

Pete Hare's son bikes cross-country for cancer research

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December 17, 2007

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David Hare likes hanging out with his friends, playing lacrosse, going to the movies and watching sports. He's a huge Tar Heels fan, likes the Boston Celtics and was thrilled recently when he got his first car.

But if you think David is a typical 16-year-old, don't.

He's far more mature than most kids his age. Already demonstrating leadership abilities, he rode his bike cross-country during the summer to raise money for cancer research.

David is the son of [Pete Hare](#), Vice President, HIV Business Unit for GlaxoSmithKline.

"It's hard to put into words how proud I am of him," Pete says. "I was writing a Christmas letter the other day and I thought when I was 16 a big adventure was a weekend in the woods with the Cub Scouts. I just can't imagine being 16 and signing up for something as big as this. In fact, I know I wouldn't have."

David, a junior at Carrboro High School, was eager to participate in the bike ride, to see the United States and accomplish something most people wouldn't dare dream of.

But what was his motivation?

What made him choose to spend 10 weeks on a bike – sleeping outdoors in sometimes brutal weather conditions – and give up his entire summer break?

Love for his mother and gratitude to the folks at UNC's Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center who treated her for breast cancer in 2001.

"That's kind of what the trip meant to me," David said recently. "At the same time as raising money, it helped me understand what actually happened."

David was younger when his mother battled cancer and admits he didn't realize the severity of her illness.

"I had so much other childish stuff going on, (so that) it really didn't come to mind always," he said. "Now that I know what actually happened, it amazes me that something so serious happened yet I was not really aware of it. It's kind of scary to know that something could have happened and I really wouldn't have understood it. Had she died, it would have hit me like a ton of bricks."

Shortly after a job change brought Pete and his family from England to the U.S. in 2001, Gill Hare turned 40.

“In England you don’t have your first mammogram until you turn 50,” Gill said. “But I was going to do everything that Americans do, so I had a mammogram and they found a very small lump on my chest wall in a duct. I think they thought if I had stayed in the UK and hadn’t gotten the mammogram (sooner) it could have spread into my lungs because it was sitting right on the chest wall. Arguably, you could say that coming to the U.S. saved my life, or (at least) improved my prognosis.”

As David grew older, he developed a deeper appreciation for cancer and what his mom had endured. He also got into adventurous sports like snowboarding, wake boarding and cycling.

So when Brian Burnham, Assistant Scout Master of Troop 845, broached the subject of a cross-country bike ride, David was immediately interested. So were several other boys, though they were also understandably hesitant.

It didn’t take long to get the boys on board. Convincing their parents was another matter.

“Everybody sat down and asked their preliminary questions like ‘Do I really want my kid to do this?’, and ‘Is it a safe idea?’” Brian said.

He told the parents about his experiences hiking The Appalachian Trail in 2001, biking across country with friends in 2003 and again in 2005 with some Boy Scouts. He talked about the other adult who might accompany them, Brad Wilson, who solo hiked The Appalachian Trail at age 17 and two years later hiked The Pacific Crest Trail in a world-record 67 days.

After hearing that, and knowing their sons would be raising money for cancer research, the parents relinquished their trepidation and agreed to let their sons go.

On June 9 in Aberdeen, Md., David, Kit Brown, Heath Hudgins, Matt Moulton, Daniel Pearce, Angelo Sharp and Adams Conrad embarked on the 68-day, 3,700-mile trip.

During it, strangers invited them in their homes for free, hot meals. Folks at restaurants picked up their tab. And people sometimes donated money to their cause.

But suffice it to say, the trip was arduous at times. Temperatures well above 100. Torrential rains. Strong winds. Towns with less than friendly residents. Areas where they were flat-out warned not to camp overnight.

David acknowledges thoughts of quitting sometimes crept into his mind.

