

2 RAGBRAI

It was the experience of a lifetime as I went “home” to Iowa this summer and joined more than 15,000 cyclists for the 42nd annual RAGBRAI...my first RAGBRAI.

RAGBRAI is the somewhat awkward acronym for the **R**egister’s (Des Moines) **A**nnual **G**reat **B**ike **R**ide **A**cross **I**owa...the oldest, largest and longest recreational touring bicycle ride in the world.

Speaking of awkward, as a lifelong competitive swimmer, I quickly learned swimming and cycling aren’t even loosely related. But my lack of skill in the saddle didn’t really matter, because I wasn’t riding for me. I was riding to honor and remember my amazing Dad and legendary Iowa bicyclist--who went home to be with the Lord last year.

My step Mom, brother, three nephews and two grandchildren comprised “Team LeBeau,” a small but mighty family contingent hell-bent on pedaling across the Hawkeye State to honor an amazing husband, father, grandfather and 41 consecutive-year participant of the iconic biking event.

For those not familiar, RAGBRAI is an annual, seven-day, bike-riding party that begins in a selected community along Iowa’s western border and ends in a town along the state’s eastern border. This year’s route took us from the northwest city of Rock Valley--through 418 miles of lush northern Iowa farmland—to Guttenberg, a charming river town on the Mississippi.

It all began in 1973 when two Des Moines Register newspaper feature reporters decided to take a bicycle ride across Iowa and write about their experiences. Of 300 riders starting the ride, 114 (including Dad) completed the trek.

Dad was officially honored on Day 6 of this year’s ride...a 67-mile leg that started in Waverly (home of Wartburg College!) and ended in American flag-draped Independence, Iowa. The course was a blur of color that day...with more than 1,500 pairs of mismatched striped socks worn by riders honoring Dad. His signature attire, the vintage stockings were available through the RAGBRAI website and completely sold out.

As my brother, Carter and I rode together, we reminisced about the guy who made us clean our rooms and encouraged us in all our endeavors. I believe his impact on the cycling community rivals that of Lance Armstrong (who, by the way, rode RAGBRAI with his entourage. I was just too far behind to actually see him!) A great cyclist, Dad never cared about the race. He just wanted to encourage all levels of cyclists to get involved by socializing and having fun.

So from Rock Valley to Okoboji and Emmetsburg--through Forest City and Mason City--we made our way through northern Iowa’s beautiful countryside...celebrating

Dad's life and legacy with hills, heat, headwinds and a sense of purpose... all the way to the northeastern Iowa border town of Guttenberg. As the magnificent view of the Mississippi River appeared in the distance, my stepmom, Kaye, summed it up. "I feel like he's still with me and encouraging me along the way."

Me too, Kaye. Me too.