

# Notes for reviewers

As it should, this chapter follows on from Chapter 1. Key points from Chapter 1:

- I learned my cancer spread and that the average life expectancy was 3 years, in September 2017.
- After learning that, I was scared and spent the weekend at a cabin with my partner & family.
- At the time of Chapter 1 and this chapter, I had not yet heard of a new medication that does wonders with guys like me.
- I'm interested in any comments, but **3 questions matter most**. Did any phrases, sentences, or paragraphs: **1)** Seem unclear or awkward? **2)** Make your attention fade? and **3)** Hold your attention more than others? Put another way, tell me if anything was unclear, dull, or good.
- The last sentence of Chapter 1 is, "I wanted to ride my bike."

I stood alone above my bike and whispered, "Fucking cancer." The words were more of a question than an exclamation. I'd been saying them to myself a few times a day, with instinct and surprise. My family swears very little, just simple dignity and maybe manners. But those words kept slipping out, when I was alone.

I knew why they came out, always in a whisper. The words came from calm yet overwhelming shock, but I still had no idea what they meant. Their meaning was entangled in intense emotions that I'd never felt before. I needed to feel less overwhelmed. I needed to untangle some emotions, which is why I needed to ride my bike.

I looked down at her for a moment. I've always referred to my bikes as "her," following the military tradition of ships and aircraft. I have four bikes, and each has a name. I picked out this one about a year before this ride, soon after my cancer showed up. Formerly, she's a Long Haul Trucker, made by Surly Bikes, but my name for her is Spirit. While learning to live with cancer, the name felt right for what I needed, what she gave me, and what I wanted to share.

The name Spirit also matches her color. She's light grey, the color of fog drifting across a lake or clouds floating above. Her color is light, but everything else about her is strong. She's a touring bike, made of heavy steel, with reinforced joints, and mounting points to carry all the gear a cyclist needs for a long ride—thousands of miles or around the world.

Many people ride bikes that are lighter, faster, sleeker, even prettier. I don't own any of those bikes. Their pretty frames crack on the cycling I love most. It's called self-supported bike touring. As the name suggests, you support yourself with that type of bike touring. Everything you need is on your bike, mostly camping gear and food. My bike is about 80 pounds heavier with all that gear, but it allows me to ride for weeks or months and see life-changing sights. Some of the best sights are on the worst roads. Even if pretty bikes could carry the gear, they can't roll for many miles on those roads. Spirit can.

Spirit's handlebars are also made for long rides. They're called "drop handlebars," which became popular with the 10-speeds of the 1970s. With hands on top of those bars, a cyclist sits upright. With hands on the dropped and curved bottom, a cyclist can crouch down to cut through wind, gain speed, or both. And often, cyclists find a midpoint on the handlebars, between sitting up and crouching down. All these positions are needed on long rides—since they are slightly or severely flat, hilly, and windy.

40 At the moment, Spirit felt light and fast since she was carrying only me. I raised my left foot to a pedal,  
 41 pushed off with my right, and slowly rolled forward. The ground gently dropped and my speed gently  
 42 increased. I sat up straight with my hands on top of the handlebars, enjoying the breeze blowing in my  
 43 face. I took a deep breath and let the air out slowly to taste it, to feel it. Summer was still in the air—  
 44 humid, hot, something from the tiny plants and tall trees around me. The taste was so rich, warm, so  
 45 alive.

46 Looking left, I enjoyed lush leaves on the trees. They became a blur as my speed increased and the  
 47 ground fell away faster. The breeze in my face became a wind. I smiled at the thrill. My body was going  
 48 fast, but my mind was going faster. Maybe my mind was going fast because of Spirit's speed, or maybe  
 49 my mind needed to get away fast from cancer, even briefly. I didn't care which. I just let the thoughts  
 50 take off. With their speed, I saw or imagined detail in everything rushing by. Sights still had texture, and  
 51 color. Scent still had fragrance, and distinctness.

52 Looking right, I passed layers of some stone. Those layers had formed so slowly, and I moved so  
 53 quickly. The contrast intrigued me. The minerals in that stone had floated for decades, centuries, or  
 54 millennia before coming together and creating each layer in the cliff. In contrast to those minerals, the  
 55 cells in my body were still floating and so much younger. I took the chance to feel young again, as  
 56 strange as it sounds. One day far away, my cells might become part of a stone cliff but not now. My  
 57 speed increased.

58 The speed wasn't just outside. Inside, my thoughts kept going faster. I wanted more. I shoved my body  
 59 down and dropped by hands to the bottom of Spirit's handlebars, touching the top of them with my chin.

60 Glancing down, the tar was a black blur. Glancing forward, the wind became a gust, had to squint to see.  
 61 Yards ahead, a patch of sunlight pushed through the thick leaves and onto the road. I flew through the  
 62 light in a second or two. In that time, the sun's rays added new warmth and wonder.

63 That light travelled millions of miles in minutes, which made me feel slow. Of course, it's unreasonable  
 64 to compare myself to the speed of light, but emotions like these often defy reason, in wonderful ways.

65 My speed finally steadied, and that was ok. I loved the thrill, but if anything went wrong at this speed,  
 66 I'd crash, and cancer would be the least of my concerns. "If I was alive enough to have any," I mumbled  
 67 playfully, with defiance. The comment made me smile, but it also made me realize how fast cancer  
 68 could return to my thoughts.

69 I pushed those thoughts out by wandering left, which added new sensations and required more thought  
 70 to stay stable. At this speed, turning leads to tilting. Tilting tempts gravity. Increase the tilt, and you  
 71 increase the thrill. Too much thrill, gravity wins, and it'll hurt. I tilted further, glanced at the ground to  
 72 my left, flying by. My mind kept going as fast.

73 With this much tilt, I enjoyed the rare sight of looking down inside the turn, while leaning over it. The  
 74 sun-speckled ground showed blurry lines of light. Other special sights flew by, in my mind. Paintings in  
 75 the Van Gogh Museum, my dad's laugh, plays at the Globe Theatre, my mother's hug, my favorite  
 76 British pub, my brother telling a joke, my sisters laughing at it, Big Ben, her very blue eyes, in love with  
 77 me. I blinked.

