

Cyclists Ride for Hope in Alabama

Gil Fox

October 1973



In the humid heat of an Alabama summer, all that most people hope for is a little cool breeze. But four young One World Crusaders set out on a 1,200-mile bicycle ride to proclaim a new Day of Hope for America. Gil Fox, One World Crusade commander for Alabama, with Chuck Blythe, Greg Kail, and Bob Nagle, rode through 21 cities in 21 days last July and August.

A One World Crusade team of two women and four men was working to develop a pioneer Unification Church center in Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

"I really felt the need to do something that they could unite around," Mr. Fox explained. "In prayer one morning the answer came something that physically and spiritually would test the members to the limit, create a tremendous amount of publicity, and lay a foundation in Alabama for Rev. Moon's 21-city speaking tour in the

United States. We would take a bicycle tour and speak in the 21 largest cities of Alabama."

They went selling to raise funds for the trip, while Dr. Fox headed for Birmingham and a bicycle shop. He told the owner, "We are going to ride bikes to the 21 largest cities in the state, proclaiming that now is the time for Christian unity, now is the time for Christian moral strengthening. And the basis for our claim will be that we four young men, sweating in the summer in the hottest state of the Union, are giving everything in order to see Christ and God honored."

The shop owner just said, "I want to be part of that. I will give you the bicycles and complete biking outfits." This meant a donation of about \$700. As it turned out, the team had to buy the bikes, but the owners contributed about \$300 in equipment.

The Birmingham center and the other members throughout the state were united around the idea and wanted to do all they could to support it. The OWC team drew up the plan, beginning in Florence on July 25 and ending in Mobile on August 14 -- a 21-day ride through 21 cities. They began preparations immediately, allowing about six days until departure.

They were to set out from the Tennessee line, at the top of the state. After putting the bikes in the back of a trailer, they left Birmingham at about 2:00 a.m. for the state line. As the sun was beginning to rise, they pulled into a little dirt road, ate oranges, and assembled the bikes. "We all prayed together," Mr. Fox recalled. "It was so beautiful-a cool breeze, the birds just beginning to sing.

"Since I was the most experienced rider, I took the lead and set the pace. We decided to go just as far as we could before we stopped. I thought to myself, they will be surprised how far we will go. The first leg was the shortest leg on the entire trip, only 18 miles. I could see that after about an hour they were feeling the strain. But, I thought, we will keep going even now. Finally, we came to a gas station and pulled in. I asked the attendant how far it was to Florence. He said, 'It's less than half a mile.' We were shocked that we had gone almost the entire distance on one leg. After that, we were so confident that nothing could stop us."

Each day the team got up early and rode to the next city, usually several hours away. Early in the morning, they felt rather wobbly, getting on a bicycle without having eaten anything. It's not good to eat a lot before riding a distance. Every 12 miles or so they would stop for a ten-minute break.

In every town they did the same things: first shower, then eat a meal, and set out on individual assignments: inviting people to the evening lecture, contacting ministers, arranging publicity, etc. Mr. Fox met the mayor of each city, to ask him to sign the proclamation for a Day of Hope for his city. Eighteen out of 21 cities proclaimed the Day of Hope.

They met Governor George Wallace. "He was inspired by what we were doing," said Mr. Fox. "He is a Christian and was happy to see people doing Christian work. Our most positive meeting with a mayor was in Huntsville. The mayor is a powerful man, and a charismatic personality."

After Huntsville, the cyclists began hitting the real mountains. "In one way it was a personal challenge," according to Mr. Fox. "No one wanted to hold back the team. Also, we could not find the strength in ourselves to go over the hill; we really found the strength in our Heavenly Father."

Helen Chin [Alexander] called them in Tuscaloosa to say that Mr. Fox could speak on the Morning Show the next day if he could get to Birmingham by 9:00. That meant that he would have to ride 50 miles before 9:00 a.m. He got on the bike at 3:00 a.m. and arrived in Bessemer at 7:30. From there the van carried him to the station. This was the most popular TV show in Birmingham in the morning. The announcer opened up the show with, "Good morning, listeners.

Today I have a young man with me from the Unification Church. What have you done this morning, Gil?" He answered that the whole team had gotten up at 3:00 in the morning to ride in from Tuscaloosa, and that this was only one stop in a 21-city tour of Alabama proclaiming the Day of Hope.

Mr. Fox patterned his talks after Rev. Moon's speeches, emphasizing the mission of America and the restoration of the family. In Jasper he spoke in a baseball park, and in Decatur at the Aquadome. The average attendance was about eight. The whole tour was prepared in only six days. More preparation could have brought greater results.

Midway through the trip, Dr. Fox was called to Belvedere, so Robert Nagle took over the responsibility for the tour. The two girls who drove the van would leave at the same time the cyclists did, arriving in the next town about two or three hours ahead of the rest, to prepare the media. Every night the whole team was together. But later on, Robert sent the van ahead as many as two days in advance, with an eye to the long-range effects.

Once he sent the rest of the team ahead to Mobile, while he spoke in Enterprise. Afterwards, he rode from Enterprise to Mobile- 220 miles- in a 24- hour period. He knew in his mind that he was the one who had to give the speech in Mobile, so he had to arrive in time. From the beginning of the tour he had said, "We will all make it. We won't quit." So he put his heart into it and went.

"If you set your mind on it, you can do anything," reflected Gil Fox, now One World Crusade commander in Illinois.

City of Birmingham Alabama

PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS, for over a century, the City of Birmingham has been esteemed for its beauty, warmth and hospitality; and

WHEREAS, the City of Birmingham is uniquely international and interracial, with a tradition of unity amidst diversity; and

WHEREAS, it is on this foundation of unity that our City has been able to flourish as a center of Culture and Trade; and

WHEREAS, we have entered an era when cultural differences have ceased to be an asset in creating a sense of variety, but rather difference has caused division; and

WHEREAS, in these times of increasing conflict on every level of our society, the City of Birmingham can serve as an example to these United States and to the world by meeting the challenge of these times, by working to bridge the gap of separation; and

WHEREAS, in recognition of the fact that, unity of purpose strengthens our City, and that growth in unity and harmony for all the citizens of the City of Birmingham.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, GEORGE G. SEIBELS, JR., Mayor of the City of Birmingham, Alabama, do hereby proclaim August 1, 1973, as

THE DAY OF HOPE AND UNIFICATION



IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Seal of the City of Birmingham, to be affixed this the 31st day of July, 1973.

George G. Seibels, Jr.
Mayor