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**16 JULY 2021** Photo credits: Anne Launcelott, Rod Rawding, Shauna Archibald

## **POST 4 Every fifth house**

*“Here’s \$10. It’s all the money I have in my wallet. But I’m working again tomorrow, so it’s no problem”.*

It was late afternoon on Friday, July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2021. I was just over 30 kilometers Southwest of Halifax on a road I knew like the back of my hand. My parents-in-law were coming out to cheer me on for the run-in to Halifax, and I was looking forward to one final roadside stop amongst familiar faces.

What I was not expecting was staff from the St. Margaret’s Bay Hydroelectric Plant.

I tried to tell this yellow-vested stranger that he didn’t need to give me any money, but I couldn’t do it. It was either nod and stammer out a thank-you or turn into a blubbing fool. A moment earlier one of his colleagues had given me \$3 in coins. They asked if they could take my picture and asked how the weather had been on the ride around Nova Scotia (“interesting” I said). After a brief chat, I thanked them both and crammed the money in my jersey pocket. I fist-bumped my in-laws, gave another round of thumbs-up, and rode away with a Cape Breton-sized lump in my throat, relieved to have avoided another emotional meltdown. There’d been a few of those over the past nine days.

About an hour later I stopped the clock at my favourite bike shop (and Cycle of Life sponsor), [Cyclesmith](#). I climbed off my bike and thanked Gordon and Mark, two cycling friends who had come out to ride the last 15 Km with me into the city. After a few quick pics, I climbed back on and rode across town to my house. I was soggy, satisfied and relieved it was all over.



Truth be told, my finish line had been in Lunenburg, ~100 Kms and four hours earlier. I'd started the last day of the ride in Barrington Passage, ~250 Kms Southwest of Halifax as the crow flies. I had modified my route to cut some distance and avoid colder temperatures along the ocean. I needed to finish today – I was two days behind schedule and a tropical storm was set to arrive later that evening.

I left Barrington Passage at ~5:20 AM under fog and light drizzle. My support crew for the day was my 17-year-old son, Cameron. After a short visit with relatives in White Point, I arrived at the LaHave River at 12:20 PM. I had just enough time to duck into the LaHave Bakery and grab a warm-me-up-pick-me-up coffee and some scones and still make the 12:30 boat. As the ferry glided across the water I drank and ate in the car (heat on max). I was surprised to see a dear family friend waiting for me on the other side. We spoke briefly and I pressed on, cold and wet, afraid of yet another shiver-fit, afraid of getting further behind schedule.



I arrived in Lunenburg shortly after 1 PM. My mother, older sister #1, a nephew, and other family friends were waiting at Dad's long-term care facility, where [he'd been living since February 26<sup>th</sup>](#). My sister got to see Dad for the first time in five months. I got to take him to an outdoor visiting area for pictures. I was soaking wet but warm. My heart was full. The stars had aligned. The Lunenburg visit had made the [Cycle of Life - Ride for dementia](#) worth it. Every last kilometer of it.

## Project 49

The idea for the Cycle of Life had emerged from two years of vague thinking about a cross-Canada dementia fundraising-awareness ride that would coincide with my sabbatical at Dalhousie University. I was going to do it before I turned 50 in late August 2021 – in my mind and on my computer it became ‘Project 49’.

COVID-19 and work-related issues changed all that. I had started to think that the ride might never happen, but in January 2021 my friend Andrew Feenstra and I sat down and discussed what might still be feasible. Andrew suggested a pandemic-friendly ride around the perimeter of Nova Scotia. No borders to cross, no planes to catch, just leave Halifax in one direction and arrive from another.

And how long should it take? One week, of course, a nice round number!

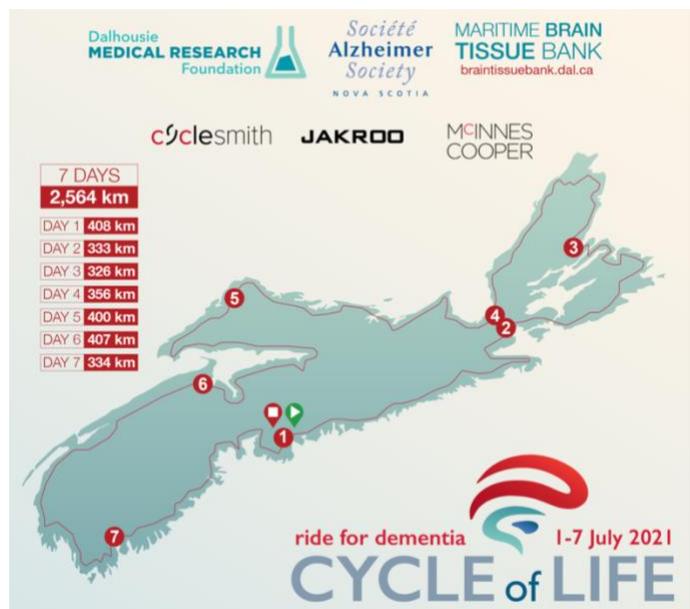
It seems silly now, but my first thought was that Andrew’s idea wasn’t ambitious enough. After a 20-year hiatus from cycling, I’d taken it up again in 2012 – with an increasing interest in distance, not speed. In 2018 I joined [Randonneurs Nova Scotia](#), my province’s long distance cycling club<sup>1</sup>. I had done multiple 3-day, 1,000 Km rides over the past few years and on three occasions had ridden 600 Kms without sleep. In 2019, I’d completed Paris-Brest-Paris (PBP), a 1,200 Km bucket-list event that happens once every four years and attracts thousands of cyclists from around the world. I completed PBP in just under 75 hours (you can read about that adventure [here](#)). I was looking for a physical and mental challenge and a ride around ‘little-old Nova Scotia’ didn’t seem hard enough.

