

HealthCare

Cancer survivor ends triumphant bike trek

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

BRANCHPORT — As his bicycle finally pierced the finish line, more than 1,400 miles after this incredible journey began, Joel Bloom blew a kiss to the cheering crowd.

Consider it a kiss of life.

Finishing a one-month bicycle jaunt from Florida to New York was small potatoes for the 30-year-old Bloom, compared to other physical trials he's endured in recent years.

He wasn't expected to make this trip.

Mainly because he wasn't expected to be alive right now.

Only two years ago, the cancer Bloom was saddled with — alveolar soft tissue sarcoma — had spread through so much of his body that he was contemplating not even going through with major surgery.

"The doctors told me I was dying; that the cancer was inoperable. So I had decided not to have the surgery," said Bloom.

Yet not long afterward, he acknowledged, "I was the recipient of a miracle."

Bloom, a New York City native who has been a Rochester resident since 1981, recalled that the experience began as he was observing some quiet prayer time. "I didn't hear a voice, nothing that would make people raise their eyebrows, but a message came through my body that I had to have the surgery," he said.

"I know the message didn't come from inside of me. I know it came from someplace else."

Bloom not only survived his operation, but is now able to conduct an active lifestyle.

And on the occasion of turning 30 years old, Bloom decided to acknowledge his durability by taking this epic journey.

"It hasn't been an easy half a lifetime. But I wanted to make that affirmation for myself that I can lead a quality life," said Bloom, who has endured seven major surgeries since his cancer was first discovered at the age of 15. "It's the



After finishing his trek, Bloom was kept busy by media from Rochester and Syracuse news stations.

power of visualization."

Earlier this year, as he was planning the trip, Bloom joined forces with Camp Good Days and Special Times, Inc., a Mendon-based facility which provides various services to children with cancer. Bloom's bike ride ended on July 11 at the camp's recreational facility on Keuka Lake — 34 days and 1,429.2 miles after beginning his odyssey from Orlando, Fla.

His journey was dubbed the "Lemonade Tour" in honor of the familiar quotation, "When life gives you lemons, make lemonade." Appropriately, lemonade and lemon cookies were served at the luncheon honoring Bloom on the day he biked into Branchport.

Bloom said that he decided to align with Camp Good Days so that he could provide hope and inspiration for children struggling with the trauma of cancer. "I know when I was 15, it would have meant a lot to see images like this," he commented.

"When kids have to face this problem that mom and dad can't fix and doctors can't prescribe a pill for, they lose a certain childhood innocence," Bloom added. "Some people grow up to be 70 years old and they've never faced a problem like this.

"But when you're 9 and having to face this, it's a tragedy. It's a theft," he added.

Bloom remarked that "my childhood ended the moment I found I had cancer. It was a very hard and sad moment."

Four years ago Bloom turned to bicycling as a symbol of youth's splendor,



Upon arriving at the Camp Good Days and Special Times recreational facility on Keuka Lake, Bloom answered questions from many admirers.

"to recapture the spirit of my life without cancer," he said. "There's a freedom I associate with riding my bicycle; it's almost a defiance."

Despite three major surgeries in 1992, Bloom embarked on his extensive bicycle trip this past June 15. Supporting him throughout the tour was Sheri Mervis — former wife of Camp Good Days founder Gary Mervis — who followed behind Bloom in a car.

Bloom endured some considerable obstacles, such as riding 120 miles on a day when the temperature rose above 100 degrees, being chased by a pack of wild dogs in North Carolina after already having biked 97 miles that day, and encountering a major traffic jam in the nation's capital. "Cancer is nothing compared to riding your bike into Washington, D.C.," he quipped.

However, Bloom summarized his experience as "a surprisingly smooth trip. There were no big curve balls."

Yet he also admitted that the gruel-



Bloom shares a quiet moment with Sheri Mervis, who accompanied him in his vehicle throughout his 1,400-mile journey.

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