

Hope and Remember 2016

September 10, 2016

My brother Brad and I again made the 135 mile trek from my hometown in Butte, to Helena, and back. After an early 5 am start we heard an elk bugle just off I-15 heading up Woodville Hill into Elk Park. That was pretty spectacular. In all the event was 13 1/2 hours door to door with 10 1/2 hours in the saddle. We were both doing pretty well until we came down the Boulder Hill on the way back to Butte and faced major gusts for the remaining 35 miles into Butte. Along with a 7300 ft elevation gain, the headwinds proved to be a formidable challenge. We had many well-wishers and are very thankful for the support during the ride!

September 11, 2016

When you are sitting in the saddle peddling for 10+ hours you have lots of time to ponder and reflect. My thoughts early on were that I wouldn't have imagined three years ago that I would be doing this or that I would have my brother by my side gently pulling me along. When things got difficult and we were feeling nothing but pain, I imagined what a person suffering from depression goes through. At times through the ride, I thought the physical pain was so overwhelming that I couldn't go on. I just wanted it to end. But at each stop, I had Lisa to encourage me and Brad to lead me forward. I had a support unit of family and friends all out there wishing me success. Then I imagined my son and the so many others suffering from depression, experiencing pain, and suffering in silence. No one cheering them on and no one encouraging them because they don't feel they can reach out for support because of the stigma associated with depression and mental health diseases. We as a society have either not talked about it or talked about it in 'hushed' voices. In 2014, Montana led the nation with the highest suicide rate. Two hundred fifty one suicides. Our young people die from suicide at 2x the national rate. I will have to live with my ignorance for the rest of my life. I paid the ultimate price. I lost my son. I wouldn't want anyone to pay that price. The good news is we can do much better. Depression, which is the leading cause suicide, is treatable. We can change our paradigm of how we view people with mental health related diseases. We can make difference. Just as you and so many were supporting me on my journey yesterday, we can openly support each other when suffering from depression just as we do when they are suffering from cancer or any other disease that afflicts the body. We can support them on their journey and let them know it is OK to get help. That is an important first step.

~Bill Wheeler