

I'm singing in the rain

Local philanthropist, gentleman and sage Pierce Cline was well known for the life lessons he learned himself and taught to others through wanderings along the Appalachian Trail.

He even had one of his nuggets of wisdom found on the trail printed on his calling card, which said

"I feel really rich! On the trail I have learned that everything I truly need I can carry on my back."

Among Pierce's contemporaries and successive generations are many men who shared those journies and soaked up that wisdom.

Listening to them share their stories at his funeral last year, I was awed by the depth and meaning of their recollections of those hikes in the wilderness.

But, I was also just a little jealous. I wished I could have had the chances they had.

Since then, though, I've come to realize just how much my bicycle adventures have given me in that same vein.

And, so, it's with that mindfulness I've been soaking up the little lessons, stashing away the memorable moments, and reveling in the simple comradie of my bike trip this week as we're pedaling our way from Birmingham to Atlanta.

Accompanied by the same two friends, Eddie and Marty, who were with me for the trip from Pittsburgh to Washington last fall, we're reliving memories of that adventure and creating new ones now.

We're laughing, joking,



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prodding and singing -- well, I'm singing. You can get downright silly during a six to eight hour day on the bike in hot sunshine.

There's also plenty of quiet time for my thoughts to wander and reflect, as my legs mindlessly turn the pedals.

Yesterday we rode 58 miles from Oxford, Alabama to Cedartown, Georgia, where this morning we're looking out at the rain and visualizing the damp day ahead.

Of yesterday's miles, all but eight were gratefully on off-road paved rail trails -- the Chief Ladiga in Alabama and the Silver Comet in Georgia.

But, the day before was a different story altogether, featuring 68 miles from Birmingham travelled almost completely on busy two or four-lane highways over a relentless series of rolling hills amid an endless parade of cars, pickups, and semis blowing past.

Hills are the bane of a cyclist's existence --at least for all but the most masochistic.

And, when you're travelling fully loaded as we are with 30+ pounds of gear, hills are amplified going up and going down.

The ascents are long and interminable; the descents are swift and fun -- though sometimes also breathtaking.

As I tweeted mid-ride on Wednesday, gravity is a fickle mistress.

It's not easy for a big guy like me, but I've had to learn to enjoy the uphill as much as the downhill.

To ignore the long uphill is to miss the bulk of the trip. And, that was one of those little "ahas" I'll take away from the bike.

Travelling on your own power -- be it by foot or by bike -- you view your possessions far differently.

Not only can you carry everything you truly need on your back, but anything you don't need but carry anyway is dead weight holding you back and dragging you down.

That's quite a thought when you look around you.

Travelling unsupported, you also learn to deal with adversity.

On Tuesday's leg from Birmingham to Oxford, we stopped about 15 miles in at a convenience store.

As I unclipped my feet from the pedals, the right foot would't budge.

I could tell right away a bolt had come loose from the cleat that holds the shoe to pedal.

There was no way to remove my right foot from the pedal.

I was lucky not to fall over on my right side, since I would have been unable to break my fall.

And, it was also a good thing I had friends nearby to hold me upright and un-

strap my shoe to allow me extract my foot.

With no bike shop within 50 miles and not even a hardware store in the town we were passing through, there wasn't much we could do.

I got by the rest of the day with a little help from my friends.

Somewhere along the way, I started feeling sorry for myself and unfairly cursed by my predicament. My right foot was aching and yearning to be set free. And, falling badly was a constant risk.

But, then recalled the start of my day. I remembered leaving the hotel room in Birmingham with my bike and gear, the door about to close when I spied my forgotten wallet laying camouflaged against the black countertop.

I realized then there'd been far more things going right than wrong that day.

We're about to head out this morning into driving rain; we will get soaked. I can spend today cursing my luck and wondering why me.

Or, I can burst out these doors with a smile on my face.

I'm going to be singing in the rain today, having the time of my life. There are lessons to learned and memories to be made.

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