



**Lon Blais will pedal across America for Alzheimer's disease.**

## Pay it Forward: Big Journey for the Big '5-0'

For Lon Blais' half-century birthday, a mere cake or party wouldn't do. Past birthdays have been without ceremony, but to mark the "big 5-0," Blais wanted to think big, do big—and give big.

So in the spirit of this milestone, Blais, a former teacher who hit 50 on June 28, has planned a year of adventures—what he calls the "stuff I gotta do before I die list." He intends to skydive, conduct a local drum and bugle corps, pose for muscle-man photos—and he will attempt his biggest feat of all: a 3,000-mile bicycle trip from his home in Bayside, NY to Santa Monica, CA.

The ride is more than just a present to himself; it is also a gift for the greater good, specifically to remember his father, Bob Blais, and others who had or have Alzheimer's disease. Blais plans to use his ambitious jaunt across America, titled "Lest We Forget," to educate the public about Alzheimer's disease and to raise funds to support care-related programs and services. He has chosen to donate contributions to the Alzheimer's Foundation of America (AFA).

Blais is among a growing number of do-gooders who are embarking on thrilling acts for philanthropic causes.

At first, Blais said that the ride was solely a challenge to himself, but then he envisioned the bigger picture.

"If I were going to be Don Quixote, I needed my Aldonza—my Holy Grail, my vision quest," he wrote in his Internet journal. "Almost without thinking, my mind went to an act of chivalry—a conquest in the name of someone, in honor of someone worthy of service. I thought of my dad..."

Growing up as a child of divorced parents, Blais barely knew his father, an auto shop teacher in Massachusetts. Soon after Blais was reunited with him—and discovered how much they were alike, his father suffered a massive stroke. He was later diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease and passed away in 2006.

Blais will start his journey on August 31 and, enduring an average 85 to 90 miles a day, six days a week, will end, at best, on October 11.

In preparation, he has been doing weight training and biking 60 miles every other day. He's been asking friends to connect him with their friends, relatives, etc. nationwide to house him, feed him, escort him and even ride with him for the day—as well as to donate to the cause.

Thanks to generous hosts, his overnight stays will include a former student's fraternity house at Muhlenberg College in Allentown, PA, a goat farm near McPherson, KS, a fire house in Bayfield, CO, and some Hampton Inn franchises. Just recently, "a friend of a friend with a truck" offered to accompany him on the last quarter stretch, from Durango, CO.

"He just wanted to be part of it," the *New Yorker* said. "It's starting to snowball."

"Any time I tell anyone about what I'm doing, they end up talking about a relative or friend with Alzheimer's disease," Blais said. "I knew how pervasive it was, but I have come to realize that it is only two or three degrees of separation from anyone."

**DETAILS:** <http://myspectaqlaryr.livejournal.com>

— CAROL STEINBERG