

DIGITAL ACCESS TO SCHOLARSHIP AT HARVARD
DASH.HARVARD.EDU

HARVARD LIBRARY


# Ride Dedications: Caring for Memories and Ritual Transformation on the World's Longest Charity Bike Ride

## Citation

Beltran Loza, Vanessa. 2025. "Ride Dedications: Caring for Memories and Ritual Transformation on the World's Longest Charity Bike Ride." Master's thesis, Harvard Divinity School

## Link

https://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/42718564

## Terms of use

This article was downloaded from Harvard University's DASH repository, and is made available under the terms and conditions applicable to Other Posted Material (LAA), as set forth at

https://harvardwiki.atlassian.net/wiki/external/NGY5NDE4ZjgzNTc5NDQzMGIzZWZhMGFlOWI2M2EwYTg

## Accessibility

https://accessibility.huit.harvard.edu/digital-accessibility-policy

## Share Your Story

The Harvard community has made this article openly available.
Please share how this access benefits you. Submit a story

# *RIDE DEDICATIONS:*

## *CARING FOR MEMORIES AND RITUAL TRANSFORMATION ON THE WORLD'S LONGEST CHARITY BIKE RIDE*

VANESSA BELTRAN LOZA

B.S., University of Texas at Austin, 2017

M.P.H., Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, 2021

Advised by Dr. Davíd Carrasco and Michelle Bentsman

A Senior Paper Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Divinity

Harvard Divinity School

Cambridge, Massachusetts

May 2025

## DEDICATION

For Jake, always, and all of us who insist on his presence in the world by speaking his name.

En memoria de Don Jesús Hernández, todavía profundamente extrañado y recordado cada vez que juegan las Chivas.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to my wondrously supportive family – your love, patience, and faith has sustained me throughout the years. Thank you, Ma, for always saying “yes” to helping me drive across the country, flying in to babysit, and helping me find new rhythms when life has thrown me off balance. Thank you, Anibal, for being an unlikely voice of reason and always finding ways to make me laugh. Thank you, Roxana, for always being a phone call away and making coming home so full of adventure. Thank you, Lilly and Chicharito, for being my most consistent sources of joy. Y’all mean everything to me.

Thank you to my 2014 Ozarks Teammates – you are central to this writing and continue to inspire me to live in a purposeful, loving way. I carry you and the stories of your loved ones in my heart always. Thank you, Kevin, for being the best friend and confidant a girl could ever ask for. Thank you, Dani and Alex, for motivating me to keep going on the hardest days. Thank you, King, Kitty, Ross, and Haley, for always being my soft place to land. Thank you, Trent, Eric, and Josh, for the unbelievable mix of absolutely wild fun, mischief, tenderness, and enormous depth of conversation.

Thank you to the church communities that have grown my faith, particularly Vox Veniae and Bethel AME. Sarah Chu, Autumn Barker, Weylin Lee, and Rachel Lee – your friendship and gentle care rekindled the embers of my faith across the years. Pastor Gloria and Pastor Ray – you took me in and gave me a home in Boston, which has been a refuge and source of comfort. Being a member of these communities has shaped my work in the world and how I orient myself toward others. I am completing this degree in no small part thanks to y'all!

Thank you to my dearest friends from the worlds of public health and adaptive leadership, who model for me what it looks like to remain engaged in the world's biggest problems and deepest needs. Thank you, Dana, for being an example of a life committed to public health service. Thank you, Monica, Farayi, and Tim, for your trust in me and for your fierce dedication to developing people who will contribute to creating a healthier, more just world. Thank you, Ron, for your heart and all the love you've poured into our community of adaptive leadership teaching and practice. Thank you, Devyn, Andrew, Brandon, Géraud, Sam, Ariana, Gal, Elizabeth, Dana, Hal, David, and Rahel, for pushing the boundaries of my thinking and encouraging me to take chances – the way you have held me with so much love has made everything else possible.

Thank you to my community at Harvard Divinity School, particularly Sitalin, Alfredo, and Thibault – you two made this place feel like home. Thank you, Profe Carrasco, for your constant support and inspiration these last three years. Thank you, Michelle Bentsman, for your enormously helpful guidance, insight, and careful attention to my work.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction …….. 5

Prologue ……. 22

Hope ……..…. 28

Knowledge ……. 36

Charity ……..... 49

Epilogue ……. 58

Appendix I: Additional Photos ……..…..……..……..... 63

Appendix II: Route by List of Days ……..…..……..…….. 68

Bibliography ……..……. 71

# INTRODUCTION

## “FIGHTING CANCER EVERY MILE’

Texas 4000 for Cancer is a student-led organization at the University of Texas that hosts the World's Longest Annual Charity Bike Ride. Since 2004, Texas 4000 has sent a team of students on a 70-day, 4,500-mile bike ride across the North American continent to raise funds and awareness for the fight against cancer. Every year, approximately 80 students complete the summer ride across the three routes, named after the Sierra, Rockies, and Ozarks Mountains to represent the general route taken from Austin, Texas to Anchorage Alaska.

The Texas 4000 team brings together students from across the University of Texas campus, narrowing the extensive pool of applicants through a rigorous process including a written application, a group interview, and an individual interview with a panel of alumni. The team is formed two years in advance of the summer ride to prepare, including planning every aspect of the ride. Members are selected, first and foremost, for their connection to the cause. “A passion to fight cancer” is the quality that supersedes all others. Other qualifications taken into consideration include leadership potential, conflict management skills, and emotional intelligence. While fundraising and cycling are major components of the summer ride, experience in either of these fields is not a pre-requisite – the organization’s commitment is to equip students with the training and skills needed to successfully complete the requirements for the organization before embarking on the journey. These requirements include 50 service hours during the academic year, 1,500 training miles, and $4,500 per rider – one dollar per mile.

The mission of Texas 4000: “to cultivate student leaders and engage communities in the fight against cancer,” through the pillars of Hope, Knowledge, and Charity.[1] Throughout the two years of onboarding and training, as well as the summer ride, riders seek to share:

- HOPE by letting those touched by cancer know we are riding for them and fighting for a world without cancer.
- KNOWLEDGE by bringing life-saving information about cancer prevention to communities and providing leadership development training to tomorrow’s leaders.
- CHARITY by contributing to cancer research and support services while developing the next generation of volunteers and philanthropists. Texas 4000 envisions a world where all students can become leaders in creating a cancer-free future.

The complex logistics of the summer ride are managed by students. The Ride Directors oversee the riders on their route in a holistic sense, while the Fitness Chair manages the build-up in training from 20 miles to 100 miles across the Texas Hill Country, while the Support and Gear Chair trains as a bike and trailer mechanic to be able to make easy fixes to equipment on the road. As the Travel Chair of the 2014 Ozarks Team, I was responsible for a committee of 8 members that planned the logistics of the route. From setting the route, managing rest stops, developing turn-by-turn directions, securing hosts, finding food donations, and working with community

[1] Texas 4000, “Our Program,” Texas 4000, accessed October 2, 2024, https://www.texas4000.org/about-us/our-program/.

organizations to deliver cancer prevention and early detection programs, the work was intense. We relied on the generosity of host families, churches, community organizations, and schools for shelter. In remote areas, including most of Canada, we secured campsites for the team.

In 2014, the Texas 4000 team was able to fundraise over $600,000, setting an organizational record at the time. Texas 4000 for Cancer has raised over $12.9 million since its inception in 2004.

**I RIDE FOR…**

*Every morning of the summer ride, aside from rest days, we were up before sunrise. The Support and Gear (SAG) team for the day, typically 4 members of the team, was responsible for the wake-up call, cooking the team breakfast, and loading the trailer. Meanwhile, riders would dress in their Texas 4000 uniform kits, eat breakfast, address bike readiness, and take a thick Sharpie marker to write a name (or a number of names) on their thighs. Often, when climbing a hill or feeling particularly exhausted, one's instinct is to look down to dig deep – there, the names of those we were riding for served as a reminder to keep going. After loading the trailers, the entire team gathered in a circle – hands over each other's shoulders – to begin ride dedications and speak our loved ones' names into the center of the circle. Community members present, such as hosts, were invited to join. No matter how delayed the team might be from the planned departure time, no matter the weather, no matter the tensions simmering beneath the surface*

*among various teammates, we came together for ride dedications before heading into the unknown.*

Ride dedications, described above, are a microcosm of the broader ritual of the Texas 4000 summer ride. Texas 4000 riders dedicate the whole of the 70-day, 4,500-mile journey to individuals who have been affected by cancer, including those who are currently battling the disease, those who have passed away, and those who have survived it. Morning ride dedications were a daily affirmation, and renewal, of the purpose of the ride in all of its dimensions, including the mission of sharing hope, knowledge, and charity in the fight against cancer; the care of memories; and healing. The etymology of the ritual's name, ride *dedications*, points to their function. The origin of the word in Latin is *dedicare,* meaning 'devote, consecrate'. Ride dedications elevated, and set apart as sacred, the simple act of riding a bike by bringing us into an awareness of our shared purpose and into a sense of connection, reverence, awe, and respect for the names spoken into the circle. Over time, as our communal bonds strengthened, the word *dedication* also came to represent the "self-sacrificing devotion and loyalty"[2] we had toward one another, extending ourselves to provide care in a myriad ways – big and small. The names written on a teammate's thigh become the names written on your thigh that drive you up the mountain, to endure the wind resistance at the front of the paceline for longer than you can, to take as long as you need to so that every rider in your group ends the day on the saddle of the bike – these are just a few examples of the dedication we came to have for each other. The phrase "I

[2] Merriam-Webster, "Definition of Dedication," October 2, 2024, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dedication.

ride for..." was not just a declaration of intent, but a sacrificial utterance that initiated the day's offering during the ride, disrupting the order of everyday life by connecting us to the fragility of our embodied existence and the uncertainty of the journey we were set to embark upon that day, together. Finally, looking at the root verb, to *dedicate,* the definition from Merriam-Webster includes “to commit to a goal or a way of life”.[3] As an organization that prides itself on cultivating the next generation of leaders in the fight against cancer, the effects of the transformational experience have a long-lasting effect post-ride. For me, it is the source of my dedication to the work of public health. “I ride for…” immediately put us in a posture of giving and service, a posture that has shaped our fundamental approach to relationships in life. In both the cases of Texas 4000 and public health, despite lofty ambitions, there is a recognition that eliminating suffering entirely is an impossible task. However, there is immense value in accompanying people through it, mitigating harm when possible, and bearing witness to their realities. Texas 4000 and public health acknowledge that the work of care is never finished—only continuously renewed. Sacrifice is not a single act, but a sustained practice that offers a daily choice to give, to endure, and to serve. Other 2014 Ozarks riders have dedicated their lives to medicine, cancer support services, and public policy. A common thread though the various personal and professional vocations pursued by the members of the team is a commitment to service and care.

