

At age 50, it's time to start keeping promises to yourself...

Half-Century Summer

– by Trudy E. Bell

A percentage of any proceeds derived from articles, books, or talks about the Half-Century Summer will be donated in the memory of my cousin Kenny Rogers (1950-2000) to a charity of his family's choice.

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Since becoming an avid touring cyclist in my early 30s, I'd been promising myself a cross-country bicycle-camping expedition—a bright dream beckoning from off in the mists of someday whenever I could “afford” the time. As the decades slipped by, though, I took only two- or three-week bike trips—all that dutiful work vacations allowed.

Meanwhile, brilliant accomplished friends in their 40s were randomly struck by breast cancer. A dear cousin was felled by Hodgkin's disease when but 49, and the vigorous father of another friend eaten alive by liver cancer within four months after his retirement. Remarkd one survivor: “You don't know if you'll live to be 51, much less 65.”

The clarion message: do it *now*.

So on June 21, 2000, despite the fact that I'd just launched my own freelance writing business and landed a big book contract, 9-year-old Roxana and I packed 100 pounds of camping gear, clothes, and supplies into the panniers and cargo trailer of our Bike Friday Family Tandem, rolled them into the back of a bright yellow rental 10-foot Ryder panel truck, and literally drove off into the sunset.

Our aim: pedal 1000 miles along the Northern Tier route mapped by the Adventure Cycling Association back to Cleveland from St. Paul, Minnesota, where we'd been invited to give a talk based on our book *Bicycling With Children* (Mountaineers Press, 1999) at the summer rally of the League of American Bicyclists.

Our venture was to be a two-month solo bike-camping tour—highly unusual for a lone woman and a child. We dubbed it the Half-Century Summer—a double entendre, as a half-century is bicycling parlance for 50 miles in a day, and I hit the Big 5-Oh! that May 24.

The courage to embark

Getting on the road itself the eve of the summer solstice felt like a nightmare devised by Tantalus, with hanging commitments and never-ending house tasks grasping my ankles like a rip tide. It was not until 9 PM, when the last of the sun's glow was fading from the darkening sky, that Roxana and I finally escaped. We drove about two hours on I-90 against stiff headwinds and bright headlights, finally pulling into the Erie Lakes truck stop, which was the size of a small airport, with row upon row of semis idling in the dark. After filling our water bottles and brushing our teeth, we spread our camping gear in the back of our diminutive truck. With a furniture blanket hung for privacy over the back entrance, we slept nestled and hidden among the big guys, to the gruff lullaby of idling diesels.

After Thursday night camping in the truck in Shabbona State Park in Illinois (at campsite 50, no less!), we made Madison, Wisconsin late Friday afternoon, for swimming, Thai food, and endless conversation with *Muse* magazine editor Diana Lutz and her 10-year-old daughter Emily, with whom Roxana bonded amid much giggling and whispering and rustling of markers on drawing paper.

On Saturday, it rained with unremitting determination in Madison, and my heart quailed within me for our adventure. But encouraged by Diana's observation that often the weather in Madison differs from that of northwestern Wisconsin, after brunch at the 1950s-retro Hubbard Avenue Diner, we continued driving north. It was still drizzling at Wisconsin Dells, where Roxana kept bouncing in her seat at seeing all the garishly painted fun rides until I agreed to blow \$6.36 for a 10-minute ferris-wheel ride in the rain. She was happy. And as we continued north to Menomenie, sure enough, the sky cleared, the stars sparkled, and Sunday June 25 dawned brilliantly sunny.

This was the big day.

Dropping the truck keys into the mailbox felt like saying farewell to the last link to life support—and I was terrified

No one seems to write much about the courage needed to embark on a major adventure. While cleaning the house, paying bills, and packing the panniers, I found the physical actions symbolic of the deeper pilgrimage the trip represents, with all the overtones of stripping one's self down to the basic essence.

Now, as we drove the truck to the drop-off Ryder terminus in Menomoneie, hauled out the tandem, mounted the four panniers, and attached the Samsonite suitcase 2-wheeled trailer, I found my heart pounding, my tongue dry, and my eyes on the edge of tears. Dropping the truck keys into the mailbox felt like saying farewell to the last link to life support; mounting the bike with Roxana and 100 pounds of self-contained gear was the ultimate metaphor for a single mother's island-solo responsibility in life.

