

1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself, and briefly describe your life before you set out on your round-the-world journey?

Here's a short rundown. Anything else, please just ask specific questions.

Joined the Army at age 21, serving for 9 years. I was the regimental climbing instructor and led a team of 10 novices to the top of Europe's highest mountain, Mont Blanc in 1986 – to celebrate the regiment's centenary year.

After leaving the Army I bummed about for a while, working as an outdoor pursuits instructor.

I then worked in IT for many years, even running my own PC build and support business from home alongside my regular day job.

With my friend Tony Vangrove, we set up West Yorkshires largest MTB club, The West Yorkshire Rough Riders. I was also involved in road racing and time trialling, with a liking for extreme endurance events. When I had to step away from competition in 2005 due to prostate cancer, I became a cycle coach and trainer, both in the UK and also leading groups in the Alps/Pyrenees for events such as The Marmot and Etape du Tour.

Along with my late wife and with the (initial) help of British Cycling Yorkshire, we organised a cycle sportive – The White Rose Classic. Because of its hilly (aka hard!) nature, it quickly gained a good reputation amongst Britain's burgeoning sportive riders. After a disagreement over funds going to charity and BC deciding to drop support for the event, we ran our own version, renamed The White Rose Challenge to raise money for cancer charities.

It was about at this time I also began my hobby as a cycling photographer, which got me into mainstream sports photography. When I was made redundant in 2008 (because I was taking time off for both my own and my wife's cancer) I made the decision to try becoming a full time professional photographer. I succeeded, even winning awards for my photography, that is until my breakdown when my wife died late 2009 and slowly I let the business go.

2. From reading your blog posts regarding your past - there appear to be many points in your life at which you have been at your lowest ebb. What is it, do you think, that drove you onward in search of something better, when many others would have faltered and given up?

I had a very difficult childhood, being one of 9 children whose father left when I was very young. I was brought up in care, abused by those who should have protected me

and told many times I would be a failure. I grew up tough, because I had to not only survive the abuse, the bullying and the illnesses, but also the not knowing (or ever seeing) many of my siblings. You have to be tough to endure that.

3. Numerous times, your blog mentions being told that your cancer was terminal, was a liberating moment for you - can you explain and expand upon that?

It goes back to my early years, when I was told many times I could not do something. I liked to prove people wrong, especially the doctors and I succeeded in doing so on many occasions. They told me and my late wife (in 2009) we had 12 to 18 months to spend together, when her cancer was diagnosed as terminal. She died just 9 short weeks later. I appreciate how difficult it is for doctors in this situation, I really do, but I'd much rather that no time line is given, because each person is different. Caroline fought like a tiger to beat her (breast) cancer in 2007, but when it returned in 2009 she simply gave up. I have never given up; I guess that goes back to my childhood. So being told I had terminal cancer, I was determined to prove them wrong again. I had no idea how this would work, but was determined to make the most of any time given to me.

But that's not the whole story. I had severe depression prior to starting out on the bike trip. I had tried to commit suicide and could not have been at a lower point in my life. Being told I was terminally ill simply pushed me into action. Deciding to cycle (as far as I could) around the world was an instantaneous decision and helped me with my depression.

4. What were your finances like upon leaving the UK? How long did you think you'd be on the road? Was there a definitive plan, per-se? Or (given your diagnosis at the time), was it a more... open-ended journey?

It was always about seeing if I could stretch my very meagre resources for as long as possible. I set out (November 2012) with just £5,000 in my bank account. I figured this would last me two years, so my target was to live that long. I had calculated a daily budget of just \$5 and to be fair, because I was mostly wild camping and being very frugal, I was on target until I started needing visas.

When you take out of that amount the cost of visas, plane travel and having to replace my passport (when stolen in Africa) and return back to the UK, it was never going to work out without a little help. I got the idea of putting a donation button on my blog a year later after the accident in the Pamir Mountains, when my bike and every piece of luggage was destroyed and I thought my trip was over. I received donations and Surly Bikes very kindly replaced my touring bike, without which I could not have continued.

Many people think my asking for donations netted me large amounts of money, it didn't. My asking for just \$5 to help me continue another day did just that, enabled me to keep going from these small donations. I genuinely lived off just \$5 a day and my current bank balance is almost zero.

