



“Clausen’s unsinkable good nature and sunny outlook jumps out at readers from practically every line of his book.”

*Publishers Weekly*

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**One Wheel — Many Spokes:  
USA by Unicycle**

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## Chapter 6

By The Strait of Juan de Fuca

The most permanent lessons in morals are those  
which come, not of booky teaching, but of experience.  
Mark Twain

Another Bald Eagle has flown in to circle our departure from the Makah Reservation. We are back at Washburn's store, ready to ride in weather that continues clear and glorious. Well-wishes and photographs delay our start. My heel still hurts, but in the excitement I barely notice. Chris Savage and Gene Tenold are riding along with us. I say 'us' now because Robert is pedaling at my side from here on. A big cheer rises as we leave the parking lot. People driving by add honks and waves; most folks at Neah Bay have heard about our plans by now. Highway 112 between Neah Bay and Clallam Bay winds along the Juan de Fuca Strait, coast on one side, rainforest on the other.

When we meet everyone for lunch at Clallam Bay, they tell us about yet another eagle which soared after us as we began. While we are carbo-loading on leftover lasagna, KariAnna pulls me off to the side and asks to play by the little creek. Barefoot, she squishes onto the muddy edge of the water. Within minutes she is jumping, dancing, and skating all over this delicious mud, together with Nathaniel and Caroline.

"Come see this, Anne." I want her to get a view before the inevitable fall comes. A few minutes later, the slide happens and KariAnna is mud-coated from head to toe. Our kids already look as happy with this adventure as Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn were with theirs.

"I suppose," Anne now says, "it's time for you to start riding again?" She looks at me as she contemplates kid clean up.

"I suppose it is," I respond, grateful for the opportunity she's just given me. Robert and Chris join me on the road with their bicycles, then ride ahead. Gene has turned back earlier.

Burnt Mountain is ahead. I have switched to five-inch pedal cranks today; they give a lot more torque than the short four-and-a-half-inch cranks I used all last week. Slowly and steadily I make it up the eleven miles to the crest of the mountain. The final three miles are the most challenging. My Achilles tendon still hurts, and I stop for a rest, sitting on the guardrail to catch my breath and scarf down two candy bars. There is so little traffic that, except for the pavement, I feel like I'm on a hike in the woods. My unicycle is propped against a signpost.

With its three-foot wheel and handlebars this unicycle will probably gather looks for as long as I am fit to ride it. Its ancestor, though, is not a one- but a two-wheeler. Unicycles evolved from bicycles—penny-farthings—the ones with the huge front wheel and the tiny back wheel. Penny-farthings were invented in the 1870s and became popular despite the challenge of riding them. Mark Twain himself learned to ride one, recording his adventures under the title, "Taming the Bicycle." The invention of the unicycle was prompted by the tendency for the tiny back wheel to lift off the ground whenever the brake was applied to the big front wheel. Eventually someone solved the problem. They cut the back wheel off for good.

Unicycle wheels as large as fifty-six inches and smaller than one inch followed. Strange inventions with wheels stacked three and more high were devised. Unicycles over one hundred feet tall really exist. Even more unbelievably, they have been successfully ridden. Back in 1934 Walter Nillson was already doing long-distance unicycling. And Steve McPeak pedaled from Chicago to Los Angeles atop a thirty-two-foot high unicycle. Before I started this ride I had no idea of what strange company I was joining. I just wanted to get out on the road.

My rest finished, I climb back on my one-wheel machine and soon reach the top. An hour later, at mile forty-two, I catch the others at the Hungry Bear Café. The yellow electric billboard outside announces our arrival. Woody and Kim and their parents, owners of the Hungry Bear, make us feel at home. Kim even bakes a birthday cake for my brother Karl's thirty-ninth birthday today. Woody downloads some of our pictures and prints out a birthday poster for the evening celebration. I watch all this from a table, my leg propped on a chair and my ankle draped with a bag of ice. When dinnertime comes I order the one-pound Hungry Bear hamburger. I'm full afterwards, but it disappeared faster than I expected.

Before we go to sleep Robert helps me change my pedals back to four-and-a-half-inch cranks to get a little more speed tomorrow. It takes ten minutes to make the switch using the pedal wrench, socket wrench, and crank puller; for this effort we get one gear change. On Robert's Cannondale touring bicycle he flicks his shift lever and has twenty-one instant gear choices. No one claims that unicycling is the most efficient way to travel!

