

Daisy Trail Cycle

Dave Goodey

dmgoodey@yahoo.com

Dave Goodey's wife Emma died in 2013. Two years later Dave decided to take on a challenge in her memory – he would ride across Europe on a tandem bicycle raising funds for several charities which had meant something to himself and Emma. In this article he reflects on his journey, which became both a tribute to Emma and a symbol of the struggles he faced as he journeyed through grief.

I lost my wife, Emma – my best friend and the love of my life two years ago. A beautiful woman who fought cancer bravely not once but three times, Emma's courage, positive outlook and determination as the illness changed our lives was truly inspiring. When her initial diagnosis robbed her of her career as a commercial pilot, she found another path and followed that with passion and drive to eventually open her own shop. In between treatments and whilst in remission she also studied interior design at college and ran the Berlin marathon.

Emma's battle from her initial diagnosis to our final farewell kiss was over five years. I wasn't prepared for the depth of my grief once she was gone. Initially I tried to keep myself busy – and that wasn't hard. As well as my own job, I was still overseeing the running of Emma's shop along with a few other projects. Life was hurtling onwards and even though I had little time to dwell on my loss, it wasn't until I got in touch with Cruse Bereavement Care that my recovery and ability to find a way out of the bewildering drudgery and darkness of grief began.

I'd already completed a number of fundraising challenges in the past including climbing Mount Kenya in Africa, Mount Fuji in Japan and had run three marathons (the Berlin with Emma), so I felt it was important for me to do something special that would not only raise money, but would also be significant. I wanted something positive to come out of losing Emma, a fitting tribute to her as well as something that represented the feelings of loss, loneliness and struggles after bereavement and symbolised the journey I've been on since her death.

The challenge takes shape

The idea for my challenge quickly evolved. Daisies had represented a personal symbol of our love, childhood memories and the coincidences that bound us together. They would also have been the theme of our wedding – we were both going to ride to the reception on a 'bicycle made for two', as in the song 'Daisy, Daisy' but due to Emma's failing health, our original church



Dave and Emma

wedding couldn't take place. The island of Hvar, Croatia was one of Emma's favourite places – we enjoyed many happy holidays there so I knew that would be my starting point for my challenge. It only made sense to link it to her other favourite place, her shop, Unique Chique, in Alton, Hampshire. It was then that I decided to cycle between the two. By embarking on this journey on a tandem, I felt as if I was completing her wish.

I worked out a rough route (1,500 miles), how long it would take and started to make plans including taking a sabbatical from my job. Our beloved dog Lotte, a working cocker spaniel, has been a constant and faithful companion since Emma's death; she's lifted my spirits in the darkest hours so it was important that she accompany me too. A local blacksmith made a bespoke, handmade basket that could be attached to the tandem to keep Lotte safe while I cycled. Along with Cruse, who have provided support, I chose a few children's charities that Emma had supported in the past.

I already knew the name would be related to daisies, then a friend sent me a picture they'd made for my website which showed a trail of daisies behind a tandem and the idea to plant daisies as an everlasting trail along the route and the name 'Daisy Trail Cycle' was born. Not only would this create a beautiful, living tribute to Emma, but it would leave behind a symbol of hope and unity for all the children that the charities would go on to help.

The journey begins

And symbolic it was – the journey was hard both emotionally and physically with as many ups and downs as you experience with

bereavement. The months running up to the start of the trip were busy and the journey to the starting point in Croatia was an epic two-day drive with only minimal rest and small breaks along the way. As we turned down the winding road into Split Harbour to catch the ferry to Hvar Island, I was hit with a wave of emotion that was simply incapacitating. Not only déjà vu, having made the same route with Emma many times over the years, but the realisation that my fundraising challenge was about to begin.

I had envisaged morning cycles, easily achieving up to 50 miles a day and spending afternoons and evenings catching up online, posting progress and relaxing a little. It didn't quite work out like that. A terrific thunderstorm on day 1 delayed our start – (I like to think it was Emma's way of ensuring I had a little more time to prepare and enjoy Hvar Island – she always hated leaving it). Once we got going, full of enthusiasm and energy, we made great progress and full of confidence decided to make up lost time by avoiding the longer coastal path into and through Slovenia, but taking a shorter route across the mountains. ... The climb took two days and hours of continuous cycling up hill on the Tandem in the lowest gear, my legs were really suffering and I needed an extra day's rest to recover.

We made good progress eventually through Slovenia and Italy, but setting up each day and then packing up camp every morning ate into time that was supposed to be spent cycling. Navigational technology didn't quite work as it was supposed to; punctures, flat batteries, unscheduled visits to the vet, fallen trees and even a landslide on the mountain paths in the French Alps were all misfortunes that meant delays. Of course, none of these hiccups were insurmountable – we navigated using paper maps and the mountains to help back up the failing technology, tyres were changed and batteries recharged, vets were helpful and squeezed us in, the tree missed the tent and as for the landslide – rather than endure a 10 hour detour on the bike, we managed to get a local boat skipper to take Lotte, the tandem and I on a boat around the landslide on a mountain lake. We laughed where we could at the problems, but as the weeks ticked by, my arrival date slipped and I was feeling the pressure to finish.

The roads varied from heavy traffic in busy towns and cities, to scenic coastal paths and quiet country roads. There were days, particularly in the final few weeks, where I was pedaling mainly on my own (or when it was safe to, with Lotte on the back).