78 I had to pull out of the bank after seeing some sand on the road. With this tilt, Spirit's tires could slide in  
79 the sand, and gravity would pull us both down, hard. Still crouched down, I nudged my body away from  
80 the sand and pulled gently on the brakes. I missed most of the sand and it quickly passed by. The road  
81 straightened, and a parking lot was within sight. I shifted my body up, put my hands on top of the  
82 handlebars, and gave the brakes another gentle pull. The gust gradually became just a wind.

83 Looking left and right, I saw trees, trails, grass, and a few picnic tables around me. The Mississippi  
84 River was in front. As I rolled closer to it, the wind became a breeze. Several yards from the river, I  
85 pulled harder on the brakes, rolled slower, and gently dropped a foot. It brushed the ground until Spirit  
86 stopped. I leaned on the foot, dropped the other, and stood.

87 I gripped Spirit firmly on the handlebars. She's just a bike but felt like a strong friend, who came  
88 through for me again. I relaxed my grip, my mind, and body. After a long moment, I realized there was  
89 almost no sound, only a few birds chirping in the distance.

90 My thoughts shifted back to Spirit, and I remembered another reason for her name. It reminds me of  
91 flying. As a kid, I loved seeing airplanes flying high over our home. As a teenager, I was amazed to see  
92 them take off and land. And eventually, I felt the wide-eyed thrill of boarding one. And just as good, I  
93 could sit by a window and keep feeling the thrill. After boarding more flights, I started noticing the  
94 cockpit and hoped to sit in that seat, with all its windows, instruments, indicators, and more.

95 As a young man, I lived the dream of piloting a Cessna, twice. The first flight was about an hour, and  
96 each second was special. On the second flight, it slowly became work. I noticed how much time I spent  
97 monitoring the "Instrument six pack:" airspeed, attitude, altimeter, vertical speed, heading, and turn  
98 coordinator.

99 A new pilot must constantly scan the six pack because the instruments can quickly change from the  
100 aircraft's movement, a gust of wind, or some surprise. If a pilot doesn't respond quickly to a change,  
101 gravity would pull the plane down, possibly hard. A more experienced pilot looks at the six pack less,  
102 but becoming experienced involves more money and time than I wanted to spend. Eventually, I learned  
103 that flying on my bike was much simpler and much better than flying a big Cessna.

104 I brushed a hand over Spirit's handlebar. If her tires ever leave the ground, it's brief, so in a strict sense,  
105 flying on a bike isn't flying. But strict definitions are often too simple.

106 Flying had become so much more than leaving the ground. It's the intense emotions, the images, the  
107 movement, and best of all, the escape. The escape is mysterious, but something about it brings back my  
108 boyhood feelings of flying. Those feelings are so wonderfully innocent. That innocence doesn't know  
109 pain or fear. It certainly doesn't know cancer. When I'm flying, thoughts of pain or fear may show up  
110 briefly, but they become outnumbered and overpowered by innocent thoughts of art, family, laughter,  
111 and love.

112 I slowly looked up, from Spirit to the river. Waves went by and I remembered where my love of flying  
113 started. It was with Dad. He served in the Air Force for 22 years, and in that time, my family lived in  
114 Spokane, Washington; Omaha, Nebraska, Seville, Spain, and Madrid. They lived in most of those places  
115 before I was born, so I don't remember much. But I grew up hearing stories of flying to homes far away.  
116 After Dad left the Air Force, he'd still take us to air bases to shop at the Post Exchange, which is a

117 military store that he called the PX. And when I was lucky, he'd take us to an aircraft museum.  
118 Eventually, I served for five years in the Air Reserve, fixing aircraft navigation radios.

119 I focused on the river again. Waves drifted by. A breeze blew, and birds chirped.

120 "Fucking cancer."

121 The words were soft and not angry. I hadn't felt much of that, except at insurance companies who'd  
122 already kicked me when I was down. Anger usually causes more problems than it solves. Dad showed  
123 me that.

124 A few tears finally fell. "Wish you were here, Dad." His gentle strength would have helped so much  
125 now. Cancer took him just before he retired, after so many decades of hard work. It seemed so sad to  
126 me, back then. He was only 64. After all he'd done to get out of poverty and raise five kids, he deserved  
127 his retirement.

128 My gaze never left the river. He used to take me fishing in a rented rowboat. If he was still around, I  
129 may have taken him for a boat ride on that water, right in front of me. Dad would have enjoyed riding in  
130 a boat, on the Mississippi River, in the big city, driven by his youngest kid. That's something else we  
131 had in common. Dad was also the youngest kid and first to get cancer.

132 An image of Mom and Dad slowly came to mind. We were in a hospital room at the Mayo Clinic. My  
133 sisters and brother weren't there, which was unusual. Dad's surgery had just ended, and we were waiting  
134 for the surgeon to show up and tell us how it went. The surgery was supposed to last six hours, but it  
135 took half that time.

136 The expression on Mom's face was similar to Dad's, concerned but calm. Like Dad, she had worked her  
137 way out of poverty, which requires calm hope more than fear. Both feelings still showed up in the  
138 hospital room, but my parents had each seen how fear gets in the way of inching forward, especially in  
139 tough times.

140 In the hospital room, Dad said something that's stayed with me. "I wish I was 30 years younger." At the  
141 time, I thought, *Dad, that's as long as I've been alive.*

142 Eventually, the surgeon stepped in, said hello to all of us, and surprised me by asking that he and I go for  
143 a short walk. We stepped out the door, turned right, and walked. With compassion, he said, "I'm afraid  
144 you're pop's not going to make it." I instantly thought how we never called Dad, "Pop." That thought  
145 quickly went away while the surgeon told me that Dad's cancer had spread so much that they closed him  
146 up soon after starting surgery.