But after a bit of detective work, I realized that a proper circumnavigation of Nova Scotia would in fact be both long and hard: at least 2,300 hilly kilometers, and perhaps a good deal more depending on how closely I stuck to the coast.

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Randonneuring’ is long-distance, non-competitive cycling (in the UK it is known as Audax). The signature randonneuring event is the ‘brevet’, where riders tackle set routes of between 200 and 1,000 Kms with the goal of completing them within a certain time limit. You can ride as slow or as fast as you want, but the clock is always ticking. You need to be self-sufficient and prepared for any and all weather. You also need to be able to ride at night (sometimes [through](#) the night).

Choosing the best way to ride around the province was complicated. I worked through a half-dozen different scenarios that balanced my desire to be as close to the water as possible with the need to have nightly stopovers near hotels, grocery stores and restaurants. I avoided gratuitous 'outs-and-backs' taken just for the sake of an ocean view. And I took into account the hilliness of the terrain when setting the daily mileage (Day 3 around the mountainous Cabot Trail was purposefully the shortest day at 326 Kms). Given the 7-day time constraint, there was no perfect solution and no way to know which combination of daily routes would be the 'best'.



The final route ended up being 2,564 Kms, just under half the distance between Vancouver and Halifax. I chose to ride around the province in a counter-clockwise direction for several reasons. First, I knew from experience that I was more likely to have a tailwind heading in a North-easterly direction along the Southern and Eastern shores of Nova Scotia. Second, I wanted to spend the final day riding on familiar roads – very helpful when trying to stay positive in a fatigued state. And most importantly, I wanted to visit my parents in Lunenburg before finishing up in Halifax.

As the ride itself came into shape I worked with the fine staff at the [Alzheimer Society of Nova Scotia](#) and the [Dalhousie Medical Research Foundation](#) to sharpen up the fundraising-awareness side of the project. You can read about that [here](#). The end of June was my original target, but with the COVID-19 third wave still going strong I shifted it back to July 1-7. It was a huge relief when, in early June, Nova Scotia's public health restrictions started to ease up and the final preparations for a July 1<sup>st</sup> start could begin.

To complete the ride on schedule I would need to do an average of 366 Kms per day. Ambitious? Yes! But I considered it doable based on the fact that at Paris-Brest-Paris I had strung together three 400 Km days on very little sleep, and by the time July 1<sup>st</sup> came around I had done ~9,500 Kms of training since

the start of the year. This included multiple back-to-back rides in the 300-400 Km per day range at average speeds much higher than what I was planning to do over the seven days.

I felt I was as prepared as I could be. Time would tell.

## Seven Days around Nova Scotia (?)

At 408 Kms, Day 1 was the longest and, in many respects, the easiest. My alarm went off at 2:30 AM, I left my house at 3:45 AM and after a quick selfie in front of Cyclesmith, I started my Garmin, launched the 'live tracker' and hit the road. I ended up riding 417 Kms (the Country Harbour Ferry was closed and I thus had to ride extra distance inland around Isaac's Harbour). But the weather was very pleasant (if rather humid), and I had a light tailwind much of the day. I arrived in Port Hawkesbury at 8:45 PM having achieved my Day 1 goal: I completed the ride without incident and had maintained a decent average speed (28.2 Kph) even as I focused on riding slow and steady.



Day 2 got off to an interesting start with a live interview about the Cycle of Life - Ride for dementia on [Global Television](#) (via Zoom from our Airbnb). This was a fantastic opportunity to raise awareness for the project, but there was a problem: it didn't start until 7:20 AM. This afforded me some extra sleep but also meant an anxiety-inducing late start. The second the interview was finished I shut my laptop, put on the rest of my gear and climbed on the bike – I started riding almost three hours later than I had originally planned. The weather forecast was also terrible. Cold temperatures, strong Easterly winds, and proper rain set to start around noon.

