



Conquering The Cabot Trail *...on two wheels!*

On August 5th I completed a five day cycling trip around the Cabot Trail in Cape Breton, NS: a place of breathtaking beauty at every bend in the road. It was an amazing, awesome and unforgettable adventure that I will treasure forever.

I did this trip to celebrate my upcoming 65th birthday, and to also honour my commitment to lead a more active life that would include movement, creativity and fun. The last three years were tough ones. I now wanted a mental and physical challenge of a different kind and looked back to what I loved as a kid. Cycling and the Cabot Trail came immediately to mind.

It was a crazy idea if you just looked at the terrain and my lack of experience. Three hundred kilometers in total that included one mountain after the other. The ascent up French Mt. alone took you to a height of 455 metres over 5 km, followed by MacKenzie Mt. at 372 metres and before the day was finished you had North Mt. with 14% and 17% grades. (Of course what goes up must come down and honestly, I thought I might be the first person on record to bike up the mountain and take the van down as they looked so scary). And yet, I had a deep desire to do this trip, even if it seemed crazy. And so I did.

When I came up with this notion I thought I would have three months to prepare, and although it looked good on paper, I ended up with only a few weeks. I had been cycling along the canal in Ottawa, several evenings a week and feeling quite satisfied with my progress but

it was a ride with a bicycle club the last Sunday in June that changed everything.

I will never forget that ride as it was humiliating, exasperating and devastating all rolled up in one 37 km trip. I was the slowest of the slow group on that day. Because we were riding on roads with the occasional hill and not on paved flat bike trails, I discovered after the first hill that I was ill-prepared for my upcoming adventure, now only five weeks away. After my agonizing three hour ride that hot day, knowing how I was holding up our group, we finally returned to our cars. I was exhausted and defeated both physically and mentally and so began the usual mind chatter about how I had made a mistake about cycling the Cabot Trail and “what was I thinking?” I’m sure most of you, dear readers, have had similar moments at one time or another.

The difference for me this time was that I was passionate about doing this ride: it really mattered to me in a deep and abiding way and I also believed I could do it, in spite of all available evidence to the contrary. I didn’t even hint to the group I had cycled with that I would be riding the Cabot Trail in five weeks. First of all, they would have thought I was joking and once they realized I was not, they could only have felt pity. So I kept it to myself.

Once I recovered a few hours later, I wrote to my tour company to make sure that they too didn’t have a policy that we “ride together.” Had that been the case I would

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have withdrawn because I wouldn't have been willing to hold ten other people up. Once I heard back the next day that was not the case and everyone would ride at their own pace, I was delighted, determined and recommitted.

For the next five weeks I kept up my regular evening rides but added spin classes two days a week plus a longer solo ride each Saturday. More importantly, I spent about 90 minutes cycling hills in the Gatineau for the next three Sunday mornings. That little bit of discipline and hard work paid off. Not in speed but in seeing the resilience of my body. This is something I discovered going through chemo, how the body wants to be well and will work hard to come back to equilibrium. With my hill training, I saw each week that my body wanted to cooperate with me and each week I got a little bit better. I also learned how to use my gears and develop my cadence, which is a fine way to slowly climb a long, steep hill. I was encouraged. And I also found that I needed to do this part on my own. *Know thyself*. I couldn't bear to keep holding others up. Doing this on my own was the best thing I could have done for me. It allowed me to develop my own pace and it allowed me to see, to my surprise, that I also enjoyed being alone.

My friend and colleague, Dr. Jinroh Itami, a well regarded Oncologist from Japan, created an interesting program for cancer patients over 25 years ago called Meaningful Life Therapy. As part of this program his patients climb mountains. He believes it promotes healing, wellness, strength and confidence. I have taught a version of his program to people affected by cancer and this year had hoped to go to Japan and climb Mt Fuji with him. Unfortunately, many things conspired against the trip for 2011 but I wanted to do something significant for myself, in the spirit of Dr. Itami. Another reason to do this bike trip.



I learned first-hand the value of Dr. Itami's "mountain climbing." To do something physically and mentally rigorous has enormous personal benefits. The planning, training and execution all bring a sense of satisfaction that I can only describe as pure joy. In my case and in the case of Dr. Itami's patients it isn't competition or bravado but simply putting one foot in front of the other, or keeping the wheel going round. Stopping when need be, to refresh and rejuvenate, but beginning again; going the distance that you can go.


When I first made the plan, I thought I would cycle every metre and under no circumstances would I walk my bike or take a ride. Once I had that ride with the cycling club, I lowered my standards. I decided that I would stretch and push myself but that I would celebrate everything I did do. Whatever I did would be a victory. And it was.

I came down off the Cabot Trail a different person than the one who went up. A confidence born of doing something I never thought I could; and yet I just did it. I thought, "If I can do this, I can take on the world."

We all have metaphorical mountains in our lives that require climbing. I am so happy, yes, happy, that I chose to cycle a series of nature's spectacular mountains on one of the world's most beautiful coasts.

I feel stronger, lighter, confident, grateful and committed to an active and joyful life while I can. Life is tenuous: it can end or change in a flash and there are no guarantees about next year for any of us. Thus, I will always be grateful that I did this thing, fulfilled this dream and cycled the Cabot Trail. Because, **this year I could.**

Trudy Boyle lives life and tells stories that share experiences we believe are of mutual value for our readers.



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