



A local snapped this photo of Sterling and Sarah at Grand Teton Lake in Wyoming. They live in Oregon today. Sarah is a part owner of a community-supported agriculture project and Sterling works for the largest cycle shop in Portland.

And during the day, the headwinds would slow them to five miles per hour. "It would take you three or four hours to go 20 miles. What's the point?" he remembers asking himself, bitterly. "This is awful. And you were only half way through the country."

But they gutted it out. "I remember when we hit that sign, 'You're leaving Kansas' we were so excited....The parks got nicer in Colorado for camping, and the weather got nicer. It was just all good."

Surprisingly, he says, "The Rockies were a breeze. They were just fun. The view was gorgeous and the weather was nice." A local toured them through Grand Teton National Park; they biked past snow-covered meadows above the tree line, they crossed the Continental Divide over nine mountain passes! They pedaled as high as 11,539 feet.

And the desert of eastern Oregon; surely that was just as bad as Kansas. Sterling smiles broadly and shakes his head. "No, because you were in Oregon, baby. Last state. We were counting down the days. It was awesome. Every day in Oregon was just beautiful." Their favorite place was

Sisters, OR. A kind couple had been taking in cyclists since 1976. "They had a little yurt with a nice...comfortable...bed." His eyes close dreamily at the memory of it.

Sterling's first flat tire of the trip didn't happen until they reached Colorado, just after he sent home two spare inner tubes because he thought he didn't need them. Sarah was not so lucky. She had so many punctures, she had to buy a new heavy duty tire. But otherwise, they had no mechanical problems whatsoever.

As they narrowed the gap to Florence, OR, they could smell the salt air of the Pacific. His aunt Jenny Hill Robinson flew out to document those last few miles. And there, standing on the beach with the Pacific surf crashing behind them, she snapped the iconic photo of them doing the dance, with their bikes raised over their heads in victory. They had beaten Kansas. In 50 years or so, when their great grandkids climb up on their knee, they can tell them all about it.

Observations on this great land of ours? "I guess it made it a little bit smaller with the fact that I could bike from one end to the other in 64 days.

It's just beautiful and every state is so different," says Sterling reverently. "All the people, all the towns had their own characteristics. And just the lay of the land, that was what we saw the most. And there's still a lot of open land out there, which made us feel good because sometimes it feels like everything is getting eaten up." They should know. They pedaled every inch of 4,126 miles.

Today, Sterling and Sarah live in Portland, OR. She is a part owner in a community-supported agriculture (CSA) project. "We do have a car, but Sarah works in Oregon City. She has to drive there and with her farming, she has to drive around to the other sites."

Sterling is strictly bike. He commutes every day in rain, fog, snow, and broiling heat 13 miles and up 800 feet one way to his job at the biggest cycle shop in Portland. It takes him 45 minutes. On his day off, Tuesdays, he pedals down to the Community Cycling Center and volunteers his time fixing donated bicycles. And in his spare time, he rock climbs to keep his upper body in shape. "I think

about rock climbing all the time." Well, maybe not as much as he thinks about cycling. His next big trip is to ride from Portland to Baha, down Route 101!

What a brilliant device a bicycle is. It uses no fossil fuels but can take you cross country in a little more than two months, for free. Well, actually, it's not free, is it? Sterling owns two bikes. One of them is a racer that weighs 15.5 pounds and is made of carbon fiber. It cost \$6,000-plus. And this trip was not cheap; his biggest expense was food, because, well, it was his fuel. But still, there's just something about the independence and self sufficiency of a bicycle that ignites that spark to go on an adventure like this. Sailors, like Sterling's Dad, experience the same feeling.

"For me, it's great because you don't have to worry about anything but where you're going," says Sterling. "And I love biking so much, I can be on my bike all day. That's all I want to do. I don't want to have to do anything but just ride my bike."

Sterling Hill, you are definitely not in Kansas anymore.



Almost there, Sterling and Sarah can smell the Pacific as they cycle the last few miles in Oregon completing their 64-day coast-to-coast odyssey.



"You're not in Kansas anymore," Sterling

"Thank God!" is probably what Sterling Hill and Sarah Lynch gasped as they crossed into Colorado. Kansas was a nightmare. The long hills, the buffeting headwinds, the storms; it almost broke them.

"Kansas was tough," exhales Sterling from the rear deck of his childhood home near Somerset. He remembers one night in particular; they were awakened by storm chasers who said, "This is the best spot to come and watch storms just roll on by." I said, 'Oh Great!' And sure enough this tornado started forming...There were a couple of nights like that, where you were lying in the tent and the tent was just swaying in the wind...It was intense. It was tough."

Kansas became more than just a windy state in the prairie. It morphed into that insurmountable obstacle that stands in our way at some point in every one of our lives. Kansas damn near won. Sarah was ready to click her heels, throw the bikes on a train or rent a car and just drive to Colorado. Sterling admits, "I pushed her a little too hard. Seventy miles a day touring is tough to do it every... single... day."