Taking these dimensions of the practice of ride dedications to mark the start of each day’s journey, Victor Turner’s ritual process is a general frame I will adopt to think

[3] Merriam-Webster, “Definition of Dedicate,” accessed October 2, 2024, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dedicate.

of the transformation the Texas 4000 experience enables by narrating three days across the span of the ride that represent how our embodied understanding of Hope, Knowledge, and Charity evolved. Arthur Kleinman's scholarship on caregiving are also central to my understanding how the Texas 4000 experience cultivates the habit of care, particularly in the ways that he describes care giving as a redemptive, moral practice that is essential – and elemental – to the existential core of human experiences everywhere and the human development process. My intervention is to demonstrate the healing power of care, both as care givers and care receivers, and provide insight into the type of leaders formed by an ethic of care in a ritual process.

## RITUAL PROCESS AND RIDE DEDICATIONS

A ride dedication would often begin, "Today, I ride for…" Each rider came in with a name, or a series of names. At events, gas stations, hospitals and more, we also gathered names of community members who signed the team's ride dedication banner that we carried with us to Alaska – after 70 days, there were hundreds of names on the banner. Beyond names, we held their stories, their love, their longing for a cancer-free tomorrow. Despite the many challenges we faced, the ever-renewing, daily ritual of ride dedications kept the flame of purpose alive and contributed to the formation of a community anchored in love, remembrance, and service.

Texas 4000 can be mapped using the four phases of a social drama, with the summer ride primarily serving as a Redressive Process for the violent Breach and Crisis a cancer diagnoses precipitates in the lives of individuals, families, and entire

communities.[4] Victor Turner defines a social drama as, “an eruption from the level surface of ongoing social life, with its interactions, transactions, reciprocities, its customs making for regular, orderly sequences of behavior. It is propelled by passions, compelled by volitions, and it overmasters at times any rational considerations.”[5] The first stage of the social drama is the **Breach**, which is a painful violation of a norm by a person or subgroup – deliberately, or by inward compulsion – in a public setting.[6] In the Breach, something terrible has happened. Anyone who has experienced receiving a cancer diagnosis (of themselves or a loved one), managing treatment, the uncertainties of survivorship, or death as a result of the disease, would recognize that contact with cancer is an enormous breach in the life of a person and a community. The day Jake – the 8-year-old child I personally dedicated the summer ride to – was diagnosed with a malignant, inoperable brain tumor, time itself bifurcated into a harsh before-and-after for every person in his orbit. *How can this be?* The diagnosis, and its crushing finality, shattered the illusion of security my otherwise ordinary life, full of mundane concerns, had previously allowed. The rupture extended far beyond Jake’s immediate family, drawing in his school community, family friends, and the broader Phillipsburg community that rallied to his support. Children aren’t supposed to die. A cancer diagnosis reveals that no amount of careful planning or good behavior can fully protect those we cherish, that tomorrow is not guaranteed – not matter one’s age. Jake died, and it felt like the

[4] Victor Turner, “Are There Universals of Performance in Myth, Ritual, and Drama?,” in *By Means of Performance: Intercultural Studies of Theatre and Ritual*, ed. Richard Schechner and Willa Appel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 8–15.
[5] Victor W. (Victor Witter) Turner, *On the Edge of the Bush: Anthropology as Experience* (Tucson, Ariz.: University of Arizona Press, 1985).
[6] Turner, “Are There Universals of Performance in Myth, Ritual, and Drama?”

world should end that very day, but it didn't. This enormous breach left every person whose life Jake touched reeling.

The second stage of a social drama, the **Crisis**, is defined as the conflicts, problems, and obstacles between individuals, sections, and factions following the Breach that the characters must respond to.[7] Once the Breach spreads into a communal Crisis, it is common to go looking for other people who are in the Breach. In finding others in Crisis, one feels less lonely and can consider what actions to take together. In Texas 4000, students at the University of Texas who have been impacted in some way by cancer find each other and spend two years developing a response to the Breach that cancer has created in their lives. When I applied to Texas 4000, it was precisely because I needed to find a way to keep living in a world without Jake – a world in which people we love, including children, die because of cancer. In this Crisis, I was able to find others grappling with cancer grief, all of us eager to find a way to respond.

The **Redressive Process**, the third stage of Victor Turner's social drama, is an often-ritualized public action that may be taken in the name of the law or religion and seeks healing by either restoring the peace and "normality" among the group or by holding up a mirror to society of the "irremediable or irreversible" breach that occurred so that we might understand the breach, crisis, and how we might be a part of the needed change.[8] The summer ride Texas 4000 undertakes, as a whole, is a Redressive Process for the experience of being impacted by cancer that holds up a mirror to society that often does not understand the Breach and Crisis of the disease, suggesting that: 1)

[7] Turner.
[8] Turner.

everybody can, and has the responsibility, to be engaged in the fight against cancer, 2) one does not have to suffer alone, or in silence, and 3) every little bit of Hope, Knowledge, and Charity raised matters, just as every mile on the road holds new possibilities for encounter. Telling Jake's story on the road to Anchorage allowed me to highlight the urgency of developing viable, safe treatment options for all types of cancer, especially rare pediatric cancers, and provide opportunities for members of society to be a part of this change through their charity. Telling Jake's story, and hearing my teammate's stories of their loved ones, also facilitated healing by normalizing his shared experience of loss and creating a community that can bear the full weight of grief. Through this Redressive Process, the members of the Texas 4000 team find healing in a new kind of *communitas*, one centered around care in many forms.

In the words of Arnold van Gennep in *The Rites of Passage,* the individual involved in the ritual process has been "modified" and comes back into the world better equipped to manage the challenges related to the impact of cancer on their lives.[9] Finally, the fourth and last stage of the social drama is the outcome resulting in **Reintegration or Recognition of an Irreparable Schism** – either the breach is healed, with peace and "normality" being restored among the participants, or there is a recognition that there is in fact no remedy.[10] In many cases, at the end of the Texas 4000 summer ride, there is a recognition that there is no remedy for the losses suffered due to cancer – but there is also an healing awareness that one never has to go through the pain of those losses alone and that there the team will support the ongoing care of

[9] Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, Second edition. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019).
[10] Turner, "Are There Universals of Performance in Myth, Ritual, and Drama?"

memories. Every year on Jake's birthday, and every year on the anniversary of Jake's death, I light a candle in memory of Jake – teammates, all around the country, do the same.

Narrowing the focus to the third stage of the social drama, the **Redressive Process**, there are three components to the ritual: Separation, Liminality, and Reaggregation.[11] In **Separation**, the person or group becomes detached from a previous fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions, and previous ways of life.[12] The Texas 4000 summer ride a period of anti-structure, when riders leave everyone they know and all the comforts of everyday life behind for a 70-day pilgrimage into the unknown. Initially, upon Separation, there was a feeling of isolation as we experienced becoming strangers in a new environment. The traditional dress of each individual becomes the team kit, which made us practically indistinguishable from one another. Separating from the structures of our school schedule, internships, and social activities to instead spend 8-12 hours on the saddle of the bike allowed for us to gain a new quality of being with each other, which allows new knowledge in. During the ride, the daily ritual of ride dedications is the marker for Separation – the final moment before *heading into the unknown*.

The second phase, **Liminality**, is where all the interesting things happen because the person on a journey is not quite in the previous state they were in but not yet in the new state or way of being. The summer ride was the threshold of a new life, in

[11] Turner.
[12] Victor W. (Victor Witter) Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, Lewis Henry Morgan Lectures 1966 (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1995).

between who we were and who we were going to be and the new values we embrace. In the words of Victor Turner, this Liminality is “a no-man’s-land betwixt-and-between the structural past and the structural future.”[13] Once we started the summer ride, the hierarchical structures became faded. On a tough day on the saddle, status hardly mattered as we came face to face with our shared experiences of pain, frustration, relief, and joy. We encountered ourselves, and each other, differently. We were all that each other had and, in that liminality, we learned to more meaningly engage with practices of care that made survival – and, later, flourishing – possible.

A key component of the Liminality phase is the creation of *communitas,* a bond created in the ritual process that has an existential quality as “it involves the whole other man in his relation to other whole men.”[14] *Communitas* is about the raw encounter that can occur at the threshold, when “men are released from structure into *communitas* only to return to structure revitalized by their experience of *communitas.*”[15] Victor Turner describes *communitas* using the metaphor of Lao-tse’s chariot wheel.[16] *Communitas* is formless, at the center, yet key to creating and sustaining something new created in between people. Victor Turner writes, “the spokes of the wheel and the nave (i.e., the central block of the wheel holding the axle and spokes) to which they are attached would be useless, [Lao-tse] said, but for the hole, the gap, the emptiness at the center… [the ‘emptiness at the center’] is indispensable to the functioning of the structure of the wheel.”[17] Each member was a spoke on the wheel, and **the center was the ritual of**

[13] Turner, “Are There Universals of Performance in Myth, Ritual, and Drama?”
[14] Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*.
[15] Turner.
[16] Turner.
[17] Turner.

**ride dedications**, which was the one daily activity that anchored the experience. Though every day was planned to an extent, there was a great deal of ambiguity because it was impossible to account for all the things we would encounter on the road. Sometimes the unexpected was a river or a lake to jump in, other times it was a flat tire or a train track that caused a fall. In either case, it was vital to be present to the experience because each moment was full of possibility. A thought that often crossed our minds was, “why can’t life *always* be this way?” The possibility and freedom of the summer ride allowed us to dream of a new way of living and being with each other, even after we crossed the finish line in Anchorage. The summer ride was the pilgrimage where growth and change occurred, opening the way to something new potentialities, because it had the capacity to hold everything that we were carrying.

Finally, in **Reaggregation**, you come home and fully enter into a new state with its own rites and obligations, integrating everything that you have learned through the ritual process. Reaggregation is coming to the end of the summer ride, re-entering structure, order, and rest, transformed. For Texas 4000 riders, it’s Day 71 and beyond. It’s the question, “how will you carry what you learned, and who you became, into the rest of your life?”

## CARING FOR EACH OTHER, CARING FOR MEMORIES

As an entirely self-sufficient cycling team, Texas 4000 riders were expected to learn how to be responsible for the functioning of the team and the safety of each person. Tactically, that meant rotating the duties of driving support vehicles, setting up rest stops, securing food donations, and preparing meals. In practice, the art of

caregiving and care receiving became the heart of the experience as we learned to care for one another and engage in the lifelong care of memories.

Arthur Kleinman explores the dynamics of care in his groundbreaking book, *The Soul of Care: The Moral Education of a Husband and a Doctor*, where he plunges us into a vivid case of caregiving and gives us deep insight into the decade during which he cared for his beloved wife, Joan, after she is diagnosed with early-onset Alzheimer's. In *The Soul of Care*, Arthur Kleinman argues that caregiving is a redemptive, moral practice that is essential – and elemental – to the existential core of human experiences everywhere and the human development process.[18] According to Kleinman, "care can offer wisdom for the art of living" by reorienting caregivers to what is most at stake in human experience and what makes life worth living.[19] The text affirms the centrality of relationships in our lives, encourages us make a habit of care, and offers the practices of caregiving and care receiving as vital tools to endure the unendurable in an uncertain world.

