

IT WAS LATE AFTERNOON on September 27 and the wind was kicking up war ghosts in Gettysburg's battlefields when the seven members of Team Guinan got our first reality check.

The next morning, we'd be pedaling out from Gettysburg with 117 other riders on a three-day, 275-mile trek to New York City to raise money for HIV/AIDS services. In truth, we knew our team might stand out a bit. We weren't regular cyclists. In fact, our most frequent group activity was hoisting pints in a tiny country pub called Guinan's. None of us had a road bike. One member, a wry Brit named David Lant, was doing the jaunt on a single-speed. (Last I'd checked, Pennsylvania had a few hills.) Another, Chris Robinson, had arrived with his late wife's 1960s three-speed and a riding ensemble more L.L. Bean than Lance Armstrong: khaki pants, duck boots, and white T-shirt—tucked in.

But our Bad News Bears status truly sank in as the last bus of riders pulled up and we were engulfed in a sea of skintight, moisture-management jerseys and CoolMax socks. Some of their bikes looked light enough to balance on a pinky. I saw calves strong enough to revive Floyd Landis's career. Lant squinted at one hard-bodied gym boy: "Does he have titanium teeth?"

Luckily, no one appeared bothered by our motley crew, and as the trip wore on, they cheered us on. That's in keeping with the spirit of *Braking the Cycle*, a journey that begins among soldiers' graves, winds through disconnected Amish country, and ends in the heart of Manhattan at the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Community Center.

The ride's Web site asks, "Why will you ride?" which is a fair question. To train, hunt down \$3,500 in donations, and then sit on something the size of a slice of pizza for three days requires at least a little forethought. Team Guinan rode for a man named John Guinan, father of our team leader, Kelly Guinan. John doesn't have AIDS; he is straight and recalls long ago not wanting to sit next to a gay man because it made him nervous. But John is now a hero among *Braking the Cycle* regulars, proof that an ordinary man can prove extraordinary.

When he learned his brother-in-law Tommy Caruso was HIV-positive in 1994, John figured he had two choices: turn his back or step up. He stepped up—and onto a bike, riding with Tommy every year on a different AIDS ride until 2000, when Tommy died. Afterward, John kept riding; his wife, Mary Jane, volunteered as crew. I rode with John in 2002 and



Team Guinan, from left: Bounds, Bradshaw, Bernhard, Robinson, Ashburn, Lant, Guinan

## Breaking Away

They didn't have the right equipment, but pedaling 275 miles in the AIDS ride proved Team Guinan had the right stuff **By Gwendolyn Bounds**

watched him cry as he cheered HIV-positive riders into camp.

But last year, soon after returning home from his 11th ride, John suffered a grand mal seizure. Doctors located the culprit: a two-centimeter mass in the right rear of John's brain. Surgery revealed more: The mass was a malignant tumor. To date, John's had three surgeries and massive doses of radiation and chemo. He still comes to his family's pub to play darts each week, but riding almost 300 miles is out. So his daughter Kelly, who didn't even own a bike, decided to ride for him. Six of us from the pub followed, including me; my girlfriend, Lisa Bernhard; Christine Ashburn; Dean Bradshaw, who rode John's bike; Robinson; and Lant. Kelly's boyfriend, Ed Preusser, manned our team tech van.

With help from the community around this Garrison, N.Y., pub, we scraped together \$31,000. From dawn till dusk we

rode; at some point during the ride, each of us was dead last. At first folks shook their heads at Chris's ensemble and David's one-gear audacity. Then they began cheering, "Go, Team Guinan!" At dinner, gay men came to sit beside Kelly and reminisce about her dad.

The last day, everyone took a ferry into Manhattan and rode downtown to the center. The streets were crowded. But through the confetti and Silly String, the pumping strains of Madonna's "Ray of Light," and waving arms, we could see a man watching us from a stoop alongside his wife.

His name is John Guinan. He is why we rode and why we'll ride again. ♣

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