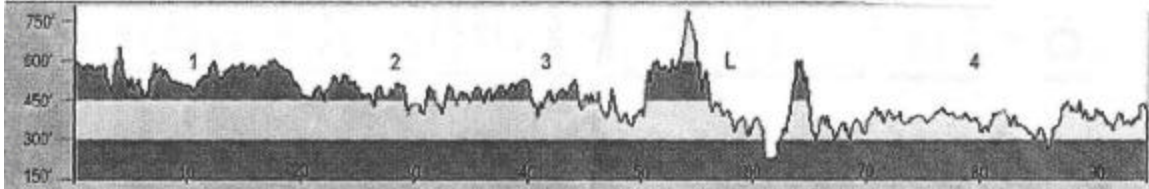
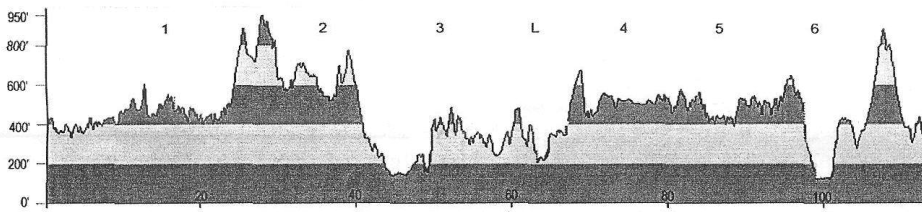


## Braking the Cycle 2006

I arrived in New York on Wednesday afternoon and stayed in a “boutique” hotel (small rooms, no elevators) in the East Village that night. Thursday morning it started to rain as I walked to the West Village to catch the 8 am rider bus to Gettysburg. When we arrived in Gettysburg around 1 pm; the rain had stopped and a few of us did a guided bike tour of the National Military Park where we heard about the dark 3 days of our country’s history resulting in 51,000 casualties. In the evening the ~120 riders heard about our 3 day ride, finished our paperwork, got the drill on safety and hydration, and received a preview of Friday’s 95 mile ride.



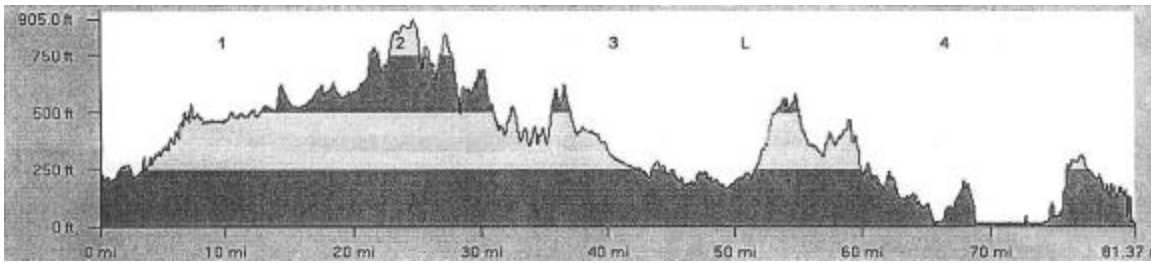
Friday morning started with breakfast at 5:30 where we picked up the detailed ride directions for the day and the daily rider “newspaper” where I was the featured rider of the day (a short blurb based upon the 6/8/06 article on me by Roberta MacInnis in the Houston Chronicle). At 7am there was a brief opening ceremony and then several of us that are HIV positive who had red “Poz Pedaler” flags on our bikes lead the ride out. The ride started off with problems; apparently a Gettysburg resident removed the signage for the first turn of the ride and everyone was off course within 30 minutes of the start. There were “Oases” (aid stations) every 10 to 20 miles, the first being back in Gettysburg after a ride to the West that showcased some of the monuments of the Civil War battleground. Things livened up at a Mardi Gras-themed Oasis set along a stream where riders were enticed to “show some skin” in exchange for beads. I had chain issue as I was shifting to “granny gear” on a tough climb just before lunch; I was able to resolve it with the help of some very generous riders. After lunch the rain started and it continued on and off the rest of the day. We crossed the Susquehanna River shortly after lunch and then did another tough climb out of the valley (I didn’t even try using Granny gear that time!). It started to rain harder; it was cold and I didn’t bring any fancy rain gear. The rest of the day I just focused on completing the 95 miles to Lancaster, PA. After finishing, I got a massage and took a hot shower and felt 100% better. At dinner I heard the stories of fellow riders who got off course and of Mary (who rode with me early in the day and though my chain incident), pulled from the course by medical at the last Oasis due to hypothermia.





A total of 112 miles were on the menu Saturday following breakfast at 5:30. We started out in Amish County and passed several horses and buggies early on. What struck me about the Amish farms was the elaborate system for drying laundry; lines strung high to the tops of the buildings by a network of pulleys. Unfortunately, there would be very little drying that day as the rain started again after Oasis 1. Saturday was, however, the day for great scenery, a beautiful ride through the countryside, with covered bridges and woodland parks. Several of the Oases were set in parks beside lakes. I rode much of the day with Rich from Brooklyn and later came to realize that we were the 2 lead riders the rest of the day. We battled several steep climbs together but he was definitely a stronger rider than me and eventually he pulled away from me. He was, however, also was prone to getting off course so we met up again at a couple Oases and rode in together at the end of the day. After the last Oasis we crossed the Delaware River into New Jersey followed by some challenging hills climbing to our overnight in Clinton, NJ. The sky cleared mid afternoon and we finally dried out in the sunshine. I showered and got another massage at the hotel and then enjoyed the sun while stretching in the parking lot. Not counting mileage off course, we had ridden 207 miles during the first two days. Since the ride logo was "275 miles, 3 days, 1 destination: the end of AIDS", was expecting to hear about our easy 68 mile third day during the post-dinner ride briefing. Instead, we heard about the 81 mile trek planned for the next day!