Care, as understood by Arthur Kleinman, is a reciprocal "gift-sharing process in which we give and receive attention, affirmation, practical assistance, emotional support, moral solidarity, and abiding meaning that is complicated and incomplete"[20] The exchange of vital presence, spirited engagement, and intimacy, called out from within us through acts of caring, fosters moments of "deep human connection, of

[18] Arthur Kleinman, *The Soul of Care: The Moral Education of a Husband and Doctor* (New York: Viking Press, 2019).
[19] Kleinman.
[20] Kleinman.

honesty and revelation, of purpose and gratification."[21] The definition of care Arthur offers is capacious, spanning "a broad range of experiences from worrying and loving to doing any or all things required to help someone, someone in need."[22] We can see Arthur's commitment as a caregiver in the mundane, everyday moments, where the care he provided Joan became a habit and a set of well-practiced rituals. He describes walking Joan through the house as she is losing her vision, stating, "I became her guide. I took her by the hand, kissing it and her cheek, first just to remind her of how deeply loved she was, and later on, as her cognitive functions deteriorated, to assure her it was really me."[23] Even as her condition worsened, Arthur's moral commitment to care for Joan shines through. In describing her unraveling and episodes of incontinence – trials that teach and test endurance – Arthur states, "I cleaned up the mess, washed the floor, and cried uncontrollably, sure that I couldn't go on any longer. Joan consoled me and cheered me on, as she had from the start: 'You can do it! Arthur, you can do it,' she implored. So I did it, and much, much more."[24] Arthur became more than he was through caregiving. As his mother and children once stated, caregiving made Arthur human. In reflecting on this transformation himself, Arthur writes, "The decade during which I became Joan's primary caregiver remade my life. I experienced pain and disappointment, failure and exhaustion, difficulty upon difficulty. I also became a different person, a better person. … [Caregiving] furthered my liberation from driving ambition and from the single-minded absorption in my work… I took on greater cares –

[21] Kleinman.
[22] Arthur Kleinman, "Arc of Interference," in *Arc of Interference: Medical Anthropology for Worlds on Edge*, ed. João Biehl and Vincanne Adams (Durham: Duke University Press, 2023), 305–26.
[23] Kleinman, *The Soul of Care: The Moral Education of a Husband and Doctor*.
[24] Kleinman.

much greater, to be sure – yet they reoriented me to what really mattered."[25] In requiring authentic commitment to the caregiving relationship, and direct action in response the care recipient's needs, Arthur was able to gain wisdom about the art of living, wisdom defined by French philosopher Pierre Hadot as "a state of complete liberation from the passions, utter lucidity, knowledge of ourselves and of the world."[26] Thus, in *The Soul of Care,* Arthur demonstrates the transformative power of care, both for the caregiver and for the care receiver.

Care is something that must be done, which makes the choice of the phrase "practice of care" significant – to practice is to perform often so as to become proficient, to do habitually, to train oneself in a customary action.[27] Aristotle is quoted as saying, "Moral excellence comes about as a result of habit. We become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts."[28] Arthur Kleinman offers us the idea that we become caring, and caregivers, by doing acts of care and caregiving. When we are faced with need, or suffering, we must act – we must respond. It's how we create who we are. Our response to suffering can be the reformation of who we are. We are able to change ourselves, and cultivate the world around us, by going out and caring for others. It is the external ritual of care and concern that brings our presence out into the world, where we find ourselves not by getting lost inside but by being present to other human beings. Chinese philosopher Xunzi states, "only humans

---

[25] Kleinman.
[26] Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. Arnold Davidson, 1st edition (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1995).
[27] "Definition of Practice," Merriam-Webster, April 22, 2024, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/practice.
[28] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. H Rackham (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Havard University Press, 1926).

can give pattern to the world"[29], meaning that only humans can create a better world. Caring for others thus creates meaning in us, and meaning in the world.

In the ritual process of Texas 4000, namely the summer ride, the stories of each day are filled with moments of caregiving and care receiving emerging from the growing sense of *communitas* that developed on the journey. As teammates, we engaged in the work of care by attending to the practical realities of each other's physical needs from the beginning. Whether it was ensuring the safety of the roads, or finding food donations in order to keep the team fed, or helping each other roll out our muscles to prevent injuries, we learned to give and receive care depending on the need and our given role on the team that day. The care for each other's emotional world grew over time as we came to know each other's stories, dreams, and the many quirks that made them singular in all the world. We come to love people in moments, in highly specific and detailed ways, and the summer ride allowed us to practice care in highly individualized ways. Kevin, my best friend, was diagnosed with Tourette syndrome in 7$^{th}$ grade – during the ride, I learned to calmy walk over to educate people when, unaware of his condition, they shot him dirty looks after a loud tic. Then, I'd make sure to walk over to hold as the anger, frustration, and anger coursed through his system. Kitty liked to methodically organize her duffel bag each night, so I sat next to her and talked about the wildlife we saw that day. Trent detested jelly so, when making sandwiches for him while on the SAG team, I'd make sure to achieve his perfect ratio of peanut butter and honey. I knew I could make Leah's day by playing her favorite song, Beyoncé's *Love on*

[29] Michael Puett, "The Haunted World of Humanity: Ritual Theory from Early China," in *Rethinking the Human*, ed. J. Michelle Molina, Donald K. Swearer, and Susan Lloyd McGarry (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2010).

*Top,* on my bike speaker. Through the summer ride, day by day, we were able to build a habit of care. The care that I receive from my teammates, which has continued to this day, sustains my life and my work of caregiving in the world.

Through ride dedications, we also engaged in the care of memories. In remembering and speaking of our loved ones who had been affected by cancer, the images, feelings, and narratives rushed forward and – for a moment – were held by the group as the sole purpose of its existence. Above our ride dedication, the cloud of witnesses above us was palpable. Their memory, now collectively held, was like the wind at our back, pushing us forward. In speaking to the importance of the care of memories, Arthur Kleinman states:

> We seem to need to remember so as to project or reaffirm key meanings in our lives. We remember to recreate meanings that sustain us, that help us to endure. Those memories are central to the way we talk to ourselves and to others. They humanize our worlds. They distil wisdom from experience. They come right into our lives and illuminate them from within.[30]

The care of memories is a form of caregiving and, for those who have gone ahead, a possibility for the continuation of caregiving.

[30] Arthur Kleinman, "Caring for Memories," *The Lancet (British Edition)* 387, no. 10038 (2016): 2596–97, https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(16)30853-4.

## TURNING TOWARD EACH OTHER IN CARE

I was transformed through the experience of Texas 4000, particularly the rituals of the summer ride and ride dedications. While every member of the team joined for selfish reasons, whether it was “my growth,” or “my healing”, or “my desire to honor a loved one”, we came to experience a sense of *communitas* through the ritual process that generated an impact greater, and more long-lasting, than the sum of its parts. My understanding of the purpose of Texas 4000 was transformed as well. Troubled by the militaristic language and war metaphors used to describe cancer, I felt a growing discomfort with language like “fighting cancer” or “cancer warrior” or the notion of “losing the fight”. While these metaphors can be empowering to some undergoing treatment, they valorize suffering and often make conversation about the tradeoffs between quantity of life and quality of life seem unspeakable. While I hold the tension between these perspectives, I came to see the mission of Texas 4000 as *cultivating caregivers and supporting communities in turning toward each other in care to address the effects of cancer*, through the pillars of Hope, Knowledge, and Charity. Through this lens, even my understanding of the three pillars of Texas 4000 shifted to sharing:

- HOPE by letting those affected by cancer know we care for them and are working toward a future with viable, safe treatment options for all
- KNOWLEDGE by bringing life-saving information of the ways we can care for each other in practical ways, including prevention and early screening, and offering up our vital presence to ensure each person feels seen and cared for in their singularity

- CHARITY by demonstrating our agape love, the highest form of love, through our concern for each other's wellbeing and the care we exhibit toward one another, which can be expressed in myriad ways ranging from small acts of service to contributing to cancer research to volunteering to provide support services

In the pages that follow, I will tell the story of a few key experiences of the 2014 Texas 4000 Ozarks route from my memories. These stories demonstrate the significance of ride dedications as the ritual anchoring the broader Redressive Process of the summer ride. Through these stories, I hope to demonstrate the healing power of care, both as care givers and care receivers, and provide insight into the type of leaders formed by an ethic of care in a ritual process.

# PROLOGUE

## WHY I RIDE: VANESSA

I ride for Jacob Austin Grecco, known by many as “Jake the Hero”.

Born on April 1, 2004, Jake would be 21 years old if he were still alive today. While the overall cancer mortality rate for pediatric cancers has declined by more than 50% from 1975 to 2022, the advances in research has been uneven for certain types of cancers.[31] When Jake was diagnosed with gliomatosis cerebri on July 27, 2011, the prognosis was fatal.[32] As a rare, inoperable brain tumor, there are no known treatments or therapies – the median survival rate is just 1-2 years.[33] With less than 100 new diagnoses of gliomatosis cerebri per year, research has been limited due to a lack of funding.[34] Still, the family was hanging on to the distant possibility that Jake would somehow beat the impossible odds.

Before meeting Jake, I only knew cancer survivors. My grandmother had basal cell carcinoma excised so many times, the procedure had become commonplace in the context of all of her medical treatments. My soccer referee mentor, Barry Sherry, had recently completed his treatment for prostate cancer. Barry was like a father to me, but more present and engaged than any other paternal figure in my life. When cancer occupied all of his thoughts during treatment, the only place he found silence and peace

---

[31] “Cancer in Children and Adolescents,” National Cancer Institute, August 29, 2024, https://www.cancer.gov/types/childhood-cancers/child-adolescent-cancers-fact-sheet.
[32] Weill Cornell Medicine, “The Prognosis,” Gliomatosis Cerebri International Registry, accessed October 2, 2024, https://gcregistry.com/gliomatosis-cerebri/prognosis.
[33] Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, “Gliomatosis Cerebri: Pediatric Cancer Treatment,” Childhood Gliomatosis Cerebri, accessed October 2, 2002, https://www.dana-farber.org/cancer-care/types/childhood-gliomatosis-cerebri.
[34] Weill Cornell Medicine, “Gliomatosis Cerebri | Neurological Surgery,” Gliomatosis Cerebri, accessed October 2, 2024, https://neurosurgery.weillcornell.org/condition/gliomatosis-cerebri.

was on the saddle of his bike. Once in remission, Barry traveled the world to cycle and raise awareness about the need for regular screening and raised thousands of dollars to support cancer research. When I was thinking of which colleges I would apply to, Barry told me about Texas 4000 at the University of Texas at Austin – the idea of college students really taking action in this, the world's longest charity bike ride, was immediately appealing. Based on Barry's advice, UT was the only college I applied to.