In a word, here I was finally embarking on my lifelong dream—and I was terrified.

Inexperience meets inexperience

After offering a prayer for our safety, we shifted into first and pedaled off in low gear. We couldn't have had more encouraging conditions—gently rolling terrain and windless weather in the 70s. Eventually raindrops began to fall, but only gently and only for about 45 minutes.

Roxana was a trooper, her steady pedaling vastly easing the weight on the flat and the gentle uphills. On the steeper climbs, we had to dismount and walk, I pushing the handlebars and Roxana at the rear pushing the trailer for 100 paces and a rest, 100 paces and a rest.

During one of the rests, we were overtaken by Ken, a lean man in his 50s in a baseball cap and shouldering a full backpack, pedaling a Huffy Superia. He'd left Green Bay, Wisconsin the same day we'd departed Cleveland, and despite his low-end bike and complete inexperience, had strengthened to the point of riding 100 miles the previous day. He was headed west and planned to keep going until he got tired of his adventure. We rode along together for 9 miles until reaching Baldwin, a thriving burg of 2200 souls. Ken peeled off to keep going, but after our triumphal 31 miles of pedaling some 350 pounds on the hoof, Roxana and I gratefully sank into hot baths at Baldwin's only motel, a Super 8 (where my new AARP membership netted us a 10-percent discount!).

At Baldwin, Roxana and I spent Monday resting and trying to figure how to further reduce our towing weight. So we packed up some stuff and mailed it either home or ahead to ourselves c/o general delivery later in the ride.

On Tuesday, June 27 we rolled again, into crisp, autumn-like sunshine with scudding cumulus clouds that occasionally overspread us and the rolling green Wisconsin cornfields with dark shadows. The route was so rural there was not so much as a gas station, and—where we were not chased off by unleashed guard dogs—we were reduced to knocking on farmhouse doors to see if a kind soul within would give us water and allow us to relieve our bladders.

We nestled into silk sleep sacks under the downy warmth of a sleeping bag, and drifted off to the hoots of owls and the fragrance of wood smoke

Strong westerly gusts caught our panniers like sails and stiffly opposed our progress even on downhills. Because of the giant hand of the wind, Tuesday's 25 miles to Willow River State Park was far more challenging than Sunday's initial 31 miles. It wasn't until 5 PM before we pulled into campsite 50 (again!) and began to set up camp, for the first time using my new North Face Slickrock tent. After a delicious dinner of lasagne and peas, and relaxing hot showers, we nestled into our silk sleep sacks under the downy warmth of an open sleeping bag, and drifted off to the hoots of owls and the fragrance of wood smoke.

Kindred spirits

Wednesday morning, the clouds thickened overhead as we packed up camp. The sky began to spit as we strapped the last items onto the bike. Bursting into “Singing in the Rain” as we pushed the loaded bike up out of the valley, we celebrated our first experience tandeming in real rain—luckily, not a steady downpour, but only fitful showers between breaks of sun that left the asphalt steaming.

That day’s ride of only 17 miles was the most challenging yet, with roller-coaster-like climbs and descents growing ever steeper as we neared the banks of the St. Croix River. At the magnificent river’s edge, we had our first truly harrowing experience—crossing an extremely narrow and extremely busy two-lane bridge into Minnesota. I stopped the bike on the narrow shoulder, unhitched the trailer, and at a rare break in the stream of cars, ran with Roxana across the road so she could walk it across on the concrete walkway. Then I resolutely mounted the loaded tandem and grimly pedaled it the length of the bridge, assertively claiming the entire lane in front of a patient white panel truck, and holding up traffic for half a mile behind.

Once reassembled, we rode up more hills out of Stillwater—a town both too yuppified and too congested for my taste—out a freeway-like state highway to another Super 8. En route, we waved to two other long-distance touring cyclists paralleling us on a frontage road across 20 feet of grass to our right, enjoying a brief shouted conversation at red lights. They were a man and a woman on singles, each towing a B.O.B. trailer, en route back to Seattle after having left there eight months before to ride to Boston.