147 The short walk ended near a waiting room. I told the surgeon that I had to sit by myself for a while. He  
148 said that was a good idea and asked if I wanted to tell my parents or if he should. I asked him to. I sat  
149 down, put my elbows on my knees, my face in my hands, and for the first time in my life, cried so hard  
150 that I shook.

151 My thoughts moved from that moment at the Mayo to the river in front of me. "That was a tough day," I  
152 whispered and wiped away tears.

153 Dad died three months later of pancreatic cancer. That sounds like my cancer, which is prostate cancer,  
154 but they're very different. Pancreatic cancer usually kills a person in a few months. Prostate cancer  
155 usually doesn't kill. As my doctors say, "We die *with* the disease instead of *from* it." Unfortunately, that  
156 doesn't apply if the cancer is aggressive and spreads, like mine.

157 On the day before going to the Mayo for surgery, Dad and I played cribbage, and I asked him about  
158 growing up on the poor side of town. He told me funny stories of what he did as a kid. On that day, he  
159 knew pancreatic cancer was a bad one, but he still felt there was a fighting chance.

160 After surgery, Dad no longer had a fighting chance. I never saw him cry, but I'd never seen him so sad  
161 for so long. Of course, I never thought poorly of him, but that's one of the few ways I hope to be  
162 different than Dad, when I no longer have a fighting chance. I hope to be calm and at least a little happy  
163 for the good life that my parents gave me.

164 "But there's the rub." I said softly. "I'm only 51, long way from retirement." I didn't want to feel angry,  
165 sad, or self-pity. All those would make me cry, and I was tired of that. Besides, my parents didn't waste  
166 time with those feelings when there was still a fighting chance.

167 I gazed at the river one more time, pausing at a place where Dad and I might have let the boat coast or  
168 drift for a while. Thoughts of good times and sad times with Dad came to mind as I pushed off the  
169 ground with one foot, pushed on a pedal with the other, and rolled down the flat trail through grassy  
170 ground.

171 Normally, I only enjoy speed when it's easy, going downhill. Going fast on a flat trail usually takes  
172 more effort than I want to give, but this moment was unusual. I pulled on the handlebars to lift myself  
173 off the saddle, stood on one pedal, the other, rapidly repeated, pumping hard with each leg.

174 Spirit's pedals were soon spinning faster than my legs could push them, so I shifted up to a higher and  
175 harder gear. A click came from the shift lever in front, on the handlebars. A clack came from the back,  
176 as the chain moved over a gear. The breeze became a wind.

177 My legs felt more resistance and power. My speed increased, and I wanted more. Still standing on the  
178 pedals, I shoved each leg down harder, grunting. The pedals started spinning too fast again. I shifted  
179 twice more—two clicks in front and a louder clack in back, as the chain moved over two gears. The  
180 grassy ground became a green blur.

181 For more power, one hand clutched the handlebars, pulling. The opposite leg shoved down, pushing.  
182 That quickly moves power across my entire body—flowing from my fingers, through my wrist, up my  
183 flexed bicep, over my shoulders, across my back, down the opposite leg, repeating with the other side,  
184 and again, again, again.

185 Emotions forced more out of each muscle, from fingers to toes. I loved the power inside, pulling and  
186 pushing Spirit hard and harder—screaming with pleasure from Spirit and pain from Dad. The wind and  
187 pedals moved faster.

188 **Question 1 for reviewers:** *The next page has some unusual writing, almost poetry. Please give me your*  
189 *honest response to it. Some reviewers suggested I shorten the unusual part and add shorter parts of it to*  
190 *upcoming chapters. I don't want to shorten the poetic part ahead, but I will if more reviewers suggest it.*

191 One more click from the front, a clack in back, pulling on handlebars, pushing with legs, loving the  
 192 power flow through my body. Sadness and stress flow with it, give my body more power. Life becomes  
 193 powerfully simple, powerfully fast, pull and push, pull and push, pull, push...

Pull, push

Pull, push

Pull, push

Pull, push

Pull, push

Pull, push

Pull, push

Pull, push

Pull, push, click, clack

Pull, push

Pull, push

Pull harder, push harder

Pull, push

Pull, push

Pull, push, grunt

Pull, push

Pull, push

Pull, push, grunt harder

Pull, push

Pull, push

Pull, push, pant

Pull, push

Pull, push

Pull, push, legs hurt

Pull, push

Pull, push

Pull, push, grunt harder

Pull, push

Pull, push

Pull, push, scream

Pull, push

Pull, push, pant harder

Pull, push, legs burning

Pull harder

Push harder

Pull, push, see Dad's hard day

Pull, push

Pull, push, fear cancer

Pull, push, cry

Pull, push, tears

Pull, push, cry harder

Pull, push

Lungs can't keep up

Pull

194 Legs won't move; Lungs can move no faster. I taste salt in my mouth. That only happens after I've  
 195 pushed myself too hard for too long.

196 My body collapsed onto the saddle. My head hung. Rapid and deep breaths replaced rapid and deep  
 197 grunts. Spirit quietly coasted, and I quietly cried.

198 My head still hung, and I felt the air slowing down—air flowing past me, flowing into my lungs, and  
 199 flowing out. I relaxed my grip on Spirit. My legs slowly stopped burning. My body slowly gained  
 200 strength. When the air was a gentle breeze, I lifted my head, lifted a hand, and wiped away tears.

201 The green blur had become grassy ground again. Trees were ahead, and the trail turned into them. I  
 202 wiped a few more tears, some sweat, pedaled slowly, and shifted to a lower gear, with a few clicks and  
 203 clacks. The trees became thicker. The trail went through them and turned toward the Mississippi.

204 More turns and hills followed. The hills aren't long, but they're steep and sudden. The turns aren't  
 205 sudden, but they show up with the hills—left, right, up, down, repeat. I stood, sat, coasted, climbed,  
 206 banked, grunted, and shoved each leg down with all the strength I could find. I moved in every direction  
 207 through the woods, in ways no airplane could.

