

Waves to Wine MS Society Ride

September 24 & 25, 2010

I did this ride in 2008 and wasn't able to finish due to my knee not cooperating. I thought it was an amazing route and after my brother-in-law was diagnosed this past year with MS, I decided it was time to hit the road again in support of the MS Society. Since I love co-conspirators, I solicit and luckily roped in my sis (Raquel) and soul sis (Suzee) to join the movement! After training (and then falling off the wagon the last month) we decide our goal (well, Suzee and I decide) was to finish the entire route the first day and just enjoy the second day biking from winery to winery – it was a plan!

Day 1 – 75 miles (or so they say – actual mileage 79.3): Rough Start

I woke to a foggy morning, with clear skies outside. It's been a long month with little sleep (work) and I laid in bed at 6AM wondering why I thought the last glass of port the previous night sounded like a good idea. My head swam in exhaustion and the room spun around it. At least I programmed the coffee maker in my manic phase the night before – coffee was ready. Raquel was chipper and roused Suzee to follow – the chaos of packing and negotiating what to bring began – as well as trying to figure out how many aspirin it was safe to take. We planned to hit the road by 7AM, but at 7:45AM we realized we had to rush to get our bags to the start line before the 8AM deadline passed (and the baggage truck left without our bags). We loaded our extra bags on our backs (very awkward) to haul 10+ blocks on bikes. As we biked down the street, I thought my legs were just sluggish as Raquel and Suzee rushed ahead, but then I noticed three things right away; 1) there are a lot of people on bikes passing us going the other direction, 2) both my tires are nearly flat which makes going fast very difficult, and 3) we could have driven our bags in the car, dropped them off and then started biking from my condo instead of back tracking (and I call myself a planner?). We arrived and were instantly told to hit the road within 5 minutes or we would be swept to the first rest stop – we're already behind! I filled my tires and as we were about to leave, Raquel's chain suddenly falls off – we all prayed to the bike gods this wasn't a sign for how our entire day would go.

Ok – we're finally off and trying to haul it across town to get to Rest Stop #1 in Sausalito before the sweep vehicle snatched us up. It is a GORGEOUS morning, not a cloud visible – except in my head. We're slow but I can't help but stop to snap a few photos (which don't do the views justice).

As we approached the Golden Gate Bridge we lost the route – no worries, we're San Franciscans and know how to get to Sausalito. On the bridge, Raquel gets a flat... bummer. We walk the bike to the parking lot on the other side and realize (first of many) how wonderful the volunteers are – Superman (minus the S on his chest) appears out of nowhere to change her tire. Raquel thinks he's just a nice guy wanting to rescue her until we explain he's a volunteer (she's evidently use to this type of service from men). We're off again... we can't find the Rest Stop #1 so we keep going and make our own rest stop just before the Mt. Tam 6% climb. We make our game plan up the hill which is don't stop... keep pedaling... just do it. Ok – got it!

Ouch – that hill wasn't easy... but I'm finally feeling good. Its only the first hill and I'm happy to get the hardest (so I think) hill done for the day. We meet up at the top and scream down the hill to be met with our 2nd hardest hill for the day to the top of Highway 1. Again, we meet up at the top and take pictures as we commiserate on its difficulty - we're off but not before Suzee's chain falls off and gets wickedly stuck. We struggle a bit but figure out how to fix it – next stop - Stinson Beach. As we arrive (after another series of rolling hills and a screaming downhill – YES!), the 2nd Rest Stop is closing. It's time to really haul butt or risk the SAG Wag. I kick it into high gear and scream through Rest Stop #3 and passing up WAY TOO many Oysters joints – yummy. I finally get a much needed break at the “official” lunch stop at Nick's Cove. Unfortunately they didn't offer Oysters – but I swear that veggie sandwich was the best I ever had (amazing how hard work compliments any food). We collect ourselves, fuel up and focus on the final couple of legs. At this point

we are about 50+ miles into the ride with many hills behind us but each hill gets exponentially more difficult and we still have several ahead. We are beat, it's hot and my knee is tender (but hanging in), but the views are indescribable and keep me motivated to want more. I'm amazed how lucky we got with the weather, we couldn't have wished for better.

The final 25 miles (give or take) is not easy. Each hill, although not very steep (in comparison), feels more difficult than any done previously. The calls from other riders turn into whispers, I barely hear "On the left" (I am on a mountain bike so getting passed is a common theme of the day). We stop at our final Rest Stop for the day and indulge in snacks we would normally not allow our tongue to touch – a privilege of the ride. Raquel is digging the crunchy Cheetos – I haven't seen her eat those since we were kids! When we come to our first stop light in a very long while, I get a surge of energy – we are in a town which means we are nearly there.... 5 more miles! I race ahead to meet friends who have been waiting at the finish for over 90 minutes (we were late and cell coverage sucks!) I'm energized again as I roll into the Day 1 finish line to crowds cheering – the pain washes away with their heartfelt cheer - I feel good! Moments later Raquel joins me who says she lost Suzee (she kept going – I guess the ride wasn't long enough for her). Moments later I see Suzee – whew! We are together again and ready to find the Wine Tent!