Thursday, June 29 dawned brilliant and cloudless, the most beautiful riding day yet—and on the most beautiful 10-mile-long paved bike path, the tree-shaded Willard Munger State Trail into North Saint Paul, where Roxana wanted her photo taken before a 10-story-high welcoming statue of a Frosty-like stucco snowman. Then more hills and headwinds and urban riding challenged our by-now jelly-like weakened quadriceps, until we coasted, cheering, into the manicured campus of the University of Saint Thomas, our home for the next few days at the Minnesota Lakes and Rivers rally of the League of American Bicyclists.

Our preliminary shakedown cruise was concluded.

Funny bikes and fun people

At the rally, it was fun trying all manner of exotic bikes, listening to Willy Weir’s Spalding-Gray–style monologue of bicycling in India, and diving through the 4-foot-high artificial breakers of the 25,000-square-foot Wave Pool. Roxana was in hog heaven, eating four bowls of do-it-yourself sundaes at the rally’s ice cream social, and I was happy to be relieved of stink by convenient access to a coin laundry. Our talk “‘Grand’ Touring: Grandparent-Grandchild Bicycle Camping” attracted three dozen active listeners.

After the rally’s final breakfast on Monday, July 3 we rolled again, starting the 1000-mile ride home. We intended to make Afton State Park some 30 miles away, but Roxana’s tiring after 18 miles compelled us to stop short at Newport’s Black Hawk Motel, for an evening of anticipating the Fourth with sparklers (during which Roxana sustained the first casualty of the trip by blistering two fingers when she picked up the lit end of one).

On Independence Day, we indeed reached Afton State Park, which was all one could wish for in a campsite—beautiful, secluded, unspoiled, with whippoorwills’ beautiful urgent calls each dusk. Although most sites required backpacking in half a mile, as cyclists we were allowed the more “accessible” canoe site “only” 47 stair steps above the bike path, and a few hundred feet from the swimming beach along the azure St. Croix River (where Roxana took great satisfaction in patting mud onto floating logs). As a completely primitive site, the only way to get a hot shower was to boil drinking water and pour it back into the water bag hung from a tree branch and fitted with a shower attachment—an open-air treat more satisfying after a hot sweaty climb than a bath in any luxury hotel. Each evening I built a fragrant wood fire so that Roxana could enjoy the peace of the leaping flames and crackling sap.

Parental sacrifice

After a rest day at beautiful Afton, we pushed the loaded bike up the river’s bluffs again and pedaled to Hastings, Minn., at the confluence of the St. Croix, Vermillion, and Mississippi Rivers. Although the ride was only 17 miles, again it was clearly so taxing to Roxana that she was having little fun in the saddle. I was also growing concerned about our continual low-mileage days.

At Hastings I bit the bullet and made an executive decision: to ship the trailer and virtually all camping gear home, thereby committing us to credit-card touring. As sad as I was personally to say farewell to the tent and stove and sleeping bag (and to take the resulting blow to the wallet), as a mom I felt it was far more important that my kid *enjoy* her first extended bicycle tour and complete the trip in triumph rather

than that I have the experience of bike camping. So, in the spirit of parental compromise, I saved out only a tarp lean-to and a few emergency essentials to keep us from courting hypothermia should we get stuck in the middle of nowhere for a night, and UPS'd the rest back to Lakewood—in a stroke, lightening our load by 45 pounds.

It was far more important that Roxana enjoy her first cross-country bicycle tour than that I have the fun of bike camping

The proof was in the riding on Saturday, July 8, when we rode 27 miles from Hastings to Red Wing in comparative leisure, despite the triple enemies of beastly heat (the only such riding day on the trip), humidity, and headwinds. As we had departed from the Adventure Cycling route, farm locals clued us into two special treats. One was the outstanding ground round burgers at the family biker (Harley-Davidson) bar King's in tiny Miesville, where we met a tattooed Harley lady who declared: "The way I figure it, we all die—and at least I'll die colorful!" The other was the rich gourmet ice cream at the Trout Scream Café in Welch on the Cannon River Valley bike trail. Welch also offers the sport of tubing, which looked especially inviting on such a hot day (except for the 2-hour wait in the beating sun)—renting inner tubes and driving patrons upstream in a rattletrap blue school bus to allow them to float and spin, laughing, down the gentle current of the refreshing Cannon River.

That river—along with Minnesota's state bird, the mosquito—was our companion for the last 10 miles down the immaculately kept paved rail trail to Red Wing, a town renowned for its pottery and shoes; there we relaxed for a day of antiquing, swimming, and indulging in ice cream.

