



Clayton Curtiss
Cyclist 2015

Clayton Curtiss and his wife Mary spent some of the happiest days of their 40-year marriage on two wheels. Like a 42-day, 1,400 mile ride through Europe. A century along the Connecticut River. And sixty miles on Clayton's 60th birthday. In 2006, though, breast cancer robbed Mary of her balance and their glorious days of riding together were over.

Mary's eight and a half year struggle at the Father McGivney Cancer Center, now part of Smilow, ended last January at Hospice. Clayton tried to find a way up from his grief by getting back on his bike last spring. After the long hiatus, he had lost all confidence in the saddle of his sleek, narrow-tired Kestrel. After weeks of not riding, he realized the problem was not with rider, but with the bike.

In July Clayton ventured to CTF Ride sponsor Zane's in Branford where Wes, who was to become his bicycle guru, introduced Clayton to a Trek hybrid. It was love at first ride. On his way home to Orange he saw a billboard for the Closer to Free Ride and knew he was fated to ride Closer to Free.

Clayton dedicated himself to his beloved wife and wonderful daughter Carolyn, who lost her life to a series of cancerous brain tumors in October 2014. He got in what training he could for the 25-mile ride which lay ahead.

"In the darkness of that September Saturday morning, as I unloaded my bike and looked around I realized I was part of a community that was a force of nature that had gathered to combat cancer," Clayton remembers. "I was not one person. I was many. It was a feeling like no other I have ever had."

Riding 25 miles wasn't easy after such a long time away from cycling. "Have no doubt about it, the ride was hard and as an overweight, 76-year-old man, I did walk some hills," he says. But that isn't going to stop Clayton from riding Closer to Free again. On December 1, he began to train for the 2016 Ride. He walks every day and has already shed ten pounds with more to lose. His goal: to ride 62.5 miles on September 10.

In addition to upping his mileage, Clayton also is preparing to increase his fundraising. "For my first ride people donated \$3,000," he says. "If I can double my distance next year, I hope to double my donations. I have always been hesitant to ask people for help. But with Mary and Carolyn guiding the words of my appeal, I have been able to tap into the genuine goodness of people."

We'll be rooting for Clayton Curtiss every mile of the way as he rides for his late wife and daughter. We hope you will be, too.

