



Biking for Awareness and a Cure

by Bruce Shriver

Shortly after getting off the train that took her from Aarhus to Odense in Denmark on July 1, 2003, Elizabeth ("Liddy") Shriver and 27 other cyclists who formed "Team Sarcoma" donned their biking clothes, mounted their bikes, and began the Shriver Family Bike Tour for Sarcoma Research. The cyclists came from Denmark, Germany, Hong Kong, Norway, Switzerland and the USA. They were joined by more than 230 Virtual Bike Tour cyclists who biked in 11 other countries and in 16 states in the USA. They embarked on a four-day "world-wide" cycling to raise public awareness of sarcoma and of the lack of young adults in cancer-related clinical trials – and, of course, to raise funds for sarcoma-based research.

Many more bikers -- "Virtual Bike Tour" (VBT) cyclists -- wanted to support the effort but couldn't manage to join the group in Denmark. So, the VBT cyclists agreed to bike on the very same days Team Sarcoma biked in Denmark; to report to them how far and where they biked; and to tell others about sarcoma. VBT bikers hailed from France, Hong Kong, India, Ireland, Japan, Portugal, Serbia, Sweden, Ukraine as well as from California, Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Vermont and Washington State. From July 1-4, the Team Sarcoma cyclists and their VBT cyclist counterparts formed a unified, coordinated international group helping to raise public awareness of sarcoma.

This was a particularly important bike tour for Liddy. Because of her diminishing lung capacity, it may be one of the last multi-day bike tours in which she could participate. Liddy was diagnosed with Ewing's Sarcoma in April 2002. She was 35 years old at the time. Her primary tumor was in the tibial nerve in her leg. This nerve supports the calf muscles and stabilizes the ankle. Surgery last July removed her tumor and eight inches of nerve. After the surgery, walking became painful because of the contact of bone-on-bone. By August, Tom (Liddy's husband) and the Shriver family knew that she wasn't responding to the standard pediatric chemotherapy protocol. By November, they knew that she wasn't responding as hoped to the 2nd and 3rd line chemotherapy treatment. Her cancer had metastasized to her lungs. Over the months, the tumors continued to grow in number and size.

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The Shivers researched the disease and learned that "the five-year survival rate is 5% for patients who develop metastases while on treatment for Ewing's sarcoma." Facing this sobering reality, she began working on a list of things she always wanted to do. Liddy, who is a cycling enthusiast, told us, "On a bike, I get a sense of freedom that I don't get any other way. Plus, I don't limp when I bike. I always wanted to ride in a multi-day bike tour. It has to be somewhere flat, since I really only bike with one leg. And, I have to do it sooner versus later since my lungs were already giving me breathing problems."

Many people shared the Shriver's goals and were willing to devote time and effort to help make people aware of this wretched disease. Some bike-riders rode tandems, some mountain bikes, some road bikes, and some even stationary bikes. People of all ages and life styles became VBT cyclists. They ranged from a 70-year old bike enthusiast; to some 60-somethings who haven't biked in more than 30 years; to a group of 20 boy scouts who biked in Portugal; a seven-year old boy biking in Japan; and a pediatric oncologist in the Ukraine. Liddy's surgeon, Dr. Murray Brennan, and four of his colleagues from Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in Manhattan were among the VBT cyclists. So far, the Shriver Family Bike Tour for Sarcoma Research has raised more than \$72,000 -- all of which has gone to the SFA.

Before departing for Denmark, Liddy said, "Perhaps the best thing about the bike tours is that for several days, I really don't feel much like a cancer patient. My last chemo is far enough in the past that I feel good. No worry about scans and their results. It's wonderful while it lasts."

With steep hills, smokey restaurants, and constant chest pressure, Liddy felt fatigued during the Denmark travail. More, she was about to start another round of chemotherapy. Always hopeful, Liddy and her family believe that medical science will one day, once-and-for-all, arrest the growth of her tumors. The Team Sarcoma cyclists and their VBT cyclist counterparts all have similar hopes and dreams – that is, that their bike ride might bring about a public awareness of sarcoma and, more importantly, a cure in our lifetime.

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