

# 1996 Pan Mass Challenge

Brian M. Richards  
 Sturbridge to Provincetown  
 August 3 & 4, 1996

The official kickoff of the Pan Mass Challenge (PMC) always takes place the night before the Ride at the Sturbridge Host Resort. I first went to my motel in Auburn, some 15 miles away, as that was the closest I could get a place. Driving back to Sturbridge I saw a lot of construction going on the main route of the Ride for the first 10 miles, and thought to myself this was going to be ugly Saturday morning. I checked myself in for the Ride, seeing my two favorite girls who always dress up in some costume on day one to cheer you on. I went and bought some souvenirs of the Ride, ate some finger food (shrimp, cheese, and crackers) and decided to head back to Auburn for a good night sleep, forgoing the pasta dinner for the first time in nine rides. I had a scare as I got back to my car as I was missing the package of information the PMC gives to the riders. The package includes your luggage tags, so the PMC a place to put your luggage at the Mass Maritime Academy (MAA) in Bourne for the two day riders, plus a bicycle tag to show your riders' number. I was number 495. I went back to the souvenir stand and found the envelope. I went to bed at 7 PM to get a good night sleep before the Ride.

Even with the construction taking place on Route 20, the Ride started out smoothly, as the State and Sturbridge police did a good job of controlling traffic. There was a different person playing the bag pipes this year at the eight mile point in Charlton, but instead of being in front of the police station, he was directly across from it. Thank God he was not playing Amazing Grace <grin>.



**Start Point  
 Sturbridge  
 1996 Ride**



**Ruggiero Family  
 Start Point  
 Sturbridge  
 1996 Ride**

At the 18 mile point I saw the first two casualties of the day. One girl slammed into a telephone pole and broke her shoulder. A guy was off to the side in what looked like an apparent heart attack. The ambulances were there so I went on my way. The first water stop was at the 21 mile point. It was different place from prior years, and for the first time in recent years there were no young girls dancing to greet the riders. It was there where I slipped on some sand and twisted my right ankle. This is the same ankle I broke three years in three places, and had a plate and seven pins installed. It was not sore to walk on but I soon found out I could not put pressure on it climbing up hills.

Saturday morning the excitement was building up in Sturbridge. There were three distinct routes and two classes of riders. The two day riders could leave from Sturbridge (192 miles) or Boston (163 miles). The one day riders (109 miles) left from Sturbridge. All groups met in Bourne on day one. The official breakdown was 268 Riders from Boston, 1540 Riders from Sturbridge, with 146 of those Riders being one day riders. There were 517 ladies on the Ride. I raised close to \$3,000 this year, keeping the Heavy Hitter record intact. Just before I started the Ride I met Tom & Kathleen Ruggiero from Stow MA. It was Tom's first PMC ride, and as typical for a first year rider, he forgot to bring a camera. The Ride started promptly at 6 AM.

I had my favorite pain killer Motrin with me, as I started taking one every four hours starting at 5:30 AM. I also took some advice



**8 Mile Point  
 1996 Ride**



from last year and used Vaseline Petroleum Jelly Cream and literally lubricated my self in the sensitive areas so I would not chafe myself while sitting in the bicycle seat. As I started out from the first water stop I was watching a girl doing a zig zag up the hills. Bicycle riders recognize this as a maneuver to make it easier to climb up the hills but it confuses the daylighters of automobile drivers. I realized at the 31 mile point on the steepest hill of the Ride on both days that my nine year record of never walking up a hill came to an end. My ankle was to sore to push on the pedal. I used a clip in type pedal with special cleats on the shoe to lock into the pedal rather than using a toe clip arrangement. It is easier to use because the ball of your foot is right over the pedal, giving you maximum power pedaling. It also relieves any pressure points on the toes versus using a toe clip arrangement. The downside of using these special pedals compounded my ankle injury, as you had to move the rear of your foot out to release yourself from the pedal. I walked up that hill, realizing for the first time how steep it really was. I got back on the bicycle at the top of the hill, and continued. I made up a couple more hills afterwards, realized not only would I be walking up more hills, but the possibility existed that I would not finish the Ride even on day one, let alone day two. Somewhere before I got into the second water stop at the 49 mile point a police officer on a bicycle saw me, stopped traffic so I could go through without stopping at the lights. He was clapping his hands as I was going through the intersection, making me feel great.