5. You have seen much of the world from the saddle of your bicycle. What can you say about travelling by bicycle?

I had (previously) seen much of the world from vehicles and aeroplanes, but you just can't compare them. Travelling by bicycle you have the time to interact with your surroundings, the amazing landscapes and even more amazing people. Cycling the world has opened my eyes, to the beauty of this wonderful planet. I can say without any fear of contradiction that there is no better way of seeing it, as walking takes too long. People all over the world love cyclists, you will always find a welcome if you take the time to interact with the locals. And lastly, there is a unique special bond between many touring cyclists.

6. Speaking of seeing much of the world, can you recall some of your best (and worst) moments?

The best is a hard one, because there are so many special moments. I think this one is up there amongst the best though:

The poorest people in the poorest countries are amazing, none more so than Senegal in Africa. At the end of a long day I was about to pitch my tent in a bush area when some kids (and eventually) their mother motioned to me not to stay there. Running their finger across their throats it became clear that if I did, I'd run the risk of being caught by local bandits. So I followed them to their village and pitched my tent in the middle of a fenced-off area for animals — the villagers' huts surrounding it. If it wasn't for their determination and insistence that I slept in their village, I would probably have been killed or seriously injured. I shared the contents of my bag (fruit – dates and oranges) and they brought me bread and milk. People like them have helped me “change my priorities”.

The worst has to be my second accident in Rimouski, Canada, mostly because even before the accident I was pretty ill and genuinely thought my trip was nearing its end. I descended into another bout of severe depression, despite my outward appearances. The dislocated shoulder on top of my breathing problems made things very difficult for me.

7. Given your condition when you began your ride, what can you tell me about how you felt yourself getting stronger, fitter, faster, *healthier* over time?

When I started the trip, I was carrying a lot of 'residual' fitness into it. My daily mileages (as much as 125 miles - 200 km's) were high and once my leg muscles got used to the additional weight, I certainly got stronger and fitter. I'd say for the first year I was keeping my illness at bay and to be honest never really thought about having cancer, as I was more focussed on dealing with my depression and talking about it with others. This helped me tremendously and I know it helped many people I shared with. I think by the time I had my first accident in the Pamir Mountains the decline had already begun, as daily mileages were taking much longer to accomplish and my fitness was deteriorating noticeably, but I'm really stubborn and so just rode for longer - some days it took me 12 hours to cycle 60 miles (100 km's).

8. What can you tell me regarding your increase in mental strength over your cycling journey? How did your state of mental well-being improve over time?

That's a really difficult question, because many people with mental health problems are so good at hiding it. I'm no different. I would try and stay positive when writing my blog, but inside I really struggled to cope. Occasionally I would give glimpses of my turmoil (in the blog), but this is incredibly hard to write about. I found relief in talking to other sufferers and this gave me not only comfort, but additional strength. The bike trip was about coming to terms with my demons and to a certain extent I succeeded, but depression doesn't just go away. What changed is that I no longer wanted to die. One thing is for sure, on a solo round the world bike trip, you have lots of time to think. This helped me to sort myself out.

9. Your round-the-world journey was unfortunately cut short by injury due to a crash - what can you tell me about the day of the crash, how did you feel after it happened (once you'd had time to get over the initial shock, and reflect upon it)?

I was cycling just outside of Rimouski on the final downhill into the town. It's not a particular steep downhill, but it is long and with my loaded up touring bike I was going at a fair old speed when my front tire just exploded. I was thrown off the bike and skidded along the road for some time, the bike also ploughing into me. I knew it was serious as my left arm was in an impossible position - dislocated. I also had severe facial injuries. I have never experienced pain like this (and I have previously broken my hip!) and think I passed out. I lay at the side of the road trying to signal vehicles with my good arm, but it seemed like ages before someone finally stopped. The ambulance crew could not give me anything for the pain and I remember feeling I just wish I had been killed outright. I felt this way afterwards too for quite a long time.

10. I understand that following your crash, you were somewhat ferried around to many different hospitals, hospices and healthcare centres due to not having Canadian medical coverage (because it was refused you due to your pre-existing

condition) is that correct? What can you tell me about the aftermath of your crash?