Day 2 – 51.28 miles: Where are the Wineries?

Goals change (for me at least) – I want to make it a "Century Weekend" which means I need 25 miles and I want to make it through the "official picture spot" which I thought to be before the 2nd Rest Stop of the day (on my 2008 there was a camera set up on the route that would take an "action" shot while riding – it was a cool pic). The new goal – get to the 2nd Rest Stop, then ride to the nearest winery.

Starting out was fine, my legs aren't sore (although sitting is a bit tender). As I progress, I'm easily passed by Raquel, Suzee and everyone (including their mother). My knee is speaking loud and clear, "Get me off this bike!!!!" I don't listen and try to negotiate with it pleading to just make it to the 1st Rest Stop (about 14 miles into the ride). I promise my knee an ACE bandage, Advil, and a break to regroup – my knee begrudgingly agrees and we finally make it there. After I find Raquel and Suzee, I limp to the Medical Tent. Lady Hero wraps me up and lectures me about how I know better and should have iced it the night before (she's right – but I was too tired to deal with it). After walking it out, I'm ready to roll. We quickly go past the spots I had flats on my 2008 ride and I point them out as if I'm pointing out famous home on a Hollywood tour... "and on your right is flat #1."

We come to Rest Stop 2 – I'm actually feeling fairly good, my knee has stopped hurting and reverted back to just being tender (ACE bandages rock... wrap anything tight enough and you don't feel it). Raquel confirms our next destination IS the first possible winery – we make our plan (SAG Wag or bike) and decide to bike. As we head out – I discover the GIGANTIC hill that I remember from 2008 (and where my knee finally blew out) is not so big after all – funny how memory gets distorted.

Winery #1 – We finally come across a suitable wine venue and it's gorgeous (desperation should not lower standards – although Raquel was disagreeing with this theory behind me as I passed the first possible winery). We buy a few bottles (convinced we'll just be picked up by a SAG Wag soon) and head back to the road. Bikers are still passing us, so we decided we have time to hit another winery before the last SAG Wag comes by - Winery #2 is hit. After a bit more wine tasting we decide waiting on the road would be best, as we approach (wineries have very long driveways) Suzee read my mind and asked if I wanted to keep going. I asked if she wanted to and she sort of chuckled confirming she wasn't going anywhere but that I should go. We agreed I would keep riding but that when they caught up with me in the SAG Wag, they would stop and pick me up – agreed!

I hauled butt to see how far I could get and deplete whatever energy I had left before they picked me up (still had a bit of work stress to burn apparently). Miles zipped by as I rolled with the hills. The beautiful vineyards are primed for Fall and gazing at it isn't enough, I want to somehow eat it all up – I want it a part of me.

A few miles from the final rest stop of the day, a Mini Coup starts paralleling me – it's the SAG Wag with Raquel and Suzee inside (it turns out Raquel knows the driver – small world). Michelle (the driver) assures me I can make it and that we all should finish the ride together as there was only 8 miles on the final leg. We agreed to meet at the next rest stop – so they were off and I kicked it up a notch (where was this energy coming from?). I arrived at the rest stop with the soul sisters nowhere to be found. Text messages and calls later I find out they were at the general store down the road buying sparkling wine and cheese – go figure! I waited for them to hear a confirmation they weren't finishing the ride (it was too hot) – with only 8 miles left, I couldn't let it be. They sweetly agreed not to open the wine and eat the cheese until the finish line when I got there – I have the BEST support team! I hop on my bike, scream out for them to catch the next possible ride because I was just going to *get it done* – I wanted wine and to relax. The last leg was the most exposed and hottest of the ride – but as I thought of how lucky I am and sung my support chant (which includes me making up a lame song of my blessings), I passed one rider after another on the final miles – I CRUSHED it! I don't think I've ever ridden that fast or hard. I finally rounded a corner and saw the finish line - YES! The support cheerleaders huddled under the shade and tried to cheer in their weakened state as I rode by, which was very much appreciated. I arrived in the parking lot at Sonoma Lake and was instantly greeted by a wonderful man who took my bike and loaded it on the truck. I hobbled over to the much-needed shade where I stayed until Raquel and Suzee arrived with the necessary supplies. After a glass of sparkling wine and bites of yummy cheese, I felt human again! Unbelievable ride and it felt good to actually finish, especially after having two days in a row with such a rough start.

The MS Society did an awesome job of supporting the riders and being so incredibly nice (except they could have done without the fruit lady at the 2nd Rest Stop on Day 2 – she was grumpy and counted your orange slices)!

Thank you so much for your support – it really carried me through!