We leave the Hungry Bear in a dense fog that lifts after our first hour of riding. The shoulder is ten feet wide in many places, so Chris and I ride side by side after the visibility improves. This is his first bike tour and he'll have more than a hundred miles in by the time he finishes at Whidbey Island. He stops at every espresso shop along the road, often riding one-handed on Anne's bicycle as he balances his coffee. Also, recent freedom from his smoking habit has him in high spirits.

While we ride, Chris and I remember our times together and find ourselves lamenting the increase in fear and global violence after 9-11 and the Afghanistan War. Our perspective has been shaped by working together during the aftermath of a five-thousand-person riot at Michigan State University. In the face of the clamor for retribution, we pushed for our church, campus, and community to consider the value of reconciliation and forgiveness. Soon after the riot, Desmond Tutu published his book about South Africa's experience with apartheid. We used it as the basis for a conference, borrowing the title and the theme of his book, *No Future Without Forgiveness*. Tutu argues for forgiveness in the most practical of terms. "We are bound up in a delicate network of interdependence," he writes,

to forgive is indeed the best form of self-interest since anger, resentment, and revenge are corrosive of that summon bonum, that greatest good, communal harmony that enhances the humanity and personhood of all in the community.

"Maybe we need another conference," Chris offers, reflecting on these months since the terrorist attack. Fear seems to be making violence easy and peace a distant dream. Talking with Chris about these things, we find it is easier to be benevolent from the shoulder of the road. Beauty is always in sight and some new kindness always lies just around the next corner.

Just after passing Crescent Lake, I get a flat. Not on my tire, but on my seat. Before I catch up to the motor home and get a new tube, I end up riding seven miles without my air cushion. With every pedal I thank unicyclist Tim Ferry for his idea. We met last summer in Iowa after seeing a *Cedar Rapids Gazette* article announcing his breaking of the one-hundred-meter unicycle time for the Guinness World Record.

Tim had counseled, "Just duct tape a twelve-inch inner-tube on top of your seat. You'll be riding on air..."

"We can do better than that," my mom offered when I told her how comfortable this seat was. "Let me sew you a seatcover to hold the tube."

What gifts.

In the afternoon we meet our first stretch of busy four-lane traffic. Here in Sequim the weather is completely different from the rainforests on the west side of the Olympics where I rode all last week. By the time the clouds reach Sequim they have already dumped most of their precipitation in the mountains, leaving Sequim dry in the rain shadow of the Olympics. Here in the rainy Pacific Northwest, people move to Sequim for the sunshine. With all the buzzing traffic, I tuck myself over to the far right of the shoulder; the congestion takes my attention away from the land.

Our start-of-the-ride entourage is continuing to peel off one by one to head for home. As they depart, the road offers up new folks who join us for moments or hours. Lynette and Caroline from the *Bremerton Sun* drive an hour to find us. On this spring day, with the temperature at a season-high seventy degrees, they are in no hurry to get back to their newsroom. We do an interview on the shoulder of the road, and then they start leapfrogging ahead, jumping out of their car to take picture after picture as Robert and I pedal the day's last miles.

We finish our day of riding twenty miles farther than we had planned. The extra distance will get us to Whidbey Island sooner tomorrow, and Robert and I are looking forward to one last night at home. The advertisement for a \$4.95 steak dinner at the Seven Cedars Casino clinches today's destination. When we arrive I roll the unicycle into the Totem Lounge, and we order our steaks.

First the security guard comes and removes my unicycle. "Post 9-11 security," he announces. "Don't worry, we'll have it right by our station and we'll have cameras on it too."

Then the manager comes over, talks to us about our ride and then signals our waitress that he is picking up the tab for our meals.

"I'll be checking your website," he tells us, shaking his head at the sight of us and what we are hoping to do. "Have a wonderful summer."

With dinner finished we drive back to Port Angeles for our first official on-the-ride presentation. Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, it turns out, was established in 1894, the same year as Seward Peninsula Lutheran Ministry began.

"No one here thinks of this congregation as a mission anymore, do you?" I ask them when I find out their founding date.

They answer no.

"A lot of people continue to think that I was a missionary in Alaska just because we lived and worked with native people. But their ministry has been there as long as you've been here. And their culture has been there in the same place for twelve thousand years, six times longer than the time since Jesus lived."