208 After the short hills and turns, the route continues on a flat trail that curves gently through the woods,  
 209 wandering away from the Mississippi. I relaxed, glanced at trees and plants passing by, and coasted as  
 210 often as I slowly pedaled. I'd exhausted myself earlier in the ride, physically and emotionally, so rolling  
 211 through a relaxing woods eased my mind and body. After passing a pond, I rolled my shoulders and told  
 212 all my muscles to let go, to unflex. Spots of sunlight moved around on the trail, as leaves above moved  
 213 with the breeze. But a hundred yards later, I sighed.

214 I could see that the wooded part of the ride was almost over, but that wasn't the reason for my sigh. It  
 215 came from how the path left the woods. It was on a long and steep climb. This long ascent was payback  
 216 for the long and fast descent at the start of the ride. One of the maxims of cycling is, what goes down  
 217 must go up, when it comes to hills. With rivers, that maxim comes from simple geology. Paths going  
 218 toward a river go down a lot, and paths away go up just as much, like the hill in front of me.

219 Another maxim of cycling is: save energy for hills, don't indulge yourself on flat parts by going too fast.  
 220 I had indulged myself during my pull-push spree, had let emotions make decisions about how much  
 221 power to give. Going fast had felt good, so I just did it, a lot. Nike isn't always right.

222 Breaking that maxim can happen when you're on a new route, but this was my favorite route in St. Paul.  
 223 The hill ahead has always been there, hasn't gone away just because I had let emotions make an unwise  
 224 decision.

225 A friend of mine is a triathlete, and she has a saying when muscles ache, "Suck it up, Buttercup." Since I  
 226 don't like swearing, my version is "Buck up, buttercup." Even with my milder version of her statement,  
 227 I have a poor history with *bucking up*. On long hills, I'm usually *grumbling up*, slowly. And at the  
 228 moment, my entire body ached, a lot. Even my wrists hurt. That was a new one. I never strained them on  
 229 a bike ride before, might have been from all the pulling.

230 I coasted toward the hill and gently shook alternate wrists, to get some of the pain out. At the base of the  
 231 hill, I looked up for a moment and decided that was a bad idea, since the long path up made my legs feel  
 232 heavier. Looking a few feet ahead, I shifted to a low gear and focused on the simple motion of pushing  
 233 on the pedals.

234 After only a few yards, my legs couldn't push any more, so I shifted to an even lower gear. It helped for  
 235 a moment, but my legs still didn't want to spin. A trick from my marathon days came to mind. When  
 236 your body has nothing left, distract yourself from the pain inside by focusing on something outside.

237 Looking up would be a bad idea since I'd see the hill again, which would psych me out. I looked at the  
 238 trees to my left, but Spirit was going so slow that she quickly wandered left with me. I turned right a bit,  
 239 cycled straight again, looked down, and focused on the spots of sunlight slowly moving under me. That  
 240 worked, for about ten hard yards.

241 I tasted salt in my mouth again, which shows that my body was exhausted again. I shifted down further.  
 242 After the click, I could feel the lever would go no further down. No lower gears were left. The clack in  
 243 back was clearly slower, matching the speed of the pedals. In contrast to that slow speed, my breathing  
 244 was fast.

245 I thought about standing up in the pedals to use different muscles, but at the moment, that wasn't an  
 246 option, for two reasons. First, standing requires a higher and harder gear since all my weight goes down  
 247 on each pedal. In this low gear, the first pedal I stood on would fall so fast that it'd probably take me  
 248 with it. Since I'd gotten to know Spirit, I knew that standing on the pedals requires two gears up from  
 249 her lowest gear, which leads to the second reason.

250 Shifting gears requires that the chain move faster than it was now. If I tried shifting at this slow speed,  
 251 the chain would very gradually grind over the gears in back. And while it moved over gears, the chain  
 252 would wobble, disrupt my pedaling, and slow down Spirit. If she moved any slower, we'd stop.

253 Of course, I could stop on purpose, but I didn't feel like it. I wanted to be strong, even with the aches  
 254 and exhaustion. Between rapid breaths, I called out, "I need some help, Spirit." More rapid breaths. My  
 255 legs lost more strength, and she started weaving, just to stay upright. "Spirit, a little help here." We  
 256 weaved more.

257 The weaving reminded me of the way Dad walked when his cancer was really bad. He couldn't even  
 258 walk to the bathroom without help. He'd put an arm over someone's shoulder. They'd put an arm  
 259 around him, and together, they'd slowly walk and weave to the bathroom. I'm not certain why, but I  
 260 never helped him with that. Maybe it was because I was a man in my 30s and my family had older men  
 261 who were bigger and stronger. While weaving up the hill, not helping Dad when he needed it made me  
 262 sad, angry, or both.

263 Emotions forced my legs to spin the pedals and shift up, click, clack, click, clack, two gears up. Lifting  
 264 myself off the saddle, I stood on the pedals, pressed hard, grunted, gained speed, ignored the pain, and  
 265 rolled up about ten yards. I dropped on the saddle, slowed down, and shifted down—click, clack, click,  
 266 clack, and back in the lowest gear. Five yards of straight cycling, followed by more weaving and fast  
 267 breathing.

268 Temptation came back, just stop and walk. "No," I whispered with a fast breath. After more fast breaths,  
 269 "Buck up," more fast breaths, "Buttercup." My legs pushed harder and saw the spots of sun move under  
 270 me with drops of sweat, about five more yards passed.

271 All I could think about was pedaling, but some emotion inside made me look up. I instantly felt that was  
 272 stupid, but instead, I saw the top of the hill, about 15 yards away, click, clack, click, clack, stand, push,  
 273 grunt, five more yards.



274 I dropped into the saddle, shifted down, and imagined myself walking and weaving to a bathroom, when  
 275 my cancer became bad. “Not yet,” I whispered with anger, between rapid breaths. Spots of sunlight  
 276 below moved faster, and my legs hurt less, as the grade of the hill eased toward the top.