I don't really know what the problem was, but yes, I was treated (or actually not treated) pretty shabbily by the hospital. They tried to put me into a shelter (for drug and alcohol addicts) the first night, despite me asking them to let me stay in the hospital. Apart from anything else I'd had a serious head injury, but they just wanted to get rid of me. The shelter initially accepted me, then when realising the extent of my injuries sent me back to the hospital. Then my friend Jean got involved; contacted the media and suddenly I was being treated like a celebrity - I felt embarrassed. Thereafter I can honestly say things couldn't have been nicer and I'm really grateful for everything they did for me. Jack - I don't want this writing up so that it looks like I'm complaining, because I'm not. It was my fault I didn't have medical cover or the means to pay for treatment.

One thing that has to be mentioned though, and that is the guys (and girls) at the local bike shop - Velo Plein Air in Rimouski. Not only did they fix up my bike, but they (and in particular Jean Madore) looked after me. Their kindness kept me from totally falling apart, I owe them so much more than my insufficient gratitude. Please ensure this is reported.

**11. How did it feel to be returning to England for treatment? Did you feel as though England was a country you'd not see again - if so how did it feel to return?**

I had never expected to return to England again. Partly because I genuinely believed I would die while on my journey, but also because I had done my best to try and come to terms with all the tragedy I'd suffered while living there. When it became clear I would have to return I was glad though, because I love my home county of Yorkshire, (it rivals anywhere else in the world for beauty) and I could finally find out what stage my illness was at. By this time I knew I was feeling better, but had no idea how or why.

**12. After running numerous tests, what did the doctors discover about your cancer? How did they explain that to you?**

I made two trips back to England. On the first I had blood work and scans. I was asked to return because the clinic thought they had made a mistake. The second series of tests confirmed what was found in the first, that there was no sign of lung cancer. The doctors have no explanation for this, although a few theories have been discussed. All I know is that when I first met Hilke in Canada, shortly after the accident in Rimouski, I couldn't breathe very well and we both felt I didn't have much time left. Truth is, I was not in a good place and was seriously considering suicide and discussed this with Hilke. To cut a long story short, I fell head over heels in love with her and she gave me back a reason to

live.

13. Describe the feeling of being told that your lung cancer had disappeared, and that your prostate cancer had become non-life threatening.

I already knew, before I was told the news. I know my own body intimately and realised my breathing was significantly improving. But something even more dramatic had happened. Myself and my wife Caroline had been trying to have children, but after my treatment (for prostate cancer) in 2005 I was infertile. Knowing I couldn't have children, there was no reason to use contraception since, so I never have. Now I'm soon to be a father, to a daughter, and for me this is the true miracle.

14. You appear to have a new lease of life, given what is frankly remarkable news and have now seemingly settled in Holland. Tell me how that all transpired.

I met a beautiful German girl in a hostel in Canada. We talked, and then talked some more. Along with another girl, we decided to share a car and explore the Cabot Trail, but on one of the walks my breathing was so poor I had to stay behind in the car. Later we visited some friends and family in Toronto and then we parted ways, not knowing if we would meet again. I had really fallen for Hilke, so decided I would follow her back to her home in The Netherlands. When she met me off the ferry, we both realised we wanted to be together. For both of us, it was a very merry Christmas (2014), our first genuinely happy Christmas for many years.

15. What is next for you?

My daughter will be born at the end of August. We are looking forward to getting back and doing some touring as soon as we safely can. I think we'll start with Scandinavia, even though our dreams take us much further afield. We both love cycling and because our daughter will be starting (very) young, hope she will too.

If you read my blog, you will find the following entry that I wrote in February 2014:

"I have absolutely no idea how much longer God will allow me to wander on this earth. I have tried to make my peace with him. Do you know the only thing I have ever asked him for? To take me instead of Caroline, my late wife. I now ask him for something else, because for the first time in my life I truly believe I will be able to accept it and not corrupt it. And now I am being selfish, because what I want is for myself, to prove I'm deserving of it, capable of nurturing it.

I want to know love one last time”.

I never in my wildest dreams expected this prayer to be answered. That it has, has not only restored my life, but my faith. While I still have to work hard to keep my depression from surfacing, I am truly happy.

I’m trying to find work, either building websites and doing IT, or with my photography. Hilke speaks many languages, so we are also offering our services as translators. It’s hard, because I’m starting from scratch. I’m also exploring the possibility of becoming a cycle guide once more. And finally, I’m working on my book, which will tell of not just my bike trip, but my whole life story.