

# Going Beyond Our Limits

Board member's example in AIDS bike ride, shows that as individuals and as a profession we can accomplish extraordinary things

by Mary Swandby, RPh

Several months ago, Curt Johnson, *JPSW* editor, learned that I planned to ride in the ACT II AIDS Bike Ride. ACT stands for Aids Network Cycles Together, and benefits Madison's AIDS Network. AIDS Network serves persons with AIDS and HIV in 13 counties in Southwestern Wisconsin. Curt asked if I would be willing to write an article for the *Journal* chronicling my experiences. I blithely responded, "Sure!" I never dreamed that I would have such a struggle putting my bicycling adventure into words. Truly, writing this article has been almost harder for me than the ACT Ride. I will do my best. Those of us who are riders know that reducing the Ride experience to words is nearly impossible. At the risk of trivializing a truly amazing event in my life, I am keeping my promise to Curt.

I have dreamed of riding in an AIDS ride ever since my husband's brother, Joel Swandby, died of AIDS in 1996. I just didn't think I was physically capable. I would ride for Joel; I would ride for the many patients I have come in contact with in my home infusion pharmacy practice. I have always been willing to step up and do what I knew that I could. Signing up for the ride meant doing something that I was sure that I couldn't.

What does it take to ride in the Ride? I needed to get myself ready to ride 420 miles in six days, through the hilliest part of Wisconsin. I was convinced that I could never do this, but somehow, between turning 50, and watching my kids and my husband go beyond themselves to accept challenges that seemed huge, I decided, why not? The worst that could happen would be that I would donate money to a group that provided care to patients far beyond the call of duty. So in February, I signed up, started training



PSW Board member Mary Swandby tested her strength and determination by riding 420 miles in six days as a participant in the ACT II AIDS Bike Ride.

and began a truly grand adventure.

The ACT II Ride is mainly organized and run by volunteers. The commitment of the people involved in the ride is unique and inspiring. For novice bike riders like me, it meant learning all about a bike and riding efficiently, and starting off with training rides in March that were cold and 10 miles long, and ending up in July with 100 mile long "century" rides through the gorgeous hills and valleys that surround us in our lovely state. I remember going through the Arboretum here in Madison, thinking that there were actually hills in there. I remember my first training ride in a stiff wind and wondering how in the world I could actually make it through a bad day in one of

those. I remember riding 80 miles in the Miller Lite Ride for the Arts in May, when I fell off my bike twice and still was immensely proud to ride the whole route. I remember the weekend a few weeks before the ACT II Ride when I rode in an 80-mile ride to Devils Lake and back, and the next day did the hilly 65-mile Ironman Loop here and the next day rode 40 miles around Madison after work. I knew then that I could do the ACT II Ride. That was the physical part.

The best part of the Ride is the people. There were 112 riders this year. For six days, you live, eat, sleep and ride with the some of the finest people on this earth. I knew many of the riders before the Ride started, from participating in the many training rides that are offered. The riders ranged in age from 17 to 70. We came in all shapes and sizes and physical conditions. There were HIV positive riders and one was riding in his 26<sup>th</sup> AIDS ride. There were gays, lesbians, straight folks like me, moms, dads, kids, grandmas and grandpas. We had flaming liberals and riders who proudly proclaimed to be from the religious right. Some people rode for the physical challenge. Some were avid bikers and rode for the training. Some rode

because they were personally affected by HIV, some rode for family members. If you like to see people and watch how they interact and hear their stories, the Ride is the place for you. I have never been part of an experience before that blended people of such varied backgrounds into such an accepting, motivated, unselfish community. If you saw the posters for the ride, you saw the phrase, "It will change your life." And change we did. Every single one of us found ourselves to be a different individual at the end of the ride. None of the things that often matter, such as appearance, marital status, clothes, occupation, or social status mattered while we were on ACT II.

None of us even really mattered as individuals. What became important was not that each of us got through each day, but that ALL of us got through each day. If you were having a bad day, you knew that there were 111 other riders right there to make sure you made it to the end. If you made it up a "good" hill, and there were lots of "good" hills, you stopped at the top with all of the riders who cheered you up the hill and cheered those who were coming up behind you. If you were whipped at the end of a day, inevitably someone was there to help you set up your tent or save you a place at the dinner table or get you some water or save you a good shower spigot. Our focus got reduced and defined to very specific body parts and how they were functioning. Inputs and outputs became a major topic of conversation, because all of us were quite focused on staying hydrated. I have never seen a group of people come together like that before. I can't wait to do it again.

