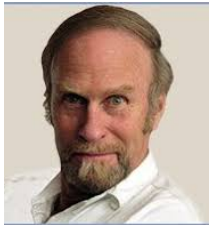


The Long Ride at Age 80: Trading Sofa for a Bicycle Seat



By Frosty Wooldridge

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This past week, we met him after walking back from a cliff on the Oregon seacoast. As we descended out of the brambles of the cliff area, the sign on the back of his bike read, "Alaska to Panama...trading the sofa for a bicycle seat."

No big deal since hundreds of cyclists have ridden trans-Americas. Yes, I've done it too, but in my 30's. In your youth, the energy, strength and true grit come naturally. As you read this story, hundreds of cyclists around the world pedal into their own adventures. They're riding on six continents...trail blazers. They're cycling into endless adventures with their own stories.

"So, how are you doing?" I asked the man.

"Not bad for an old dude," he replied.

"So, what's old?" I asked.

"Turned 80 this year," he said. "I decided that I was running out of time-turf, so I better make some miles before my time is up on this planet."

"You just rode down from Alaska?" I said. "And, you're riding to Panama...heck man, that's a hell of a ride at 80."

"You know what they say," he said. "Better late than never. It's been a great ride so far. I didn't get eaten by a grizzly bear and I survived the mosquitoes."

Talking to Robert D. Fletcher inspired me to appreciate a whole new understanding of the age of 80. The average man in America dies by 77.3 years. Past that, it's a toss-up whether or not you will see the next day.

So, instead of waiting for the final day of his life, Fletcher got his butt off the couch, and he started pedaling. By the time he reached the spot where we met, he'd lived a dozen lifetimes. It's no small item to cycle down from the Arctic Circle, Alaska. I've done it, and I can verify that a cyclist faces being eaten by grizzly bears, stomped by moose, and/or eaten alive by mosquitoes. The demonic little blood suckers give no pause in their pursuit of your body's fluids.

"There is a fountain of youth: it is your mind, your talents, the creativity you bring to your life and the lives of people you love. When you learn to tap this source, you will truly have defeated age." –Sophia Loren

What I didn't know about Robert Fletcher while speaking with him: he's a world class athlete, world explorer, educator and totally amazing human being. A few of his credits:

- Climbed Kilimanjaro in December 2014 and was the second oldest to do that climb that month
- Visited more than 100 countries
- Volunteered at a rhinoceros sanctuary in Botswana in 2013
- Rode in over 20 countries
- Ran five marathons with my fastest time of 3 hours, 28 minutes, and 29 seconds Completed three Olympic size triathlons
- Cycled from Agra India to the bottom of India in two months and about 4,200 km

- Hiked 125 km through the Rift Valley in Maasai territory of Kenya
- Completed two Caminos de Santiago, one by walking the 800 km French Route and one by cycling the 950 km Ruta de La Plata.

As I stood there talking to Robert, it occurred to me that no matter the enormity of his journey, he plowed into it with a youthful sense of enthusiasm that knows no age. You just get on that bike, slip onto the pedals, settle into the seat and ride into the next moment.

It reminded me of a sermon I once heard...that life is vulnerable, that we must at times surrender and, of course, we all face struggle. Every one of us on a bicycle faces vulnerability as to traffic and the whims of the weather. The key is, are we vulnerable up or down? If we choose down, we face defeat. If we push forward, we give "up" a chance to flourish. We enjoy many rewards when we face each day with "up" on our faces and in our minds.

Then, we surrender to the ideas or moments of the day. Do we surrender up or down? If we choose "down", we defeat ourselves. When we choose "up", we move forward. We face opening opportunities of adventure.

Finally, life presents struggles. You've experienced yours and I've experienced mine. Whether it's family, friends, politics, religion or simply the human race's vagaries and insanities—if we choose "down", we can make them more unpleasant, or we can choose "up" as our personal path. When we choose "up", we affect our brains and bodies by injecting chemical realities into our beings. Perhaps that's why I've always been "happy out of my mind" while touring across the planet. What about you?

"Well Robert," I said. "It's really a pleasure to meet you. And really, it was only by chance. If we had stayed on that cliff another few minutes, we would have missed you."



"Yeah, well, that's the nature of life," Robert said. "You make the best of it and good things happen. The best to you on your own journeys."

"Yes sir, and I will be first in line to buy your book about your journey," I said.

At that, he saluted me, slipped into the pedals and moved into his amazing journey at the age of 80. But again, on a bicycle, are you 8 or 80? Do you think about it or even care? There's something about the magic of those spokes turning, that chain tightening on the freewheel, the tires gripping the pavement, the soft breeze in your face, the warm sun caressing your skin, your muscles pouring themselves into the magic of your ride, and finally, those moments that come and go. The ones that are "over" and the ones that are "yet to be."

All you gotta' do is get off the sofa and slide your rear-end onto a bicycle seat. Follow him at www.octoodyssey.com His book will astound you: **Octogenarian Odyssey: Trading a Sofa for a Bicycle Seat** by Robert D. Fletcher.

Frosty Wooldridge, 6 continent world bicycle traveler, The Kickstand Chronicles: The Miraculous, Funny, Sublime and Downright Miraculous–Inevitable Moments of the Journey, Bicycling Across Six Continents, 45 years, 150,000 Miles. Also available on audio-book. Amazon.

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