

Part 9

We were looking forward to getting out of Kansas if for no other reason than to prove we were making progress west. The panhandle of Oklahoma would be our next state to cross and we would be in and out in only 60 miles. I remember seeing a sign in Pratt, Kansas as the "Home of the Miss Kansas Pageant". As we rode through Hooker, Oklahoma I was wondering what type of pageant they were famous for. I didn't think it would be much of an honor to be crowned "Miss Hooker".

The southwest wind continued to howl at a steady 30 mph. There was enough of a cross wind from the left to give me a blast from oncoming cattle trucks. As a truck came past I would need to put my head down and my mouth closed. The gusts almost brought me to a stand still.

Crew member Jon Royer sometimes got out to ride with me. My bikes had toe clips and straps so Jon was able to ride one of my bikes in his gym shoes, t-shirt and jean shorts. In 1981 a baseball cap was as good as a helmet so Jon wore his blue and white mechanics cap. Jon was a pretty good rider in 1981 and a few years later would be a USCF Ranked Category 1 racer making a living on the Pepsi Cycling Team. He was a wiry climber and a strong time trialist. The day he was riding with me in Oklahoma it was too windy to talk but I enjoyed the mutual suffering. As a semi truck approached we braced ourselves for the blast. Jon's baseball cap blew off and tumbled behind us in the wake of the truck. Jon needed to make a U-turn on the shoulder and go find his cap in the ditch. This routine continued at least six more times

during the hour Jon rode with me. It was amusing to me and frustrating to Jon. I couldn't help speeding up a little every time Jon lost his cap and make him work to catch up again since I felt he needed the training.

I was barely averaging 10 mph today. The towns were getting further apart and I had few landmarks to gauge my progress. By dark I was entering Texas and had Oklahoma behind me. The tracks of the Santa Fe railroad followed along the highway. In the night sky I could see the single cycloptic orbiting headlight of an oncoming train in the distance. The powerful beam was sometimes visible for at least ten miles on the flat prairie. I estimated if the train was going 50 mph and I was going 10 mph we should meet in about ten minutes. Every time a new train came toward me I played the game of estimating how far away the train was and when we would meet. Throughout the night we were only plus or minus one minute of my guess.

My daily routine had changed the past three nights to include more and more night riding. Partly to avoid the winds but I was getting used to spending 18-20 hours on the bike and sleeping less. My goal before the ride was to travel at least 200 miles everyday. By sunrise I was entering New Mexico with only few stops during the night. I had only gone 180 miles in the past 24 hours against the stiff headwind. I was getting discouraged and was losing track of how many days I had been on the road. The shoulder of the highway was paved with golf ball sized rocks to act as rumble strips for tired drivers. On the bike the chatter broke my water bottle cages and made tender hands and seats feel even worse.

By mid day I had reached Tucumcari, New Mexico. Our map showed I had a turn coming up to get on Interstate 40. This would be our our first turn in 850 miles since the Mississippi River. I was really tired from skipping a sleep break the night before. The temperature neared 100 degrees. My crew agreed I should ride 60 miles further to Santa Rosa and go to sleep in a Motel-6 until sundown. The good thing was the wind had died down to a manageable breeze and I could ride at least 15 mph again. The bad thing was the rough chip seal shoulder continued on the interstate. New Mexico was still making the transition from Old Route 66 to new Interstate 40. There was a lot of road construction with miles of closed lanes and one-way traffic. Fortunately I was able to ride unsupported during the day and weave my way passed hundreds of orange traffic cones and road barriers. By the time I reached Santa Rosa it was late afternoon. I was tired and ready for a nap. I didn't know how tired I was until I got woke up to ride at 9:00 PM.

End Part 9