On Monday, July 10, we arose at dawn and were pedaling south on the 6-foot-wide shoulders of U.S. 61 by 7:30 AM, feeling great. It was our best riding day yet—sunny skies, strong legs, our longest distance (34 miles). It also afforded us our first glimpse of the mighty Mississippi, revealing how a body of water could be such an inspiration to the likes of Mark Twain.

But the day's real highlight was finding ourselves in the midst of the first day of the annual St. Paul-to-Chicago AIDS ride, whose 1700 cyclists were raising some \$4 million by pedaling 500 miles in a week. Men and women in bright red jerseys passed us in singles and groups, always with a cheering word, a squeak of a handlebar squeaky-toy pig or turtle, a twirl of a helmet-mounted propeller, or the swish of a cluster of rainbow ribbons.

We rode with this party on wheels all afternoon, into Wabasha, Minn.—they to camp in the high school football field, and we to relax at Minnesota's oldest hotel, the 144-year-old Anderson House, which comes complete with a live pet cat (if desired) for every room. Roxana desired, so our sleep was punctuated by the active paws and purrs of Ginger. We also spent a rest day afternoon splashing about in the Mississippi just feet off the porch of Slippery's, a local bar and bait shop made famous by the movie *Grumpy Old Men*.

Our first rescue

It was raining steadily Wednesday, July 12 when we headed out of Wabasha. Even worse, five miles south of town, a telltale *pss! pss! pss!* halted our progress with a rear flat.

Between the rain and a 9-year-old on the shoulder of busy U.S. 61, I didn't want to try any heroic repair. Roxana began waving at trucks. Within seconds, a bright orange Minnesota Highway Department vehicle headed north swung a U-turn across four lanes of traffic and kind Mike O'Donnell drove us 30 miles south to a bike shop in Winona, where we checked into the AmericInn to wait out the steady drizzle.

By late afternoon, the sun had steamed off the pavements enough for us to enjoy an open-air summer band concert, one of a series of free summer concerts the town of Winona has been hosting without interruption since World War I. As an extra breathtaking light show, the clearing rain clouds gave a dramatic horizon-to-zenith display of sunbeams and shadows (technically known as "crepuscular rays") that were worthy of accompaniment by heaven's own organ music.

Thursday was a tough, hot pedal to La Crescent. But the next day Roxana and I enjoyed refreshing breezes from the deck of the La Crosse Queen, our first Mississippi River cruise aboard a genuine sternwheel paddleboat similar to that piloted by Mark Twain.

La Crescent was our last day in Minnesota. On Saturday, July 15, we slipped away at dawn, pedaling strongly south through cool ground fog, crossing the Iowa border 24 miles later just before noon. After delicious barbecued chicken and broccoli salad at the border town of New Albin, we finally reached Lansing, where at one point our loaded tandem was comically surrounded by dozens of Harley bikers and molls on their immaculate, roaring hawgs. Roxana cheerfully perched on a blue one, ready to join the motorized two-wheelers (they said we looked as though we should be put into the hospital!). In Lansing, we spent a rest day enjoying the view from the aptly named Scenic Valley Motel.

Upon the hotelier's recommendation (when bicycling, I make a point of taking locals' route recommendations), we again departed from the Adventure Cycling route to pedal down the Wisconsin side of the Mississippi to Prairie du Chien. The morning was cool, brilliant, and dry, with gorgeous photo-ops of magnificent wildflowers that stood taller than Roxana—and a more bizarre, if repulsive, photo-op of literally millions of carcasses of dead Canadian fish flies (like mayflies but more than two inches long) as thick as black mulch drifted into piles along the roadside.

By 10:30 AM, we'd covered more than 20 miles, and so relaxed for a couple of hours at Lock #9 of the Upper Mississippi's 26 locks, to watch a tow of 15 barges lock through. In the late afternoon, we pulled into the Brisbois Motor Inn in Prairie du Chien for a refreshing swim to sluice off the hot road dust.

After a rest day in which we took in Disney's *The Kid* (surprisingly good and appropriate for someone in midlife crisis in her Half-Century Summer!), we headed across the Mississippi to Marquette, Iowa...

...and straight into cyclists' hell.