My plan was to dedicate my Texas 4000 ride to Barry. I don't think I truly understood everything that cancer can take away from a person, a family, a community, until Barry introduced me to his nephew who had recently been diagnosed. Jake the Hero came into my life, snazzy guns blazing, and stole my heart. Here was this beautifully silly, perfect seven-year-old boy with bright blue eyes and a crooked smile. He loved the marshmallows in Lucky Charms, M&M's, and Superheroes – especially Batman. With his signature HUGGY!, Jake had literally won the "Best Hugs" award at his summer camp the year before he was diagnosed. He lived a normal life, not knowing a cancerous tumor was growing in his brain until he collapsed one day. When he received his terminal diagnosis after a biopsy, the doctors gave him six months to a year left to live, where every moment of every day would be a fight for another tomorrow.

Jake took one experimental treatment after the next without complaint, often with a silly smile on his face as he tried to cheer those around him up. He spent his days playing, learning, laughing, and loving, even as his condition continued to deteriorate. After the doctors had done everything they could, with only hospice care and palliative treatment left to make end of life more comfortable, the only stone left unturned was a

costly experimental treatment in Germany. In just a couple of days, a community of his friends and family raised $25,000 for this purpose. Jake and his mom flew half a world away on a hope and a prayer while the rest of us held our breaths. After some initial improvement, Jake's condition markedly worsened. Then, our only concern was getting him home to say goodbye. A private, medical flight was the only option, but the price stood at a seemingly insurmountable $57,000. A campaign unlike anything I have ever seen began. Emails, tweets, posts, calls, anything and everything we could think of to get donations. People gave what they could or prayed if they couldn't. The money was raised almost overnight, not by known philanthropists or organizations, but in $5s, $10s, and $20s, by a community of people who wanted to give Jake's father one last of those hugs by our little Superhero. Jake's brothers, Alexander and Joshua, were also eagerly awaiting his return.

Jake's emergency medical flight was scheduled to depart at 7:30 am on August 1st. Jake fought to stay with his mother, Stacey, until she told him that the choice to leave was his. It's like he held on until he knew Stacey was ready as she listened to his breathing slowing, wondering which breath would be his last. In the end, Jake died in Germany in his mother's arms, at 3:26 am on August 1, 2012 – a year and four days after he had been diagnosed, just hours before his trip home.

I was left with an empty feeling. In his absence, Jake's final gift to us was a community of care – one that came together and remains active in our advocacy to fund research for more effective treatment options for rare pediatric cancers.

## DAY 2: TEMPLE

It was June 1st, the day after the Atlas ride. The first real day of the summer ride. My team and I started the first morning of our 70-day ride with a Ride Dedication circle. We had said goodbye to our family, and the life that we knew, the night before. My throat caught remembering saying teary goodbyes to my babies, Lilly and Chicharito, who appreciated the kisses and hugs but looked confused nonetheless about why I was so emotional. I held their tiny faces in my hands, memorizing the distinct color of their chocolate eyes, their smell, the texture of their fur. I felt the gift my brother sent me off with, a small bison figurine with a piece of his favorite bandana wrapped around its neck, sitting in my back pocket. “Call him Sonder,” he said. When I looked it up on my phone, I saw that the definition for sonder on the *Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows* was:

> the realization that each random passerby is living a life as vivid and complex as your own—populated with their own ambitions, friends, routines, worries and inherited craziness—an epic story that continues invisibly around you like an anthill sprawling deep underground, with elaborate passageways to thousands of other lives that you’ll never know existed, in which you might appear only once, as an extra sipping coffee in the background, as a blur of traffic passing on the highway, as a lighted window at dusk.[35]

It was perfect.

[35] Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows, “Sonder,” accessed October 2, 2024, https://www.dictionaryofobscuresorrows.com/post/23536922667/sonder.

Sonder, embodying my brother's love, would be like my guardian angel this summer. Still – who would find a way to make me laugh on the hard days? Who would remind me to take off my contacts at the end of the night? Who would be there to push me up the hills that seem impossible to cross? The 27 of us, practically strangers at that point, stood shoulder to shoulder in a circle. We recognized that we were at a precipice, a moment that would mark a "before" and an "after" in our lives, with no idea what life would look like on the other side. One by one, then all at once, we put our arms around each other's shoulders in the circle. "Today, I ride for…" The stories came spilling out, quiet and serene on the first day. Short. We were full of feeling, apprehension mixed with love mixed with grief. While we carried the image of their faces in our mind's eye, and their names on the tip of our tongues, bringing others into that reality felt like a daunting proposition for some of us. I wrote the name I could barely say, "Jake", on my thigh with a thick Sharpie. We had an 80-mile day ahead of us in 100° weather. Jake couldn't throw in the towel a single day when he was fighting Gliomatosis cerebri and, in honor of him, neither could I.

Near the end of the day, dehydrated and feeling defeated, I slowed to consider if I could keep going. Kevin, my teammate next to me, noticed and immediately put his hand on the small of my back to keep me at pace and growled, "*Empuje*! You can't give up on me now. For Jake – we'll finish together." And we did.

**HOPE**

## WHY I RIDE: DANI

I ride for my dad's close friends, Gregorio and Ricky. When my father's friends were diagnosed, I did not understand how horrible this disease was. Seeing the men who helped me take my first steps many years ago completely change in front of my eyes was devastating. My father is a man of action; he immediately began contacting everyone he knew asking for monetary and food donations for their families. Soon, everyone close to us knew about my father's friends and was very willing to help. When Ricky passed away, my father was not himself for a while. I felt like I completely understood his sorrow, but in retrospect, I realize I could never even imagine how he felt. Gregorio had beaten his cancer, and everything seemed to be returning to normal. However, during my first semester of college I received a call from my dad asking me to pick up Gregorio's daughter who studies at St. Edward's and meet up with him. His voice was stern – I did not even have to ask what was wrong. I drove down to Houston a couple weeks later for the funeral arrangements; simply put, it was an incredible service. Gregorio was an 18-wheeler driver, as is my father. Next to his grave they had parked his truck. My father's truck, along with his co-workers' trucks had formed a big circle around his truck and grave. After a moment of silence, the horns of the trucks all cut through the air. What would regularly be an unpleasant shrill in your ears actually highlighted a very tranquil and peaceful moment. As I looked around, I could see everyone hugging and embracing. Gregorio and Ricky battled cancer however they did not battle it alone they had full support of their family and friends.

My father is one of the most admirable people I know. He's helped me grow into the person I am today through his love and determination to excel, even when things are not always going his way. Seeing the way cancer changed him, changed me.

I ride for the families of those who have fallen to cancer and the friends who helped them fight through. Cancer does not just affect the person with the disease, it changes everyone around them. I ride for the amazing cause that is Texas 4000, reaching out to everyone and for reminding cancer fighters that they are not alone on this fight, ever.

## DAY 4-5: HOUSTON, TX, USA

The house still smelled of the cookies we made to celebrate watching Trent's interview on TV after our team wrapped up our presentation, where we delivered updates about the research our ride was funding and emphasized the importance of cancer prevention, early screening, and social support for those undergoing treatment. Having spent months communicating with our hosts, the local College Station channel was eager to hear how he had been able to arrange such a powerful community event at the local high school. My heart burst with a rush of love and pride as he asked us to take a picture of him next to the television for his mom. I was lucky to share the host house with the rowdy Buds, Trent, Josh, Eric, and Reid, who I heard bounding down the stairs before I could see them. After a quick breakfast of toast, eggs, and bacon (the leftovers of which we stashed in our jersey pockets as a snack for later), we met up with the rest of the team at the high school for our ride dedication circle. All of our hosts joined, expanding the circle to encompass the whole of the faculty parking lot. After thanking and hugging our hosts goodbyes, we broke up into ride groups for the day's 65-mile ride.

Dani, Leah, Haley, Emmy, and I decided to ride together. It was a particularly exciting day for a couple reasons: 1) we were riding to Leah's house, 2) many of our family members, including mine, would be present at our community program that evening, and 3) we had our first rest day the next day! The first rest stop was on the side of the road at the 25-mile mark, where Eric found an exceedingly large grasshopper that – to my absolute horror – he popped in his mouth. "I just wanted to see what the texture was like," he said. Noting how surprising it was that it was squishy, rather than crunchy (as

he expected), he casually jumped back on his bike to continue riding. The lunch rest stop at the 50-mile mark was a feast, featuring donations from Sonic, Papa John's, and Church's Chicken, secured by the day's SAG team of Ashley, Vaibhav, Teddie, Kristina, and Kevin. As we rode the last couple of miles into Leah's neighborhood, she described all the significant markers of her childhood she could point out. "This is the street I would take to school, here is the backyard that always had sprinklers on in the afternoon on my walk home, here is where I fell of the bike when I was learning to ride." I smiled, imagining how much smaller Leah must have been as a child – at only 19 years of age, she was the baby of the team.

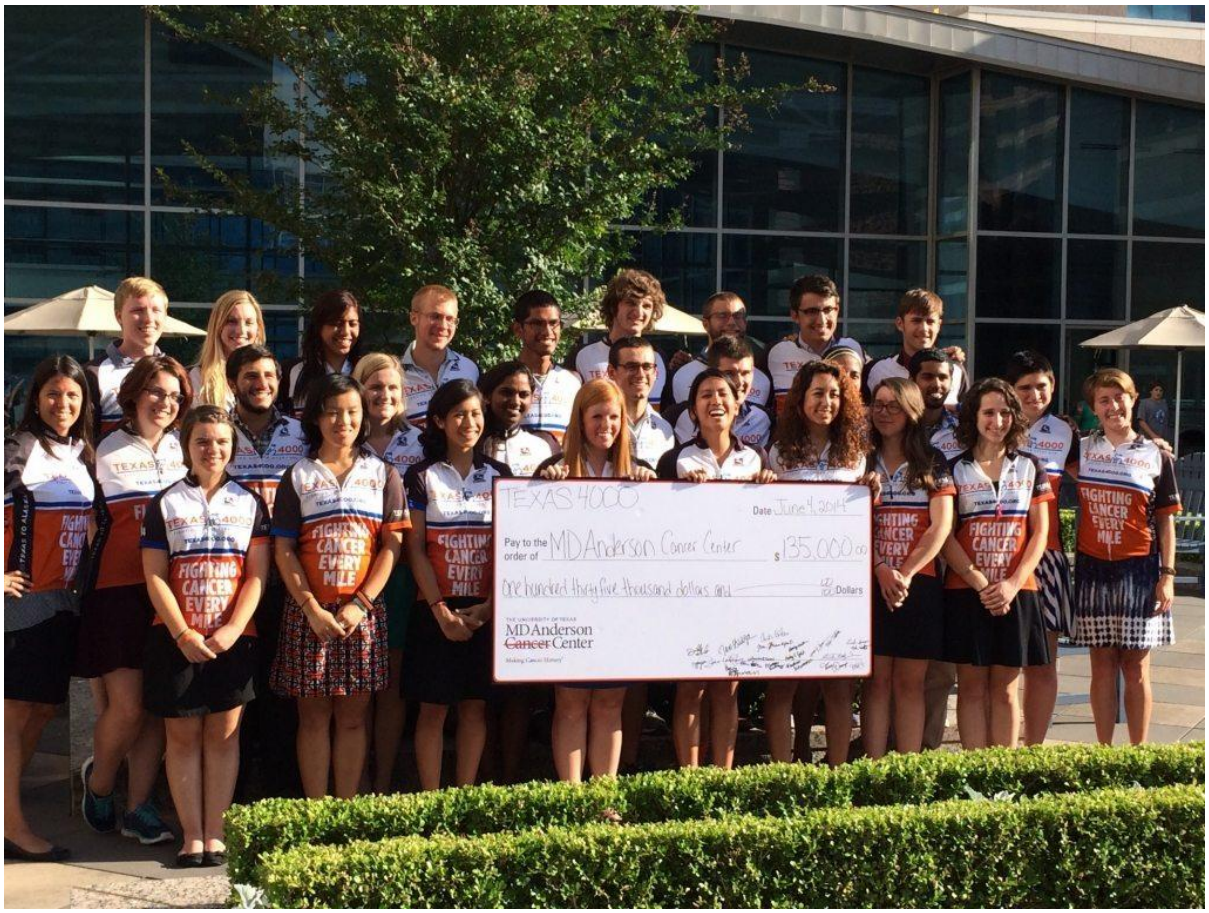
After showering, we headed to the 'Block Party' planned by Mukthi and Leah at Northshore Park, on the banks of Lake Woodlands. I'd been kayaking with my family at this park a dozen times, and knew all Lozas within driving distance would be coming in to see our program. Several other teammates had family in the area that came out and contributed to our massive potluck. Mamma J's, a breast cancer support group, had heard about the event and came out in force. By the time Emmy and I made it to our host's house, we were exhausted. We fell asleep talking, eagerly awaiting our visit to MD Anderson the next day.