I go on to recount the story of how Lutherans came to be on the Seward Peninsula. It begins in 1894 because of reindeer. An early missionary recommended that reindeer herding begin on the peninsula to increase the food supply. Sami (Laplander) herders from Norway agreed to come to the Seward Peninsula and instruct the Inupiat people, provided they could have a Lutheran pastor in Alaska as they were used to in Norway. Arrangements were made, and soon the Sami herders arrived by train in Wisconsin to meet Tollef Brevig, their new pastor and his family. Together, they continued across the country by train. After a forty-four day steamer trip they landed at last in Teller, Alaska. Today, thanks to these hardy souls, reindeer and Lutherans both exist on the Seward Peninsula.

Near the end of the presentation Robert asks me, "Are you going to talk about your hair?"

People look surprised by the question. I am, too, but I get a good feeling right away for this Robert that I barely know. It's looking like a summer full of surprises and good humor with him around.

"Okay then, I will," I answer my new riding partner with the bald top.

"I'm growing my hair for Locks of Love," I begin. "They collect hair and make wigs for children who suffer from cancer or alopecia. This is my first time with long hair, and I've been surprised to have a number of people tell me, 'You've got to cut your hair.'"

"A friend from Ohio wrote to warn me, 'People are asking why they should give money to a longhaired hippie on a unicycle.'"

I ask people here their opinion of my long hair. A man my age with hair longer than mine recommends, "Cut it. I used to work in the investment business. Looks matter. I had the best suits and the best haircut I could afford."

An older white-haired woman raises her hand. "Keep it," is all she says, and smiles.

I share how I finally decided to leave it long when I realized that I fit every other culturally acceptable stereotype: I'm white, straight, married, have kids and a college education. The one piece of me that doesn't fit routinely gets singled out for attention and comment. There are many who can't just cut their hair or change some single feature to fit in: women facing the glass ceilings of business or seeking to become priests in many churches, people who aren't heterosexual, people of color, some immigrants, some Inupiat friends. I'm riding with long hair as a small personal reminder to value our diversity and differences.

Robert grins as I finish. Folks give generously to the endowment fund. For many this is the first they've heard of Seward Peninsula Lutheran Ministry.

As we re-box our display I look over to Robert, "This is our summer: ride, set up, pack up, ride."

"Sounds good to me," Robert replies. "I just want to ride, and ride, and ride."

On Wednesday morning, we're out the door of the motor home at 6:15, headed for home. The ferry dock at Port Townsend has Bremerton Sun newspapers on sale, and I see myself pictured on the front page.

"You were on the CNN ticker tape yesterday!" Vern Olsen tells me as we walk onto the ferry. He has his accordion along and sings songs as we make the crossing to Whidbey Island.

The ferry crosses to Keystone Landing in half an hour, and then we're back on Whidbey, back to all the busyness we have lived with the past winter. It was a challenge even to fit in the riding practice I needed. I made some fifty-mile training rides and a lot of twenty-five milers, but with all the preparations I usually had to settle for a daily seven- or ten-mile stint. Today will be the same kind of busy. Anne is exhausted from all the last minute preparations that she's been accomplishing this past week. Life feels easier on the road.

Chris, Robert, and I ride off the ferry for our last fifteen miles together. I stay with them until we reach the crest of the first hill on North Bluff Road. They take off coasting. I keep pedaling every stroke, uphill and downhill, too.

On the way home we pass close to Darrel Berg's home, and I remember how much he encouraged Anne and me as we were preparing for this ride. We were on the Keystone Ferry with Darrel, returning from a get-together with the retired Methodist pastors of northwest Washington. It was one month before the start of the ride.

"I'm eighty-one years old, and I live with some big regrets," said this pastor who started preaching at the age of nineteen.

"Today you made me think back to when I ran for Congress in 1972. That year Nixon was promising to get us out of Vietnam and instead, we were getting more and more involved in the war. I was going to get elected and get my hands on the levers and put a stop to it.

"My friends all thought I was crazy, and that I would settle down and forget about the race. That's what reminded me about this, Lars, when you were telling about setting out to ride all these miles and raise all this money with just a dream to get it all started.

"Do you know that I had a map of the eastern third of Nebraska and on it I had marked out a bicycle tour campaign of my whole district? I figured out how to get to every town during the race.

"I ended up not doing it. I was so busy with speeches and meetings no one thought I had time to be bicycling. My advisors talked me out of it.

"To this day I still wish I'd made that campaign tour by bicycle. I wouldn't care if I'd lost by a landslide."

When I told Darrel about Mark Twain's words that inspired us through a winter of preparation, he replied, "I'm living proof of those words."

Twenty years from now you will be  
more disappointed by the things  
you didn't do than by the ones you  
did do. So throw off the bowlines.  
Sail away from the safe harbor.  
Catch the trade winds in your sails.  
Explore. Dream. Discover.