Day 2 can be summarized as follows: a stiff headwind all the way from Port Hawkesbury to Glace Bay; heavy rain on and off (mostly on) throughout the day; and an unexpected 8-Km stretch of gravel with some large puddles stretching the entire width of the road. To top it all off I got a flat tire, and the family car broke down thanks to a large pool of standing water.

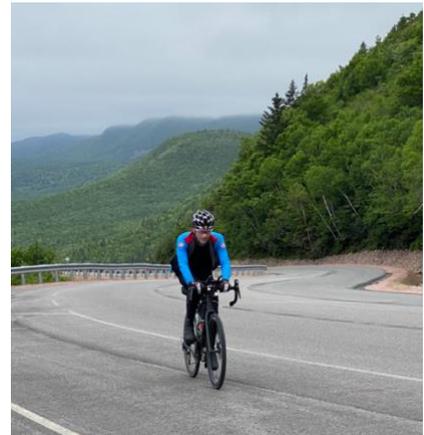
After 250 Kms and 10 hours of riding, I arrived at my aunt-in-law's house in Sydney (a pre-arranged stopping point). It was already after 6 PM. I was drenched, cold and demoralized. The day had included a roughly four-hour stretch during which I was out of cellphone range and thus could not be tracked online. Given the weather, this was very stressful for all involved (had I not been able to fix the flat myself I'm not sure what would have happened – there was no traffic and no houses on that rough stretch of gravel road). The original route had me pressing on for another 70 Kms through North Sydney, over Kelly's Mountain and stopping at a hotel in St. Ann's. This was now impossible. It felt horrible to 'pull the plug' on Day 2 before I was finished, but it was the only thing that made sense.

I left Sydney early the next morning (Saturday) and finished the Day 2 route. It was rainy and cold but uneventful. Soaking wet, I stopped in St. Ann's just long enough to have a snack and launch the Day 3 route on my Garmin. I then started making my way up the East side of the Cabot Trail towards Ingonish.

While I was riding my family had picked up a rental car in Sydney (thanks for the help Bev!). They caught up to me shortly before I reached the first major climb of the day, Cape Smokey. By this time the rain had stopped but it was still cold. We got into a rhythm and made our way around the Cabot Trail in temperatures ranging from 9°C at the top of the mountains to 12-14°C everywhere else. We stopped at Chéticamp for the night – roughly three-quarters of the way through the original Day 3 route. We witnessed a spectacular sunset before going to bed worried about the next day's weather bomb.

## Les Suêtes

I left Chéticamp at ~5:30 AM on Sunday July 4<sup>th</sup>. As I started the last 135 Km leg of the Day 3 route to Port Hastings, it was raining, 9°C, and very windy. Cape Breton's famous Les Suêtes winds were a consistent 30 Kph with gusts



in the 50-70 Kph range.<sup>2</sup> I was headed roughly South, and the wind was cross-tail to cross-head depending on the twists and turns in the road. The gusty crosswinds made eating on the bike difficult (I thus combined my pee breaks with face-stuffing sessions).

Occasionally the road would point straight West and the tailwind would push me along at 40+ Kph on the flats and 60+ Kph on the downhills. Normally I love a good tailwind – all cyclists do. But the problem here was that the temperature was hovering around 10°C and I was soaking wet; the only way to stay warm was to pedal hard. I sat up as high as possible to increase my wind resistance so that I wouldn't run out of gears. On a couple of the longer downhills, I even resorted to dragging my brakes so I wouldn't have to stop pedalling. I've done plenty of shivering on my bike over the years, but I don't remember ever having to purposefully slow myself down for that reason!

This part of the ride was exhilarating and occasionally even laughable due to the high speeds (max 69 Kph), slow speeds (when the road turned East I pedalled down hills into Les Suêtes at 20 Kph!), and the ridiculous amount of water on the road. The term 'magic carpet ride' comes to mind, but that would imply that it was somehow enjoyable – it was not – and I knew it was risky. Gas stations on that stretch of road are few and far between. I was one flat tire or crash away from proper hypothermia.

I regrouped with my family just outside of Port Hastings. I was not surprised to hear that they had felt unsafe driving the car under such conditions. They felt terrible that it had taken them so long to catch up to me. Part of the problem was that I was riding faster than expected and we had again been without cellphone service for part of the morning. They had difficulty following my 'dot' online and for a long time I didn't know whether they had even left the hotel in Chéticamp. By the time their texts started coming through again (I could read them on my Garmin cycle-computer) I was more than 80 Kms down the road.

I was relieved when it was time to pull off the road across from the Port Hastings Motel (where we were originally going to stay). I stopped 'Day 3', started 'Day 4', and carried on across the Canso Causeway to Tim Horton's #5. It was time to warm up, refuel, and regroup.

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<sup>2</sup> The term 'suêtes' is a contraction of 'sud est' / 'south-east'.