“I’d fall over and land on my elbow and it hurts a lot and I’m already in a bad mood because it’s already 100 degrees,” David said. “You need somebody to tell you everything’s going to be fine ... but Brian would just say ‘That’s too bad. Keep biking.’ ”

Whenever things got really rough for David – like 15 days into the trip when he crashed into someone’s mailbox and had to wait a month before getting his bike properly repaired – he pulled out a note his father had hidden in his bag before he left.

“My dad was very proud of me, and he actually wrote me a note and put it in my bag,” David said. “I actually didn’t find it at first, but when I did it was one of the perfect times, in Ohio, which was one of the hardest states to get through.”

The note, brimming with a father’s pride, was supportive and encouraging.

“He told me he knew it was going to be hard and plenty of things were going to be tough, but he knew I could get through it,” David said. “It meant a lot to me ... I kept it and whenever things got really, really bad I’d pull it out and also look at some family photos (including those of sister Rachel, 13) that I’d brought with me. That definitely helped me get through it.”

No matter how dicey things got, the boys were determined to make it.

“It’s hard to imagine unless you’re actually out there doing it,” Brian said. “You’re living on a bike. You’ve got your tent, your sleeping bag and your clothes. There are no motels or hotels, and you basically bike from campsite to campsite, 60 to 70 miles a day. You go through places where you meet an assortment of people. You get harassed sometimes by drug dealers or homeless people...”

Brian said he’s proud of the boys for completing the trip, which is discussed on their Web site, www.wabucycletour.com, and for raising more than \$18,000 – well above their \$10,000 goal.

Dianne Shaw, Director of Communications at Lineberger, praises the boys. In fact, when she and Lineberger Special Events Coordinator Mary Seagroves learned about the planned fund-raiser they were surprised.

“We both thought, how amazing,” Dianne said. “These young men are going to sacrifice their summer to ride their bikes all those miles across the country to raise awareness of and funds for cancer research. We were just amazed and so in awe and really, really deeply honored that they wanted to do this.”

To show their appreciation, Lineberger officials invited the boys to Fast Break with Roy Williams on Oct. 12.

“They got to meet (Tar Heels mens basketball) Coach Williams and they gave him a T-shirt which he then took up to his office,” Dianne said. “He was talking about the boys the next day at a UNC football game. He was most impressed with them.”

Besides being a success, what else did the trip mean to David?

“I learned so much about the little things and how much stuff costs,” David said. “I learned how cheaply you can live your life and still enjoy it. Money isn’t everything. It sure makes it easier...(but) at the same time it kind of felt good to budget yourself and when you finally do save up over a couple of days so you get 10 extra bucks and then can get a good meal, it tastes so much better. If you had a good meal every day, you would take it for granted.”

Several times during the trip when David preferred Gatorade he drank free tap water instead. And when he thought he couldn’t pedal anymore, he dug deep within and mustered the fortitude to go on.

That he matured over the summer isn’t lost on his parents.

“He’s different,” Gill said. “He’s great. He’s more mature and more focused on life. He doesn’t moan as much. And he learned, through talking to people and reporters about cancer research, that there is a message to get out.”

David, who turned 16 the day after the trip ended, said it was life-changing.

“I learned so many things that you can’t learn unless you do something like this or unless you try to take care of yourself,” David said. “I don’t feel I could have done anything else that would even compare to it.”

In fact, when asked to depict one word to describe the trip David cited three: unexplainable, amazing and independence.

The trip has also made an already close family even closer. Pete is unabashed in saying he missed his son tremendously and cried when he saw him ride up on his bike in Washington.

“Like most English people I’m not a particularly emotional person, (but) it was one of the most emotional moments I can remember when they came down the final hill,” Pete said.

David said he’s definitely closer to his mom now. “As we grow older, we get closer anyway,” he said. “But I definitely do feel like I’m more connected to her now.”

And he knows he’ll never think of cancer the same again.

“When I hear someone has cancer now, it has a different effect on me. Now I understand it more, what they have to go through, the radiation, treatment,” David said. “You can

hear somebody say something, but it can just blow right over your head because cancer is such a small word for something so big.”