

5th JohnnyRide an Enjoyable Experience

By John Durand

If you're into people-watching and human eye candy, there was nothing like this year's JohnnyRide. As we skirted the beautiful Minneapolis lakes in the so-called Grand Rounds area, we saw people walking for other fund-raisers, people walking with their dogs, young people and old strolling hand-in-hand and enjoying the cool fall day slowly warming by a friendly sun. We saw dads and moms guiding their kids along on bikes and little scooters, and, of course, runners and roller bladers and sun-bathers and a well-tanned older guy dressed only in shorts who sat at a picnic table pretending to read a newspaper while hoping a pretty girl would stop to ask the time or something. Or maybe I'm projecting.

I suppose 9-year-old Giselle Durand was not as distracted by the multitudes as I was. She was probably more focused on keeping up with the grown-up riders and wondering if she could really ride the entire 23 miles. Or what we thought was 23 miles. In any case, we figured that after a leisurely start we'd be back in plenty of time for the picnic.

Wrong! The ride was not 23 miles but 30 miles, and Giselle rode the entire distance on her kid-size bike and would not give up, even when, just a few miles from the finish, her little brother collided with her in a burst of JohnnyRide enthusiasm. "Hi, Zellie," he cried as he peddled furiously on his little two-wheeler to join her on the bike path. **CRASH!** The two young riders and their bikes went sprawling.

There were tears and recriminations and apologies, of course, but all was well after about ten minutes, and both Giselle and Ellis mounted their bikes to finish the ride. For Giselle to go the distance after her accident was a gutsy performance that made her folks proud and earned the admiration of the rest of us. And when five-year-old (but soon to be six!) Ellis rode the final five miles, he thus became the new "youngest rider" to peddle his bike to the finish of the annual fundraiser. No small feat, considering that in order to propel his bike for five miles with its 12-inch wheels his little legs had to circle the sprocket more than 5,000 times.

Oh, it was a great ride on a perfect fall day!

Mike and Marilyn Durand rode. So did Ellen Olson (recently moved back from California). And Chuck Fick, up from Plainfield, Minnesota for his 5th JohnnyRide. And Giselle's dad Peter. And me. We all went the distance. And Giselle's mom Julie joined us for the final five miles, hauling little Stuart on a "car seat" behind her. The little guy had an easy time. He conked out in a deep, deep sleep after enjoying the free ride for a couple miles. It was truly a "family" affair of familiar riders, and except for the crash I felt it was the nicest ride so far.

While the riders were enjoying themselves, Alice Keppel and Anne Fick spent the morning setting up the picnic lunch and the silent auction of theme baskets at the Minnehaha pavilion. Pat Keppel helped for a time, then left to provide sag wagon support for the riders. Of course, he couldn't find us, because like a flock of sheep we took a wrong turn and missed our first rendezvous. Through the miracle of cell phones, Pat found us at a second rendezvous. And just in time. By then we'd been so long since an early breakfast that people were getting hungry, especially with the realization that after more than two hours we were still only about half way.

Back at the pavilion meanwhile, folks began gathering for the picnic that was to have begun "about 1 o'clock." Bob Durand and his daughter Melissa dropped by. Joanne and Bud Berres and several grandchildren arrived. And then the 1 o'clock hour arrived, with nary a sign of the bikers. Almost another hour ticked by before riders began trickling in, hungry and proud of Giselle's feat and none the worse for wear, as the leisurely ride wasn't tiring so much as butt wearing.

A good appetite is the best sauce, an old saying goes, and so it was. The pulled pork sandwiches, potato salad, and picnic fixings took many people back for second helpings. A special 5th Anniversary JohnnyRide cake and other sweets topped off the meal. Alice Keppel has our special thanks for making the picnic lunch such an enjoyable affair.

Contributions are still coming in, but donations to 2008 JohnnyRide will probably be about the same as last year, something over \$2,500. In addition, the silent auction theme baskets garnered over \$200, and the raffle for two Green Bay Packers footballs and other items brought in \$511. This year some of the faithful either participated in or contributed to JohnnyRide for the fifth time, and several people contributed for the first time. To all of you I say, Thank you so much!

After every JohnnyRide there is much discussion and a flurry of ideas about how JohnnyRide can be made bigger and easier to manage and can raise more money. Nothing much seems to happen, however, and JohnnyRide remains pretty much a family affair.

For my own part, JohnnyRide will always be an event that helps to memorialize my son John (my son Peter's brother), but this year I began to realize that JohnnyRide is becoming less about John and more about just trying to do some good in the world. So far JohnnyRide has awarded \$4,300 in scholarships. By some measures that's not much, but for the young people who received checks from the JohnnyRide scholarship fund the awards meant a lot. They were much appreciated. And that's nice.

I am also beginning to realize that unless some miracle happens we will not have \$50,000 in the scholarship fund by the end of 2010. By then I may barely be able to wobble along on my bike but I will still look forward to the brief camaraderie of a JohnnyRide. I also may be the oldest rider again.

I hope not. That's why I'm announcing here that the 2009 JohnnyRide will take place on Saturday, September 19, details to follow. After all, if 9-year-old Giselle can do it, so can you!