We started our rest day at the M.D. Anderson Children's Cancer Center, where our team had a lunch meet-and-greet with patients undergoing treatment. In each of their faces, and their bald heads, I couldn't help but see Jake. I held back tears and took a moment to compose myself before finding a pod of conversation. King had immediately fallen into deep conversation with Joseph, a patient who was getting very close to finishing his treatment and then starting college at the University of Houston. Joseph's

goal was to be a biomedical engineer so that he can help people who have the same condition. I met Steven, a young teenage boy, who was recovering from femur elongation surgery. After a piece of his femur was removed due to a bone tumor, this surgery would enable his limb to continue growing with him as he aged. He was excited to tell us all about the procedures to lengthen his leg, still turning his head to speak with us even as the nurse was rolling out the door to his appointment. When I looked around, I saw my teammates fully immersed in listening to the children in front of them, or playing with them, or laughing as they ate slice after slice of pizza together. It was difficult to say goodbye at the end of our lunch, though we promised to write and stay in touch throughout the rest of the summer ride.

We crossed the street to visit the infusion room in Texas Children's Hospital, where children were actively receiving chemotherapy. Our visit was short lived, as administrators recognized perhaps bringing 27 college-aged students in cycling jerseys into a sterile environment. We headed to our last visit, the M.D. Anderson reception at the Texas 4000 Garden on the roof of the hospital. We were to present a $135,000 check, part of the funds raised by the previous year’s team, to fund research on targeted therapies at M.D. Anderson. The team was asked to nominate two riders to offer testimonials in a reception that included parents, cancer researchers, physicians, hospital administrators, patients, and more. It was daunting. Kevin volunteered himself to speak to Texas 4000 as an organization and the work our grant dollars were funding across the country. Having heard my tell Jake’s story at the St. Baldrick’s for Cancer Brave the Shave event shortly before the beginning of the ride, I had several teammates approach me to be the second speaker. “Tell Jake’s story,” they said. The entire reason I

had joined Texas 4000 was to bring awareness to how severely underfunded pediatric cancer research was, despite the enormous impact the loss of a child has on a family forever. I couldn't say no.




*At the Texas 4000 Garden, presenting a check for $135,000 to the MD Anderson Cancer Center for critical research projects*

From the moment I started, "I ride for," I was at the point of tears. I found Trent's eyes to steady me. "*You got this,"* he mouthed, and held me in his gaze – all love, strength, and faith. Those standing next to each other linked arms, holding each other almost as a way of holding me among them, as I spoke about the importance of developing viable treatment options for all types of cancers. I shared the hope I felt

knowing Joseph, the pediatric patient being treated at M.D. Anderson, was heading off to college with the mission of becoming a cancer researcher. I beamed, speaking to the hope I felt knowing new, innovative technologies would allow Steven to continue growing. I concluded by saying, “a diagnosis should not be a death sentence, like it was for Jake. No matter how hard he ‘fought’, how hard we prayed, real hope would have looked like a clear, safe path forward in his care. Thank you.” The audience erupted in applause, and Trent offered a slight nod of approval before walking over to pick me up in a bear hug. The other Buds rushed over to participate in the roughhousing, bumping around chanting “V! V! V!” In all, the moment lasted less than 30 seconds before we spread out across the room to speak to reception attendees.

After the event, we were full of energy as we headed to Mukthi’s parents’ house to stay for the night. They had cooked us an Indian feast and set out the karaoke machine. Following the custom of our hosts, we ate a shocking amount of food – all with our hands. Our ride to Livingston the next day was only 66 miles so we let ourselves enjoy a late night with the family, laughing at the progressive decline of each karaoke number as the night wore on. Before falling asleep, we quickly gathered in the upstairs living room to write our hosts a thank you note. We each scribbled our names and wrote a few words – in his, Eric just asked if he could come back over for more food after the end of the ride, which gave us one last good laugh before we turned in.

**KNOWLEDGE**

## WHY I RIDE: MARITZA

I have spent countless hours thinking about this question. Every time I think about it, the answer becomes more complex. Originally, I applied to Texas 4000 because I wanted to do something bigger than anything I had ever done. A lot of people around me had family that was suffering from cancer, and I wanted to join something that would help me make a difference.

At that time, I was under the impression (or avoiding) that I did not have anyone close that had been affected by cancer. However, as soon as I had submitted my application, I received word that one of my uncles had been diagnosed with the disease. He had kept it a secret from most of our family, but my mother knew and she told me because I am fairly close to my uncle. The weekend after finding out about this was not a pleasant one. I was pretty devastated. His words every time we would go to Mexico were always the same “This might be the last time that you see me. Don’t forget what I told you. Always be grateful, for your parents and for the opportunities that you have. Most importantly, never forget where you come from.” These words have resonated in my head for as long as I can remember. First and foremost, I ride for my uncle Lalo.

I was born in Uriangato, Guanajuato, Mexico. I lived there the first three years of my life. Then my parents decided to move to Texas. My father had already been coming to the US since he was 18 and decided that it would be better if we all moved together. I lived in the small town of Navasota, Texas until I came to college. My family abandoned their families and everything that they knew to come to this new place in order to provide my brother and I with a better way of life.

Now here is the hard part. When I was six, there was a phone call. A phone call with bad news. My grandfather, on my mom's side, had passed away. We knew that he was ill, but we also knew that we did not have permission to leave the US. We had been allowed to come into the country, but if we left, we might not have been allowed back in. This was the starting point of my mom's depression. It later worsened with another phone call five years later. When I was 11, we received news that my grandmother was very ill. She had a lot of health complications, including a tumor. The difference this time was that we were able to see my grandma before she passed because we had gotten our papers in order. However, upon returning, my mother's depression worsened. I always knew that cancer had taken my grandma, but I tried to forget about it because it brought back a lot of painful memories. Secondly, I ride for my MaLola.

My family has always been my support system. They have encouraged me in everything that I do. The only thing I have ever wanted to do is to make them proud. I ride for my greatest supporters, my parents, my brother, my godchildren, and my godmother.

Lastly, certain groups of people often tend to be forgotten. However, cancer does not discriminate. I ride for the people that simply cannot ride. Those with disabilities that prevent them from doing certain activities. I ride for the undocumented community. I started off being undocumented. I was brought here as a child, but by the time I was 11, I was a permanent resident. Now, that I am a United States citizen, I must not forget where I come from and the privilege that I have now. Lastly, I ride for those that applied to Texas 4000, but unfortunately did not get in, or those that did get in, but for whatever reason were not able to finish their journey.

This is why I ride. “I want to inspire people. I want someone to look at me and say because of you I didn’t give up.”

## DAY 15: EUREKA SPRINGS, AR, USA

I couldn't sleep. The thin mattress in my dorm room at the University of the Ozarks was impossibly uncomfortable, worse than my foam sleeping pad. I tossed and turned, waking up to the list of tasks I needed to complete the moment my alarm sounded. I was still furious at Sunshine. To a lesser extent, I was angry and disappointed at Alex and Dani. It's hard to sleep with wire in your belly. On the eve of the most significant, logistically complicated day of the summer ride, they decided it was more important to "relax and have fun." Well-accustomed to playing the role of mom, older sister, resident party pooper, I pulled their whiny asses away from post-BBQ dinner hang at Bad Dawgz downtown to plan and re-pack the SAG vehicles.

To qualify for the Eureka Springs Challenge, riders had to complete the 103 miles from Texarkana to Hot Springs in less than 7 hours. A record of 13 riders had qualified, more than double what I had anticipated when planning the route. The qualifier was intentionally set on a day with significant climbs, giving us a sense of who could maintain a consistently quick clip even with the additional strain of elevation change. I'd heard horror stories from the previous travel chair about this route. For those completing the challenge, more than half of the route was on small, mountain roads without any cell phone service. If the turn-by-turn directions failed, it would be impossible to find each other. Far from civilization, there was no access to gas or fresh water or additional food – we had to carry everything we might need. Uncertain of the road conditions, it would be impossible to take the trailer that carried most of the supplies. With the team split in half, we'd have to spend time dividing everything between the two vehicles. Dani, Alex,

and Sunshine would take the regular route, while I'd be on my own on the Challenge route.

Then, there was the matter of our policy: in case of inclement weather, we had to have a way to safely pick up and transport every rider. Between the two passenger vans and car, we had a seat for every rider. In the trailer, pulled by a passenger van, we could store all of the bikes. On the Challenge route, given we could not risk the trailer and anticipated more riders would have to be picked up on the regular route, the maximum number I could fit with bikes was 6 – less than half. Their names ran through my mind: Emmy, Mark, Ross, Kevin, King, Miles, Leah, Ashley, Kristina, Eric, Josh, Reid, Trent. I thought of their parents. I thought of the trust they had put in me to get them home safe. We had a meeting at the team where I laid out the risks. I half-hoped the qualified riders would back out, but the glory and lore of being a Finisher were too great. Getting to sign your name in the trailer, there for "all of time", was too much for them to pass up. All I had left to do was prepare – "control the controllables", as Barry would say.