What did I learn on the Ride? The most important lesson for me was that I was capable of so much more, both mentally and physically, than I ever dreamed. Each of us learned that. When we thought we were tired, we still had 40 or 50 miles left in us. Pain is very relative and really only matters if you let it. We are each so fettered by our own view of our limitations. It is so very much fun to let go of those limitations and see what we are capable of. Shame on me for waiting so long!

The next most important lesson for me was that I had a blast riding in the Ride. I thought it would be so much harder. When I ride my bike, I see such a beautiful world. We live in an amazing state, filled with amazing people. Our route took us from Madison to Reedsburg on the first day, then along the Wisconsin River, up and down the ridges over to Boscobel on Day 2. We continued the next morning to Wyalusing near Prairie du Chien, and from there, we rode down the Mississippi, up and down the ridges again, to Cassville. Our fourth day took us through Potosi, Belmont and Darlington, along the rolling lands to New Glarus. Day five wound down to Beloit and up to Janesville, ending in Milton. And on our last day, the day we all dawdled because we didn't want to be

done, we rode back to Madison. Back to our families, back to our routines, and back to work. And we all found that the posters were right. The Ride changed our lives. I found that I was lucky, I didn't return to a job that was meaningless, but to a profession that is rich and varied, full of incredible people, and sometimes challenging beyond my limits. I know now that the only real limit is me.

It took me 50 years to try something I

didn't believe I could do. I hope that each of you will try something you think is beyond your limit. If we as a profession keep reaching beyond our limits we will collectively make this world a far better place. And in the end, none of us will matter individually, but ALL of us will make a difference. ●

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## Announcements

Due to a printing error in the **SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER** *Journal of the Pharmacy Society of Wisconsin*, a flowchart was omitted from the "Guidelines for the Use of Cephalosporin Antibiotics in Patients with Reported Allergies to Penicillin." To view the article in its entirety, including the flowchart, see <http://www.pswi.org/communications/pharmacology/PP%20beta%20lactam.pdf>

The 2004 **PSW MEMBERSHIP DIRECTORY** was praised in a recent ASHP communication for its depth of content: "This month we send a very big pat on the back to the Pharmacy Society of Wisconsin for taking an ordinary member benefit and making it a terrific member value piece. PSW has taken the concept of a membership directory and made it into one of the most comprehensive member resource pieces seen in some time. In addition to members, by practice, they have included information on health plans serving state citizens, monthly health celebrations and other supportive information."

The following individuals served as **PEER REVIEWERS FOR JPSW** during 2004: Jeff Binkley ● Todd Canada ● John Dopp ● Barry Gidal ● Stu Guenther ● Russ Jensen ● Bobbi Langkamp-Henken ● Terry Maves ● Michael Nyffeler ● Kathy Skibinski ● Chris Sorkness ● William Tanke ● Joe Thiesen ● Lee Vermeulen. PSW and the editorial staff thank them for their volunteer efforts.

**CHRISTIAN PHARMACISTS FELLOWSHIP INTERNATIONAL (CPFI)** is a worldwide organization to promote fellowship and spiritual growth among Christian pharmacists. Many members are involved in missionary work to help serve as witnesses for Christ while using their professional skills to help people abroad. The UW School of Pharmacy has a student CPFI chapter in Madison. The chapter's activities include Bible studies, volunteer work within the community, social outings and sponsoring Christian speakers who have experience in pharmacy and health care. The CPFI Chapter has monthly "Believing in Our Profession" breakfasts at which invited speakers share their experiences as Christians in the health care profession. To find out more about CPFI or to suggest a breakfast speaker, please contact the CPFI President Katie Kabe at [klkabe@wisc.edu](mailto:klkabe@wisc.edu) or the CPFI faculty advisor Paul Hutson at [prhutson@pharmacy.wisc.edu](mailto:prhutson@pharmacy.wisc.edu) (608-263-2496).

**HARTIG DRUG STORES** is celebrating 100 years of service this year. Founded in 1904 in Dubuque, Hartig is the second oldest family owned chain in the country. The company has 350 employees and 15 stores in Iowa, Wisconsin and Illinois including traditional drug stores and a long term care pharmacy.

New position? Been promoted? Opened a new pharmacy? Received an award? Send your announcement to [editor@pswi.org](mailto:editor@pswi.org) Photos are welcome.