**John Ryan**

Good morning,

It usually takes me a while to gather my thoughts about our trip ... and then write them down. Usually later than most of you. So ... first of all ... I’ve been wondering what’s up with the absence of team commentary on email ... again as usual I really look forward to your reflections on our time together.

‘One word’ to sum up seems impossible ... best might be best for me ... from many perspectives. Togetherness, daily reflecting, presentations, crowds (numbers and reactions), riding, priests, accommodations (together, ‘occupy’, unexpectedness), political presence, finale (presentation not audience ... well it was a great audience of caring listening folks).

The words we heard from you all every night were inspiring (community, the Spirit, being moved at soup kitchen and shelter, ... I look forward to Lou’s short notes on those). As were Fr Stephen’s prayer (mission), Fr Fador’s homily (manna & dependence), Fr John homilies (each one’s call), Sr Pat’s speech (the normality of shelters and soup kitchens). Tom’s prayers too (Good and gracious God) and intro at the finale.

And our conversations are wonderful ... from the sublime to the ridiculous ... all enjoyable (almost all). Sports, poverty, theology, philosophy, food-nutrition, kids, politics, prayer ... it occurs to me: all the stuff you’re not supposed to talk about, we seem to do with as much as ease as the ‘normal’ conversation.

I was glad to hear from Bob’s elected officials (except for ...); I would like to keep their collective comments / attitudes in mind when I think of these people ... it will make it much easier, impossible even, to not be perpetually disappointed and angry with “them”. That was an excellent development in our mission progress, it seems to me.

Joe DiSciacca’s comment about our teams’ growth over the years still strikes me ... very positively. A very thoughtful comment, delivered hours later by a respected ally with great perspective ... can be taken to heart, understood and appreciated. I think many folks would not see the growth;

fewer would say so. I think he said WE connected more with the poor folks than previously, that WE were more emotionally involved than more intellectually the last time, that the spiritual dimension of our mission was more evident. Makes me wonder, excitedly, about our future in this regard. (I would like for us to discuss this at some point ... your understanding of Joe’s comments, where we go with our understanding)

Another image that comes back to me often is of the folks we spoke to/with gathering around the table to pick up our white papers and sample letters. They actually seemed anxious to get their copies ... hopefully that would translate into some letter-writing! I don’t remember anything like that from the past.

Our SAG people are tremendous ... no news. We were very fortunate to have some new people step in and catch the spirit right away ... maybe they came with the spirit ... of spotting a problem, or potential, and fixing it. “How are you doing?” Even shorter, “OK?” With meaning and concern was comforting and very helpful. They do so much ... finding food, offering drinks, washing clothes, checking routes. We have said in the past that we need two-person teams in each SAG vehicle; someone alone has too many things to think of ... talk about distracted driving! I think we must make sure that is the case going forward ... starting now with the personal invitations.

The words again ... I am so happy when I hear our presentation ... the various speakers ... the adjustments that are made ... the meanings conveyed ... it’s no wonder people flocked to the tables. Thank you. What a great group to be part of.

I also find those rides such fertile ground for new ideas ... not having enough air to speak must make the mind work extra! We do have a message, a mission. We have been persistent. We are better at it. Is it time to expand the target somehow?

John

**Lou**

John,

I love you.

It is fitting that you should start things off. I have been waiting for some reflections to begin.

I have my own thoughts and have been holding off waiting to see others reactions.

I intend to document my thoughts shortly and want to piece together or "words", maybe write short journals for each day too.

I have been contemplating on when to write down my reflections, have been sort of down because our trip this year has ended although it continues.....I miss everyone. Tel you the truth, if we had to go another day, I don't think I could have gotten on the bike. I was beat, like those in poverty, not knowing how I would continue, what lies ahead....it was like "I'm done".

This year's ride to me was the most moving, emotional. It really got to me. Maybe that's why I am "down" a bit. I know I am still tired.

But John's email has gotten to me and sparked my thought process. So, my reflections, thoughts will follow some time today.

Love you all.

The Holy Spirit came through again. That sums up this year's ride for me.

Peace,

Lou

So, I think this year's ride was one of our best.

We had a lot going for us. We had good presentations and good attendance. we had good political presence. We visited soup kitchens and shelters. And we visited our state senators again.

Only two flat tires, first day and last day.

