

**2019 BTC Journals**

**Day Five – Waterbury to Hartford to Manchester**

We began to wake up one by one. Joan was in the kitchen with Donna while I deflated the mattress and got dressed for this morning ride.

Breakfast was muffins and croissants. Coffee was made. We began to gather in the kitchen. Some of us went over for morning mass. Nice way to start the day. We read about ourselves in the Waterbury Republican. Nice article!

Little by little we started getting ready. Bike tires checked and pumped. Bikes cleaned and wiped from yesterday’s ride in the rain. Fr. Jim checked out our bikes. He is an avid cyclist. He did “Our Father’s Ride” a few years ago which was a fund raiser for Catholic Schools. Fr. Stephen was part of that ride. In 2016 Fr. Jim rode with another priest to the Notre Dame Basilica in Montreal, Canada for a fund raiser for his parish school. So, Fr. Jim knows bikes.

While we were talking, he suggested we come back to Waterbury next year and present at St. Francis Xavier parish which is part of his responsibility and stay here at the Basilica. He thought we would also cycle up to the top of Holy Land park where the cross is, have mass and dinner there. Sounds pretty cool but I am sure the ride to the top would be a bit challenging. We will have to discuss this more at our next meeting.

Finally, we had the vehicles packed, the bikes we ready, Cue sheets handed out, and we went to the front of the Basilica for a photo. Then Jason sent us off with a prayer.

We only had a very short ride to St. Vincent de Paul Shelter to meet with Jered. It was very hot. Very uncomfortable. Again this is something we have to offer up as how we relate to those who cannot get out of the heat or have a shower at night or sleep in an airconditioned room.

Jered began his education of us and continued as we moved from room to room. They are renovating the shelter. He showed us much of it. New ceiling tiles, newly painted walls. We noticed there were many outlets near the beds which the lack of which was pointed out to us as a problem is some of the other shelters we visited. Jered told us about the programs and services they provide. I asked him what was different from when we visited two years ago. He mentioned that they now have a Youth program and how that really benefits the youth. Also, he mentioned that he is seeing more single dads than before. He commented that potential guests must provide reason they should be accepted in the shelter. Once in they are permanent but have to continue to seek employment.
He is not the Messiah, he can't save them. They must want to be saved! I found that an interesting comment. We met for close to an hour and I felt bad for John, Sue, Joan, and Tom waiting outside in that hot sun.

As we thanked Jered he asked us back for next year. If we come back we will definitely stop in again to see what has changed. Obviously, there is still a need for shelters. Shouldn’t be but there is. Homelessness supposedly has been reduced in Connecticut but after visiting these poverty centers we didn’t see any signs of it being any less than before.

So, now we headed for the long ride to Hartford and our visit to Hands o

The ride was warm but not too bad. John and Sue did a great job revising the Cue Sheet and even adding a section just for the Support vehicles. I guess that is something we will have to do next time. It helps our support folks very much. Again, without them we are not as efficient. Can’t do without support. We thank them so very much!

We did not hit many difficult hills as we ventured out of Waterbury. We did come to a very familiar downhill. Wow! This would be an experience for Claudia for sure. I won’t tell Joan how fast I went down that hill. Exciting.

We again came upon one of the bike trials we have traveled on often. Stopped for lunch in the same spot as two years ago. We went through New Britain and we eventually came to the CT Fastrack which we had ride on a few times on this year’s ride. The Fastrack is a nice ride but it is a bit boring. Nothing to really see and no chance to engage people. We passed that same commentary where people are dying to get into. Get it?

We were running a bit late and Lauren called Wanda but it really was not a problem. When we got to Hands on Hartford, Claire’s husband Rich greeted us. Claire would be leaving right after our HonH visit.

We got further educated on what has been going on with Hands on Hartford since the last time we were there. They have made several changes to their facility. Good updates to be serve the community. While we noticed the new features, we also noticed some of the same things like their backpack program, their community garden. There really are a lot of opportunities available for those in need but they have to know where to go to get them and take advantage of them. That too is part of the “Educate” in PEDAL.

We said our tearful goodbyes to Claire. Always emotional when we come to the end of our ride. So now Johnnie, Lauren, Claudia, and I would cycle “home” to St. Bridget. As we rode, I began the process of unwinding. I had discussed this feeling with Claudia as I felt she had been greatly impacted by this ride, that she would have a bit of an emotional let down a few days after she was home. I looked forward to hearing some of the thoughts of others as things settled in. I thought about some of our regulars, Pam, Maureen, Jim, Eric, Gary. I missed them. I though about Tom Sacerdote and his decision. And, I thought about some of the people we touched and met this year. The ride was the same but the ride was different as it is every year.

We got to St. Bridget and we unpacked the Support vehicles, packed our own cars. Claudia’s mom was there to greet her and take her home. Lauren had to get to her dad’s and get ready to drive home to New Jersey.

I made sure Joan was all set and then got on my bike and began the last two miles of my ride. Here I am every year alone with my thoughts. I am tired but I am happy. I am glad all went well. No one was hurt. Everyone was safe. We grew as a family. We made a difference that I truly believe. And we will be back again next year for our 18th BTC poverty awareness ride. Look for us on the streets of Connecticut! And as I said previously, I am Blest! Truly I am!