It was slightly warmer on the mainland (11-12°C) but no less miserable. We decided to cut out the original coastal deviation North around Cape George (80 Kph winds were being forecasted at the tip). After lunch I made it 50 Kms further past the causeway but it was becoming increasingly difficult for me to warm up enough during breaks to be able to keep riding. Two minutes after I left Antigonish towards New Glasgow I realized it was impossible. I did a U-turn in the road and went straight back to the car.



That's it. I'm done. I was shivering and had no more dry kit to change into. My wife and kids were relieved – they knew I was on a fool's errand on before I did.

### Cycle of Life – reset

Sunday July 4<sup>th</sup> was change-over day. Shauna and the boys were going back to Halifax for work and my old friend Rod Rawding was taking over as my support crew for the rest of the event. I was supposed to be going to Amherst. I wasn't even close. So Rod drove to Antigonish where we spent the night and hit the reset button. The goal for the next day was to make it 241 Kms from Antigonish to Amherst and get back in register with my original seven routes, albeit one day behind schedule. We achieved this without too much trouble.



Monday July 5<sup>th</sup> started out, yet again, cold and rainy and it was hard to stay positive. But by the time I passed through New Glasgow after ~70 Kms of riding the weather was starting to improve. My mood would improve too, though not immediately.

I had lived in this part of Nova Scotia as a young boy (up until the end of elementary school). Rolling across the Pictou Causeway, memories of my youth came flooding back – family trips, pets, sailing with Dad on Pictou Harbour, etc. Cue the sniffles. When I stopped at the end of the driveway of our old family home, sniffles became sobs. I recovered, took a selfie and sent it to my sisters. I laughed at the fact that I used to tell my friends our driveway was ‘a mile long’. Standing there as an adult, I pegged it at ~300 meters!

Shortly after I’d hit the road again Rod pulled up in the car to do his usual check-in. *All good? Yup, everything’s fine.* Actually, no it isn’t...

I pulled over, laid my bike on the ground, sat down on the tarmac and started sobbing again. Perhaps it was the realization that I’d lied to my childhood friends about how far I had to walk to catch the school bus. The intense emotion was more likely borne of relief. I’d made it through three cold, wet, stressful days (more than once I’d feared that the Cycle of Life was going to end shortly after it had started). And for the first time in ages, I felt warm. I didn’t have to pedal hard to stay warm on the bike. The weather forecast was improving, and it appeared that we were going to get back on track.

Regardless of what had triggered my crying fit, things got a tad awkward when a woman and her daughter pulled up in their car. They saw me sitting on the ground with my face buried in my hands and asked what was going on.

*Is he ok?*

*Yeah, he’s fine.*

*Ummm, do you want us to call anybody?*

They probably thought that I had fallen off my bike and that Rod was first on the scene. Or perhaps he’d run me over with his car! Either way, from their perspective Rod didn’t seem to be doing anything about it. (He was of course doing what any good friend would do: after a pat on the shoulder and word of encouragement, he’d stepped back and given me my space.) And so Rod gave our concerned onlookers the backstory – Dad, dementia, family house just back there, silly-long bike ride, crap forecast, calls to the Weather Network’s Operations Manager left unanswered, etc. They seemed satisfied with that.

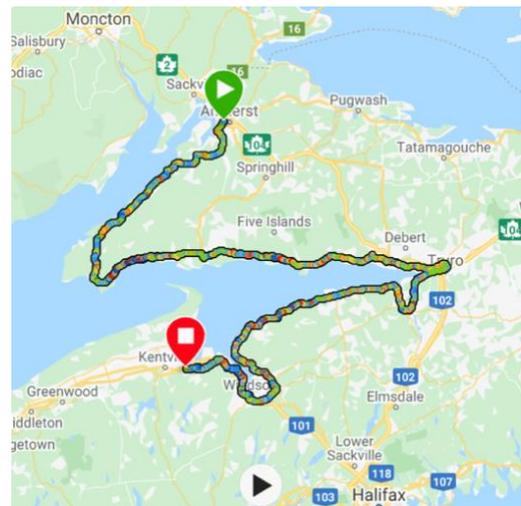
They wished me good luck and drove off. I sheepishly got up, dusted myself off, and climbed back on my bike. Geesh, what was wrong with me?!

I'm happy to report that no further tears were shed on my jaunt across Nova Scotia's North Shore. The main highlight was a chat with Randy and Enid at their farm in River John (they'd been dot-watching and surprised me at the end of their driveway with a cow bell). I also enjoyed having a real coffee in the throbbing metropolis of Tatamagouche. The further I rode the warmer it got and the better I felt. By the time I rolled up to our Amherst motel late afternoon it was 28°C and full-on sunshine. Rod and I had a good meal and got to bed early.



