

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. The movie runs nationally this Friday. I hope it inspires all of us as to our own potential in the face of enormous challenges not only as individuals, but also as a nation.

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. We started on the Pacific Ocean at 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, Niagara Falls, and the serendipity of the Catskill Mountain chain. To take such a bicycle journey at our advanced ages, took guts, gumption and true grit. One of the group, Gerry, brought his guitar to sing songs from Reba McIntyre to Willie Nelson and Roy Orbison. We sang our hearts out around the campfire nightly. As you can imagine, everyone had been married once or twice, and even three times. The stories around the campfire proved hilarious and just plain wild and

crazy. The book published in January: **Old Men Bicycling Across America: A Journey Beyond Old Age**. It gives a rollicking story of how old men manage their triumphs, failures and disappointments, yet move forward. It also shows anyone, especially the 80 million baby boomers, how to ride across America themselves.

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. One note after a week on the road,

“Frosty, I had no idea this bicycle trip could be so fantastic...and we’re just starting. This is the greatest experience of my life.” I responded, “You’re welcome, Don. For certain, it’s going to get even more fantastic.”

At one point as we reached Niagara Falls, we saw the water cascading in a thunderous roar, a double rainbow over the falls and the eclipse of the sun all in five minutes. It proved one of those moments the literary greats call “eudemonia” or that perfect second where everything in your life meshes for an instant of sheer euphoria.

For certain, 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 experience. At this age, you've used up a good bit of your time on Earth. 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 advanced longevity. 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.

You also know that by being tireless in your pursuit, the final victory shall come into sight; in this case, the Atlantic Ocean. Sure, your legs hurt, and your high blood pressure throbs in your head, but you rest, drink some water, and then, you set out again with dogged determination and tireless resolve. It's a part of your essence as a human being.

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 or a hike or a canoe trip or a XC ski trip or anything that you enjoy outdoors, you understand that age does not define you. You're living in your "eudemonia" pure and simple. It's that "sweet spot" in your life that encourages great joy and gratitude for being alive.

That's what I discovered with those grizzled old men who 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. In my case, one of my brothers died at 50 and the other a stroke at 55. 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. As the story goes, dog thieves, in 1897, dognaped Buck out of his comfortable California home. He found himself shoved onto a train and whisked away to Alaska-Yukon 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. He lived in a tiny log cabin at 100 square feet, potbellied stove, small wooden desk, chair and bed, plus an outhouse. Talk about hard living at minus 50 degrees below zero F.)

Today, should you choose to harness yourself to your touring bicycle for such adventure or any outdoor 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. In any rain, sheer liquid torture! Same on the Alaska Highway out of the Yukon. On that road, you might meet up with a grizzly. We did! We lived or this tale wouldn't be told. One thing stands as a certainty on your adventure: 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. You make choices. In those selections, you create an extraordinary life. You never know what's around the next bend. You never know where you might sleep that night. You devour food with rapacious gluttony. You never know who or what you will meet in the next sunrise. Isn't that the "Call of the Wild" in each of us?

You thrust yourself into the adventure. You engage it with the tenacity of Buck's courage. With your 70 years of living, you choose your 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 or our chosen mode of travel. Much like Buck in Jack London's epic novel, a real-life adventure awaits you.

Frosty Wooldridge, 6 continent world bicycle traveler, **Old Men Bicycling Across America: A Journey Beyond Old Age by Frosty Wooldridge**, available on Amazon and Kindle, (Grizzled and gray Gerry and Don on the Lewis & Clark Trail of Columbia River, Oregon.)

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