Some deer. Lots and lots of hills. Great rides. Good weather. Good debriefs. Good prayer to start us off. Good homilies at St. Bridget and Holy Family. Lots of emotion. Did I mention hills. Loved our dinner together in Litchfield. Thank God for our support people. Glad we had some new folks

join us. We were blessed. Enjoyed cycling with you all. Glad Maureen joined us and we got Claire back. How about those hills?

Will remember the people we met along our ride, the motorcyclist just before Simsbury mountain, those two women who invited Claire and others to their home to use their restroom, the belly dancers, Fr Fador dancing down the isle, the cantor at St. Bridget in Cornwall, the people outside the St. Vincent de Paul Soup Kitchen in Middletown, Lydia, Ron Krum cycling with us, Fr. Joe Disciacca's hospitality and comments the day after our debrief, the shelter at St. Vincent de Paul Mission and how it made us all feel, Wayne and I struggling to get up those hills on Sunday, Johnnie F doing 53 mph down the hill to Cornwall, having showers at St. Anthony's, Joan's fall, three cracked ribs, her hanging in the entire weeklong, the people stopping on the way out of St. Anthony's all taking sample letters, the quickness of the mass, John's comments at mass, stopping for lunch and resting, and eating, great support, sleeping together, showing together, getting showers down in Stratford thanks to Bob Ford, meeting Jim Clifford and his commitment, Aldene's talk at St. Elizabeth Seton, seeing him again at the Finale, talking to so many homeless and feeling helpless, crying, laughing, Joan laughing in pain, Claire and the gears of hope, Wendy and her camera, Steve's smile from the support vehicle, a smile of encouragement and support, Kathy getting us breakfast in the morning at St. Joe's, Staying and waking up to finish the laundry at St. Anthony's, those hills, and another hill, missed Dave and Scavotto, enjoyed riding with Eric watching him dodge the deer, love eating Subway on these rides, wish we stopped for ice cream, lots of "Our Father's" going ups those hills, no Hail Mary's because of the line "now at the hour of our death, was afraid to say that, little boy at St. Bridget wishing me a safe ride, little boy at Mercy House soup kitchen telling me not to fall off my bike, his mom being so grateful for the meal although hating to be there, the hugs I shared with you and some of the people we met, the way our plan worked when we visited Blumenthal's and Murphy's offices, "my ask is...", all the people taking our white papers and sample letters, our short presentation at St. Bridget and how good it worked, Fr. George at St. John the Baptist, coincidental that St. John the Baptist's feast day had just passed, all of you who spoke with your passion, all of your shared feelings and love for each other, the Finale even though it wasn't the best, just liked being there because we were supposed

to be there, and being there with you all, sad it ended, happy it ended, those hills, tired, energized for the next time.

I could go on but it's getting late.

Will be sending all of you my summary of our debriefs and our words. Wasn't that special and that we did it every night, every night, a first. Thank you all for participating, for educating, for dedicating yourself to this mission, for advocating and making a change, and for your love.

PEDAL on!!

Lou

**Pam**

This years ride was amazing in so many ways. I too have been trying to process the whole experience as I have been enjoying the beauty of Cape Cod. After I read John's email, I went to look at Facebook and saw this verse on East Catholic's web site

The more closely you walk with God, the more clearly you will understand all He can do in and through your life.

How appropriate for our team! I think during our weeklong we definitely walk right next to God.

I will try to sum up my feelings and reflections in the next few days, probably not as eloquently as John did.

I miss you all. You are always in my heart.

Pam

**Bob**

I guess, I feel somewhat the same as others who have responded so far. For some reason, it’s harder to capture my thoughts in an email. I guess I feel it would be more focused if said in person but I’ll try a few preliminary

thoughts and then add some more later. Our pedaling this year was very tiring for me but the icing was the pleasure of the team at every turn and every meal. The daily grind was very familiar and comforting in consistency. The various towns and cities we visited are always exciting and the new friends we made hold great promise, especially Bob the bike mechanic, Father George in Hamden and the elected officials who kept their promises and attended our presentations.

I think part of my difficulty in expressing my feelings is the disappointment and outright insulting lack of courtesy by the Hartford district and city elected officials. Hurtful to Sister Pat, Colleen and her clients. I’ve been trying to compose an honest letter to the editor about our disappointment and it has been on my mind since we returned home.