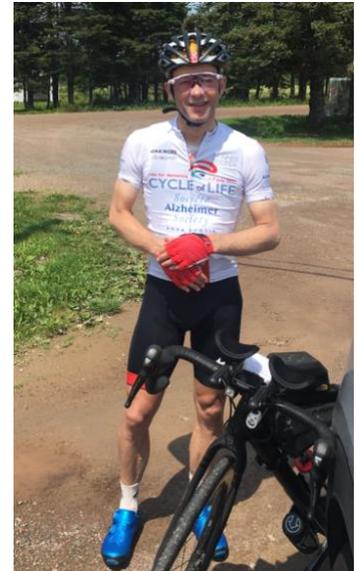
### Amherst to Wolfville – the long (and hard) way

With the reset in Antigonish, Day 5 of the Cycle of Life - Ride for dementia had become Day 6 on the bike. It was at that point that I started losing track of what day it was. I left Amherst at 5 AM on Tuesday July 6<sup>th</sup> (I think). At roughly 400 Kms, the Day 5 route wasn't the longest, but on paper it was definitely the hardest; it had more climbing than my ride around the Cabot Trail. Shortly after I left the motel a heavy fog and drizzle set in and didn't leave until the 140 Km mark between Parrsboro and Five Islands.



Fortunately, when the weather turned, it flicked like a switch – within 30 minutes it was sunny, hot and humid. I shed my raingear and focused on covering ground. I picked up a nice tailwind as I continued East, which turned into a headwind as I did a 180 in Truro and headed West on the opposite side of the Bay of Fundy towards Maitland.

Later in the day, as I went along the Noel Shore and started turning further South towards Brooklyn, I spotted a rider coming towards me in a high-vis yellow vest. It was my clubmate (and 2019 PBP finisher) Adam Pearce! He turned around and we rode together. We hadn't seen each other for a long time due to the pandemic and had a grand old chat. It was nice to be distracted.



Unfortunately, things went pear-shaped shortly after we met up with Rod in Brooklyn. I was now ~350 Kms into the ride and starting to lose interest in food – never a good sign on a long bike ride. In addition to breakfast and second breakfast, I'd already eaten six meat-cheese-veggie wraps, a couple of bananas, and too many energy bars and chocolate bars to count. I had drunk six bottles of Gatorade and another six or eight bottles



of water and Perpetuem. None of the food or drink in the car remotely appealed to me. I choked something down anyway (I forget what), re-stocked the bike, and freewheeled away from the car and down a steep hill towards Windsor.

Moments after I hit the wind an intense fit of shivering came over me. I pulled off the road and frantically started pulling warm clothes out of my saddle bag. Shoe covers, leg warmers, arm warmers, vest – I put it all on. Rod came along moments later and I told him to crank the heat. Adam left to ride home, and I climbed into the car and put on a hat, a neck-warmer and long-fingered gloves.

As I was recovering (from what I'm not sure), we hatched a plan for my next proper meal (yes, it involved Tim Horton's). I eventually got out of the car and started riding towards Windsor. We were both acutely aware that I still had 50 hilly kilometers to go to Wolfville, and that it would soon be dark. I was comfortable with the night riding, but the shiver fit had seriously unnerved me. It was still almost 20°C outside!

We got this.

We got this, right? (Crickets. Tumbleweeds.)

It wasn't long before one of my two headlights began blinking, a sign that it was running out of charge. This was my daytime running light and so I wasn't that concerned. But then my main light started blinking too – Nooooo! I'd been saving that one for the last few hours of the ride. For the past couple of days my rear lights had been misbehaving because of all the rain (they were only lasting 2-4 hours after a charge, when they typically last 6-8), and now my front lights were crapping out too.<sup>3</sup>

My two front lights were now both on 'standby' mode; I could be seen but they were not helping me see. The only thing we could do was take it one step at a time. We got to Windsor. We got to Hantsport. And after hitting the roundabout in Avonport, we crawled our way West down the Gaspereau Valley, and finally started climbing up and over the ridge. That whole time Rod drove right behind me so I could use his headlights to see the road properly.



Although I don't consider myself a seasoned ultra-cyclist, I've ridden unsupported through the night on numerous occasions. It sounds crazy, I know. But the tranquility and connection to nature that can come from gliding through the countryside under one's own power is something that must be experienced to fully understand. Anyone who exercises outside very early in the morning will have a sense of what I am talking about.

Night riding can also be an intensely lonely, soul-crushing experience, especially if mind and body are already fatigued. And it can be cold. At [Paris-Brest-Paris in 2019](#), it got as low as 4°C in the middle of the night – in August.

On this particular evening in early July, the weather was warm and dry. Kids were out riding their bikes in tank-tops and flip-flops for crying out loud! I can't explain why my body wanted to be bundled up like it was March. I guess it was

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<sup>3</sup> At the time I blamed myself for failing to keep my lights properly charged. But the water damage hypothesis was confirmed when the headlight suddenly started blinking in the garage almost a week after I'd finished the ride. None of us had touched it. I've seen this before – days after its battery appears to have died, a light can gradually dry out and come back to life!

just begging me to stop. I also can't recall ever having done a harder stretch of night riding – mentally or physically – than that last 20 Km into Wolfville. It was the only day of the Cycle of Life that I had to 'empty the tank' just to finish. It's not what you want to be doing when you have another 400 Km ride scheduled the following day. But it's what I did.