"Why can't we do this in the morning? It's going to be fine! No matter how much you want it to, it's not going to be perfect anyway," Sunshine muttered, moving at half speed. The dour look on their face and almost theatrical performance of protest was seeping into Alex and Dani's disposition as they looked wistfully toward the dorms, eager to spend time with the rest of the team before the big day. Exasperated, fuming, almost in tears, I said, "If anything happens to one of our teammates tomorrow, how are you going to live with yourselves? We're not here to have fun. I don't give one shit about what we are missing out on. NOTHING else matters right now. I'm lead for the day tomorrow and don't want to hear one more fucking word out of any of you until we are

done." I gave them a hard look – the shocked look on their faces was priceless. Dani spoke first, "Sorry, V. I get it. Let's do this right." We finished the job in silence, speaking only to clarify the division of items. After walking through the turn-by-turns and making a plan for wake-up, we headed to bed close to midnight.

By the time 4 AM came around, I was happy to hear my alarm go off. To meet our departure time of 6 AM, we had to get everyone moving. Alex and I worked on oatmeal for breakfast while Dani and Sunshine got the team moving. By 5:30 AM, everyone was dressed and ready for our ride dedication circle. There were names written on thighs, forearms. We held each other extra close, knowing we would all need to remember why we were riding in order to get through the day. Every name spoken fell into the middle of the circle with a different sort of gravity, one that held every member of the team. Tears fell freely down my face as I listened, butterflies in my stomach. At 6 AM, the riders got on their bikes and rolled out. Still feeling hurt from the night before, I struggled to take in the SAG hug. "Good luck, see you at the feet of Jesus," Dani said, referencing our final destination of the Christ of the Ozarks in Eureka Springs. Her family and the local television station were meeting us there at 6 PM, meaning we had 12 hours to get all 27 riders to the top of Magnetic Mountain.[36]

For the first 10 miles, I felt a sense of relief. Sure, the climbs were steep, but nothing like the harsh terrain I had been anticipating. The road was well paved as the riders went up switchbacks up the mountainous terrain, with only brief moments of respite between climbs. I raced ahead to mile 20 to set up the first rest stop, laying out

[36] "Christ of the Ozarks," The Great Passion Play, accessed January 25, 2025, https://www.greatpassionplay.org/christ-of-the-ozarks.html.

peanut butter and jelly (or, in Trent's case, peanut butter and honey) sandwiches, pickle juice, and some beef jerky I had found in the trailer – a prized delicacy on the road. Riders came in flying, trying to buy themselves time for the harder stretches of road ahead. As they took off, I packed up as quickly as I could so I had time to chase them down before the next rest stop. Following the turn-by-turns, I turned onto a what seemed like a smaller road. My stomach fell – ahead of me, the road turned to gravel and dirt. When checking turn-by-turns, prior to the summer ride, we "walked" the route on GoogleMaps to make sure we were only taking safe roads. However, this part of the Ozarks Mountains hadn't yet been mapped – I could now see why. With our thin road bike tires, this road was nearly unrideable. I kept driving and came upon the ride group with Emmy and Ross, our Ride Director and Assistant Ride Director. I stopped at the top of the hill they were climbing so that we could quickly confer about what to do. Without the ability to contact the other SAG vehicles, and without the ability to transport all the riders myself, I knew we were in a bind. I climbed out of the van and yelled at Emmy, Ross, and Mark as they made their way up slowly, "you've got this, let's go!" Despite my best efforts at looking cheerful and confident, my face was full of worry and remorse. *I should have checked the route again. I shouldn't have taken the chance. I can't believe I put the team at risk.* As soon as they reached the top, Emmy jumped off her bike. She ran into my arms, giving me a big hug. "I'm sorry, Em. I didn't know. I am not sure what to do," I said. The four of us looked at each other, looking for an answer.

"Look, it feels like shit, but the gravel is small – I think it's rideable. We'll have to stay close to each other to keep the group tight in case anything happens. I say we go for it," Mark said. Ross followed, saying, "I agree – cancer treatment often takes

unexpected turns. It's going to be fucking hard, but *this* is when it really matters. I'm not getting off my bike." Emmy gave a slight nod. *Okay*, we were going to keep going. I gave them each a quick hug as they took off. The other three ride groups followed shortly after, and I filled them in on the plan – we'd all meet at the next rest stop and they'd leave in 5-minute increments so that we could move through these back roads in a cluster. They agreed, eager to keep moving.

After the second rest stop, the climbs just seemed to be getting steeper and steeper. It took twice as much energy to get up a gravel hill, especially with trying to keep the wheel straight as the ground moved beneath. While Leah was trying her best to put on a brave face, I could see how hard she was struggling. On a particularly steep hill, I pulled up behind her ride group and turned the volume up as loud as I could in the van, blasting *Eye of the Tiger*. Even as she was breathing heavily, I could see it made her laugh. I waited at the bottom of the hill for every ride group, just to make sure everyone was able to make their way up. Kevin was leading his group, which breezed past, with absolutely no time for my jokes – they were locked in. The Buds group with Eric, Josh, Trent, and Reid, jumped up and down on their bikes as they sang along. As Emmy's group approached, it was clear she was in pain. As the hill started, Ross had a hand on her back to steady her as she slowly made her way up. There were tears mixed with the sweat running down her face, red and pulsing with effort. I pulled up beside them – "Little Mike, do this for Big Mike! Come on, dig deep!" Michael Erin "Emmy", named after her dad, Michael Allen, had his name written on her thigh and a voice note with him saying goodbye tattooed on her left bicep after his death in 2012, just before we were accepted onto the team. Mark slowed down, now parallel with

Ross. Both had their hands on Emmy's back, propelling her forward. "We're almost there, Em, keep going!" The four of us made it to the top, relieved to see the path straighten.

I drove ahead to catch the first group but, around mile 53, I came to a steep downhill. The good news was that, and the end of the hill, we turned onto a nicely paved road. The bad news was that riding a mile on a steep, gravel downhill was an unbelievable risk. I waited at the top of the hill to slow down the riders, praying they would all be ok by the time I drove down the hill for the last time after the fourth ride group. I breathed a sigh of relief to see everyone back on a road, safe and sound. Eager to make up for lost time, they were flying! I set up the next rest stop at mile 66 in a hill overlooking the Ozarks National Forrest. It was gorgeous! Once I got service back, I called in to make sure the rest of the team was doing ok. Dani, Alex, and Sunshine had found a Sonic willing to donate burgers at mile 80. I drove to meet them and, as I was pulling up, they ran toward the van. I jumped out and the four of us hugged tightly, relieved to see each other. Apparently, they had also run into some dirt gravel and had even had a couple of falls. While everyone was uninjured, all of us were visibly rattled. Sunshine drove ahead to set up the last rest stop while Alex, Dani, and I waited for all the groups to pass through. The view along the final stretch of the route was gorgeous, with riders going through downtown Eureka Springs. I felt the weight of the ride begin to lift off my shoulders. *I think we are going to be all right.*

As we were turning into the park where the Christ of the Ozarks stood, there stood one final hill – bigger than any we had ever seen – to reach the 70-foot statue of Jesus, arms open, looking over the Ozarks Mountains. *Of fucking course*, no part of

today could be simple or straightforward. I parked at the top of the hill so that the riders could see where it ended, and waited for the groups to come through. The riders completing the Challenge were the first to arrive, making it up the hill slowly but surely. They rode past me until reaching the base of the statue, jumping off their bikes and hugging each other. Along with Dani, Alex, and Sunshine, I waited for the others at the top of the hill. One by one, the other ride groups arrived. Already tired, some of them bruised, they made their way up the hill slowly. She was moving so slowly at one point, Kitty almost looked like she was going to fall over. Instead of taking the fall, too tired to push off, she put her foot down. Once you've stopped on a hill, it's almost impossible to started again, all gravity and momentum pushing you down. Josh and Eric came from behind me and started running down the hill. Instinctively, I followed. They stood behind Kitty on each side of the bike and started pushing her, "we're almost there, Kitty, you've got to keep going!" I ran beside her, a hand on her shoulder to steady her, naming every person's name spoken in the ride dedication circle that morning. The other riders who had finished ran down the hill to join us, encouraging her to keep going. This pattern continued, over and over, until every rider made it to the top.

Dani's uncle, Tio Dario, had prepared a massive welcoming committee for us – there was a huge sign, reading *Welcome Texas* 4000, and dozens of Dani's family and friends cheering. They cheered while all 13 members of the team that had completed the Eureka Springs Challenge, signed the inside of the trailer. We headed to the motel in town, where Tio Dario had fundraised to book 11 rooms for us. He had arranged for a potluck feast in the motel event space, even a cake to celebrate Leah's 20$^{th}$ birthday. Leah got the full Mexican experience of a "mordida", meaning that Dani and I smashed

her face into a slice of her cake – a tradition we were stoked to introduce into our team celebrations. As the night wound down, I could feel myself finally relaxing. We made it. No one got hurt. The next day, when we were scheduled to visit the Thorncrown Chapel, I'd have many prayers of thanksgiving to make.




*Going up the final hill to the Christ of the Ozarks in Eureka Springs, AR*

Kevin and I, a package deal, shared a room with Alex and Dani. The four of us stayed awake talking, recounting our adventures that day. We turned off the lights and, right before falling asleep, I asked Kevin – as I did every night – "what was your favorite part of the day?" He smiled and said, "getting to see everyone's face as they made it

over that last big hill.” In that moment, I was sure I couldn’t love him more. “Same,” I said. We said goodnight, and drifted off slowly to sleep.

**CHARITY**

## WHY I RIDE: KEVIN

Cancer is a terrible thing that claims the lives of over half a million people annually in the United States alone. What cancer isn't aware of, however, is the fact that we – you and I – are ready to fight. No one should ever have to fight alone.

My grandfather (better known as Papa amongst the family), Kenneth Helgren, lost his battle with Myelodysplasia – a precursor of Leukemia – on October 13th, 2011 at 60 years young. My Papa lived in a little white house in Elgin, Texas right next to a big field. On Sunday afternoons, he would take my cousins and me out to the empty field and look for arrowheads to add to his collection. After we had expended all of our energy, we would go inside and snack on the freshly picked blackberries that we had retrieved from his garden before church that morning while he sat in his chair and stroked a blank canvas delicately with his favorite paintbrush. Once per month my grandfather would take all of the grandchildren to the San Antonio Zoo. The ride was accompanied by his one-of-a-kind CD collection, complete with fifty separate frog sounds, each of which he could name; and the original Footloose album. We would have to set aside an entire day for the trip because he insisted upon stopping at each and every exhibit to take a plethora of pictures; and upon reading the biographical information for each species we encountered. As I grew older, the arrowhead hunting ceased and the zoo trips gradually became extinct; his love for me, however, only grew stronger. As his oldest grandchild, he was my biggest fan. I cannot recall a single band concert, baseball game, or awards ceremony that he didn't attend. He would stand at the back of the auditorium or at the top of the bleachers and whistle loudly when my name was called; and when he wasn't whistling, he was taking countless pictures that

would undoubtedly end up in his scrapbook within the week. My Papa and I spent countless nights staying up way too late playing Monopoly, watching Star Trek and coloring in our Yogi Bear coloring books. He was diagnosed with Myleodysplasia in 2008 – though my mom told me that something was wrong with my Papa's blood, I never really understood the severity of the situation. As time went by, I didn't think much of it until I received a phone call during school in mid-October of 2011 – it was my mom's voice on the other end, almost unrecognizable due to muffled crying.

