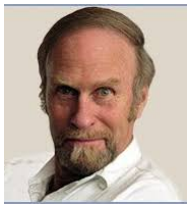
There’s a Patience in the Wild: Dogged, Tireless, Persistent



By Frosty Wooldridge

In his epic book, The Call of the Wild, Jack London said, “There’s a patience in the wild: dogged, tireless, persistent—like life itself.” You might like the movie portraying the book with Harrison Ford as the grizzled old man who befriends the dog, Buck.

A couple of years ago, I led a group of 60 to 70-year old’s across America on a coast to coast of the Northern Tier. On the Pacific Ocean of Astoria, Oregon to the Atlantic Ocean of Bar Harbor, Maine. It stretched across 13 states and 4,200 miles of rugged mountains, the vastness of the northern Great Plains, the beauty of the five Great Lakes, and the serendipity of the Catskill Mountain chain. To take such a bicycle journey at our advanced ages, took guts, gumption and true grit. (Some pain relievers, too)

Two of the guys on this journey proved themselves “day riders” for all their lives. But, at over 70, they enjoyed retirement with time to spare. All of us sported gray hair, or no hair, gray beards, high blood pressure, bad knees, sore hips, touch of diabetes, and spare tires around our mid-sections.

But when you overrun the age of 70, your life changes. Your perspectives change. Your understandings of the years, piled up like silage in a silo, remind you that this life is a terminal disease. You’ve used up a good bit of it. You might

enjoy a year or ten years, but you're not sure as you attend a lot of funerals.

But if you've lived through those first 70 years, you've got a sense of patience that allows you to penetrate life's challenges with the wisdom of your old age. You know that if you maintain your course with dogged determination, you will ride across that mountain chain, one pass at a time. You will cross the Great Plains one mile at a time. You will glide by the Great Lakes one day at a time.

(New-born bison calves on the Great Plains) Photography by Frosty Wooldridge

You also know that by being tireless in your pursuit, the final victory shall come into sight. Sure, your legs hurt, and your high blood pressure gives you a head-throb, but you rest, drink and then, you set out again with dogged determination and tireless resolve. It's a part of age.

When you hit those Catskill Mountains along the Appalachian Trail, you realize that your persistence brought you this far, to this age, and so, why not present yourself onto the doorstep of life's ongoing challenges? Really, on your bicycle, you're absolutely no defined age. You're living in your "eudemonia" pure and simple.

That's what I discovered with those grizzled old men that rode with me. Gerry, Robert, Don, Frank! They delighted in their lives as if they were kids. They all knew that their windows of opportunity grew narrower with every sunset. That's all the

more sobering when one of our fathers died at 46 and another one died at 62. It gives you pause when you realize you've exceeded those ages already. Yet, you persist in your own choice of courage.

London portrayed it in that courageous dog, Buck. Dog thieves, in 1897, dognapped Buck out of his comfortable California. He found himself shoved onto a train and whisked away to Alaska and harnessed to a dog sled. End of luxury life: beginning of the hard life in the frozen north. (By the way, I cycled to Dawson in the Yukon to stand by Jack London's cabin where he wrote his stories in the Gold Rush of 1897-98. Tiny log cabin at 100 square feet, potbellied stove, desk, chair and bed, and outhouse.)

Well, should you choose to harness yourself to your touring bicycle for such adventure, you too, face hellacious mountains to cross under your own steam. You will encounter dry, hot, miserable deserts that could sweat you to death, cramp your liquid-starved thighs and even break your will with the heat.

And talk about the liquid-misery of rain, cold, ice, even snow! Nothing like riding into a rainstorm to drench yourself in liquid-wretchedness. You're soaked, you're sweating, glasses fogged, and everything in-between. If you're riding down from Nordkapp, Norway, you face freezing rain for days unending. Sheer liquid torture! Same on the Alaska Highway out of the Yukon. On that road, you might meet up with a grizzly. One thing stands as a certainty on your bike tour: Life lets you know you are alive!

"In this manner, Buck fought forgotten ancestors. They quickened the old life within him, the old tricks which they had stamped into the heredity of the breed were his tricks… And when, on the still cold nights, he pointed his nose at a star and howled long and wolf-like, it was his ancestors, dead and dust, pointing their noses at the stars and howling down through the centuries and through him."

Like Buck, you choose to move forward. Let’s face it, we humans are animals, too, animals that think. We make choices. In those selections, we create an extraordinary life on two wheels. We never know what’s around the next bend. We never know where we might sleep that night. We devour food with rapacious energy. We never know who or what we will meet in the next sunrise. Isn’t that the “Call of the Wild” in each of us?

We thrust ourselves into the adventure. We engage it with the tenacity of Buck’s courage. With our 70 years of living, we choose our own valor at our own speed.

This coming summer of the “Roaring 20’s” of the 21st century, whether you day-ride or explore across the planet, young or old—let’s all pursue our own creative and expansive lives on our bicycles. Much like Buck in Jack London’s epic novel, a real-life adventure awaits you.

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E-Mail Frosty: frostyw@juno.com

Website: www.HowToLiveALifeOfAdventure.com