When I catch up to the bicyclists at home, Chris is exclaiming, "No wonder you guys are in good shape. Those are the hardest hills we've had on the whole trip. I hit forty-five miles an hour coasting down that biggest hill."

Something has indeed worked right with the training. It's day ten of my riding since Tillamook, and I'm feeling great. I grab a fast shower, and Anne drives us up to school for KariAnna's presentation. She is sharing the book she authored and illustrated this year at school. It is titled "Jessica the Lost Hummingbird," and the dedication is to her Michigan friend Roan Ma. KariAnna has gone from deathly fear of standing in front of the class to uncontained excitement about sharing this story. The illustrations astound me. Art is her passion, and she's never far from a marker and a scrap of paper to draw on. I sit in her classroom, looking around at all the students that I've come to know from volunteering during the year. The familiarity of this classroom makes "One Wheel - Many Spokes" seem momentarily strange.

Home by three we scramble to pack. I get a twenty-minute nap. The riding is tiring, but what really wears is staying up late and trying to keep abreast of writing, record-keeping, and the logistics of getting on the road each morning.

All of us are re-energized when we show up at Trinity Lutheran Church for the evening. Karl Olsen has put together a potluck and concert for us. It is made doubly special by his insistence to hold the concert even though his mother Nora died last Sunday, not long after they raced back from visiting with us at Neah Bay.

Before the concert we line up for the first potluck of the journey. Robert fills his plate to proportions that only practice and a lot of bicycling could allow for. The evening before, after we presented at Port Angeles, I'd been thinking we'd settle into a routine. Tonight's "One Wheel - Many Spokes" Trinity concert is assurance that whatever lies ahead will be filled with unique experiences.

The concert is a royal send-off for our time on Whidbey Island. Karl and Deb treated us exceptionally well this past year as we shared their home. We're hoping to see them again once more this weekend. Nora's funeral is at

11 a.m. on Saturday and, if possible, we'll drive back to Seattle for the service and get back on the route and schedule right afterwards.

"I'll pick you up at five in the morning," I tell Robert as he and his family get ready to leave the concert. He looks tired but content. With Nathaniel sleeping in his arms he and Amy and Caroline head home to bed.

We get home quickly and put our kids to bed. Their bed is next to ours and soon they're breathing in deep sleep. Anne and I turn to each other. This is the last night here for the rest of the summer, perhaps for the rest of the year. The moonlit firs outside the window and the worn dusty books along the windowsill highlight our familiar here on the brink of this new unknown. How will the kids do; will the motor home, the equipment, the money, and my body hold out? Can we keep the schedule; how will the relationship of Anne and me be impacted? We could have used another year to nail down all the details. We'll have to hope that we can live with all the incompleteness and imperfections that remain. Making love on this last night home, moonlight shining in on us, the two of us bridge the gap together, between all that has brought us here and all that lies ahead of us.

We lie awake afterwards, holding one another. Among all the things she could choose to say, all the reservations she has a right to express, Anne tells me only, "I'm lucky I found you."

She is more generous than I deserve. We're lucky all right. Thankful for each other. In a few moments we join our children in needed sleep.

Morning comes too early. Our friend Kristie shows up just as Robert and I start pedaling.

"Ben is going to remember this ride," she explains, "and I want to tell him about your starting out."

Ben is Kai's kindergarten classmate. He is the one who decided their family coin jar would go to the Seward Peninsula Endowment when it got full. His sister Marissa had picked rhododendron petals for us the evening before for a May Day blessing.

My dad passes us in the motor home soon after we start. When I get to the ferry landing, the others have already crossed.

As I walk onto the ferry, the ticket taker calls out to me across the line of cars that separate us. "Good Luck."

"Thank you," I yell back, and for a moment here on the dock, all the emotions well up inside and my eyes go watery. Those two little words of well wishing somehow sum up all the blessings and encouragement that have been showered on this ride these first ten days. I am heading off the island, heading away from home, heading into this whole summer of riding. The beginning has been not one single event but an unfolding. Boarding the ferry is another step deeper into the journey.

A man commuting by bicycle walks his bike onto the ferry with me. We recognize each other from a get-together earlier in the year. At that party he told me about a bike tour he made from Canada to Mexico. Sitting together as we cross to Mukilteo, he tells me he wishes he were coming along.

"The best things I've ever done are the hardest ones to explain to anyone else. A lot of friends didn't understand why I did my bike tour. It's still the highlight of my life."



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