third in the five mile race and the winner of the miss and out event which went 12 miles, were tied for second place with 10 points each.

Jack Brohal, of Bloomfield, the New Jersey Junior champion, had little trouble winning both the junior mile and three-mile events to top his class with 14 points.

Robert Wrede of New York and Richard Pfaff of Belleville finished one-two in both the juvenile one-half and one mile races to wind up with 14 and 10 points respectively.

In the girls competition Catherine Manwiller beat Mrs. Mildred (Kugler) Smithana to the finish line in the half-mile race and they reversed this procedure in the one mile race. A special half-mile race was then staged between Miss Manwiller, and Mrs. Smithana, with the former being the victor.



The winners in the Grenda Memorial: L. to R.: Alice, daughter of the late Walter Grenda, presenting plaque to Senior winner Jimmy Lauf; Junior winner Jack Brohal, N. J. Sr. State Champion (it's his Schwinn Paramount shown in photo); Juvenile winner Robert Wrede; Girl winner Catherine Manwiller.

Photos by Al Hatos of Metuchen, N. J.



1988 Muriel and I do a century training ride for the 200 mile Longest Day.



Cape May 1991 "Longest Day". Lili and I finished first, almost 2 hours ahead of the next bike, but an hour slower than Muriel and me in 1988 (11hr.3min. my fastest 200mi. ever).



Hoosier Pass 11542 ft. central Colorado



Somewhere in Montana.



South Beach, Washington. We reach the Pacific.



Ruby Beach, Washington. The obligatory wheel dipping ceremony.