At the second water stop I filled my water bottles, drank some juice and food, and talk to some of our volunteers who make doing the Ride such a joy to do. One girl said the Riders are the heroes of the Ride as they raise the money. I said that is not true. I'm no jock of any means. I told this girl I could not do this ride without the support they give the riders. I talked briefly about my sister Carol's battle with cancer, saying that she is in remission and her son Jon will be five years old this October 27. I did not mention about the ankle injury at this time to the PMC as I was hoping it would go away.

I realized not only was I was wrong about the injury going away as I left the 49 mile point, it was getting progressively worse. I gave up any idea of riding up hills at that point. I just got off the bicycle, push it up the hill, then get back on. I had problems pushing the pedal on the flats, but it was a manageable pain. I finally caught up with that girl whom I saw zig zag up the hills. I introduced myself and she told me her name is Cheryl. The entire day we were together,

whether we realized it or not. I would pass her and then she would pass me. We would talk on the flats on our reasons for doing the Ride. There were a few times where she would catch up with me as I was walking up a hill if I was OK. I told her to keep going as I did not want to hold her back. I was in a lot of pain. I officially notified the PMC of my condition somewhere on that stretch of the Ride. The people in the sag van, who saw me struggling asked me if I was in trouble. I explained my problems and told them I will go on to



water stop three at the 69 mile point (lunch stop) and decide then whether to continue or not. I felt real lonely at that point, but I realized I was not alone. Cheryl is wearing knee braces, and she was determined to finish, so I said I could do it.

I got into the third water stop at 1:30 PM. I normally get there at 11:00 AM. The PMC had already broken up the site, so all I was able to get was a half of plate of cold pasta and water. A volunteer came up to me to try and get me to quit. He said I am now the tail wagging the dog, holding everyone up. I got infuriated, not believing what I was hearing. He wanted me to skip two water stops and take a ride to the fifth water stop, where I would have only 14 more miles to go. I told him that is cheating. There was no way I was going cross the finish line at Bourne unless I did it under my own power. It is one thing if there is an injury or a problem with my bicycle that requires transportation between water stops. It is





a problem in my mind to be told at a water stop that I am going to be leap frogged over two stops so I could cross the finish line on a bicycle. I told that person the PMC can pull me out of the Ride right then and there and drive me to Bourne, as I was not going to ride my bicycle across the line, or leave me alone. I told him he did not know the meaning of pride. My father never quit in his battle in cancer, even though he lost his battle in the end. I knew right then and there I was not going to be able to do day two of the Ride, and maybe not finish day one without some

support, but I told this person to go to hell, and went on my way.

I struggled through the next 16 miles to water stop four. Thank God for Cheryl being with me on the way. She managed to get away from me, but had a problem with her bicycle and had to stop. Her chain on the rear gears got jammed between her high gear sprocket (the small gear) and the chain stay. She was waiting 15 minutes for help when I caught up with her. I knew what the problem was, so I grabbed the chain and forced it off the chain stay and put the chain on three gears lower. I picked up the bicycle, shifted the rear shifter and moved the pedal to get the shifter to align properly. I realized that Cheryl was using a friction shifter. A friction shifter is one where you move the shifter by feel until the chain goes to the next gear. I use index shifting. Index shifting has distinct shifting points, called click and shift. Friction shifters are harder to use, so I had more admiration towards Cheryl. My fingers were covered with grease, so I just rubbed my fingers on my bicycle pants to clean my fingers. Cheryl looked in disbelief until I told her the original reason why bicycle pants are black is for that reason, to get rid of the grease without it showing.

I got into water stop four and checked into medical. I asked the nurse if I could get a cortisone shot for the right ankle. She smiled and said aspirin, Tyenol and Advil. I smiled and asked for a hug, which I promptly got. The people who were running the sag vans came up to me and told me they heard what happened at the 69 mile point, and they were going to support me all the way.