By the time Rod and I arrived at the motel it was after 11:00 PM. I was fully expecting to have another meltdown but for whatever reason I didn't. One of the very first things I did was stop the live tracker and do a Facebook post announcing that I was finished riding for the day. That had been my routine thus far, and I'm really glad I did it straight away on this occasion. Several dot-watchers later told me that they couldn't go to bed that night until they knew I was safely off the road.

I choke up every time I think about it.

Is it guilt at having needlessly worried so many fine people, my wife and kids included? Is it shame at having put myself in harm's way so publicly? Embarrassment? Embarrassment at the fact that, to me, the Cycle of Life had come off the rails not once but twice? Embarrassment that I couldn't somehow be stronger – eat more – ride faster – do what I said I was going to do, exactly how I said I was going to do it?

It is probably all of those things and more.

I'd ridden for 15 hours and 52 minutes and Rod had been supporting me on the road for almost 19 hours. I could tell that the day had been as stressful for him as it was for me. I was also aware that Rod was waiting to take a cue from me as to what on Earth we were going to do next. I had started mentally working through various scenarios a few hours back whilst still on the bike – when it became obvious that something had to give. They all stank. Sitting in the motel room at midnight, the best decision was... not to make any decisions.

We needed sleep. We also needed to do laundry – boy did we need to do laundry. So I suggested that we set our alarms for a leisurely 7:30 AM and take it from there. After a bit more discussion, Rod put in his earplugs, rolled over and tried to go to sleep (I snore like a banshee after a long day on the bike). I picked at the food I promised him I'd eat before bed.

## Just ride...

Wednesday July 7<sup>th</sup> was supposed to be the day I finished the Cycle of Life in Halifax. It was instead a 'recovery day'. While Rod was at the laundromat, I ate my usual bucket of oatmeal and bagel, re-organized my gear, and sourced some hotels further down the track. After second breakfast, I hopped on my bike at ~11:00 AM and rode 107 Km into a persistent headwind down the valley floor from Wolfville to Annapolis Royal.

We'd chosen Annapolis Royal as the day's endpoint because it wasn't too far away, but far enough to allow me to gauge how well I was recovering from the previous day. The sunshine and warm temperatures did wonders for our spirits and by the time I arrived at the motel my legs had loosened up nicely. We had an early (massive) supper, gave the drivetrain on my bike a better-than-usual cleaning, and got an early night.



The plan for the next day was to get as close as possible to Shelburne, the original start-point of Day 7. After an early start under beautiful skies, we hit some challenging roads in and around Bear River. This included a few kilometers of gravel with a steep descent that had to be taken at ~5 Kph to avoid a puncture (Rod had to drive a similar speed to avoid scraping the bottom of his car on boulders).

I eventually found tarmac and started making good progress around the Southwest tip of Nova Scotia. Just outside Yarmouth, Derek Goodwin, a former teammate of mine from the 1980s-90s, pulled up in his truck.



*Hello!*

*Hello back at you!*

*Do you want Pizza and Coke?*

*Hell yes!*

We hooked up with Rod in Yarmouth and had lunch on a park-bench by the train station. I could easily have eaten the whole pizza but cut myself off at two slices. I also declined the Coke.<sup>4</sup>

By mid-afternoon I'd made it to Derek and Amanda's house in Argyle (where Cameron and I would be staying the night). After a brief stop and snack at the end of their driveway, I pressed on through some short rain squalls towards Barrington Passage (nothing makes the rain disappear more quickly than stopping to don raingear). By the time I pulled into the Sobey's parking lot, all of my gear had already been transferred to the Archibald vehicle. Rod and I had been through a ton over the past four days and saying goodbye was difficult. I paused my ride and stopped the live tracker. After loading my bike into the car, Cameron drove us back to Argyle for the night.

Derek and Amanda had prepared an amazing spread of food. We had not seen each other for 20+ years, and it was great to catch up at the dinner table. But there was precious little time for reminiscing. I needed to focus on getting sorted for the final day and climbing into bed as quickly as possible. They cleaned bottles, lined up breakfast, and Derek graciously offered to clean and re-lube my chain (which I was not looking forward to doing myself again after Rod's departure).

## **Day 9 – Barrington Passage to Halifax via Lunenburg**

After one final early alarm and breakfast on Friday July 9<sup>th</sup>, Cameron and I loaded up the car and drove back to Barrington Passage. (Don't worry, we made sure to park in the exact same spot!) I started my Garmin and live tracker

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<sup>4</sup> I don't drink the so-called 'red ambulance' unless I am absolutely desperate for quick sugar. I hadn't had any Coke on the ride thus far, and it didn't seem like the time to experiment.

and hit the road shortly after 5 AM. Fog and drizzle. Riding in the wet was getting so old it was starting to feel new again.

