

Cycling: The determination to keep cycling



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By [Jackie Chow - Maple Ridge News](#)

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One of the first people – and one of the most inspiring – I met after moving to Maple Ridge almost seven years ago, is my good friend Betty.

I remember the first time I ran into her, on the trail along Tamarack, when she had almost completed her daily bike ride to the Kanaka Creek riverfront park. She told me she had just seen a bear in the park. The prospect of potentially pedaling into another one in the future didn't deter her from continuing to enjoy her daily exercise.

She followed pretty much the same route every day, rain or shine. It was the only route close to home that was flat and gentle enough on her arthritic knees.

Part of her route was on the shoulder along Lougheed Highway between 105th Avenue and 240th Street, where she had to hold on tight to the handle bars when big semi-trailers would rumble past her.

She'd cross the railroad tracks at 240th St., and then took River Road. She had a bad fall once by the lumber yard on the railroad track, which crosses the road at an angle – a dangerous crossing for cyclists, especially with rain or icy road conditions.

Despite the injured thumb that never healed, she still didn't give up cycling.

When she got sick and couldn't bike because of medications that made her feel less stable on her bike, she finally settled for a hometrainer on her deck to stay in shape – but she kept looking forward to getting on her real bike again.

In the end, once she got off the medication, she decided that it was getting a little too scary for her to bike across the highway.

And who could blame her, now at 83 years old.

There's no doubt that Betty's determination to keep cycling has helped her to stay as healthy as she can possibly be. Unfortunately, many seniors in our area who would benefit greatly from a daily bike ride are not as brave as Betty to ride on roads that are built for fast moving cars and trucks only.

In the Netherlands, about 24 per cent of trips by seniors are made by bicycle. The number and length of trips by seniors are now actually increasing, thanks to the growing popularity of the e-bike.

There are many safe off-road routes to choose from, and cycling to do their errands or to visit friends gives seniors a wonderful feeling of freedom and independence. It also offers a great opportunity to continue an active lifestyle by just getting around on their own power, without having to join other rickety old folks in the gym, and being constantly reminded that they're now one of them.

Recently I read about Jaap, a Dutch senior whose wife had died a few years previously. He decided to get himself an electric bike and started pedaling as a way of dealing with his loss.

In 2011, he biked 10,000 km. One trip was 120-km long, to visit a newly born great-grandchild.

In 2012 he was proud to be the oldest person – at 87 - to complete the Tour of Holland, a 1,300-km bike route around the borders of Holland. He stayed overnight with members of Vrienden op de Fiets (Friends on the Bicycle), private homes that offer cheap accommodation including breakfast (to people traveling on their own power only) and he made some wonderful new friends along the way.

Jaap is, of course, a bit of an exception, even in the Netherlands.

If Betty was living in the Netherlands, she wouldn't be an exception – she'd be like everybody else – and that's the way it should be.

We like to think of ourselves as a society that's just and equitable. But there's nothing just and equitable about our road transportation system. It clearly favours drivers above everyone else, and it's not a surprise that relatively few people cycle – especially seniors and young people – to get around. We may want to give this a lot of thought, because as we all know, things are changing.

Aside from environmental considerations and things like peak oil and rising gas prices, we need to consider the fact that in the coming decades the proportion of seniors in our population will be growing. There will be a lot of demands on the younger, working generations, since there will be fewer of them looking after more of us.

It looks like we can't count on transit to save the day. That's why making sure that walking and cycling to get around is a safe and viable option for everyone.

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