277 After rolling over the top, I put both feet down, leaned over Spirit, crossed my arms over her handlebars,  
 278 and dropped my face on top of them. My heart beat hard and felt like a long drumroll. My lungs  
 279 collapsed and expanded as fast. Sweat pooled and dripped between my arms and face. Eventually, the  
 280 drum roll inside me slowed with my breaths. A few words slipped out with them, “Good climb, Steve.”  
 281 It was something Dad would have said. Tears mixed into the sweat.

282 I brushed a hand over my face, pushed my body off the handlebars, and looked down the hill, with  
 283 mixed emotions. Climbing it had never wore me down that much, but I’d never pushed myself so hard  
 284 before reaching that hill. It was a good climb, but I felt like different and harder hills were ahead—like  
 285 complications with cancer and, even worse, chemo. But still, an important reason for this ride was  
 286 working on emotions that were tightly tangled. No single ride would untangle all of them, but that hill  
 287 helped loosen the emotional knot a little.

288 Pedaling hard helps with tough emotions, but slower cycling with some excitement helps too. That kind  
 289 of cycling was next, since I’d be going into downtown St. Paul.

290 The trail took me away from the woods and along the Mississippi River, for about a mile. During that  
 291 time, skyscrapers slowly came into view, and I thought about St. Paul. It and Minneapolis form what  
 292 Minnesotans call the Twin Cities. That name comes from the fact that Minneapolis and St. Paul are next  
 293 to each other, and they started with a similar layout.

294 But these days, people in the Twin Cities know that St. Paul is the smaller twin. Unlike Minneapolis, St.  
 295 Paul has no NFL team, no major league baseball team, less retail than Minneapolis, and less people. For  
 296 those reasons and more, I love St. Paul. One of my favorite bumper stickers says, “Keep St. Paul  
 297 Boring.”

298 As I cycled along the Mississippi, the ride felt pleasantly boring, or maybe relaxed, but that would  
 299 change soon, since skyscrapers were now filling the view to my left, with the river on the right. With a  
 300 left turn, I went away from the river, climbed a short hill, and soon entered downtown.

301 Yards away, there were little shops and skyscrapers. Inches away, there were cars, trucks, and busses—  
 302 stopped or crawling forward. A common phrase about driving is that “We’re stuck in traffic,” which  
 303 says a lot about cycling in a city. Cyclists aren’t *in* anything. We’re *on* our bikes. We’re out there with  
 304 nothing blocking us from the life of a city, which makes us *on* in other ways.

305 We’re alert, alive, lively, liking it, or loving it. There’s no steel, glass, music, or radio commercials  
 306 separating us from the life of a city. Like any life, a city has moments that are amazing, disappointing,  
 307 graceful, gritty, surprising, and routine—although that last one doesn’t happen often on a bike.

308 And we rarely feel *stuck*. When drivers are stuck, we move—weaving through gaps between cars,  
 309 trucks, and busses. Moving to the front is smart because it’s the safest place to be seen, by drivers.  
 310 Cycling through the gaps is also a challenging thrill. Gaps in traffic slowly become wider, narrower,  
 311 and taller when a semi or bus is inches from each shoulder.

312 But a gap can suddenly collapse when a pedestrian or determined driver shows up. That can be risky but  
313 it's more exciting than dangerous. I've rarely been knocked off my bike, and each time, there was a way  
314 to avoid it. After each fall, I got up, got off the street for a moment, and learned how to read the gaps  
315 better—and enjoy them more. There was one time when getting up took a few months, while my left  
316 knee healed, but that fall taught me the most.

317 When we get through the gaps and reach the front, gems of a city can show up, like coffee shops,  
318 bakeries, and restaurants. At stoplights, we also see people walking, sometimes say hi, and even chat for  
319 a bit. As you'd expect, some parts of the city are less pleasant. We also get close-up views of trash,  
320 broken windows, people sleeping on sidewalks, and drivers texting while they're stuck. It's always  
321 tempting to tap on their windows and ask them to stop, breaking the law.

322 Of course, some cyclists break the law too. You've seen them. They almost ask to get hurt, wearing dark  
323 colors and no helmet. They cycle on sidewalks. Their bikes have no lights, and they miss few chances to  
324 run a red light. That's not me. I obey the law, wear bright colors, bright lights, or both.

325 After a few red lights, green lights, and fast cycling through yellow lights, the buildings became lower;  
326 traffic was thinner; and I approached Summit Avenue in St. Paul, one of the most beautiful roads in little  
327 St. Paul or big Minneapolis. As the name suggests, getting up to Summit Avenue means climbing a hill.  
328 In this case, it's a gentle climb to a bluff that overlooks downtown St. Paul and the Mississippi River.

329 People have always enjoyed the view from Summit Avenue, going back to the early days of St. Paul.  
330 During those days, the rich and powerful built their mansions on Summit to enjoy the view. A few  
331 decades ago, the inside of some mansions were divided into separate homes or apartments, but the  
332 outside still shows the grandeur from the original owners.

333 Many of the mansions are made of stone, with gargoyles and other sculptures carved into it. Others are  
334 made of wood, but they also show a style that doesn't fade with fashion. Windows on the wooden  
335 mansions are trimmed with wood carvings, rich colors, both, or more. Rolling down Summit is an art  
336 gallery of architecture, even in a car. On a bike, the details are richer. You don't just glance at the  
337 wonderful mansions. As you slowly roll by, you can examine them, maybe even stop and take a picture  
338 for Facebook.

339 I always enjoy seeing the mansions, but the thought of owning one has felt increasingly foreign, even if I  
340 could afford it. About a decade before this ride, my ex-wife and I owned a humble home in St. Paul, one  
341 of the smallest in our neighborhood. At first, it was wonderful having my own place, in a new marriage,  
342 but after only a few months, taking care of that small home took far too much time away from running  
343 and cycling—too much time from *living*.

344 I turned off Summit and into an alley behind it. The other side of the alley is Grand Avenue. It's known  
345 for small shops, cafés, and restored apartment buildings from the 1920-30s. A couple of times, those  
346 buildings have been my home. It was also my home during the time of this ride, since moving back from  
347 London in November 2015.