It was a logistically complex day. Visit relatives in White Point; catch the Lahave River Ferry; get to Dad's long-term care facility in Lunenburg by 1 PM; leave enough time in hand to finish the ride in Halifax. The weather forecast was also worrying: more rain and high winds – clearly not my forte. And a tropical storm was coming late in the day and overnight into Saturday. Not making it to Halifax was not an option.

So in order to meet my targets and minimize the chances of hypothermia, I spent most of the ride between Barrington Passage and White Point slightly inland on Highway 103.<sup>5</sup> I was glad I did, because every time I came off the highway and did a coastal stretch, the temperature dropped 3-4 degrees.



Riding on the highway was not without challenges. The cross-tailwind meant that I could maintain a good speed but with cars and transport trucks flying by, water and wind was coming at me from all directions. I had to spend much of this time riding without glasses. My eyes and contact lenses took a beating.

Cameron and I had the best muffins ever with Dad's relatives just outside of White Point (I ate four of them). As we sat inside the coffee shop the heavens opened and a bit of thunder and lightning served to jolt me back to reality: there was no time to waste. The weather started to ease up as I was putting on my rain gear. And just as I slung my leg over the saddle it started pouring again. I climbed back in the car and waited awhile longer. Eventually I couldn't wait any more.

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<sup>5</sup> As highways go, the 103 South of Bridgewater is a good one to ride a bike on. Relatively low traffic volume, speed limit of 90-100 Kph, and wide shoulders.

More heavy rain and standing water, more wind, more squinting without glasses. The saving grace was the temperature – it was about 20°C and I had no trouble staying warm. Cameron and I continued to execute the ‘leap-frog’. He’d drive a set number of Kms up the road and pull over. When I caught up to him, I’d stop if I had to (food, water, clothes, grumbling, whatever). More often than not on this day, I’d ride straight past him with a quick thumbs-up.

*All good? All good.*

We did this over and over again, with Cameron sending me text messages of encouragement and navigation cues (with a bit of extra squinting I could read them without stopping). As we turned off the highway and headed towards Petite Rivière, our focus became the LaHave River ferry. The 12:30 crossing started to look questionable. But I gunned it and arrived with 10 minutes to spare. I pushed harder still on the East side knowing that I would soon be seeing my family.



## The final stretch

The family visit in Lunenburg was pure magic. Despite his worsening Alzheimer’s disease, that afternoon Dad’s eyes had a sparkle we hadn’t seen in ages. The care facility staff knew that I was coming and were incredible (thanks Marie!). After introductions, chats, hugs, photos and fist-bumps, it was time to start riding again. My biggest fear was that, after all the excitement and relief at having gotten the timing right, I wouldn’t be able to regain my rhythm. Or Tropical Storm Elsa would kick in early. Or both. I told Cameron that he needed to stay extra close and be prepared for Dad to come off the rails.



But you already know that's not what happened.

I did what I had done dozens of times since my on-again, off-again relationship with cycling began in my teens: I focused on riding my bike up that gorgeous stretch of coastal road from the Bridgewater - Lunenburg - Mahone Bay area to Halifax, via Chester and Hubbards.

I made sure to eat and drink. I was careful not to push too hard on those short but steep rollers around Graves Island. It rained on and off (I no longer cared). I played it safe and cut out both the Aspotogan and Peggy's Cove loops (I'm sure I'll ride them again soon). I met some generous strangers at the St. Margaret's Bay Hydroelectric Plant. And some of my cycling pals showed up to ride me in. Before I knew it, I was back in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, back where the [Cycle of Life - Ride for dementia](#) had started 9 days prior.

### Coulda shoulda woulda

If you've made it this far, you will have noticed that this blog post is focused on the ride, not the reason for the ride (my other posts can be found [here](#)). These two things share more common threads than one might think. You might also be wondering whether riding ~2,500 Kms around Nova Scotia in seven days was even remotely possible, for an amateur cyclist like me at least. I've been thinking about that too. In the end it was a full nine days. The journey afforded fresh perspectives that help me to better understand how (and why) I ride my bike long distances and how I see the world.



I knew I would get wet – this is Nova Scotia, not Arizona. But it was the combination of wet and cool temperatures (particularly on days 2, 3 and 4) that I found particularly challenging and triggered a chain reaction of delays from which I couldn't recover. As anyone who spends a lot of time outdoors will tell

you, cold and dry is fine and wet and warm is bearable. But wet and cold is dangerous. I was borderline hypothermic on several occasions<sup>6</sup>, which forced me to ride harder than I wanted to for extended periods of time. The rain became a running joke – an annoying, cruel joke that was funny only on very select occasions. It got to the point that we started keeping track of how much time I was spending in my rain pants. By the time I returned to Halifax on July 9<sup>th</sup> it added up to 800 Kms (a third of the distance covered).

