

## Part 22

I rolled into Greensburg, Kansas at 10:00 PM, completing 278 miles today. The warm summer night was filled with the chirp of crickets. We were leaving the west behind and my skin felt the dampness from the midwest humidity. I went into the motorhome and my mom had a full dinner waiting on the foldout table. I tried to eat some boiled potatoes and vegetables. My Mom had the challenging job of trying to cook in a motorhome that was starting and stopping every half hour. She did a great job of making real meals for the crew and me. Tonight I was hungry but too tired to eat much. After 18 hours on the bike it was hard to get off and start eating. I talked with my dad and brother Ken about the plan for tomorrow. We would start riding at sunrise at about 5:00 AM. I could get a full seven hours of rest. Now I only wanted to lay down and sleep. I peeled off my sweat soaked jersey and took a quick sponge bath. I crawled into the lower bunk in the bed in the rear of the motor home. Within moments I was asleep.

Route 54 across Kansas was a cement slab highway in 1981. The grass grew right up to the edge of the road because there wasn't any gravel shoulder. The support car that was following me tried to yield as much of the lane as possible when a truck approached from the rear and drive the car most of the way onto the grass. Sometimes as two trucks would come from the front and the rear we could tell they would meet at the same time they passed us. The support car and me with my bike would bail out completely on the grass. I would need to stop and lift my bike back on the cement roadway to restart riding. Staying safe was my biggest concern about riding

across the country. I am sure we lost a bunch of time by getting off the road and waiting for traffic to pass. The good thing is we were safe and most motorists gave us a friendly honk and wave as we passed.

It had been almost two weeks since we had passed through Wichita on our way east. As we got closer to the city Susan contacted the police department and asked if we could get another police escort across town. The good thing about dealing with the police on our return trip is that they remembered us and it was easier for them to understand what we were requesting. Today the Wichita police were waiting for me on the west side of town with two motorcycle patrolmen. As I rode into the city the motorcycles leapfrogged through each intersection with one patrolman stopping cross traffic while the other patrolman sped ahead to the next traffic light. I was making good time and holding a steady 22 mph pace. I rolled out the east side of town and into the rural farm country again. It had been another good day and I was now halfway across the country.

Eastern Kansas is not as flat as the western half of the state. Route 54 started a series of rolling hills that descended into shallow valleys that crossed small creeks. The variety of terrain was a welcome change because the towns were hidden from view until I approached the final mile toward Main Street.

As I pedaled through Iola, Kansas I noticed the well kept houses with neatly mowed lawns. Our motorhome was parked along the curb and my dad was standing by the back bumper. As I approached he waved me over and said the boy who lived in the house where he had parked was wondering what we were doing. When my dad explained about the record attempt the boy had offered the crew to use his house to take showers. My dad said they had a shower waiting for me. It was mid day and about 90 degrees and didn't think taking a shower would do me any good with 125 miles yet to ride today. My dad said it would do me good since I hadn't had a real shower in five days since leaving California.

I went inside the two story Victorian house and the boy showed be the way upstairs to the bathroom. It was an original style clawfoot bathtub with a hand held shower sprayer. It wasn't my idea of a shower because I had to squat on on my knees and try not to spray water all over the floor. My knees and ankles hadn't been bent so sharply in weeks. My legs could only go in circles. I tried not to tip over as I used the sprayer. I was able to get enough water on my head and back to wash my hair with shampoo. I changed into a clean jersey and shorts and walked back down stairs. My bike was waiting for me near the motorhome. I got on it and rode away while confirming with the crew that they would chase me down in about a half hour. My whole shower stop had taken about 15 minutes. Even though I was sweating again by the time I left town, I did feel better and the distraction of getting off the bike made me feel like I could keep riding into the night.

Spoiler alert...

Little did we know how my path would cross with the boy from Iola again the following year when the first Great American Bike Race (Race Across Across AMerica) would ride though Iola.