I went on my way having no idea if I was going to finish day one. I was on my own for those last lonely miles. Cheryl managed to get ahead of me and I did not see her until the fifth water stop. I was at this point to go from water stop to water stop and decide then whether to drop out. I really was not alone. My mom and dad

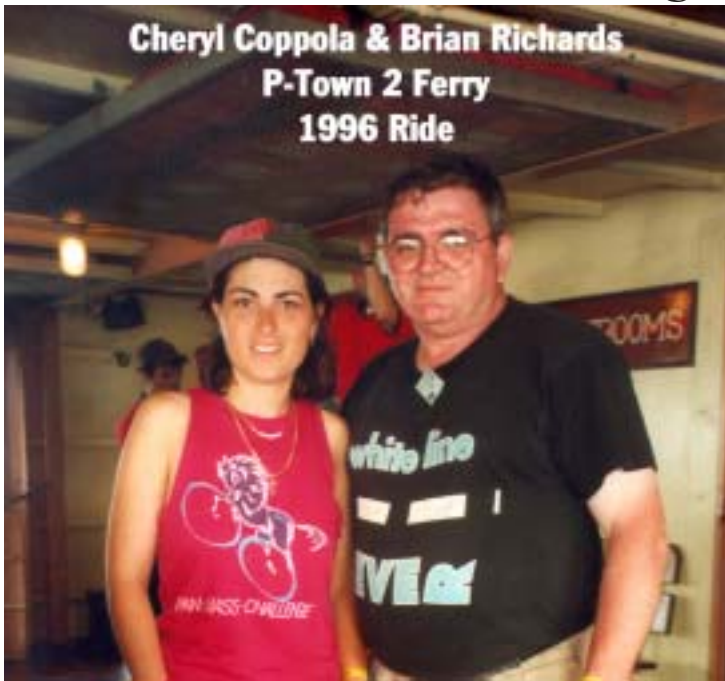
were there cheering me on. Mom was giving me hell saying get off the bicycle and quit. Dad told mom leave him alone, that's my boy. Both were respecting my decision to continue on. In a morbid sense I enjoyed the 15 miles between water stop four and five. The stretch of the ride has one going through a lot of old graveyards. It was enjoyable going so slow looking at the epithets on their graves, someone in death sharing their lives for a future generation to read.

I stopped my bicycle somewhere before the fifth water stop realizing something was wrong. I pulled out the map of the Ride trying to see where I was at. The people on the sag van, who were faithfully following me since the fourth water, yelled out that I was on the right route. I yelled back saying who in hell added five more miles to day one of the Ride, as I wanted to meet him or her. Day one from Sturbridge is advertised as 109 miles. Over the years I saw it being anywhere from 107.5 to 109.7 miles, but never 114 miles. It through off my planing, because five more miles added almost an hour of ridding time, as I was running so slow. I got on my bicycle and continued.

I got in to the fifth water stop approximately at 5:30 PM. Cheryl was leaving then and said see you in Bourne. The volunteers in the sag van came to me and asked how I was doing. I said surviving. I was asked what was my plan of attack for the final stretch. I said walk up the hills, get on the bike, and go for it. I was told there was 14 more miles to go and was asked how long will it take me to get in. Normally it would take one hour to do, but I was hurting so much I said two hours. I asked the volunteer plus a friend in his own wagon being used as a sag van to say in effect that they could bring me in now to Bourne and allow them to get in somewhat early, eat some food and drink some beer. They would not hear of it. They smiled and said "We are getting paid double time for this." I smiled realizing as a volunteer pay is zero, so two times zero is zero, so I said lets go for it.

I left at 5:45 PM and continued on my way. I stopped a couple times before I was walking up a hill looking over my shoulder to see if the sag van was in view. The people in that last sag van came up to me and said I was not slowing them down, as they were planing the next day agenda. I was told do what you have to do and do not worry about us. At that point I knew I was going to make it to Bourne. Three miles to go someone in their car going in the opposite direction yelled out "Brian, you're a hero." I came close to falling off my bicycle as my throat went dry. I stopped the bicycle, grabbed my water bottle for a drink, and got off the bicycle to wash my glasses.

