

# Headwinds, road kill and small town America: The Lus' cross-continental adventure in family cycling

By **Esaúl Sánchez**

"When someone invites you to bike from California to Washington, D.C., it sounds like a great idea," says chemistry professor Ponzy Lu. "Then, the day before you leave, you think it is a dumb thing to do."

But second thoughts didn't keep Lu and his daughter Kristina (C'97) from joining two other father-daughter pairs on a cross-country cycling trek that began on Mother's Day and ended on Father's Day.

The idea of biking 3,200 miles was bounced about by David Eisenberg, a molecular biologist from UCLA, who had given a talk at Penn last year. He was strolling with Lu when he noticed Lu's customized bicycle. As they talked bicycle shop, Kristina came by with her customized bicycle. Eisenberg asked if the Lus were interested in joining him, his daughter Nell, scientist Michael Kuehl from the National Institute of Health and his daughter Sarah in a Pacific-to-Atlantic cycle trip.

"You don't meet crazy people like that every day, so you have to seize the moment," Ponzy says.

"I thought it was a great idea from the beginning," says Kristina. "It was a challenge and an opportunity to see the country at a slower pace than driving

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small family, the six of us...*

—*Kristina Lu*

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from one state to the other."

Yet desire alone was not going to be enough to undertake a physical challenge such as this one. "We knew that the commitment was not just for the ride, but also to get ourselves into shape." Ponzy says. "This trip would require that we averaged 100 miles a day biking at 15 miles an hour. It was going to take us at least a month of

training to ride that much comfortably."

Patricia Schindler, a semi-professional cyclist and the assistant director of external relations for the College, gave the Lus some hints on what to eat, how to survive the trip and how to train.

The Lus started training in January. "We made sure we rode at least three long trips a week. We did a fast hard ride on Saturdays, using our heaviest steel mountain bikes," Ponzy says. By the end of the spring, "we biked three hours on Saturdays, five on Sundays and added 15 to 20 miles during the week."

On Mother's Day, the Lus, Eisenbergs and Kuehls began their trek from the pier in Santa Monica, Calif. A van with first-aid gear, spare bicycle parts and luggage followed closely behind the bikers the whole trip. Heidi Fahl, Ponzy's wife and Kristina's mother, was there for the first three days before heading home.

"The first three days were physically the hardest," Ponzy says. "We climbed 5,000 feet on the first and 5,000 more on the third day. Once we had done that, the rest seemed easy. It was just a matter of doing it."

Four days into the trip, a double-trailer earth-moving truck blew Kristina off the road in Glendale, Nev. She fell off the bicycle and cut her left eyebrow.

The accompanying van took her to the closest clinic, where medics closed the wound with stitches. A few hours later,



Photograph by Dwight Luckey

***Ponzy and Kristina Lu rode 3,200 miles in five weeks***

the Lus jumped in the van and caught up with the group. "We weren't going to be the ones who quit. This was a big project involving a lot of people and we didn't want to let them down," says Ponzy.

In the western part of Oklahoma's panhandle, the riders encountered headwinds of 25 miles an hour for three days. "We were going arrow-straight against the head wind, with no scenery and cloudy skies for three days. It was boring. We cheered and got excited when there was a bend on the road. I had to keep focused and tell myself that I really wanted to do this," says Kristina.

"We also encountered lots of road

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## Library renovation begins

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sound-proofed group study rooms are also planned, as well as “electronic lounges,” seminar and small individual study rooms.

Several years ago, when Mosher first contemplated the future needs of Van Pelt-Dietrich, he faced a basic decision: build a new library or work with the 1960s concrete and glass structure. A new building would have cost about \$50 to \$60 million, whereas renovation of the existing facility would be dramatically less expensive and could be financed in phases.

“We decided to do it in pieces, raising the money as we went,” said Mosher. A staggered renovation plan also allowed the library administration to “buy some time,” as he explained, to see how the digital revolution would affect collections and services.

The library’s fund-raising began with the establishment in 1990 of a Board of Overseers—something the library had never had—and a fund-raising strategy.

Any university library has a unique challenge because “the library isn’t a school; the library has no alumni,” Mosher pointed out, so Penn’s library had to develop a constituency that reached across the entire University

community.

Reunion classes have been—and continue to be—a key part of that constituency. Several classes have decided to mark their reunion years by donating to specific renovation projects. The Electronic Lookup Lounge, for example, will be a gift of the Class of 1964, and the redesigned entrance a gift of the Class of 1960. The microforms and current periodicals collections will be reconfigured with funds from the Classes of 1963 and 1969. Other significant contributions are pledged from the Classes of 1937, 1943, 1944, 1953, 1955, 1968 and 1971. Individual donors and families have also

signed on to help underwrite specific parts of the library renovation.

A unique twist on fund-raising is the partnership with a specific school. For

the first phase, Wharton School Dean Thomas P. Gerrity joined the fund-raising efforts to consolidate Lippincott Library, which serves Wharton students but is available to the entire University community.

“That kind of alliance was a first at Penn,” Mosher reported. A wall-breaking ceremony will take place in early September, with completion of the

Lippincott phase slated for late next spring. The entire renovation is expected to be completed by 1998.



Photo courtesy of Van Pelt

## Bicycling across America

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kills in Oklahoma,” Ponzy adds.

“Armadillos, turtles, snakes, dogs. Road kills stink. They are gross. You start smelling them far away, then pass by the dead animal. When that one is almost over, you start again with another one.”

For the largest part of the trip, the bikers used single-lane blacktop secondary and tertiary roads. “We saw the smaller towns of America. And overall, people in those towns were very friendly,” Kristina says. “But in Arkansas, we got the finger, and drivers told us to get the hell off the road. They resented sharing the road with us.”

“Once we got to Tennessee, I had no doubt we were going to do it,” says Kristina.

The bikers had followed precisely the route described by Robert Winning in his book *Bicycling across America*, except in Tennessee, “where the author left out every second or third direction and we would end up somewhere else,” Kristina says.

The bikers arrived at the Reflecting Pool on the Mall in D.C. on Father’s Day.

“I had a lot of fun,” says Kristina. “In the end it wasn’t so much a physical challenge anymore, it was just enjoying the ride and being with the people. We

had come to feel like a small family, the six of us. It was a continuous discussion about politics, life and bicycle mechanics. Along the trip, about 22 bikers joined us at different points for a segment of the trip. I wish we could still be doing that right now.”

Instead, Kristina is working at the Vet School for the summer. Ponzy, 12 pounds lighter than in January, has finished writing a paper with Mitchell Lewis, associate professor of biochemistry and biophysics, describing the exact shape and size of a protein called lactose operon repressor that he had been trying to describe for the last 10 years.