A multiton semi missed us by a bare six inches...Roxana was scared, exhausted from the heat, and crying

Hell...and heaven

While the road shoulders in Iowa were six feet wide, they were not of smooth pavement as we'd enjoyed in Minnesota and Wisconsin. Instead, they were a dun-colored mixture of soft sand and large gravel. Rare stretches of paved shoulders, where they appeared just before turns, were interrupted by wide rumble strips. Drivers charged by, giving no quarter or even warning, even the multiton semis, one of which missed us by a bare six inches. And forget level cornfields—eastern Iowa is almost as hilly as West Virginia. It was all but impossible to push the bike in gravel and risking life to do so on the pavement.

Roxana was scared, exhausted from the heat, and crying. In desperation, and for the first time seriously calculating our odds of mere survival, I flagged down an Iowa Department of Transportation truck, which carried us to our next intersection, allowing us to coast down on without further incident into Elkader. That was the black night I wept, heart wrenched at whether this all was just physically too demanding for a child, berated myself for poor parenting, and despaired whether I perforce must give up my long-cherished dream of a cross-country bicycle trip.

The next few days revealed that even on lightly traveled back roads, too many Iowans were rednecks, driving drunk, proudly sporting stories of how many highschool buddies had been killed each year in motor vehicle accidents, and yelling at us to get off the road. I decided to make for Dubuque as fast as possible and rent a truck to make up our lagging mileage.

Nonetheless, one day in Iowa that started shaping up to be our worst on the road transformed into one of the magical best. That was the morning that, nine steep miles out of Elkader and 30 miles from anywhere else, we coasted down into Littleport with legs and wills of jelly. "This may be the night we use our emergency camping gear," I warned an exhausted Roxana.

Hearing a radio's music from a barn, we crunched round on the gravel to surprise a lean carpenter perhaps my age planing a door. After providing us with much-needed water, he surprised us by offering: "It's not much, but you can stay here. The wife will be home shortly." When she drove a truck in moments later from her job as an embroiderer for Land's End, his first words to her were a gruff: "Here are your houseguests."

With this awkward introduction began what became a wonderful afternoon and evening with open-hearted Kevin and Jess, whose 29-year marriage had withstood more tragedy than most of us can conceive—including the year before a flood that invaded their just-refinished house with four feet of mud

and water. Grateful only that the family had survived, they were stoically starting over, and all walls were stripped of wood or sheetrock from shoulder height down to the floor. So gracious to us strangers were they that Kevin caught one of his horses to give Roxana her first bareback horseback ride, and Jess pressed me to borrow an intriguing book that I had begun reading in their guest room and mail it back after we returned home.

At the next day's crisp and clear dawn, Roxana and I pedaled strongly the entire 30 miles to Dyersville, whose claims to fame include the intriguing National Farm Toy Museum and the baseball diamond made famous in the movie *Field of Dreams*. Then another day of riding 26 miles on the crushed limestone Heritage Trail from Dyersville to Dubuque—home of a Ryder truck office.

Before leaving Dubuque—whose steep bluffs and expansive water vistas reminded me of nothing so much as San Francisco—we took in the Riverboat Museum, the Dubuque County Fair with its dizzying rides, trained monkey, and fresh-spun cotton candy, and the delicate, dripping stalactites of Crystal Lake Caverns.

Truckin' to Ohio

Powered by four wheels and a GMC engine, we headed into Illinois for an all-too-brief reunion with former cycling companion and *IEEE Spectrum* editorial colleague Karen Fitzgerald, now living in her grandmother's house for next to nothing and working on a novel about Isaac Newton.

In just two days, we'd driven across Illinois and Indiana—fully appreciating the irony that we were motoring across the easy, flat states after all our pedal-grinding up and down West-Virginia-like terrain. Relieved to be once again in a land of paved shoulders, we turned in the truck just over the Ohio border.

The Ohio portion of our adventure was much more as I had (mistakenly) anticipated the entire trip would be—leisurely and less demanding. Some days, in fact, were almost magical, with sparkling sunny skies, beautiful cornfields, gently rolling country roads almost as traffic-free as paved bike paths alongside babbling rivers, and spontaneous conversations with strangers that frequently concluded with an exchange of addresses for Christmas cards. Our day in Grand Rapids culminated with a trip on a mule-drawn canal boat, that in Bowling Green with more vertigo-inducing rides at the Wood County Fair, and that in Pemberville with a warehouse tour of historical bicycles and the purchase of a wooden tricycle sculpture.