Ups and downs

Family and friends that joined me at points along the route to give a helping hand and a much needed boost in a similar way to how they supported me during the uphill struggles and the unbearable pain that follows bereavement. My neighbour Charlie accompanied me pretty much the entire journey, driving the support van. He had only planned to do a few weeks but we became firm friends and after flying back to the UK from Italy, he returned a week later to finish the journey with me.

As friends and family came and went, there were ups and downs in both the literal and emotional sense. Steep hill

cycles drained every ounce of my energy. Late nights cycling in darkness then trying to rustle up a meal by torchlight or finding the campsite showers had no hot water were little things that chipped away at the spirit from time to time. The weather varied from searing heat to driving rain that soaked our clothes, bedding and tents. From thunderstorms, harsh winds, snow and ice to azure blue skies, gentle breezes and cooling swims in the Adriatic. – the weather definitely defined the mood.

Making memories

During a radio interview at the start of the journey I was asked if I felt Emma was with me. At that very moment a beautiful butterfly landed next to my hand and I knew the answer. From the wildlife I met along the quiet roads, the mountain daisies that bobbed in the wind as I struggled up steep inclines, the bees humming along the river banks or the birdsong in the morning, I felt that Emma was with us all the way – laughing at our mishaps and mistakes, guiding us through the city traffic and leading us through the narrow mountain passes.

There were so many special moments that lifted my spirits. The warmth of strangers along the route – like the tearful hug from the Italian cyclist who stopped to ask what I was doing, to pure joy and the gleeful response from children given their little packs of daisy seeds to plant. Poignant moments like visiting Normandy Beach and remembering the soldiers who never



Dave and Lotte *en route*: mountains and memories

made it home. Sitting on the banks of the river Loire watching the sun come up and feeling at peace, if only for a while before getting back on the bike.

Back home, thanks to a team of digital cheerleaders, support for the fundraising was incredible. Daily updates were posted on the blog, website, facebook and twitter, and we dedicated various cycling days to friends and strangers who had lost loved ones. We even attracted the attention of 'Chatty Man' Alan Carr, who broadcast the story to his twitter followers, and then made a generous personal donation. Lotte gained her own fan club, with followers anxious for the photos, videos and updates. The team at home even made a range of daisy-themed dog bandanas to help boost fundraising efforts.

The whole experience was exhausting, exhilarating and at times, overwhelming. I have been moved by the comments and messages people sent, touched by strangers reaching out to share their stories of bereavement, humbled by the generosity that helped us achieve the cycle and raise over £12,000 in those six weeks and so very grateful for the help and support I received. Arriving home, accompanied for the final few miles by a small flash mob of local cyclists and to a large cheering crowd of friends and family outside Emma's shop was a great way to finish the cycle.

Journeys, healing and closure

It took me several weeks to recover from the challenge. Away from everyday life for 44 days and having cycled over 1500 miles, crossing five countries and pushing my body to its physical limits, I needed time to recover mentally, physically and emotionally. The journey of grief that had been so private before the cycle had been opened up for the world to hear about and I wanted a little time alone again to rest, recover and catch up and do an emotional reset to find out where I was in my personal bereavement.

Before the journey began, as well as wanting to raise money and remember Emma in a special way, I felt it might mean that my bereavement journey was moving along to some kind of conclusion. With the help of my Cruse volunteer Marion, and talking to others who have experienced bereavement, something I have come to understand is that there isn't 'an end' – I am still healing and rebuilding. It was difficult not to want to impose time limits on myself, feeling that each anniversary (today would have been our second wedding anniversary), special date or event would make me feel differently, and then feeling slightly disappointed that it didn't. I looked for closure, but that's not really the right word. Closure implies end, and it never will. It will just get easier until I can remember Emma more with happy memories rather than the terrible ache of missing her.

The final post on my blog during my trip showed a picture that I could not look at for at least a year following Emma's death.



Emma's goodbye to Lotte

My Cruse volunteer Marion told me that when I was able to look at all my old pictures of Emma and not get too upset, I would be on the way to some sense of normality (in bereavement terms). I still shed a tear when I look at this picture as it was such a difficult and final moment in all of our lives. Emma adored Lotte, just as I adore her today. I sneaked Lotte through the hospital and into Emma's hospital room (although the ward sister knew already) so that Emma could say goodbye. This was Emma's and Lotte's final farewell before Emma passed away a few days later. At least now I can look at the picture, which is progress ... and eventually my tears of sadness will be replaced by tears of happiness and loving memories.

Future challenges

Now that my muscles no longer ache, I feel rested and continue to make progress. I try to focus on my good days and just accept my bad. I am already thinking about what fundraising challenges I still want to do. These are not distractions – I have always enjoyed physical challenges and fundraising. However, I don't feel my daisy trail cycle journey is quite finished. Emma's final resting spot is at another of her favourite places – Loch Rannoch in Scotland where she wanted her ashes to be scattered, and there is now a special daisy bench in her memory overlooking the Loch. Later this year I plan to take a week or so to finish the final leg of my journey by cycling to Emma's bench at Loch Rannoch. Daisy the tandem cycle will be wheeled back out again to help Lotte and I raise more money for charity and finish the final chapter in our journey. What started as a story of love and loss has turned into a tale of human (and canine) endeavour, and optimism for the future.

To donate or see Dave's journey, pictures and blogs, please visit his website: www.daisytrailcycle.com ■