On Sunday's ride we would go from a largely rural area to the most densely populated area in North America. It was a beautiful sunny day albeit a bit cool for a Texan in a sleeveless jersey at the 6:30 am ride out. We met up with another organized bike ride on the same course about 25 miles out; one of their ride marshals informed me that I was going the wrong way, so I had to educate them that there was an "AIDS ride" going on too. A couple miles later I hit some street debris and had a blow-out on my front tire. No biggie, I had a new tube in my pack and a CO2 cartridge to inflate it. I made the change, inflated it and was putting it back on my bike when POW! It went flat. I used my cell to call for sag to come and get me. While waiting for the bike techs to arrive another generous rider offered me a tube so I thought I'd try it. By the time I was airing it up the tech had arrived so I used his pump. He asked me what happened and then saw the newly inflated tube bulging from the gash in the tire. He told me to release the air or it was going to blow; I needed a new tire. The ride bike techs didn't have any so they were faced with getting tires for me and a couple other sorry souls on a Sunday morning. Nearly three hours later the "bike doc" arrived with new tires and an attitude; he was tired from late nights and early mornings responding to rider demands, he was hungry and thirsty and our concerns about getting out on the course before the next section closed were not his highest priority. Finally, he showed me what tire would work for me and I made the change and put in the tube I got from my fellow rider. I paid doc the \$25 for the tire and I rode out just as the course was closing. I only got a couple blocks before the tube lost pressure; it had been weakened by being inflated in a damaged tire. I walked back disheartened. The techs rapidly helped me replace the tube and air it up. Suddenly, doc's highest priority was getting me back on the course. We put my bike in his van and he drove me out a couple miles where the course was still open and I was on my way; my hero! I was then at the back of the pack and my eyes were opened to how the other half lives: coming into an Oasis just as they are closing, threats of being pulled from the course. The people back there were the heart of the ride, they were slower for whatever reason (health issues, less training, less efficient bikes, etc.), but they poured every ounce of their energy into the ride; they really inspired me! As we got closer to the city we faced new obstacles: more traffic with irate drivers, more street debris and pot holes, doors opening from parked cars, frequent stop signs and traffic lights. I thought to myself "what a crappy course!", but then reconsidered. The ride wasn't about riding fast and getting there first without hassles, the ride was about facing challenges (course signage, hills, rain, bike problems, and traffic) and moving forward together. I thought about my own 18 year battle with AIDS and some of the challenges I've faced: (depression, loss of vision, daily IVs, CD4 cells I could count with one hand, cancer, hyperlipidemia, avascular necrosis) and how I'd faced them and moved forward. I also thought about how lucky I

was to make through to reap the benefits of the new HIV treatments that became available in the mid-1990s and about the many that weren't so fortunate .

We finished the New Jersey segment of the ride at the Hudson River in Weehawken where we waited for all the riders to arrive, boarded a ferry with our bikes and crossed to Manhattan. We then rode the last couple miles lead by us "Poz Pedalers" to the finish in front of the LGBT Community Center (the ride's beneficiary) on 13<sup>th</sup> St in the West Village. There was a brief closing ceremony where we heard about how the over \$300,000 raised by the ride would be used to provide services to persons infected with or affected by HIV and how federal funds to provide those services have been lost since "W" has been in the White House. As I wheeled my bike into the Center I heard someone yell "Larry", I turned around and saw my longtime friend Larry Hughes from Houston, I hugged him and started to cry. Braking the Cycle 2006 had been an emotional journey for me for various reasons. I had memories of my first trip to New York in 1986 for the marathon, now 20 years later I looked at downtown Manhattan from the Hudson and remembered where the twin towers of the World Trade Center used to stand. I wondered about 'Tom", a boyfriend that I met at the Gay Games II in San Francisco in the summer of 1986. He lived in the East Village and was one of the first people who told me "I'm HIV positive"; what happened to him?...I assume the worst. I hope that he got some help from the Center, one of the first organizations formed in response to the AIDS epidemic.



Thank you to the Braking the Cycle organizers, riders and crew for making it such a great experience! Thanks also to my partner, Al, and to my supporters (fundraising and otherwise) for helping me make it to and through Braking the Cycle. I raised nearly \$5000 for the Center! Thanks especially to mentors, coworkers and colleagues in the Texas Medical Center and fellow members of the Tuberculosis Epidemiologic Studies Consortium, the Houston Masters Sports Association, the Houston Trail Runners Extreme, and Frontrunners Houston. Thanks also to my orthopedic surgeon who suggested that I switch sports from running marathons and ultras to biking and who performed the surgery in 2005 that has resulted in the new bone growth in head of the femur of my right hip. He donated \$500 to BTC and has been tolerant of my obsession with running (I've run three 50Ks and three marathons so far in 2006).

Best regards,

Larry – Rider #137