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Concord boy keeps long-distance friendship rolling

By Nancy Shohet West | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT JULY 10, 2014



LANE TURNER/GLOBE STAFF

Concord teen Justin Moy (seated) and his mother and siblings are gearing up for a 480-mile ride across Iowa with family friends.

Thirteen-year-old Justin Moy does just about everything his Concord classmates do,

except walk.

He sings in several choirs and has had roles in the school musical all three years of middle school. He plays video games and computer games. He takes part in a baseball league, one specially tailored toward kids in wheelchairs, like him, or with other physical or developmental disabilities.

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But this month the rising ninth-grader, who was born with muscular dystrophy, will do something very few teens in Concord have done: He'll take part in RAGBRAI, a noncompetitive, seven-day, approximately 480-mile bike ride across the state of Iowa.

Heading into its 42d year, it is the oldest and largest bike-touring event in the world, according to its website (www.ragbrai.com).

The acronym stands for the Register's Annual Great Bicycle Ride Across Iowa (the "Register" refers to its founding organization, the Des Moines Register newspaper).

The ride on July 20-26 won't be Justin's first distance-oriented athletic adventure. Three years ago, his friend Adam Davis pushed him in his wheelchair in a Chicago half-marathon when both boys were 10; a year later the two of them, along with several members of both families, took part in an Indianapolis half-marathon.

Adam, who lives in Chicago, loves challenges, and he likes to be sure his friend Justin can take part as well. So when Adam learned from cousins about RAGBRAI, he immediately wanted to do it — as long as he could pull his friend Justin in a bike trailer.

Riding along with Justin and Adam on the trans-Iowa bike ride will be Justin's father, Chris Moy, and his 12-year-old brother, Nicholas, as well as Adam's parents, Jennifer and Dan Davis, and their family's au pair.

All of the bikes will be rigged to pull Justin's trailer, so the riders can take turns,

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although Adam Davis is determined to do the majority of the towing.

Justin's mother, Prow, said she plans to ride with them on the shorter days of 40 miles or so. On longer days, she'll drive the RV from one campground to the next.

In preparation for the event, the Moys bought a tandem bike this spring, and have been learning to ride it and to pull Justin's trailer.

"The first ride my dad and I did on the tandem was on a big hill near our house," said 12-year-old Nicholas. "We rode up it and then down. It's quite scary going downhill. The brakes are really slow."

Both Nicholas and Prow are learning to ride as "stokers," as the rear member of the tandem is called; Chris is the captain. "You have to learn to ride in synch with the captain," Nicholas said. "If you don't pedal in synch, it's a very jerky ride."

Justin, who has experienced what it's like in the trailer when the two tandem riders haven't yet found their rhythm, concurred.

"The first time I rode with them, it was pretty scary," he said. "You have to brake for a long time before you actually slow down. But once we got better at it, I discovered it's really fun. We hit 30 miles an hour on the Cape Cod Rail Trail last month."

Nicholas soon discovered that his responsibility would go beyond riding the tandem with his brother behind him. He and his father are taking a 12-hour bike maintenance class so they know how to keep the bikes at optimal performance.

The worst part of the training rides, Nicholas said, has been cleaning off the bikes afterwards.

Though they've never lived in the same state or even the same time zone, the Moy and Davis families have been friends for years, starting when the Davises signed on as software developers for the Moys' restaurant supply business.

Adam and Justin first met in 2010 when the Moys stopped in Chicago on a cross-country trip. The boys bonded immediately over a shared passion for Legos; they've

kept up a long-distance friendship ever since.

Jennifer and Dan Davis are marathon runners who don't give much thought to biking, other than taking their six kids out for the occasional weekend jaunt.

But last year, Adam spent a few days visiting cousins who had done RAGBRAI in past years.

When he brought it up with his mother, she remembered how as a child growing up outside of Dubuque, Iowa, she used to go watch the cyclists ceremonially dip their bike tires in the Mississippi River at the conclusion of the ride.

“Would you consider doing it with me?” she asked her son.

“Only if Justin can come with us,” Adam said resolutely, according to his mother.

“We're a team.”

Jennifer contacted the Moys, and Justin was excited about it.

“At first, I said, ‘A bike ride across Iowa?’ I was a little confused,” he said. “I've driven across Iowa, and all you see is cornfields. But now I can't wait to bike across Iowa with my family and friends.”

The next text that came from Jennifer Davis asked Prow whether she would be willing to serve as chief driver in a rented RV, following the ride's route from one campground to the next.

“Riding across the Midwest in an RV was definitely on my bucket list,” said Prow.

“Driving one, not so much. But I'm looking forward to learning how.”

The younger Davis children will ride in the RV along with 7-year-old Veronica Moy, who said she hopes that all of that driving past cornfields includes at least a few samples of corn on the cob.

RAGBRAI riders are typically on the road from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. Each day's stretch is anywhere from 40 to 70 miles. “It will be flat,” pointed out Prow, contrasting it with

the training rides they've been doing around Concord, Sudbury, Carlisle, and Lincoln.

"But it will be hot," countered Justin. "It will be 100 degrees. That will be hard for us to get used to."

Because of the long Chicago winter, Jennifer Davis said, her family got a later start training for the ride than she had hoped, but they are feeling on track now.

"From our home to our office is about 12 miles, and the kids' school is right next door, so we've biked to school and work as many days as we could this spring," she said.

"Adam plays soccer and runs throughout the year, and he's been trying to bike every day."

As far as getting accustomed to pulling a trailer, "He uses his sister as a tow dummy," said Jennifer. "Whether she wants to or not."

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