I’m trying hard not to let it affect my overall reward for your company and honest joy in your presence.

More later.

Peace. Bob

**Wendy**

I have finished two of my journal days (a new experience for me this year which I enjoyed writing) which I did during the trip. I don’t know how you remember anything after the trip is over, it goes by so fast. I’ll let you send to the group because I’ve lost track as to what the latest e-mail list is.

Maybe I’ll get to finishing my other day’s journal entries which I started but since I can’t be sure, I wanted to send this out.

I feel so blessed to know all of this team including people who could not be with us this year – you are absolutely there on this trip in spirit. I love the

mission we are on and feel so fortunate to be a part of it. I look forward to this amazing experience every year. God bless each and every one of you!

Wendy

**Eric**

Wendy, you write as well as you take photos. I really enjoy your style on both, very talented!

As I've read from some of you, this year was totally exhausting. I don't remember needing as much recovery time as I did this year. I went home and slept on Thursday, very rare for me. I was in bed by 8pm the rest of the weekend. Much of it was physical fatigue but a good amount of mental fatigue as well.

I've been planning to do some journaling of each day that I rode, but I'm going to start on Sunday 6/22. In my four years of riding, this might be my single most enjoyable and fulfilling day with BTC. Wendy's photo album of the day is just terrific. It really captured the essence of the day.

Eric

**Claire**

Hi everyone,

It was such a privilege to ride with you. Physically it was the most challenging thing I have ever done. It is so good to read that it was challenging for you because throughout the trip I had to deal with those little voices telling me I was not good enough. Also on the physical side as being most impressive were the calves of Bob in Stratford! Wow!

I so appreciated the small kindnesses......Lou fixing my tire and pumping them every morning, Eric bringing me coffee at Holy Family, Fr. George inviting you to sit at his dining room table and sit on his red brocade chairs. (I would never let sweaty, sun screened people sit on my cloth chairs). On a more spiritual note...started a retreat at SES on Monday nite which is

about Pope Francis’ words. What stayed with me is that as much as we are seeking God, God is seeking us. God is waiting for us with many opportunities to serve...we just need to recognize them. Reflect on what is getting in the way. All from the retreat….In a way, seeing Wayne and Pam waiting for me at the top of every hill is just that…ok you can do it..let’s get going on Our mission. Thank you.

So happy 4th of July…we have freedom…let’s celebrate it and use it.

Love you all….Claire

**Tom S**

Quick share as I read the journals of others sitting by the river in Rocky Hill .... today is the first day that I have been back on the bike since the ride. Every time I would contemplate it I would allow something to distract me. This morning it occurred to me what was going on. As much as I wanted to ride, saddling up without all of you just took the joy out of it.

So what I think I was reminded of by my experience over the past week is what the hallmarks of true community are. Aside from the care we show for each other and like-mindness we share around the mission of BTC there is the joy of being interdependent; many vines from the same branch; one

body in Christ. So, yes, we are all fine on our own but we are AWESOME together! That is why God has brought us into community with one another! So, I will be riding home from the river in a few minutes alone in body but will all of you in my heart. Enjoy the 4th!

Peace, blessings and love to all,

Tom

**Johnnie F**

I guess it is my turn to give my thoughts. After reading those of other folks I can say wow. You folks are so great to be with. The faith, hope (even on the lowest gear) and love of the group is inspiring.

I loved spending the week with you. The community was ever present. In every community things are not always perfect. I really am thankful for the chance to meet new people. Steve,Bob, Jim, Peter. Mary, Maureen (raisins in meatballs), and those who I am too old to remember their names.

I am glad to have the opportunity to share and hear from y'all every night. The tightness and flexibility of the presentation was awesome. The meetings with the legislative offices were well planned and direct.

The ride was great. The Holy Spirit kept my tire together for 40 miles.

The visit to the shelter in Bristol may have been the highlight for my own education. So many times we have visited shelters and noticed the community there, the helpfulness of the workers, and I did not feel the hopelessness of being without a home. Now I saw and can begin to feel the terrible conditions, struggles, hopelessness, fear, and loneliness of many of our brothers and sisters. Thank you, God, for showing me.

A friend followed us every day on facebook and was so excited to show me the pictures and ask about the trip. That was a great job Pam.