Top photo, with the Pacific Ocean surf crashing in the background, Sterling Hill of Orange County and Sarah Lynch of Key West, FL raise their touring bikes in victory after bicycling 4,126 miles cross country. Above, Sterling Hill recently paid a visit to the massive gum tree in the front yard of his home place between Barboursville and Somerset. Currently, he lives and

But instead of quitting he turned to her and said, "We're here. When you finish and you come back, do you want to say 'well we ended up getting a car and skipping a state? And 20 years down the road, you're going to wish that you had at least attempted to make it all the way.'" He pauses, sets his jaw. "We've gotta do it," he told her vehemently. "We're not going to ever do this trip again. You've got to go all the way."

And they did...from Yorktown, VA to Florence, OR on the Pacific coast...the wrong way...into a headwind almost all of the time, and uphill from the Mississippi to the Continental Divide. And they did it on bicycles.

Deep down inside every one of us lurks a glimmer, a spark that says, 'one of these days, I'm going to do something like that. I'm going to hike the AT, or sail solo across the Atlantic, or ride a bicycle from Orange County, California to Orange County, Virginia, or a motorcycle from here to Sturgis. But then things get in the way...

good things, like common sense and family and work and some not so good things, like fear of failure and self doubt and just cussed laziness. And then you've wasted so much time on excuses, the biggie slips in on you and snuffs out the dream: age.

But these guys did it. They're young, they're free, they got off of their butts and they stared down all those bad things like Kansas, and they did it!

Come on. Let's ride with Sterling and Sarah all the way across this country of ours because, in a strange sense, they took us with them every pedal stroke of the way.

The story starts with their back wheel in the Atlantic Ocean and ends 64 days later with their front wheel in the Pacific. The date was May 12, 2009. Sterling and Sarah splashed some Atlantic sea water on their bikes, mounted up and headed east. It took them two days to make it to Gum Tree Farm between Somerset and Barboursville, where Sterling was born and raised.

"It was kind of our dry run. It took us two days to get here, and we ended up unloading some stuff and realizing 'hey I don't need to take this, but I do want to take this,' because we had waaaayyyy too much weight the first two days."

They took sleeping bags and a tent, a small gas stove, one cook pot, plastic cups, bowls, and utensils and "two of what you needed to wear." They carried all this stuff in front and rear panniers and on the rear rack. "We never actually weighed it because we didn't really want to know," winces Sterling. "But I probably carried about 80, 85 pounds, including my bike." The bike, by the way was a big, steel-framed touring model



**Sterling Hill celebrates the top of the last climb in the Appalachians in Kentucky. Surprisingly, our eastern mountain range is tougher to negotiate on a bicycle than the much taller Rocky Mountains.**

with wide tires and plenty of granny low gears. It weighed all of 30 pounds.

They also brought chairs! "Everybody made fun of us," smiles Sterling, "but I didn't want to have to sit on the ground. I wanted to be able to sit back and relax after a long day of riding. These chairs we found were great." They folded up into something smaller than a loaf of bread.

Speaking of which, they bought their food every day in little towns along the way. And every 20 miles they would stop and treat themselves to a bagel (carbs), bananas (potassium) and peanut butter (energy and protein) sandwich. Still, Sterling says they were hungry all the time. "You just wanted to eat every minute of every day...and drink a lot of beer."

On May 14th, they pulled out of Gum Tree, a little lighter, and made it to the Cookie Lady's house on Afton Mountain. "She is the most famous lady on the whole trail.... she's called that because she used to give out cookies...She's not doing it anymore. I think we were some of the last people to see her." The

Cookie Lady has provided lodging for cross-country cyclists ever since the Bicentennial of 1976. Sterling and Sarah gaped at the memorabilia on her walls; added their own message to the board, like so many before them. And so they joined a unique fraternity of cyclists who have attempted and completed the TransAmerica trail.

The next morning, they cycled over the Blue Ridge, down into the valley and up into the Alleghenies. This was "the toughest part of the whole ride...The Rockies, since the roads were built a little more recently, the grade isn't so bad. So, they're longer, but they're not very steep. And on a touring bike you've got a really easy gear. And even though you're carrying all that weight, you're not really trying that hard. But the Blue Ridge," he sighs wearily, "it's steep. There were some parts where you had to stand up and pedal on some of the switchbacks. I can remember being

on a climb for three hours, just climbing for three hours."

The next state was Kentucky, which Sterling describes as "interesting. A lot of people yell, 'Get off the road,' and stuff like that." In one park where they were camping, they sensed what he terms "a weird vibe," as the locals sized him up in his matching cycling shorts and shirt. "I think if I were to do it again, I would have looser looking clothes. You got a lot of strange looks walking into some country store in the middle of Kansas or Kentucky in spandex."

