

Start Part 4

The day finally came when we had our vehicles and equipment ready to start our drive from Illinois to New York City. Several of the neighbors stopped by to see what all the activity was about. When we finally got on the road I had a feeling of relief that we were finally getting started. It would take us two days to drive to Susan's Aunt Mary's house in Staten Island, New York. There we set up our base camp for two days before we started the Record Attempt from City Hall in downtown New York City. During our two days of preparation at Aunt Mary's house I am sure we caused quite a site with ice coolers and bike spread out all over the front lawn. The crew did a great job of sorting and getting everything ready to start. The amount of work expanded into the amount of time to get it done. The days were busy but everything was finally packed. We were planning to start Saturday night which was really Sunday morning at 3:00 AM. We figured that was the quietest time to leave the city.

Aunt Mary prepared us several meals and we had one last evening dinner together. After dinner I tried to get some rest which was difficult because of the excitement and trying to go to bed early. At 1:30 AM the support van and little car needed to drive over the bridge into downtown with me and four crew members. We needed to plan our departure from City Hall without a lot of extra time waiting around because of limited parking. The motorhome would drive ahead and meet us on the road further out of the city. I barely slept that night while waiting for my dad to give us the okay to start driving. We arrived at City Hall and were met by a U.S.C.F. official. The

paperwork was limited and we waited for the count down to 3:00 AM. I had time for a quick photo of me straddling my bike on the steps of City Hall. After five years of serious preparation we were finally going to begin. I started the Double Transcontinental from the New York City Hall exactly at 3:00 AM. I rode through Harlem and remembered there was a song about "A Rose from Spanish Harlem". That was all I knew about Harlem. I hummed the song as I rode out of Manhattan with a fair amount of excitement and anticipation about the next 6,000 miles.

Good bike lights were rare in 1981. I needed a light for my bike even though I had the support my Dodge Omni car following me. For a bike light I had a large plastic camping flashlight taped to my top of my handlebars that used six D-cell batteries. Within a few blocks from the start of the ride I hit a manhole cover. The lens popped off the headlight and all the batteries spilled on the street. Within two seconds I could hear the crunch of the support car tires smashing the lens and batteries to pieces. So much for having a headlight.

I rode for about an hour through Brooklyn and came to the Varazano Bridge crossing into Staten Island. It was still plenty dark when I reached the start of the bridge. I could not ride a bike on the bridge because of the six foot long expansion joints with two inch gaps. My support car said they would meet me on the other side of the bridge and I could walk on the sidewalk. The Varazano Bridge is a huge mile long bridge over the New York Bay similar to the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. I started walking and pushing

my bike along the guardrail. I would have ridden on the sidewalk but it was really dark and I wasn't sure what other curbs and joints were hidden in the shadows. I missed my big camping headlight. A few homeless people slept along the massive towers and beams and didn't notice me walking by. I remember looking at the lights of city and oil refineries in the distance. It was really a beautiful night for a walk. I thought how strange it was to start a 6,000 mile bike ride with a 20 minute hike.

Finally I arrived on the other side of the bridge in Staten Island. I met my support car and we continued into New Jersey. By 5:00 AM the sky was getting lighter as we headed into the first of the eastern hills. A misty rain was starting which delayed a brighter sunrise. I was riding my Austro Daimler bike with 13-21 six speed Suntour freewheel and 52 tooth single front chainring. This was my favorite bike back home in flat Illinois. It was painted pale yellow and made with Reynolds 531 steel tubing. I had ridden it on a sub nine hour double century a few weeks earlier. It wasn't so fast in the hills of New Jersey. I remember stalling out on one of the first of many climbs that day. I had a spare black TREK bike on the support van roof with 42-52 chain rings and 13-21 freewheel. I got on the TREK and rode all the mountains in a 42 x 21 low gear. I was learning what mountain grades really were. I asked the crew to go to a bike shop and buy some lower gear freewheels with a 13-26 combination. It was Sunday and the bike shops were closed.

I made pretty good time riding through Allentown and Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. By the end of the first day I had ridden 275 miles by 8:00 PM.

Our motor home went to a campground to park for the night. I ate dinner in the RV and went to bed. I would start riding again at sunrise. It never occurred to me our our crew to ride into the night. We were all naive about lay ahead for the next 5,700 miles.

End of Part 4