

Junie Rose

Hoka Hey Ya'll

My journey started well before I ever reached the starting line. While sitting in a cancer center in Mattoon Illinois, in March of 2010, receiving chemotherapy I read about the Hoka Hey Challenge. A room filled with other cancer patients, I shared my findings, I said listen to this, there is a 7000 mile motorcycle challenge going from Key West Florida to Homer Alaska with a prize of half a million dollars in gold. That's when someone said you should do that. When my oncologist walked in I asked him if he thought I would be strong enough to do this ride. He said go for it, go live your life. Then handed me a hundred dollars to get things rolling. I shared this with some friends and within two days they had started a campaign to make it happen. Fliers were printed and distributed around Mattoon and within a week people were donating things for a silent auction they planned, t-shirts were made with my name on them with the famous pink ribbon in the center, a poker run was planned and so it was to be that I would ride this amazing ride. Friends and family gave me money for gas and what-not. They asked me if there would be a way to follow me so I set up a group page on facebook so they could join me.

Things started out a little rocky at the beginning with me sitting at the pancake house when everyone was leaving. I could have sworn Jim Red Cloud said we were leaving at sunrise which was 6:43a.m. But when I heard all the bikes taking off I scooped up my stuff and made a dash for my bike; which was sitting all by herself under the canopy at the Marriot. Dodging the bikes I would be competing against it was a miracle I didn't get hit at the corner. I still owe an apology to the lady who had the misfortune of walking out of the Marriot just as I reached my bike because needless to say I was not happy. So off we rode across the bridges; disregarding everything that was said about jockeying for position I was riding like I had gold rush fever.

It didn't take any time at all to catch up with everyone but I felt like I needed to be further up in the pack and was passing like a nut every chance I got. I caught up with a guy named Mick who I had met in Gainesville and rode down to the keys with. I was trying to stay with him and Chris Carr but they were crazier then I was and I lost them. Then I realized that I was out front with no one behind me. Well the reason no one was behind me was because I was going the wrong route. I had missed the toll bridge completely. After that; Florida was pretty much a blur. I was rained on at least five times that day and finally ran in to a few riders one of which was wearing a garbage bag for rain gear. You remember thinking that for a ride like this a guy would have rain gear but I found out later he had lightened his load somewhere crossing the bridges and one of the things in that bag was his rain gear. I think the first day everyone was a little goofy. So there was me, garbage bag guy and a guy they called Rubber, uniting our efforts to find our way through Florida. I didn't feel so bad about getting lost so quickly because they were as confused as I was. It was probably about midnight when we finally arrived in Daytona. Me and Garbage Bag got a couple beers and toasted to our first day and then got some sleep.

Rubber was already gone when I woke up but Garbage Bag was still there and so we ended up heading out for day two together and stayed together the rest of the ride. Quite a few people were there when we left so we figured we were still doing okay. Garbage Bag was quite the person to have around I realized after a few days of riding. He was an ex-Marine and had been trained for just about anything. It was like having MacGyver with me. Our second day of riding there was no rain but lots of sun and heat so I came up with the idea of finding a lake or river to jump into to cool off. No we did not skinny dip but we did have our hillbilly bathing suits, so we found a secluded spot in a river in Alabama, I think, and jumped in. Garbage Bag thought it was the perfect opportunity to do his laundry and bathe so he brought his Dawn dish soap and took care of several tasks all at the same time. I just floated around in my hillbilly bathing suit and enjoyed the cool water.

Our second night was spent next to a liquor store, conveniently enough, right outside of the Talledega, Alabama state park. There was a picnic table with an area that just looked perfect for our needs. We had stopped at a Piggly Wiggly and bought pork chops that we cooked on a stick over a campfire Garbage Bag had built. I mentioned how nice it would be to take a shower and next thing I knew he was pulling a portable shower out of his saddle bags. He said as long as there was water he could rig something up. So I walked over to the liquor store that was now closed to see if there was a hose or faucet outside and as luck would have it - there was! I figured I could handle a cold shower but Garbage Bag had found something to heat the water up so I took a nice warm shower behind the liquor store.

The pork chops were yummy with a couple more cold beers. A really crazy storm had blown through that night and we found out the next day there was a tornado so it was a good thing we stopped.

When I woke up the next morning Garbage Bag was mumbling something outside the tent so I stuck my head out to see what he was saying and he said his boot was missing. Like a critter had walked off with it. Or it had burned up in that campfire he had built (I had mentioned the night before that maybe he didn't want to leave the boots by - crispy file of sole. It was then he realized what else was in that bag he left back in Florida... his other shoes. Fortunately we were close to town so he only had to ride barefoot for a short time. We saw some other riders that had taken shelter in a car wash. Good thinking.

