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**Chicken
Soup** to Inspire
the
**Body
& Soul**

Motivation and Inspiration
for Living and Loving a
Healthy Lifestyle

Love to you...

December 2003

Dear Adeley:

You're an amazing woman! Thank you for writing "She Kicked & Got my Life Back."

Alicia Wentworth

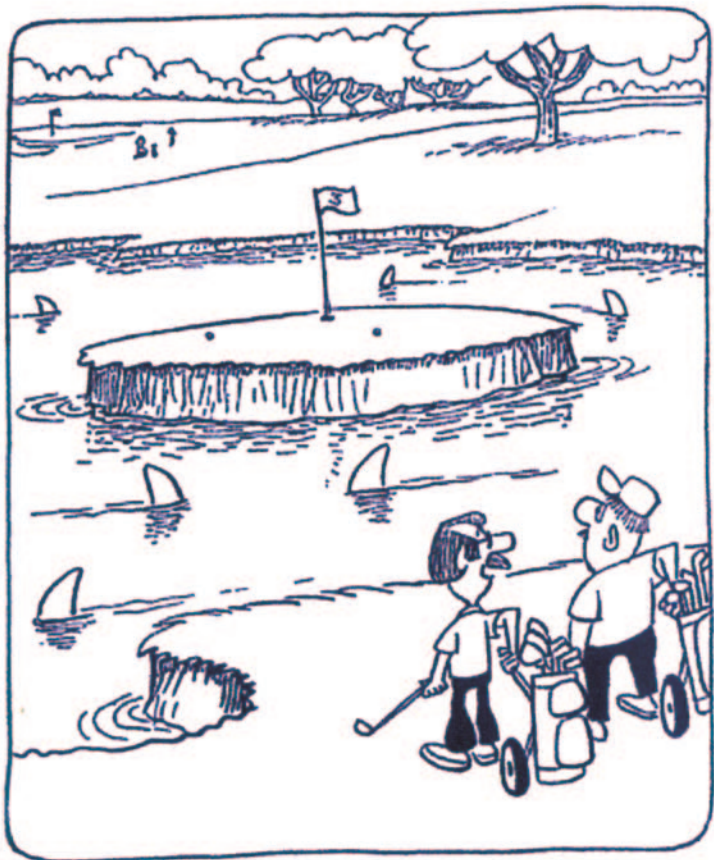
Dan Mellon

Paul Sanford

Mark Victor Hansen



Changing the World One Story at a Time™



"This is the tough hole I was telling you about."

The Week I Got My Life Back

A talent can be cultivated in tranquility; character, only in the rushing stream of life.

Goethe

We arrived in San Francisco early on a crisp Sunday morning in 1998. As cameras flashed and a crowd cheered, thousands of participants flooded the registration area to begin the 475-mile AIDS Ride to Los Angeles.

A few months earlier, the longest bike ride I'd ever done was eleven miles along the boardwalk. I was utterly terrified of street traffic. On my first training run I had crashed, and I couldn't get back on my bike for two months. When I returned to cycling, I was the tortoise of the training pack, barely struggling through two miles when the others had crossed the ten-mile mark. I had four months to get ready for the AIDS Ride and wondered if I could ever train in time. I decided to get appropriate equipment, including a racing bike. My boyfriend, Jim, tried to teach me how to get on and off it in my new cleated shoes, but I never even made it out of the parking lot that day.

Every weekend we got up at dawn and trained, no matter what the weather was like or how we felt. Each week I faced a

new fear and pushed through it, climbing harder hills, riding farther. My lupus, which had been in remission, flared up again, and I wondered if I was crazy to attempt the strenuous ride. I almost quit, but then Jim had a bad fall, injured his knees and couldn't take part in the ride. When I thought of his brother and my friends whose memories we were going to honor, and the money we would raise for the victims and for research, I became determined. When I first became sick, I'd been angry at what had been taken away from me: my looks, energy, career and health. But these friends had lost *everything*, and I hoped that in doing this ride I would discover a new me.

On the first day we rode ninety-two miles, to Half Moon Bay. The scenery was magnificent, the traffic terrifying. That evening, I fell asleep, too tired to even eat. On day two, I tucked a wide-brimmed hat under my helmet, since lupus makes my skin hypersensitive to the sun. We rode inland, and completed another ninety-seven miles.

By day three, the euphoria was over. Life was one hot, long hill. I had never felt more alone, because Jim was out of the ride. By day four, as riders in front of me dismounted to push their bikes up a monster of a hill, something deep within me kicked in: *You're going to ride every mile.* My coach, Gregg, had said, "Cycling is good for the spirit."

By day five, I hit "the wall"—utter exhaustion. Just when I was ready to quit, I saw my friend David ahead of me. He had lost both legs, built his own bicycle and cycled with his arms. He was my hero. If he could do this, so could I. Through every ache and pain, through the sweat streaming down my face, through the heat of the sun—I discovered to my astonishment that the struggle brought out the best in me.

On our very last day, Jim was determined to ride in, despite his damaged knees. Our roles had reversed: I had become the strong one, the fast one, and now it was my turn to support him. We arrived in Malibu by lunchtime, and he urged me to ride full out as we got close to our goal. I let it rip. Cars honked, people cheered us on, and I felt I owned the Pacific Coast Highway. Four months ago I had been terrified of it.

Twenty-six hundred of us rode our bicycles down Avenue of the Stars in Los Angeles to the closing ceremony. We wept in silence as an empty bicycle was led down a platform, the missing rider another AIDS victim.

We raised \$9.5 million dollars. I had ridden a bicycle from San Francisco to Los Angeles, and in the process, got my life back.

Adoley Odunton