



The Cyclist's Vehicle

www.edmontonbicyclecommuters.ca

780-433-Bike (2453)

Edmonton Bicycle Commuters' mission is to promote and facilitate cycling as everyday transportation to Edmontonians by providing bicycle services and resources.

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Phyllis Blackplume

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Cycling As Empowerment for one Downtown Resident by Liliana Lupse

The following story is excerpted with permission from the author. This story appears in the October-November 2003 issue of "The Downtown Spirit", the newsletter of the Downtown Edmonton Community Association (DECA). This story has been edited for newsletter size.

As Phyllis Blackplume cycles up to the coffee shop and immediately makes eye contact with me upon entering it, my instant impression of her is that she's friendly. Although she's lived

downtown since 1997, our paths have never crossed-until now, that is. She smiles at me while she walks towards me and I find myself looking forward to meeting her. During our hour-long interview, my admiration of Phyllis grows with each passing minute. Phyllis (in her mid thirties) is one of those rare individuals who sets extraordinary goals for herself and then proceeds to actually accomplish them.

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Phyllis is in this picture, we just can't find her!

Seriously, from left to right is David Parker, Chris Chypyha, Gerry Paschen, Bill Sellars and Phyllis Blackplume

Photo by Courtney Parker

Baby it's cold outside... Towing Children in Cooler Weather

The new mother in me said "ooh, isn't it too cold for the little ones in bike trailers?" and the seasoned cyclist in me said "we can tow them, yes we can!". I'm an all weather commuter cyclist and now a mom of two 11 month old girls, Camilla and Rory. I cycled during my pregnancy until I no longer fit between my gear shifts and the seat. I started cycling with Rory and Camilla as soon as they were big enough to fit the 5 point harness, at about 7 1/2 months. I road slowly and carefully back then so that their little bodies didn't incur shock. Now I ride just as carefully, with a wee bit more speed. Most of the time my girls fall asleep for the ride.

With the cold weather approaching, I've been thinking about keeping my kids happy in cool and cold weather. I've asked four experienced cyclists about how they commute with kids in tow. I thought I'd share some of their delightful, inspiring and helpful advice.

In the end, how you choose to transport you and your kid/s is your decision. Even if you have no intention of cycling in cool and cold weather, hopefully the following will show you that choosing modes of transportation other than a car can be possible and rewarding. I hope to show my kids that by cycling, walking and taking the bus, we can meet and greet our neighbours, keep fit, and lessen our impact on the environment.

If you want more information, contact the Edmonton Bicycle Commuters' Society (EBC) at 433 2453 (433 bike). Courses in towing a trailer are available.

Below are comments from four seasoned (excuse the pun) cyclists.

Wendy Allsopp (WA): I've been cycling for most of my life and as an intentional bicycle commuter for 12 years. Luke is 19 months and Anna is 6. **Roberta Franchuk (RF)** I've been a serious transportation cyclist since 1990. Children, Inka, age 4, and Astrid, who was born last summer. We have been car-free since 1995 and still do not have regular access to a vehicle.

Daryl Richel (DR): Owen is now 3 and we've been riding with him since he was just under one year old. I've been riding to work pretty much every day for the last 15 years.

Michael Kalmanovitch (MK): I've been riding as a

commuter since 1981. Timothy is 9.

When did you start to tow your children?

(RF)

I took Astrid in her car seat in the trailer on occasion when she was about 6 months old. This only worked if Inka wasn't with us as they both didn't fit. Astrid liked the ride and usually fell asleep. Now at age 1 she's less happy to ride alone because she tends to topple over unless I wedge her in. Inka has been riding with me since she was 18 months old, when we acquired our trailer. I will ride with them until they don't fit or I can't pull them, whichever comes first.

(MK)

Due to my parenting arrangements I believe Timothy was about 9 months old before I put him in a trailer. We used busses, foot power and the occasional car to get around.

Why do you tow your children?