Our stay in Woodville was a little too exciting, however, when I—after packing up the rear panniers in an exceptionally cramped room of the inaccurately named Delux Inn—stood up and cracked my skull on the edge of the metal holder of the overhead TV. When Roxana pointed out that the wound was bleeding through the ice, the motel's manager graciously drove us and the bike 20 miles to the emergency room of Memorial Hospital in Fremont. Two staples and a day's rest later, we were ready to roll another 35 miles to Huron, and the Clarion Inn overlooking ocean-magnificent Lake Erie.

Deliberately making our last week in the saddle the most relaxed, we enjoyed three restful days in Huron, hiking out to the lighthouse, building a 20-foot-long sand sculpture, and strolling each evening down to the bustling Pied Piper ice cream stand for delectable orange-vanilla twists. Thursday was an easy 12-mile cruise along farmland shoreline to Vermilion, our last stop only 30 miles west of Lakewood.

A surprise heroines' welcome

Saturday, August 12, our long-anticipated homecoming day, dawned sparkling and picture-perfect. Neither Roxana nor I, after now 625 miles and more than 7 weeks in the saddle, could really believe this was our trip's last day.

By lucky coincidence, my business partner Dave Dooling was up in Cleveland from Huntsville, Alabama, attending a NASA conference. That sunrise, he drove out to meet us to photograph our last day's departure and ride. Church friend Tom Waddle pedaled his single out to join us on the road for about 6 miles near Avon Lake, and former McKinsey colleague Dennis Swinford met us for the last sunny 15 miles.

But the best was reserved for last.

Roxana's voice rose drowsily from the pillow: 'Thank you for taking me on the bike trip, Mama.'

At 4 PM as we turned down Andrews Avenue, it was clear that word had spread in the neighborhood about our return from our epic two-month, two-wheeled journey. Families with babes in arms stood on their front porches watching us ride by as if awaiting a parade. As we slowly pedaled closer to home, one neighbor walked across the street stretching a glittering silver ribbon decorated with the cheerful rainbow letters “WELCOME HOME! WELCOME HOME!” while adults and kids clapped and cheered and sounded party horns. Balloons and crepe streamers danced on the house stairs and adorned bushes next to hand-lettered signs reading “Congratulations!” “You did it!” “Welcome home, Trudy and Roxana!”

As the piece de resistance, still and video cameramen from the Cleveland *Plain Dealer* and Channels 19/43 TV news—Dave Dooling’s surprise to us!—filmed our breaking through the ribbon, and a reporter stepped forward to interview us. The stories aired that night on local TV news and in the Metro section of Sunday’s *Plain Dealer*.

Late that night, as Roxana and I drifted off into exhausted sleep, her voice rose drowsily from the pillow: “Thank you for taking me on the bike trip, Mama. I loved it all—even on the days I complained.”

BOX

Deliverance from *Deliverance*

“Aren’t you *afraid*?” I was asked repeatedly. “You know, being a woman traveling *alone* with a child on a *bicycle*?”

Hey, I’d seen that chilling movie *Deliverance* two decades ago, just like everyone else—you know, the one that chronicles the horrors (including male rape) that befall several hunters vacationing in Appalachia. And they were *men*.

The message? Whatever chance did a 50-year-old woman have on the road with a 9-year-old girl?

Of course, I was afraid—to the point of being deliberately vague about my route in e-mail messages, checking in by telephone with my mom every night so some reliable person would have record of when I was last seen, and telling everyone that we were meeting up with friends along the way.

But after a few days, it gradually dawned on me that Roxana and I were uniformly receiving the greatest courtesy and respect—even from the prevalent Harley-Davidson motorcycle gangs. Time after time, people commended the fact that a mother would devote a summer traveling with her daughter, affording her both maternal attention and incomparable memories. Three times, complete strangers came to our rescue. Many others offered to include us in their prayers.

The message from real life?

Deliver us from Hollywood and the nightly news.

CAPTIONS

Red indicates the 655 miles pedaled with Roxana by tandem bicycle; yellow indicates the portions of the two-month route driven in a rental truck.

Our first few nights, we we spread our camping gear in the back of our Ryder truck (which Roxana dubbed “Goodwin”), which was empty except for the bike and trailer.

