

Terry Baker

Dear Jim and Beth,

As one of the organizers/participants, I would like to take this moment to reflect on the Hoka Hey Challenge. As you are both well aware I have been a part of this great adventure from the onset. I knew from the beginning what an enormous undertaking this event would be, what I didn't know was how it would change my life.

I had the great fortune of meeting a lot of the riders at the many rallies we attended and witnessed the sincere questions, smack talk and bravado displayed. What touched me most was the sincerity of some of the riders as to why, and I repeat why, they wanted to be a part of such a tortuous event. When I arrived in Key West and mingled with the Challengers it was evident to me that some of the dynamics of the event had changed. There was still a lot of chest thumping and talk of how certain people would leave others in the dust, but for many the meaning of the event had taken on a more solemn and spiritual tone.

I had the luck (or misfortune depending on how one looks at it), to check in almost every rider as they came to me to have their bike looked at. In was during the check-in process that I started to hear the stories. Almost everyone had a reason as to why he/she would ride. The veterans were riding for buddies lost in war that never had the chance, one woman decided to ride for a friend that was battling cancer and another woman was doing her bucket list knowing full well that this was more than likely the last ride of her life. As I continued to check the bikes in and hear the stories, each one touched me deeply. The bravado and smack talk continued, but it had a different sound to it. Once strangers, the participants now flung the words around as if they had all known one another for a lifetime. One man who came to have his bike checked handed me a picture of his daughter that he had brought with him. The rider explained that he and his daughter were to do the ride together but she had died unexpectedly just two months prior at the age of 22. He asked me if we would post her picture for all to see.

The magnitude of what had been created in that little cabin at Bur Oak, Ohio began to dawn on me. Peoples' lives were changing. This wasn't just a motorcycle ride – it was something bigger. As we scrambled from checkpoint to checkpoint amidst total exhaustion and chaos, we were being changed as well.

I could continue and go on and on about what we did at the checkpoints, but that has become a small part of the bigger puzzle. I remember finding grown men and women weeping on the side of the road because they had found strength in themselves that they didn't know or had forgotten they had. And, I can still see the smile on an old man's face as men and women of honor rode up his driveway and allowed him to once again feel like the Chief that he truly is.

Some of us we had to reach deep into our pockets to make sure this momentous event was able to come about. For me it was truly money well spent. Memories of this event and the friends I have made are priceless. My faith in humanity has been restored.

In closing, I would like to again thank you both and to also thank everyone that had a part in the Hoka Hey Challenge

~ Your Brother and Friend Forever,
Terry Baker