(WA)

I ride in cool weather for same reasons I ride in other weather. I love to ride, Luke loves to ride in trailer, I get exercise, we save the family money and so we can buy good organic food, vs. the bus we have more flexibility in terms of when we leave (although we are seldom late when we take the bus!) and what route we take and what stops we make. I see now that trailer riding also teaches children riding and traffic skills for later.

(RF)

I cycle with my kids because that's how we get around. It's faster than walking, more convenient and cheaper than the bus, easier on the environment, and better exercise than anything. We continue in the winter for the same reasons - in fact, for many of our destinations, it's still faster and warmer to cycle in the winter than to take the bus or walk! Because we live in a central community, I am able to carry out most of my errands on a bike, with kids. We go to preschool and our co-operative daycare; buy groceries; go to lessons; go to the doctor, health unit, library, bank, offices; visit family; and do our other shopping and errands.

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Having grown up in the outdoors, Phyllis does a lot of walking and basically cycles everywhere year round (yup, including wintertime). She describes herself as an 'avid cyclist' and has actively been involved with the Edmonton Bicycle Commuters (EBC) Society. "A friend of mine told me about EBC and I knew a bit about bikes, so I thought I could go and give my services to them. As time went by, I just got more involved," she says meaning that for the past 2 years she's also been sitting on the Board of Directors as a 'Member at Large'.

Phyllis happily elaborates on the EBC, proudly stating that it offers an open atmosphere wherein everyone is welcome: "When I first joined, the service was great, the atmosphere was great, and I just felt at home there."

Initially located downtown, the EBC currently resides on Edmonton's south side at 10047-80 Avenue (having an alley entrance). Besides offering a bicycle repair shop called 'BikeWorks' (a community workshop where people are encouraged to come in and learn how to fix their own bikes), they also provide qualified mechanics to assist beginners, any necessary tools, pamphlets detailing step-by-step how-to's, as well as specializing in a large inventory of used bicycle parts, both new and used, for sale. As the Society's hours vary throughout summer and winter, it's best to phone ahead, (780) 433-bike (2453), before venturing down; Phyllis assures me that they would gladly answer any and all questions about their services and prices, including annual membership fees.

As we talked about her extensive interest in bicycling, it intrigued me to hear that while riding her bike, Phyllis talks to it saying, "I hope you get me from point A to point B." Having a sense of humour about her, we chuckled together about this for a while, the mood between us light. Of course, after eventually learning about her recent biking 'expedition' from Edmonton to Fort McMurray (for truly that's what it was), I started to understand just how deep her connection to her bike was.

In February 2003, Phyllis and four others undertook an incredible feat of endurance, willpower, physical strength, and sheer determination: They decided to participate in the annual Muffaloose Winter Ride taking place from Fort McMurray to Fort Chipewyan (they'd chosen to bicycle the 100km distance from

the options of 25km, 50km, 75km, or 100km). If that wasn't impressive enough, they also decided to bicycle to Fort McMurray (a 650km bike ride from Edmonton), before venturing from there in the Muffaloose Winter Ride.

To get to the Muffaloose, Phyllis tells me that each day they cycled 8 hours, accomplishing an incredible 100km per day! At night, they pooled their resources and all shared a room at the nearest inn and would plan out their route for the next day, only to wake up and do it all over again...this continued for 6 days. Each morning, the five would have an early start, after having first eaten a healthy breakfast with "lots and lots of oatmeal, granola bars, fruit, nuts and water." Often times throughout the day, they would stop and share their water with each other since "water was hard to come by."

They easily fell into a pattern that consisted of whomever was in the lead doubling back to make sure everyone was ok; all five alternated doing this throughout their trip. "We bonded very well...I got a lot of encouragement from them. A lot of support," says Phyllis.

Now, just to refresh your memory, at this particular time of year that the group went on this bicycle trek, the temperature was averaging -30C, with the windshield factor easily making it -40C on the road. "We didn't realize how cold it was. We just said, 'OK, let's just get on our bikes and go.'...On the road, we lost contact with the media, so we couldn't have known just how cold the temperature had gotten."