Our first day we were overtaken by Ken, who—despite his low-end bike, heavy backpack, blue jeans, and complete inexperience—had strengthened to the point of riding 100 miles the previous day.

*At the League of American Bicyclists’ national rally in St. Paul, Roxana and I gave an invited talk “‘Grand’ Touring—Grandparent/Grandchild Bicycle Camping” based on our book *Bicycling With Children: A Complete How-To Guide, and enjoyed trying unusual steeds.**

Forget level cornfields—these parts of Wisconsin, Minnesota, and eastern Iowa are almost as hilly as West Virginia!

With the cargo trailer hauling our camping equipment, shown here at our departure from Afton State Park, we topped 350 pounds on the hoof. We found the “used car” flags outside of Stillwater, Minn., and they rode with us the whole trip bearing the message “B-I-G 5-0!”

Independence Day started off rainy at Afton State Park, but luckily our stuff was protected by a 10-foot tarp lean-to (foreground)—which we continued to carry as emergency shelter after shipping back the trailer and camping gear.

What can you say about such sunsets in Wabasha (left) and Winona (above) but “Wow...” Throughout the trip, clearing rain clouds gave a dramatic horizon-to-zenith display of sunbeams and shadows (technically known as “crepuscular rays”) that were worthy of accompaniment by heaven’s own organ music.

Dead fishflies by the cupful—Roxana’s face tells the whole story of her reaction to the millions of 2-inch-long black carcasses drifted as thick as mulch on the road from Lansing, Iowa to Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin. Note the size of the live insect compared to the width of the two-by-four on which it rests.

After our rescue by Littleport’s gracious Kevin and Jess, Kevin caught his gentle horse “Ug” (short for “Ugly”) to give Roxana her first experience in riding bareback.

Vertigo is fun! Roxana rode on all these dizzying rides at the Dubuque County Fair, while I enjoyed the antics of a trained monkey.

In Illinois, we enjoyed an all-too-brief reunion with former cycling companion and IEEE Spectrum editorial colleague Karen Fitzgerald, who is now writing a novel about Isaac Newton.

In Huron, Ohio, Roxana and I spent three hours one afternoon on the beach, engineering a 20-foot-long sculpture out of sand balls that we christened “Tourist Attraction.”

Journalist Trudy E. Bell has written about the physical sciences, technology, management, and society since 1970. The holder of a master’s degree in the history of science (New York University, 1978), she has co-authored or edited two books and written some 250 articles on science and technology—15 of which have won top journalism awards.

Most recently, she was lead writer for the millennium book of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers—*Engineering Tomorrow: Today’s Technology Experts Envision the Next Century* (with Dave Dooling and Janie Fouke; IEEE Press, 2000)—which in January 2001 was named an Outstanding Academic Book by *Choice*, the journal of academic librarians.

Over the past three decades, she has been an editor for *Scientific American* magazine (1971-78), founding senior editor for *Omni* magazine (1978-79), a senior editor for *IEEE Spectrum* magazine (1983-97), and the communications specialist for the North American Operational Effectiveness Practice of the international management consulting firm McKinsey & Co. (1997-2000).

She has also taught scientific and technical writing both at the graduate level (Polytechnic University of Brooklyn’s Graduate Program in Specialized Journalism, 1980-91) and at the undergraduate level (New School for Social Research, New York City, 1978-80), as well as day- or week-long seminars at corporations and universities. She has also written on contract for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), the U.S. Congressional Office of Technology Assessment (OTA), and the National Science Foundation (NSF).

Over the same three decades, Ms. Bell has also enjoyed a keen interest in science and adventure travel, the history of exploration, and bicycle touring. Since 1970, she has published more than 60 articles on science travel and bicycling, and written five books on bicycling. She has taught bicycle safety to children and introductory continuing education courses on bicycle touring for adults. She is a certified bicycle mechanic (East Coast Bicycle Academy, 1989) and AYH-trained bicycle tour guide.

Before this year’s mother-daughter tandem-bicycle adventure, she had chased five total solar eclipses (Mexico 1970, Arctic 1972, Sahara 1973, South Pacific 1977, Montana 1979); bicycled the 1000-mile length of Baja California (1986-

87); trekked to Mount Everest base camp (1987); and flew to El Salvador to adopt her daughter Roxana as a single mom (1991).

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