As I sat next to his bed in the hospital, my hand in his, I reminded him of all the wonderful things we had experienced together. He may not have been able to respond verbally, but I could tell that he was listening. As painful as it is to reflect upon the many memories that my Papa and I made together, I find comfort in knowing that he, too, has the luxury of reminiscing in such happy thoughts. My grandfather – an elite artist; an avid photographer; an exceptional leader; and a genuine human being – fought until the very end. Kenneth Helgren was – and always will be – the most sincere and humble person I have ever known, and I am so incredibly thankful to have had the opportunity to call him my grandfather. Get ready, Papa – we're going to Alaska!

## DAY 54: LIARD RIVER HOT SPRINGS PROVINCIAL PARK, BC, CANADA

I went to sleep cold, and I woke up cold. Our campground at Stone Mountain Provincial Park was called Summit Lake – it truly lived up to its name, our tents set up feet from the glassy, aqua blue lake overlooking all the mountains nearby. We were completely and totally alone, in the middle of nowhere, which made the pasta with garlic bread the SAG team had made for us for dinner all the more impressive. As I started moving around, my whole body sore from a series of long days. We had to bike from one provincial park to another, with only a few gas stations and highway restaurants in between. We had a 103-mile ride ahead of us, with several mountains in the Canadian Rockies in between us and the Liard River Hot Springs. At we had a rest day to look forward to tomorrow. Without hosts meeting us on the other side of the ride, we could also take as long as we wanted – a dangerous proposition for a group like ours. As a convener of the Chill Wave, I walked around to look for folks to join my ride group who would be down for an easy pace, side quests, and take time to relax at the rest stops. Mark, Eric, Maddie, Kitty, Becca, and myself made for an interesting ride group, as we seldom rode together in this combination, but Mark always had a few tricks and games up his sleeve – I was excited. After our customary oatmeal breakfast, we created our ride dedication circle. Still shivering, I listened as King spoke about all the children who were currently undergoing treatment, and their families, who we met at M.D. Anderson. Thinking about pediatric cancer, my purpose, I made my ride dedication – “for Jake, always.”



*Ride dedication circle at Summit Lake*

At 7 AM, we rolled out of the campsite and onto Highway 1 again. Within a few minutes, we warmed up and started dancing to the music playing from my bike speaker. We promised each other that, if anyone wanted to stop to explore something, we would. This would be the ride where we said *YES!* The first side quest that came up was a massive bridge over the lake, just to the side of the road – presumably for people hiking in the area. Made of see-through metal grating, you could stand in the middle and see the rushing river beneath you. We sat on the edge for a few minutes, watching. Once back on our saddles, we kept our eyes peeled for other opportunities to play. Food was running low at the first rest stop, causing some friction as we had to scramble in the back of the trailer to find enough bread and granola bars to get everyone fed. It was lucky we came upon Toad Lodge shortly after our first rest stop, a small motel off the

side of the road with a restaurant and bakery. Though it looked a bit sketchy, we had to give it a try. As we were walking in, King was proudly walking out with a basket of poutine. Eric's eyes widened, giving his scruffy face a cartoonish look – no doubt he would also be getting some poutine. Knowing we still had 80 miles ahead of us, I opted for coffee and a piece of pound cake. It tasted like heaven! I stopped at the gas station next to Toad Lodge to pick up a root beer for Kevin. Since one of our mail drops had arrived late, Kevin had volunteered to drive back hundreds of miles to pick up our letters and packages from loved ones, missing the day's ride. He was sad to be missing a day of riding, but I figured a little treat when he got to the campsite could help cheer him up after a long day in the car.

Our next rest stop was right next to the river, an absolutely stunning location where you could hear the sound of the rapids as the water coursed down the mountain. On the other side of the road, an enormous cliff side faced us. We were nestled between the clear, blue water and the harsh grey stone. As we pulled up, we saw a feast before us on the foldable tables – a full peanut butter and jelly (in Trent's case, peanut butter and honey) sandwich for everyone! Before we had time to ask where all these goods came from, Haley and Alex told us about how a couple in an RV had stopped as they were packing up the first rest stop. They had seen the team cycling past in our full kit and wondered, "are y'all really here all the way from Texas?" They were curious to know how we found ourselves on this remote highway in British Columbia. As Haley explained that we were cycling across the country to raise funds and awareness for cancer research and support services, the woman's eyes filled with tears. She started speaking about a friend who had recently passed away from cancer,

a devastating loss to her. Alex ran into the back of the trailer and get the banner for her to sign. Moved, she asked, “what can we do to help? What do you need?” Though Alex tried to assure them that we were ok, that we were collecting donations all along the way but otherwise were a self-sufficient route, she insisted, “what can we give you?” Sheepishly, Haley asked if they had any bread – though she and Alex planned to race ahead to see if they could find food, they weren’t entirely sure if they’d be successful given how little we knew about the road ahead. The couple went back inside their RV and brought back a $100 check and a box of food, including 10 loaves of bread and a few jars of Nutella. Haley described how long the woman held her when they hugged goodbye, grateful for the opportunity to help us along the way. Alex promised to dedicate his next ride to her their friend, Janice. “If they hadn’t stopped, we really don’t know what we would have found in the trailer to feed y’all,” Alex said, laughing, but the look of relief on his face was clear. We had enough supplies to make it through the day.

We took off, keeping an eye for Muncho Lake. Known for being the coldest lake in Canada, we were determined to jump in. We held hands on the rocky shore and counted down – 3! 2! 1! – before splashing in. I felt sharp pain, like needles, in every inch of my body, but we kept wading in until the water came up to our chests. I dunked my head, just to get the full body experience. We counted to 30 and then ran to the shore, hurriedly toweling off with the bandanas around our neck, laughing. I picked up a few rocks to skip on the glacial, blue water. Before long, Eric and Kitty had joined me while Mark, Maddie, and Becca rated our throws. I retired after achieving 12 skips, a personal record. We jumped back on our bikes and started to make our way. With all of our side quests, it was starting to get pretty late – we rode through mostly cool air, the

mountains blocking the sun. It started hailing at one point, small little pellets that stung our faces. Going downhill, wind blowing into our faces, Mark yelled at the top of his lungs, “FUCK, this is BRUTAL!” Our ensuing laughter trembled, breaking a bit because of how hard we were all shivering. Once we turned a corner, at the bottom of the downhill, we saw Haley and Alex’s van parked on the side of the road. Haley peeked her head out of the driver window, and yelled, “That sucked! Do y’all need a hug?” One by one, we lined up next to the van as Haley – held at the waist by Alex – leaned out of the window to give each of us a big hug. We kept riding but, when I looked back, I saw the next ride group in line to get their hugs from Haley. I couldn’t help but smile.

In the last stretch, we were running on fumes. We saw a black bear in the ditch on the side of the road next to us, but didn’t even have the energy to panic. Looking back, we moved to the middle of the road to give him ample space. The bear stood on his hind legs, seemingly trying to decide his next move. He decided we weren’t worth it, sitting back again to continue eating. We were treated to an incredible sunset in the last five miles, with bright reds and gold, pink and indigo, lighting the sky. A hush came over us as we took it in. I wanted to remember every moment of this day. Finally, around 9 PM, we pulled into the campsite. My legs felt like jelly, but I jumped off my bike to go find Kevin. I had a root beer and had to tell him all about our adventures, including the bear, before we even thought about setting up the tent. As I was walking around, I noticed how familiar all the tents around me looked. It took a moment to realize that they were actually our tents! Neha and Vaibhav, the other two members of SAG, had raced ahead to find a grocery store 50 miles ahead so that they could prepare the team a nice meal

that evening and set up the tents before we arrived. Even more, they had started a fire. After such a long, cold day, it was glorious.

When I finally found Kevin, I nearly tackled him with a hug. I pulled his root beer out of my back pocket. He smiled and pulled out a bag of peppered beef jerky and a Kinder egg for me, real road delicacies. As he walked around, handing out letters and packages, our teammates jokingly called him “Kevi Claus”. We sat around picnic tables as SAG served us a meal of macaroni and cheese, made with real butter and milk, and hot dogs charred by the fire. They even had a couple of boxes of cookies to share as dessert. As I heard all about Kevin’s day, including all of the wildlife he saw and the car conversation he was able to have with his mom before losing service, I realized how much I missed not being able to see him throughout the day – how acutely I felt his absence. With less than 20 days left of the ride, I started to wonder: what is it going to be like when we don’t see each other for days? Weeks? I shook the thought out of my head, too difficult to think about after such a beautiful day.

As we found our way back to our tents, and settled into our sleeping bags, we talked about getting up early the next day to visit the hot springs. I could feel my eyes start to close as I heard Kevin say, “aren’t you going to ask me what my favorite part of the day was?” I smiled. It had become our nightly ritual. “Ok, Kevi, what was your favorite part of the day?” I asked, yawning. “I really don’t mean for this to sound cheesy or sentimental in ANY way, but seeing you,” he replied.

“Same, you bitch. Same. I love you,” I said, in between yawns.

“I love you, too. I’ll kill you if you wake me up too early,” he said, turning over.

# EPILOGUE

## DAY 71: THE REST OF OUR LIVES

The first thing I did when I woke up on Day 71 was text Kevin. It felt strange waking up and not knowing where he was, or what he was doing. We had ridden together on our first day and crossed the finish line holding hands in the double pace line, wearing matching “carpe the FUCK out of this diem” socks and pink zebra print bandanas. At the Finish Line reception, the two of us were again chosen to speak on behalf of the Ozarks team. Kevin, usually so cool and collected, broke down in tears as he spoke about how much it meant to be able to talk about his Papa and to see the kind of scenic beauty he painted and photographed throughout his life. I held him close for a moment before walking up to the mic myself.