Freezing temperatures aside, weren't they physically exhausted? "Physical exhaustion didn't really factor in. The main thing was to keep going...even though I was cold towards the end of the bike trip, towards the last 10km or so, I would get off my bike and start walking. The only thing that was really cold for me were my toes, so I'd get off my bike and walk my bike until I'd get the circulation going back in my toes and then I'd get back on the bike."

"The main thing was not to stop for too long because your body temperatures drops and then it's really hard to get it back up again once that happens." What kept her motivated to do this and to not just stop? "For me, my mindset was just to get from point A to point B and to visualize me already being there." I was starting to realize.

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That this was a personal mantra of Phyllis'...one that obviously served her quite well!

She acknowledges having been both emotionally and physically tired, but maintains that she still felt great! Cycling, she says, calms her mind and empowers her motivation to accomplish other things. "I let my mind float," she says. "I sing a song". She laughs when I ask if she sings out loud or in her head: "Out loud. We're all singing out loud."

At times, she recalls not being able to see her fellow cyclists on the road and "I panicked, thinking, 'What if I got really cold and started to hyperventilate and nobody would stop to pick me up.'" But she never allowed herself to dwell on this, always refocusing her mind on envisioning herself already at the next pit stop. "All I kept thinking was pedal...that's all I kept thinking: Just pedal." If people stopped to ask her what she was doing out there, she'd jokingly reply, "We're cycling to Fort Chipewyan: All the hotels in Jamaica are full, so we decided to go up North."

Okay, so I had to ask: What was the purpose of such a physically exerting trip? "It was just a challenge," she says, as if she didn't think anything of it. I'd soon discover that Phyllis regularly embarks on trips for her own sense of accomplishment. "It's just a nice way of just seeing what it feels like to cycle for a long period of time." Only a true cyclist would actually say that! "And when I was out on the road, on the Athabasca River...I was all by myself at this point...and the sun was coming down, and it was getting pretty dark, and the wind was blowing across the lake," Phyllis recalls, "...at this point, I thought, 'Oh my God, I couldn't believe I did this...like, I just couldn't believe I just did this!' It was so surreal!"

I was amazed to hear that she didn't even need to train for such a trip, given that she cycles year round. When questioned, she attests her good physical shape to eating a healthy diet that "keeps me going." For Phyllis, this means being a vegetarian (which she has been for the last 6 years). Not surprisingly, Phyllis also sits on the board of 'Vegetarians of Alberta' (780-988-2713).

The interview was drawing to a close and I had one last question to ask: Having just listened to Phyllis'

that she had every reason to do just that). After some thought, she shrugs abashedly and finally settles on "being spontaneous and having a sense of adventure." 'Besides also being in incredible shape,' I wanted to add, but didn't, knowing that my compliment would only serve to embarrass the humble person that she's revealed herself to be.

So what is next for her? It didn't surprise me to hear that each Thanksgiving Phyllis celebrates her blessings by taking in Alberta's magnificent views from the comfort of her bicycle seat (a tradition, you might say, that she'd started 2 years ago). Throughout this day-long bicycle trip, just as on any other trip, you'll find her also repeating her own personal mantra to her trusted bike: "I hope you get me from point A to point B." Something tells me that Phyllis will get to any destination she sets for herself in her life. Happy cycling, Phyllis!

Editor's Note:

To get in touch with DECA, you can email them at deca@compusmart.ab.ca or call 425-1432. DECA is now a bona fide community league of the downtown area. They are located at #421 10113 104 Street (The Birks Building).

They host many downtown events for those EBC members who reside in the downtown area.

Message from Molly Turnbull

I've changed titles from president to past president. I'm looking forward to seeing what exciting ways I can donate my time to EBC while juggling the needs of my two one-year-old girls. I'll be writing a summary of my term as president for the next CV. My sincerest thanks to all the wonderful, exuberant and talented volunteers, who have made my term as president so rewarding.

Molly Turnbull
Past President



