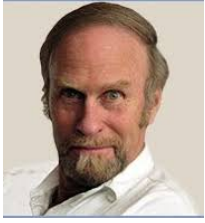


Our Life Journey Must Include Grief and a Broken Heart



Frosty Wooldridge

June 29, 2023

Have you ever felt the energy of joy? What about winning that soccer game, tennis match or racquetball tournament? Incredible how every cell in your body 'rises' to such euphoric heights! You feel good down into the deepest reaches of your heart, mind and body. You explode with something that only you can explain...sheer ecstasy!

Wouldn't it be wonderful if the entire human race could feel joy and ultimately, happiness every day of the year?

On a long bicycle ride, you feel that joy once you reach the top of a mountain pass. From the grind up Independence Pass at 12,100 feet...to the road leveling off, and then gravity propels you downhill, oh, what a feeling of sheer pleasure! Or, ride along a rushing whitewater river...where the water imbues your cells with energy, joy and happiness. Or, how about sitting by a campfire with the embers throbbing with an indescribable beauty? Every cell in your body dances with peaceful energy...spiritual energy. Your entire being feels right with the world.

That's a taste of the good times while hiking, backpacking, rafting, canoeing or camping. It's your connection with the wilderness. On long distance bicycle tours, another kind of connection to the



Natural World encompasses your spirit. For months on social media, I followed Canadian Arie Hoogerbrugge across Canada, America and now into Mexico. I followed senior citizen Lee Rogowski on his journey from Key West, Florida to northern most part of Maine. One man is young and vibrant. The other is old, overweight, with a heart condition and used an E-bike to cover thousands of miles.

Both men shared that certain courage that it takes to strike out across the planet on a bicycle no less...much like Marco Polo, Captain Cook, John Muir, my lifelong friend Doug Armstrong (all 7 continents on a bicycle), Heinz Stucke (over 50 years across 196 countries) and dozens more. On the female side, Tahnee Seagrave, Finoa Kolbinger, Sanne Cant, Juliet Elliot, Jenny Graham, my Boulder friend Bonnie Gagnon and dozens of others. It's certainly been an honor to have met some of them and ridden with them.

What do they all possess in common? Answer: a certain mental, emotional and physical courage to reach outside of themselves for greater wonder, along with true grit and pluck beyond the ordinary person. As they live their lives, they inspire the rest of us mortal human beings.

That's not only in bicycling, but all endeavors whether it be

Simone Biles, Michael Phelps, Caleb Dressel, Tamyara M. Mensah or Sydney McLaughlin. Some become famous for a moment or a lifetime...yet all face their inner demons...just like you do!

For this long-distance rider, I've enjoyed the great 'highs' in life. It's been a good journey over the years. But I've also discovered the 'lows'...those times where I was so lonely or depressed that when I looked up...all I could see was the bottom. I've learned about the reality of Circular Grief.

I lost my Dad when I was a teenager. One lousy heart attack that hit my Dad at 46 years of age...completely changed the trajectory of my life. Pain, hurt, anger, frustration, meaninglessness, and rage. One minute he's alive umpiring a baseball game, and the next, he's falling over the catcher and dies on home plate. How do you process that 'event' as a young kid with dreams of a college athletic career? I simply staggered into each day until the pain slipped into my rearview mirrors. I kept moving forward because that's what my Dad taught me, "Keep going son, no matter what...and you'll get there...whatever your goal."

Yet these years later, on long distance rides across Europe, America's Great Plains, the Continental Divide, Alaska's endless wilderness expanse, the Atacama Desert, the Outback, China...I've found that grief is circular.

While riding, my Dad visits me. Sometimes, he rides along with me, or he sits on a ski chairlift, or he swims a lap with me. Sometimes, I spot him in a crowded mall only to wake up out of a dream. At other times, he's laughing with his buddies on an old 8mm movie. Seeing it immediately brings an instant Niagara of tears. All the time, his 8"X10" picture hangs in my office. His picture remains in my wallet on every journey. He's with me...he shaped me, he molded me into a man that he wanted to be most proud. Sometimes, I burst out crying because I can't talk to him. I can't hug him, and he can't hug me for assurance.

All I've got are memories, pictures and those 'moments' when he rides with me via my imagination.

For the millions of you who lost your father or mother at an early age, or any age, we share a circular grief that others don't know, cannot understand and cannot relate.

I remember that the Spirit of St. Louis flyer Charles Lindbergh said, "Death is the last great adventure."

When I go on THAT adventure, I know my Dad will be there straddling his bike with his hands on my bike. We will ride together once again.

© 2023 Frosty Wooldridge – All Rights Reserved

E-Mail Frosty: frostyw@juno.com