But generally people welcomed them with open arms. "People were very friendly. They're used to seeing cyclists; always coming out to you, 'Hey where are you coming from?...Can I get you anything. How're you doing?'" One lady, who had just bought some ice cream, flagged them down to share it with them.

The route they followed is laid out on a series of maps. "They had distance, where campsites were, bike-only lodging, which were basically a lot of church-

es, and where you could get water and food. And it just made it really easy," says Sterling gratefully.

They traveled around cities, not through them, and stuck pretty much to back roads, although they did travel on some divided highways, which are actually safer for cyclists than narrow two-lane roads.



**This was the storm in Wyoming that forced them to hide in a ditch. Another storm literally blew them off their bikes, and a tornado funnel touched down near where they were camping in Kansas.**

Concerning traffic, Sterling shrugs, "a couple of times cars would come really close, but I'm used to that, 'cause I've been biking for awhile."

Like ever since he was a little kid. "The one thing that my Mom and Dad would let me do kind of on my own was to ride my bike to the post office. And then it turned into riding to the Somerset Center Store." Then he remembers a cross country cyclist camping in their front yard, and that's what sparked the dream.

"I just always really liked biking," continues Sterling. After he graduated from Grymes and Woodberry Forest, he attended the College of Charleston in South Carolina. "As a freshman, nobody has a car, but everybody wanted to get out to the beach, so I started riding my bike out there." One thing led to another; he started racing and going on tours; even landed a job in a bike shop. And then one day he said to himself, "You know what? I'm going to bike home."

He figured it would take him eight days. "I didn't tell Mom and Dad because I didn't want them to worry or to say 'No, don't do it.' Well, my first day I did 100 miles. Wow, I'm already two days ahead of where I should be," he marveled. "I got rained on the second night and I didn't have a tent so I was soaked. And the

third night a buck stalked my campsite and kept me up until about 3:00 o'clock in the morning. It just kept coming around really close...stomping his hoof, making noise."

So, with little to no sleep, he made it all the way home, 150 miles, that fourth day. "I came up the driveway and just fell in the yard and screamed, 'I'm home, I'm home.'" His parents, Floyd and Margaret Hill breathed a sigh of relief; they had been beside themselves with worry.

But that trip home just planted the seed, and the next thing you know, he and Sarah are biking to Oregon. They went for three weeks straight, all the way to Illinois, without taking a break. They cooked dinner almost every night, "a lot of pasta. We found this great tortellini that you could get that was dry that you didn't have to refrigerate...Sarah was pretty good coming up with things; packets of salmon she would toss into the pasta." One night in Missouri, they literally had to sing for their supper at a crazy little roadside bar. At one point they cycled along a rails-to-trails bike path with no motorized traffic, which was "cool for the first two or

three hours, and then it got really boring because it was so flat, and you couldn't go very fast. You were on this kind of like gravel."

For breakfast they usually chowed down (fueled up?) at a Mom and Pop. "I had biscuits and gravy in every state along the way, and Sarah had French toast in every state, or maybe it was pancakes." He also had his Mom send care packages full of power bars to General Delivery addresses along the way.

Oddly enough they did not take iPods or a radio to wile away the boring miles. Sterling reasons, "Not being able to hear each other; if you were listening to your iPod and somebody yelled something, and it was just something else you had to carry." Besides how would they recharge these devices? They're camping. "It was nice to just listen to nature."

They ran into some rain, and would go through a ritual they called the Rain Dance, "actually stopping and putting on your rain gear and then getting back on your bike. And once you did that, you'd get about five minutes of rain and then it would stop. The sun would come out. You'd take off your gear; you'd ride for five or ten minutes, and the rain would come right back."

And then there were the storms. "One storm when we had to get off our bikes and hide in a ditch. There was hail and just crazy strong winds and lightening and everything like that. That was Wyoming. There was one other storm in Yellowstone that actually blew us off our bikes. But that ended up being cool because a family in a big RV stopped when they saw us get blown off our bikes, and said 'get in here.'"But the scariest was the tornado in Kansas. They had set up camp beside a man-made lake. It was a drop-dead gorgeous setting, a brilliant sunset. They went through their evening ritual of doing laundry and cooking dinner and cleaning up. And they fell fast asleep, only to be awakened by the headlights of these crazy storm chasers, and you know the rest. They actually saw the



**On the road somewhere between the High Lonesome and the Big Empty. Both riders were heartened by how much open space still exists in this country.**

funnel in the lightening flashes. "That thing started to form. It definitely came over top of us."

As a nemesis, Kansas did a pretty good job. "There were such big rolling hills that when you went downhill, it didn't really get you very far up the next hill. And the wind was horrible. At night you were running from tornados and just crazy windstorms and thunderstorms."