Prepare for the worst, hope for the best. I did this – but only sort of. I had the right gear to wear when it got nasty, but I didn't pack (or even own) enough back-up gear.<sup>7</sup> And I seriously underestimated how much support and encouragement I would need, especially during bad weather. My family and friends signed up to help without hesitation, even though I was vague about what exactly I would be needing them to do. Keeping track of clothes, road food and drink; sorting out navigation snafus (of which there were many); planning meals before, during and after the rides; checking in and out of motels, loading / unloading the car, daily bike maintenance, on and on. It was a full-time job and then some. My support crew were overwhelmed with the logistics and at times deeply concerned for my safety. I feel guilty for having asked so much of them. Together we burned a lot of physical and mental energy.

Do I think I could have pulled it off in seven days under different circumstances? Maybe. With much better weather and generally more favourable winds, I think I'd stand a chance. For the most part I had the right equipment and mindset, though clearly my emotions were at times a hinderance to progress. And even after more than 90 hours in the saddle I had no debilitating injuries that

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<sup>6</sup> I carry one of those crinkly emergency space blankets in my saddle bag in case I really get into trouble. I bought it for Paris-Brest-Paris in 2019. Thankfully it's still in its original packaging.

<sup>7</sup> For starters, I had only brought a single pair of riding shoes – big mistake. This meant that my feet were more often wet than dry, even when the sun was shining (the relief one gets from putting on dry socks only lasts a few minutes when your shoes are squelchy). By Day 3 I had run out of chemical toe warmers, which I rely on extensively due to poor circulation (Rod brought more when he joined me the end of Day 4). I had four pairs of riding shorts, but only one of them had a thermal lining (I could have and would have used a second pair). I had only packed one proper thermal base-layer to go under my jerseys and jackets – another oversight. I had two pairs of long-fingered gloves and two pairs of shoe covers; the neoprene ones were lifesavers. My head was the only part of my body that was properly sorted at all times: summer-weight cycling cap, light-weight Nordic ski cap, winter-weight merino wool cap, helmet rain cover – all worn under / over my helmet in various combinations over the 9 days.

prevented me from turning over the pedals. My body, brain and gut were well-trained. It was the cumulative, synergistic effects of weather and logistics that got me, that got us.

But none of that matters. Coulda shoulda woulda. I'm proud of how we handled the speed bumps. We made sound decisions based on the realities we faced. We didn't dwell on the things we couldn't control. We stayed positive and took proactive steps to shape the journey as best we could. When presented with hardships, that's all any of us can do.

## Every fifth house

The night that Rod and I were crawling towards Wolfville in the dark, one of the dot-watchers had been my cycling club-mate Vicki Robertson. Vicki later noted that I had silently gone by the homes of several families she knew had been impacted by dementia. Riding at night I often pass the time by looking at houses – it's impossible not to. Sometimes I'll notice a pet in the window. Sometimes I catch a glimpse of someone watching television or a family having a late dinner. I do sometimes think about the strangers I see and what their lives are like. But until Vicki mentioned it, I had never considered my 'house-watching' habit through the lens of dementia.

That got me thinking. According to the [Alzheimer Society of Canada](#), more than half a million Canadians are currently living with dementia. One in five Canadians have experience caring for someone with dementia. That's a lot of Canadians. Smoothing out the numbers a bit, the inhabitants of roughly every fifth house I passed that night and every other day on the Cycle of Life have been impacted by dementia in some way.



Every town, every community, every country road. Every fifth house.

I thought about that for the rest of the ride and have been thinking about it ever since. The next time you are riding your bike or driving your car or walking down the street, I encourage you to think about it too.

## Cycle of Life – Ride for dementia by the numbers

**\$21,000** — approximate amount raised as of July 16<sup>th</sup>

**\$13** — amount in coins and cash donated roadside by two strangers in St. Margaret's Bay on July 9

**2,378 Kms** – total distance covered July 1-9 (800 Kms in baggy rain pants)

**91 hrs 33 min** — total saddle time (moving time) July 1-9

**26 Kph** — average riding speed over 9 days

**22,144 meters** — elevation gain over 9 days

**26,960 calories** — total burned over 9 rides (7 routes)

**15 hrs 52 mins** — ride time for the hardest day on the bike: 399 Kms from Amherst to Wolfville (25.1 Kph average speed, 4,400 meters climbed, 18 hrs 42 min total elapsed time)

**6** — number of incredible support crew members who helped me on the road and before/after each ride, and/or looked after me at night (Shauna, Cameron and Miles Archibald, Rod Rawding, Derek and Amanda Goodwin)

**1** — broken down family car on Day 2 (thanks giant puddle of standing water)

**1** — rental car pick up in Sydney

**1** — number of flat tires over 9 days (bike, not car)

**15+** — number of Tim Horton's visited in 9 days

**1 hr** — time spent in Lunenburg on Day 9 visiting my father, mother, sister #1 and other friends. It made the whole ride worth it. Every. Last. Second.

**Too many to count** — texts and messages of support received