We made it to the next check point middle of the day and heard that people were way ahead of us so we started riding more for the enjoyment and started stopping to take pictures. Arkansas has insane. We must have gotten lost as much there as we did in Florida. Whenever you ask someone in Arkansas for directions they would say "where ya headed?" We even asked a mailman for directions and he was no help so we didn't get very far that day either. We stayed in a state park that night and made brats over our campfire. We could hear a guy playing his guitar and singing his heart out under the stars that night. Like a lullaby for two very tired babies.

Next morning we were up very early trying to get a fresh start to another long day. We made it across Oklahoma and across the panhandle of Texas. We knew we were deviating from the route but figured we weren't going to win anyway so we didn't care. We were about 12 miles from the New Mexico state line when we found a road side rest area that had a bunch of picnic tables which we turned into our next hotel. I put my bike on one side of the table and Garbage Bag put his on the other and took a tarp I had and draped it over the table to block some of the wind. I pumped up my air mattress and slid it under the table. Garbage Bag slid in next to me and I slept like a passenger on an Amtrak with him on the outside protecting me from anything that might come our way.

New Mexico was beautiful. We met a guy named Larry who was an Apache Indian. Larry caught our attention because he had tattooed his face with blood and tears, symbolic of what his people had been through. He told us casinos were not enough to make up for the things his family had suffered. We shared with him the reason we were out there and knew we had made a new friend.

I figured we were already so far behind that Garbage Bag wouldn't mind if we stopped to see some friends I hadn't seen in 15 years who live in Colorado on our way up to our next check point in Wyoming. So, we met up with her in Denver and had breakfast shared a few stories from the road thus far and started across the mountains toward Fruita where I caught up with the brother and sister in law of my friend in Denver. We promised each other we wouldn't let that much time go by before we saw each other and then off I rode. We hadn't gotten very far into Utah before we stopped for the night and were so glad we had because Utah is a state you need to see. Gorgeous!!

When we got to the next check point in Wyoming it was hard to get moving again because that dealership really out did themselves. I love how they had put so much thought into what us riders might need. Everything from soup to nuts. Comfy couches and chairs. And the Mom was such a hoot. It was okay that she was rooting for the Australians especially after all they had been through. That night we set up camp in the most peaceful place on earth. There were mountains on one side and a river on the other. It was a reservoir so it was free to boot. There was a glorified out house there but Garbage Bag said there were critters out there and that we needed to leave our scent to put them on the offense and leave us alone. What did that mean exactly? He wanted me to pee outside. Oh brother! But I did it when he left to find some firewood. He said we might not have all these conveniences up in the Yukon so I went along with the plan. We made some of the most awesome steak sandwiches that night smothered in grilled onions and seasonings he had in his saddlebags that he said were to keep bugs at bay. When we rode out of there the next morning we saw some wild horses.

Now I know we were suppose to be heading toward South Dakota but we didn't do that either. We just started north toward the next check point in Missoula, Montana hoping to actually catch up with some of our fellow riders. If it wasn't so cold there in the winter I might actually think about moving there. Being from Illinois mostly all you see here is corn and soy beans. No mountains, no huge trees, no wild horses.

I bought a new tire in Missoula figuring this would be the last dealership in the US and heard the roads were a lot rougher up in Canada and Alaska. After looking at the route from there Garbage Bag came up with a plan to be sipping a cold one in Alaska before a lot of our fellow riders by going west to Washington and then up. Well that probably would have been a great plan if we weren't stopped at the Canadian border. Yep - "Sorry sir. You can't come in. OMG! All this and now it was either go it alone or stop here. We had really become great friends and Garbage Bag had taken pretty good care of this girl thus far. I didn't know what to do. Looking back I have to say I have a lot of regrets for not going on but there were a lot of 'what ifs' in my mind at the time. I know you can't change the past; only learn from it and so that's what I have done. I would never give up the friendship we created for anything and this next ride from San Diego to Nova Scotia will be a lot different for me.

I hope you enjoyed my little diatribe and that it helps you to remember some of the great times and place, people, and friends you made along the way. By the way we made the best of the situation and headed down the coast and into California where I caught up with another friend I hadn't seen in 23 years. Best trip I have ever taken in my life and can't wait to give it another try!

Junie