Lou Thanks for keeping us on task for the planning.

Wendy I love how you have taken charge to be sure we had support

Steve and Joan Thanks for running all over looking for a tire.

Joan you are a trooper. Thank God you came with us.

New and old I love you all

**Maureen**

Sorry I haven’t “weighed in” on the comments about the BTC trip sooner. I guess I have just needed all of this time to digest. Wendy’s photos, people’s journal entries, reflections, Lou’s links to articles reminding us of the need to press on – I continue to be floored and moved by people’s commitment.

I want to thank every single of one of you for the privilege of taking part in this group. You inspire me. Thank you to my fellow riders for keeping us moving forward. Thank you to the SAG people for your INCREDIBLE acts of kindness. Thank you Lou for your leadership. Thank you to the men who aren’t afraid to express emotion. Thank you Bob for all of your work in making those political connections. Thank you Pam for encouraging me to do this. Thank you Claire for showing me that I can do this for years to come. Thank you Johnny for making me laugh. Thank you Tom S for your insights about the church. Thank you Eric for giving me someone to chase up those South Glastonbury hills. Thank you Steve for scoring a lunch stop for us in New Haven. Thank you Wendy for sharing your highly personal and painful connection to the vulnerable people in our society. Thank you John Ryan for your passion. Thank you Joan for staying the course despite your injury. Thank you Jim for the courage to join us. Thank you Kathy for the coffee at 5:00 a.m. Thank you Mary for the picnic lunch in Bushnell Park. Thank you Tom B for your company on my first day. Thank you Wayne for your constancy. Thank you Sue for the ride home. Thank you Kelly for supporting the group even though alas our paths didn’t cross!

I had been attending the BTC meetings throughout the year, and still had no real idea of what it was I was committing to. I’m hooked. I want to do more. There’s so much to do,

Maureen

**Our Words**

This year's ride was different. It was wonderful fulfilling. Difficult for sure.

We did something we haven't ever done. We debriefed every evening. A first for us.

I thought this was part of what made this year special.

Words........are a powerful thing, a short message of what was and what can be, what is.....US.

Thank each and every one of you for contributing your words, feelings, emotions. I know it was difficult getting together after a long day on the bike and in a car, but you all hung in and we did it. Let's remember this for next year!!

**Day 1 Debrief - Our words**

*Unexpected* - flat tire; the two women

*Inspired* - cool breezes; prayer

*Familiar* - all works out

*Holy Spirit Filled* - nothing more to say

*Circles* - our support

*Calm, peaceful* - not confusing

*Connected* - to everyone

*Challenging* - hills?

*Better than expected*

*Kinship* - like a family

*Humbling* - very much so

*Perseverance* - nothing more to say

*Endurance* - ditto

*Persistence* - a theme here

**Day 2 Debrief - Our words**

*Dependency* - on God, family, freedom, Manna

*Interdependent*

*Prayer* - stopping

*Conflicted* - beautiful scenery but tough hills

*Engaged* - prejudged, church, people

*Better than expected*

*Music* - upbeat

*Inspirational*

*No judgments*

*Unique*

**Day 3 Debrief - Our words**

*Pleased* - no glitches, served, template worked

*Connection*

*Frustration* - helpless

*Uncomfortable* - to contentment

*Blessed*

*Grateful*

*Vulnerable* - Lydia, US

*Community* - our group

*Fun*

*Edifying* - Lydia, presentation

*Educational*

*Appreciative* - frustrated too

*Sore* - in a joyful way

*Disappointment* - yet fulfillment

*Confused* - conflicted

**Day 4 Debrief - Our words**

*Relief* - cue sheet done

*Smell of Poverty* - shelter

*Angry* - Shelter Rules

*Hopeless*

*Sad*

*Touched*

*Real*

**Day 5 Debrief - Our words**

*Kindness* - Fr. George, flat

*Trust* - showers, lunch

*Meeting* - every night

*Catholicism* - connection with community

*Community* - BTC, indescribable, Holy Spirit

*Special*

*Success*

*Stamina*

*Satisfying*

*Commitment*

*Blessed*

*Welcoming*

**Day 6 Debrief - Our words**

*Disappointed*

*Upset*

*Angry*

*Frustrated*

*Done*

*Look Forward*

*Learn*

*Be Better*