I made it to the MAA in Bourne with different feelings. The initial stop at the MAA is approximately one mile from the final finish line in Bourne. A volunteer asked me what is my number (rider number). I had a big smile and said "Is there someone behind me, please. There has to be someone behind me." I said 495. She then told me "They're waiting for you." I really did not want that one. A tradition of the PMC since I was with them since 1988 is to cheer the last rider in on day one. I thought at the point when I was three miles out cleaning my glasses to tell the sag van not to have anyone there to cheer me on, as I felt so ashamed of carrying the Richards' name. Common sense told me not to break a PMC tradition. I was finishing that last mile with tears in my eyes. I have



whom I have done the ride with in the past, but I met more new friends who will always remember me. I was amazed at some of the people's energy in dancing after completing 192 miles on a bicycle.

In closing to those who say that there will never be a cure for cancer, they will be right if people do not do anything about it. I may not see it in my life time, but I know it will happen. The money raised this weekend helps the doctors out at Dana Farber to do the experiments that insurance companies and the federal government do not fund. It does take time. I honestly believe that if there was such a thing called chemotherapy back in 1959 that my mother would not have died of cancer in 1964. All she had back in 1959 when she was operated for cancer was radiation treatments. I like to say special thanks to Cheryl Coppola who made the Ride so enjoyable to do, the four unsung heroes in their sag vans that followed me in my final 30 miles, and to my dad for giving me the inspiration not to quit. Hope you were proud of me on day one, sorry I let you down on day two. As always, my 1996 Ride is dedicated in memory of my parents, Joseph Albert and Kathleen Marie Richards. Until next year.

heard bigger cheers in nine years for the last rider on day one, but to be truthful I cannot remember. The PMC announces the last rider is five minutes from coming in, and the riders and volunteers form in a horse shoe format at the finish line to cheer the last rider in on day at the official finish line. The line started at an intersection before one slams a sharp right to finish the final 100 yards of the Ride on day one. I had to put my right or left hand under my glasses to rub away the tears in my eyes. I looked to my left and people were screaming and cheering me on. I looked to my right, still crying, and saw my two favorite girls screaming my name "Brian Brian." I heard other people screaming my nickname Jersey, knowing I live in New Jersey since 1989 and still come back to do the Ride. I could not ride any further as people were in front of me. There were over 1500 riders and volunteers cheering their lungs out. In my mind I was getting ready to say I do not deserve this, but as I looking in front of me there was Cheryl, with the big smile on her face. The tears were gone as I flashed a smile back, and quickly realized to get my camera out and have Cheryl take a picture of me in a moment of history. Riders were coming up shaking my hand, calling me a hero. It was the most awesome experienced I ever had in my life. I was being cheered not for coming in dead last but as a rider who refused to quit and stuck it out and finished it.

Brian M. Richards



There was some concern on the PMC's part that I wanted to get back to Sturbridge, since I was scratched from riding Sunday. I said as long as I got back to Sturbridge by Sunday night I did not care what they did with me. Billy Starr, the founder of the PMC said I was going to be on the ferry from P-Town to Boston, even if I did not sign up for it, as he wanted the hero of the ride on the boat. I informed Billy I had already signed up for the ferry. I had a victory beer, and took a shower. Since I came in last I did not get to eat and I had a cot to sleep in. There were four to a room, and one person offered his bunk in exchange for the cot, since I was hurting. I declined his offer. Sunday morning I got up early, had some breakfast, and found myself being leap frogged to water stop six, then water stop seven, and finally to P-Town.

It was great going back on the ferry. I did not see many people



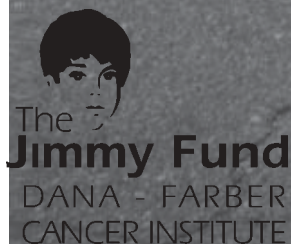
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Mom & Dad would be proud. Until next year.  
Thank you and may God Bless.

Brian M. Richards