348 In the alley, I slowly pedaled and rolled over bumps and potholes, until seeing my building. I coasted,  
349 gently pulled on a brake, and lowered a foot until it dragged on the broken tar. A moment later, I  
350 dropped the other foot, stopped, and stood over Spirit.

351 I sighed. The ride was over. It did what I hoped it would. Climbing the hills and feeling the thrills had  
 352 loosened the tight knot of emotions, which had been jerking me around. But now came the hard part, I  
 353 had to pull some of those emotions out of the knot, face them, and give each careful thought. Some of  
 354 those thoughts tried coming to mind as I stood over Spirit. I pushed them back. They would make me  
 355 cry, and I was still standing outside where people might see my tears. I prefer to cry alone.

356 *Question 2 for reviewers: My writing class suggested cutting the indented section below. Do you*  
 357 *agree? I don't want to, but I will if enough reviewers say so. They said the section was good but*  
 358 *that it distracted from the purpose of this chapter, which was untangling emotions.*

359 I dismounted Spirit, carried her up the steps to the back door, unlocked it, and carried her down  
 360 the steps to the basement. Walking back up the steps to my apartment, I still felt uneasy but also  
 361 safe and comfortable, the feeling of being home. I stepped off the stairs, into the hallway, and  
 362 enjoyed the sight of two little doors. One was about a foot from my left shoulder. Another was a  
 363 foot from my right, and two more were about ten yards in front of me, also on the left and right  
 364 of the hallway.

365 They were made of old wood, about two feet square, and five feet from the ground. Each door  
 366 opened to each apartment on the other side. Decades ago, milkmen opened the doors to deliver  
 367 milk and cheese into cupboards on the other side. My last apartment building on Grand Avenue  
 368 had similar doors, in a similar hallway, but they were a bit bigger and opened into an ice box on  
 369 the other side.

370 After stepping into my apartment, I looked around with bittersweet feelings. I loved this place.  
 371 Large windows faced south and let sunlight fill the room. Old wooden trim framed the windows,  
 372 and the same kind of wood was used in the large baseboards and along the ceiling. The walls  
 373 were painted in rich green, which made the wood look even warmer. I was alone now, so sad  
 374 feelings also came out. This place was so special to me, and I worried it may not be my home for  
 375 many more years, if my cancer got worse again.

376 Looking down, I appreciated the hard-wood floor and walked over it to the kitchen. It was tiny  
 377 by today's standards, but the kitchen had everything I needed. The sink and gas stove were old,  
 378 small, and cared for. The built-in cupboards were also small, including the little door that opened  
 379 to the hallway. That was the door used for delivering milk long ago.

380 Next to that door, there were a few tiny built-in drawers, only a couple inches square. With  
 381 guests in my home, we tried to figure out what those tiny drawers would have been used for. Our  
 382 best guess is that they were used for spices, keys, or maybe coins to give the milkman a tip.

383 I never wanted to live in a modern apartment. Even the most expensive ones, with all their  
 384 amenities, could not give this feeling. It can't be built. It only comes from life, time, and care.

385 *Comment to reviewers: If I cut the indented section above, I'll add a brief transition before the*  
 386 *next paragraph, so the story shows me entering my apartment and walking to the kitchen.*

387 I sat at my kitchen table, scanned the kitchen again, the living room beyond it, and felt the fear from a  
 388 few untangled emotions. My ride untied them from their knot, which was good. But now, they were  
 389 bouncing around my mind and heart, which wasn't good.

390 The first fear was that I'd soon lose this small, simple, and wonderful place. Dr. Carrington had  
 391 emphasized that I had every reason to think my life would last more than three years. That was great, but  
 392 even if it lasted twice that long, it was hard to feel happy. Lasting four times that long was only 12 years,  
 393 and those extra years didn't even get me to retirement, since I was 51. That may have been the worst  
 394 fear, but others were trying to be.

395 Other fears told me that my hopes would never happen. I didn't raise a family like Dad, but I still did a  
 396 lot and hoped for more. I wanted to see the Van Gogh Museum again and other museums. I wanted to  
 397 return to London many more times. I wanted to see more plays from the Royal Shakespeare Company,  
 398 at the Globe Theatre. I wanted more bike rides in London, see my British friends, laugh with them in my  
 399 favorite pub. Those laughs were good, but nobody made me laugh like my brother and sisters. I wanted  
 400 to laugh hard with them to retirement and beyond, far beyond.

401 I wanted all those things, but if you have advanced cancer, you think about what you want most. What I  
 402 wanted most was seeing the most special kind of love again. For me, that comes from the eyes of one  
 403 woman whose glance is more beautiful than any painting, happier than any laugh, and more intriguing  
 404 than Shakespeare. I've only seen that once, for a few years in London. Her eyes were bluer than any I've  
 405 seen. Her manners were better than most Brits, and her grace was as disciplined as most Germans, since  
 406 she is German.

407 Leaving London meant leaving her. I tried to stay, but after living in London for seven years, I missed  
 408 parts of America that Britain couldn't give—like family, massive national parks, and more cycling  
 409 options than I could enjoy in a lifetime. And unfortunately, she wouldn't move here because she no  
 410 longer trusted me.

411 I lost her trust from foolish mistakes, by letting only emotions make important decisions. On two  
 412 occasions, I abruptly told her that I had to move back to the US. The first time, I changed my mind and  
 413 stayed for almost another year. The second time, I left London, moved into this apartment, had no job,  
 414 and a month after arriving, I was diagnosed with cancer.

415 That was a hard time. I was shocked, cried a lot, and started whispering, "fucking cancer," but like most  
 416 people, other hard times helped me deal with the shock. One of those times was losing Dad. Another  
 417 was losing Mom about 15 years later. A third occurred just after Dad died.

418 At that time, my oldest niece was killed in a car accident. She was a 20-year old honor student in  
 419 college, and the killer was a high school dropout, driving a new Corvette his mom gave him. My entire  
 420 family was around her in Intensive Care when they stopped life support, so my entire family watched  
 421 that beautiful young woman die.

