

# FaithBIT



## Riding to Help the Sick

Reflection by Bill Middeke

Kent is my best friend from Air Force days. He's Uncle Kent to our children. On a Sunday evening in December of 1990, he woke us up to tell us he had "it." "It?" "I'M HIV+." I remember thinking "What do we put on the quilt?" I'm happy to say he is still with us.

Fast forward to November of 1998. I went to a friary in St. Paul to sign up for the Twin Cities-Wisconsin-Chicago AIDS Ride. Kent lives in Chicago and I decided to ride my bicycle to see him and raise funds for HIV/AIDS agencies along the way. I wasn't sure I could ride the 6 days, 500 miles to Chicago. Nor was I sure I could raise the required \$2,300 for the seven agencies that would benefit from the Ride. However, I knew I had to try.

Therefore, I bought a new bicycle, started training and, on July 12, 1999, was at the Minneapolis Convention Center to start the Ride along with another 1775 riders. I thought it would be a one-time thing.

I remember a lot about that first ride: Evacuating camp at 2:00 in the morning due to an approaching storm cell. Riding in a thunderstorm down LaSalle Boulevard in Chicago. Waiting in the sun in 90+ degree temps for the ferry to take us across Lake Wisconsin. Riding the 12 miles from the Illinois state line to the next camp where there was an AIDS ribbon or poster on almost every telephone pole. Seeing AIDS ribbons on the fence of the cemetery I rode by. The fire department in Madison using their hook and ladder truck to spray us with water to cool us down. I also remember doing a lot of talking to God. But I have to admit, a lot of it was things like "why is it so hot?" or "why does it have to rain?" or "I need some help getting up this hill!"



"It's hard to ride a bicycle when you are crying."

- Bill Middeke

There is one thing I remember more than anything else. It was on "Day 4," the "Hill Day." Think, "The Dells" area. It was late in the day. I was miserably hot and tired from climbing hills. I was cursing Kent for being HIV+ and asking God and myself why I was doing this. Well, God answers prayers. I heard, "On your left," the signal from another rider that I was going to be passed. When the rider passed me, I saw the orange pennant on the back of his bicycle. It was a sign that he self-identified as being HIV+. I then read the back of his jersey: "I can do this because of people like you! OMG, that's why! It's hard to ride a bicycle when you are crying.

I'm proud to say I rode every mile of the Ride. I was hooked. This summer will be 21<sup>st</sup> year of riding and 36<sup>th</sup> charity bike ride.

I feel I have been blessed by God with a good set of lungs and a strong pair of legs. The parable of the sheep and goats tells me I'm to help the sick, feed the hungry, and house the homeless. The charity bike rides are how I do it. I'm grateful for the experiences I've had and the people I've met on my journey. I'm thankful for all of the people, many of them from Immanuel, who have donated to my rides. I'm looking forward to my charity ride this summer.