*Kevin and I speaking at the Finish Line reception for the Ozarks team*

I spoke about what kept us going. I shared with the audience that, every morning, we started with ride dedications. It was our most important ritual, the one that oriented us to purpose in the morning and throughout the day. While I had known the rough statistics behind my teammates' loved ones – relationship, general state of being, type of cancer, etc. – it was through ride dedications during the summer ride that I came to know who they were, how they lived, and the role they played in shaping the friends that were becoming family to me. Saying their names kept us going. "Jake", "Barry", "Don Jesus", "Devon", "Tita" – these names were the air in my lungs. There were tears on days I missed them or felt my regrets particularly acutely; there were laughs when I told my favorite stories about them; sometimes, saying their names came with a wistful sigh – simply wishing they were there to take in the beauty. Our ride dedication circle created a web that held up all of these names, stories, sources of inspiration. On hard days, there would always be someone next to me to help find the last bit of *empuje*. On days I had strength, I did the same. It became instinctive. We grew in our capacity to care for one another. As I looked out into the audience, seeing all of my teammates and the people who loved them into being, I reiterated in my closing: "This ability to care, to love in the most active and capacious of ways, this is what we take forward. The absolute clarity about what matters most is what we take forward. It's not about finding the next Alaska, as alumni have told us. I believe it's about finding Alaska in our lives. So, jump into the lake. Write the thank you note, no matter how small the kindness. Take time to stop and really hold someone when you give them a hug. Say I love you as often as you can. Find your purpose, and find ways to not lose sight of it. Look for ways to bring those who have gone ahead with you – we can help. We will remember with you."

As I waited for Kevin to text back so that we could coordinate a meal together, I thought about the words I left my teammates with. I wondered how our relationships would change as we headed back into the “real world”, with all its pressures. I felt at peace, knowing I had fulfilled my mission. In every community program my team delivered on our way to Alaska, I spoke to the importance of pediatric cancer research through the lens of Jake’s story. While treatment remains complicated, expensive, and painful for cancers with known cures, there is at least hope on the other side of a patient’s suffering. Without effective treatment options, the cancer journey quickly becomes one impossible decision after the next. I resolved to commit my life to public health, a field that focuses on addressing the needs of the most vulnerable. While I had crossed the finish line in Anchorage, I knew that what it really represented was the starting line for the rest of my life.

---

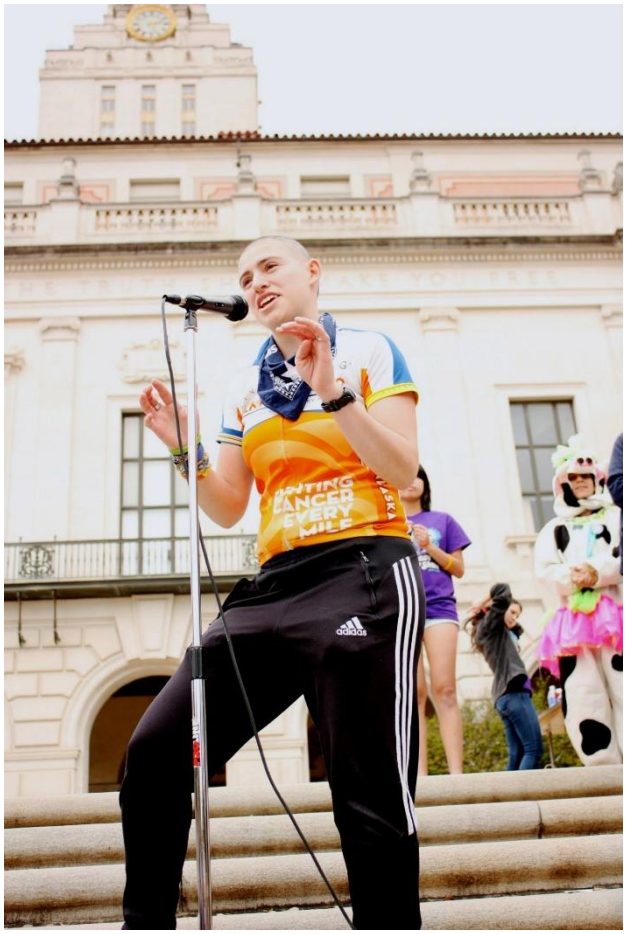
Every year since I dedicated my summer ride to Jake in 2014, at least 1 Texas 4000 rider has carried his name and story across the finish line. It’s hard to believe it’s been 12 years. Jake’s older brother, Alexander, is now 23 years old. His younger brother, Joshua, will be graduating from high school this year. On Jake’s birthday, the anniversary of his diagnosis, the day of his death – it’s as if no time has passed. The question “how many brothers do you have?” or “how many kids do you have?” may seem relatively straightforward to many – this is never the case for families who have lost a child to pediatric cancer. It’s a loss the family has to learn to live with, over and over again.

These days, I don't ride my bike all that often. I've put in my miles. Now, I have to figure out how to live for Jake. I've tried a lot of things in the past ten years since the summer ride. From completing a fellowship at the Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas, to work in culinary nutrition for improved chronic disease management, to the community outreach I do for the Undiagnosed Diseases Network so that they can widen the research on rare and ultrarare diseases, I often think about and ask myself how I am contributing to building a world in which little boys like Jake get to grow up.

As for my teammates, we grew in our capacity to care for one another. Ten years later, we still know how to come alongside one another. How to accompany one another so that we can endure whatever hardship we are facing, together. It is a habit, built across a summer in a thousand little moments. Weddings, deaths, births, divorces – a lot of life has happened in these past 10 years. We help each other in the care of memories, and how to relate to those memories in new chapters for life when the previous container no longer holds. When we talk on the phone, I still make sure to say "I love you" before saying "see you later." As Texas 4000 teammates, it is always a "see you later".

## APPENDIX I: ADDITIONAL PHOTOS



*"Brave the Shave" for St. Baldrick's Foundation at the University of Texas at Austin, in preparation to the summer ride*




*“O is for Ozarks”, en route to Shreveport, LA (above)*

*One of the switchbacks on the first big hill climb, Eureka Springs Challenge (below)*








*Ride dedication circle and appreciating the beauty with Kevin in Wyalusing State Park, overlooking the confluence of the Wisconsin and and Mississippi Rivers*




*Reaching the Alaska Sign*





*Crossing the finish line on Day 70 (above)*

*Closing the experience, holding on to the sense of each other (below)*



## APPENDIX II: ROUTE BY LIST OF DAYS

Day 1: Lampasas (Atlas Ride)

Day 2: Temple

Day 3: College Station

Day 4: Houston

Day 5: Houston (Rest Day)

Day 6: Livingston

Day 7: Jasper

Day 8: Carthage

Day 9: Shreveport

Day 10: Texarkana

Day 11: Hot Springs

Day 12: Little Rock

Day 13: Little Rock (Rest Day)

Day 14: Clarksville

Day 15: Eureka Springs

Day 16: Springfield, MO

Day 17: Waynesville

Day 18: Stanton

Day 19: St. Louis

Day 20: St. Louis (Rest Day)

Day 21: Springfield, IL

Day 22: Champaign

Day 23: Chicago

Day 24: Chicago (Rest Day)

Day 25: Milwaukee

Day 26: Madison

Day 27: Bagley

Day 28: La Crosse

Day 29: Rochester

Day 30: Minneapolis

Day 31: Minneapolis (Rest Day)

Day 32: St. Cloud

Day 33: Aitkin

Day 34: Bigfork

Day 35: International Falls

Day 36: Sioux Narrows

Day 37: West Hawk Lake

Day 38: Winnipeg

Day 39: Winnipeg (Rest Day)

Day 40: Saskatoon (Drive Day)

Day 41: North Battleford

Day 42: Lloydminster

Day 43: Vegreville

Day 44: Edmonton

Day 45: Edmonton (Rest Day)

Day 46: Whitecourt

Day 47: Valleyview

Day 48: Grand Prairie

Day 49: Dawson Creek

Day 50: Fort St. John

Day 51: Buckinghorse River Provincial Park

Day 52: Fort Nelson

Day 53: Strone Mountain Provincial Park

Day 54: Liard River Hot Springs Provincial Park

Day 55: Liard River Hot Springs Provincial Park (Rest Day)

Day 56: Watson Lake

Day 57: Rancheria

Day 58: Teslin

Day 59: Marsh Lake

Day 60: Whitehorse

Day 61: Whitehorse (Rest Day)

Day 62: Haines Junction

Day 63: Burwash Landing

Day 64: Beaver Creek

Day 65: Tok

Day 66: Chistochina

Day 67: Glenallen

Day 68: Nelchina

Day 69: Wasilla

Day 70: Anchorage

## BIBLIOGRAPHY


Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated by H Rackham. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Havard University Press, 1926.

"Cancer in Children and Adolescents." National Cancer Institute, August 29, 2024. https://www.cancer.gov/types/childhood-cancers/child-adolescent-cancers-fact-sheet.

Dana-Farber Cancer Institute. "Gliomatosis Cerebri: Pediatric Cancer Treatment." Childhood Gliomatosis Cerebri. Accessed October 2, 2002. https://www.dana-farber.org/cancer-care/types/childhood-gliomatosis-cerebri.

Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows. "Sonder." Accessed October 2, 2024. https://www.dictionaryofobscuresorrows.com/post/23536922667/sonder.

Gennep, Arnold van. *The Rites of Passage*. Second edition. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019.

Hadot, Pierre. *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*. Edited by Arnold Davidson. 1st edition. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1995.

Kleinman, Arthur. "Arc of Interference." In *Arc of Interference: Medical Anthropology for Worlds on Edge*, edited by João Biehl and Vincanne Adams, 305–26. Durham: Duke University Press, 2023.

———. "Caring for Memories." *The Lancet (British Edition)* 387, no. 10038 (2016): 2596–97. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(16)30853-4.

———. *The Soul of Care: The Moral Education of a Husband and Doctor*. New York: Viking Press, 2019.

Merriam-Webster. "Definition of Dedicate." Accessed October 2, 2024. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dedicate.

———. "Definition of Dedication," October 2, 2024. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dedication.

Merriam-Webster. "Definition of Practice," April 22, 2024. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/practice.

Puett, Michael. "The Haunted World of Humanity: Ritual Theory from Early China." In *Rethinking the Human*, edited by J. Michelle Molina, Donald K. Swearer, and Susan Lloyd McGarry. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2010.

Texas 4000. "Our Program." Texas 4000. Accessed October 2, 2024. https://www.texas4000.org/about-us/our-program/.

The Great Passion Play. "Christ of the Ozarks." Accessed January 25, 2025. https://www.greatpassionplay.org/christ-of-the-ozarks.html.

Turner, Victor. "Are There Universals of Performance in Myth, Ritual, and Drama?" In *By Means of Performance: Intercultural Studies of Theatre and Ritual*, edited by Richard Schechner and Willa Appel, 8–15. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Turner, Victor W. (Victor Witter). *On the Edge of the Bush: Anthropology as Experience*. Tucson, Ariz.: University of Arizona Press, 1985.

———. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Lewis Henry Morgan Lectures 1966. New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1995.

Weill Cornell Medicine. “Gliomatosis Cerebri | Neurological Surgery.” Gliomatosis Cerebri. Accessed October 2, 2024. https://neurosurgery.weillcornell.org/condition/gliomatosis-cerebri.
———. “The Prognosis.” Gliomatosis Cerebri International Registry. Accessed October 2, 2024. https://gcregistry.com/gliomatosis-cerebri/prognosis.