422 Those tough times helped me deal with the shock of losing love and getting cancer, but one more gave  
 423 me guidance for how to deal with it, months and years later. That came from my brother, Mike. I related  
 424 to his tough time and response because our personalities are so similar, even though he's 13 years older  
 425 than I am.

426 Mike was born with a bad eye and a weak eye. The bad eye could only see shadows in the distance and  
 427 large letters up close. The weak eye could be corrected with thick glasses and allowed Mike to drive.  
 428 When he was 26, a retina detachment and bad luck took away the sight in his weak eye. That made his  
 429 bad eye his good eye. It also made Mike "legally blind," meaning he could see very little.

430 Of course, Mike was sad, but his sadness lasted for months instead of years. My strongest memories of  
 431 Mike are that he quickly made people laugh again, went to work, and enjoyed gadgets. At first, he  
 432 learned about talking wrist watches, but it soon moved into making his Apple ][ computer talk. I've  
 433 always enjoyed sports more than Mike, but another strong memory is that he rode a bike for 20 miles  
 434 soon after becoming legally blind, from his house to our parent's place.

435 Losing his sight shocked Mike, but it didn't stop him from laughing, learning, and *living*. He wasn't  
 436 trying to impress anybody. He was just trying to enjoy himself, within the limits of blindness. He found  
 437 a lot. I wanted to try the same, within the limits of cancer. At least, that was my hope.

438 I was still trying to get through the shock. Like Mike's situation, there was a lot I could do. I might find  
 439 special love again, maybe with Mary. I might get back to London, maybe a few times. I might even go  
 440 on a long bike ride again, maybe more than one. But while I sat in my kitchen, I kept thinking about my  
 441 cancer, since it and my treatments would decide how many of those hopes could happen.

442 My cancer started about an inch above the spot where I could feel the kitchen chair under me. That's  
 443 where my prostate gland used to be, before being surgically removed. That location helps the prostate  
 444 gland do its job, which is working with a matching set of glands that hang about an inch forward. When  
 445 those glands create sperm, the prostate creates fluid that moves everything along, quickly. The matching  
 446 set of glands returns the favor by giving prostate cells testosterone. That's the favorite food of prostate  
 447 cells, whether their healthy or cancerous.

448 Before today's bike ride, I'd read more about prostate cancer on the Mayo Clinic's web site. Some of it  
 449 was review, but other parts were new. Prostate cancer is the second most common cancer for men in the  
 450 US, after lung cancer. When prostate cancer is detected, the first treatment is "hormonal therapy," which  
 451 shuts off a guy's testosterone. Unfortunately, only about 90% of testosterone can be shut off. For a  
 452 couple of years, the cancer shrinks but still lives on the remaining 10%. About a year after that, it adapts  
 453 and grows, by no longer needing testosterone or by making its own. Clever devil.

454 To prevent it from adapting, the next step is often removing a guy's prostate gland, weeks after cancer is  
 455 detected. In that case, the cancer usually comes out with the gland, doesn't spread, and the guy lives a  
 456 normal life.

457 Unfortunately, I'm one of the unusual and unlucky guys. Some cancer cells slipped out, before or during  
 458 surgery. From their previous home in the prostate, my cancer cells wandered into my lymphatic system,  
 459 which is easy. That drainage system has entrances and exits inside and nearby most organs, flowing left,  
 460 right, up, and down like some bike trail inside me. My cancer cells had just started their way in the  
 461 lymphatic system. The furthest were a short but dangerous inch above my pelvis, by my kidneys. That  
 462 inch put me in the unfortunate category of having "advanced cancer."

463 If my cancer would have stayed in my pelvis, it could have been treated with radiation. In that case,  
 464 doctors zap all the places where cancer cells might be, for weeks and from multiple angles. Targets for  
 465 the radiation come from special PET scans, only available at places like the Mayo Clinic. Those scans  
 466 find collections of cancer that are as small as a pen tip. Unfortunately, there are smaller groups of bad  
 467 cells that could be anywhere in the pelvis, which is why they zap many places down there.

468 As I sat in my kitchen, the thought of being zapped so much down there made me shift in my chair.

469 In many cases, radiation kills all the bad cells, cures the cancer, and the guy lives a normal life, with one  
 470 exception. All that zapping prevents a very special organ in the pelvis from getting erect, during  
 471 wonderfully exciting moments. With cancer treatment, that loss is considered as acceptable collateral  
 472 damage. Even though guys dread that sacrifice, it's a chance at a cure, which makes all prostate cancer  
 473 survivors embrace what matters in life, or for life.

474 Since cancer cells had left my pelvis, radiation was no longer an option because the bad cells were now  
 475 close to critical organs. Damaging any of those with radiation was no longer acceptable collateral  
 476 damage, since that would kill me faster than cancer.

477 Now that the bad cells were in my lymphatic system, they could flow and grow in any organ, but there  
 478 are a few they like most. Sometimes, it's the lungs or liver, but their favorite target is a bone, and then  
 479 more. Once they reach one, cancer cells settle down, spread out, and dig in.

480 **Question 3 for reviewers:** *Is the section above too detailed? Did your interest fade?*

481 **Question 4 for reviewers:** *I wrote a section describing what happens after cancer digs into the*  
 482 *bones, which usually leads to killing a guy. I removed that section because it seemed too detailed and*  
 483 *sad. I'll put it back if you think that section would make this chapter stronger. Should I put it back?*

484 That's where I stopped reading about how my cancer could grow, before my ride. The thought of my  
 485 bones being attacked was more than I could take. Besides, I've always had an optimistic disbelief that  
 486 my cancer would ever reach my bones. That could be entirely irrational, but the alternative was  
 487 imagining how my legs would be attacked and broken. I'm a scientific kind of guy, but in this case, the  
 488 optimistic disbelief felt fine. I read next about how my cancer could be treated.

489 **Question 5 for reviewers:** *The last sentence in the previous paragraph is meant to be a transition*  
 490 *to the next paragraph, but I'm concerned that sentence doesn't provide enough of a transition, that the*  
 491 *transition is too abrupt. What do you think?*

492 Since radiation was no longer an option, the next treatment would probably be chemo. For decades, it  
 493 has been the most popular treatment for advanced prostate cancer. Even before having cancer, I never  
 494 liked the idea of chemo. The way it attacked a person's body and spirit made me shocked and sad. But  
 495 still, I had to learn more about it, at least a little. With some information, I could learn which hopes were  
 496 still possible. Calm facts can also tame wild fears.

497 Chemo works by killing anything that quickly moves, focusing on fast growth. That's why people on  
 498 chemo lose their hair, since those cells naturally grow faster than others. Cancer cells grow with  
 499 unnatural speed, one of the most perfect invasive species. Once they really get growing, they gobble up  
 500 parts the natural ecosystem needs, slow it down, and kill it.

501 Chemo slows cancer down. In my case, a chemo cycle would probably last 12 weeks. About once a  
 502 week, I'd go to the hospital, sit in a large, comfortable chair, and have IVs put into my arms. A moment  
 503 later, a few bags of chemo fluid would be hung above me, and probably behind to keep them out of  
 504 view. A tube from the bag would be slid onto my IV, and the fluid would seep into my arm and body for  
 505 about an hour.

506 While I waited, the nurses would ask if there was anything they could do to make me more comfortable  
 507 during that difficult time—like a TV show, magazine, or blanket. I’d probably answer that a 100-mile  
 508 bike ride would be nice, and they’d probably reply that the cord wasn’t long enough.

509 When it was over, they’d take the IV out, and I’d feel a little strange. I’d go home, get in bed, spend a lot  
 510 of time sleeping, about as much resting, and make fast trips to the toilet to sit on top or kneel in front.  
 511 Those trips to the bathroom would become harder if I glanced in the mirror, since my hair would fade.

512 Those physical effects were hard, but something else about chemo felt much harder. For decades, chemo  
 513 has been a common treatment for advanced prostate cancer, and in that time, the average life expectancy  
 514 was three years. I’d heard of many guys who lived longer, sometimes a lot longer, but I also knew that  
 515 we don’t hear from the guys who didn’t live longer. That’s how averages work. If one guy lives twice as  
 516 long, another guy lives half as long, a mathematical fact.

517 All that made me think that chemo was the beginning of the end, made me think it would slowly and  
 518 ungracefully lose its ability to prolong my life. That made me more than sad. That made me scared,  
 519 which doesn’t happen easily. I wasn’t scared when cycling in London traffic, when cycling for  
 520 thousands of miles on my own, or when moving back with a broken heart and with no job—but I was  
 521 scared of chemo.

522 My expectation of chemo was that I’d be thinking of those scary thoughts while laying in bed for a  
 523 dozen weeks at a time. The thoughts would be interrupted during occasional dashes to the bathroom, and  
 524 they would return after going back to bed, hoping I was one of the lucky guys who lived more than three  
 525 years. Unfortunately, that hope relies on one of my weaknesses, staying optimistic when you’re wore  
 526 down.

527 Depression runs in my family’s blood. I’ve had it a few times, but it faded when I found my passions,  
 528 marathons and bike tours. Those passions are intensely active. Lying in bed from chemo is intensely  
 529 inactive, which is why I fear it so much. For me, it seems like a clear path to depression and possibly the  
 530 beginning of an unusually slow and undignified end.

531 I stood up, off the kitchen chair I’d been sitting on. I had to stop thinking about cancer and chemo. They  
 532 were part of the emotional knot I was untangling, but I had to give it a rest. Besides, those thoughts were  
 533 too sad and full of fear. Dwelling on fear gets in the way of inching forward. I saw that from Mom, Dad,  
 534 Mike, and the rest of my family during hard times. I picked up my phone and looked at text messages  
 535 while walking toward the windows in the living room.

536 Mary had sent me a text about an hour ago, must have missed it when I was on my bike. I sat on the  
 537 couch and replied. She instantly did the same, and we chatted with texts.

How was your ride?

Good, thanks. How’re you?

I’m good, just hoping you beat up  
 your body enough. I know how  
 that important that is to you.

You know me well.

You are kind of nut, but that's one of the reasons I like you. We still on for tomorrow morning?

Yep, nothing like a hot date in a doctor's office.

I'm happy to be there with you. How're you feeling about it?

Not the best. I did some more reading, on the Mayo's web site. Chemo is likely.

Maybe so, but you don't know that. And even if you get chemo, you'll get through it. You've already made it through a lot.

Thanks, but I don't like chemo, at all.

I know.

I'm a little scared.

It is scary, very. Are you sure you don't want me to stop by?

I appreciate the offer, but I'd still like to be alone, after being around people all weekend.

Do whatever helps but let me know if you change your mind.

Thanks. I'll text you before I turn out the lights, probably sooner.

Ok

538

539 I needed to look at something fun, so I picked up my laptop and browsed the web, still sitting on the  
540 couch and enjoying the calm light of sunset from the windows.

541 I ended up on the website for Adventure Cycling. They've been offering bike tours since the 1970s. The  
542 tours that caught my attention took the long way across the US. Two were direct routes and had simple  
543 names: The Northern Tier and The Southern Tier. A third rote meandered through the middle. It was  
544 called the Trans America Route, or Trans Am. I read a little about each when I noticed that the room



545 was almost dark. Those rides were a fun dream for someday, but at the moment, I had to focus on  
546 tomorrow's doctor's appointment.

547 During that appointment, I'd learn which treatment would be used for my cancer. That discussion and  
548 decision would be emotionally tough, even exhausting. One way to prepare for it was a good night's  
549 sleep, so I shut down my laptop and got ready for bed. Before turning out the light, I sent Mary a text.

Yeah, hope you sleep ok.

I'm turning in early. See you  
tomorrow at 9 as planned?

Thanks, sweet dreams.

Sweet dreams.

550