

"They say time is the fire in which we burn. Right now, Captain, my time is running out."



Every picture tells a story. The time of day shown in the garmin screen (upper left)- 9:36am. This ride used to finish between 9:18-9:22pm. As early as 9:14 on a really fast day.

I can still ride my bike up the same hills, ride the same distances (I think), but every single Tuesday & Thursday morning, as I end my ride at the official start/end point (Olive Hill and Canada Road), I have an in-my-face reminder of how much slower I am than just a few years ago (well, it seems like just a few). I start the ride at the same time I always have, but instead of hitting the end (still 2.7 miles from home) at 9:20am, I consider it a good ride if my Garmin says it's anything earlier than 9:40.

That's twenty minutes I never planned on losing from my life. Twenty minutes less time to take a shower, eat something and get to work. When I was faster, I never once thought wow, this is great, I'm so fast I can do all this and still have plenty of time to get ready for work! There was never a thought to getting slower, other than not being able to keep up with someone who was really fast. It's a rude awakening.

From age 50 to maybe 62, the decline was very gradual, and it remained the case that one year could be better than the year prior, if I spent more time on the bike. Strava PRs were still possible. My diagnosis with Essential Thrombocythemia (a mild bone marrow cancer that you generally live with, not die from) was towards the end of that run, but didn't stop it. And even those years from 63 up to now, 69 in just a couple weeks, have seen times I've really surprised myself, especially in France where I seem to hit my stride after a few days of tough rides.

But the Tuesday/Thursday-morning ride times don't lie. It wasn't that long ago that we had "guidance" for those coming out on our ride- you had to be able to get up Kings in 30 minutes or less. Then it stretched to 33. And the really strong, fast riders started going elsewhere, because the ride wasn't challenging enough for them. I was never the fastest on Kings, but I could hang in there and did really well in the three sprints- first, the top of the final rise heading into Sky Londa on Skyline, next the short steep pitch at the end of West Old LaHonda and, finally, my favorite. The sprint up Albion to the intersection with Olive Hill. The only person who could reliably beat me there was Todd. My breathing issues didn't matter; I had 18 seconds of full power available, if I wasn't already gassed leading into it.

I don't know if I'm aging gracefully or abruptly; this is new territory for me! It's possible that changes to my work/life balance (meaning, more time to ride) could turn back the clock a bit, but I don't see that happening anytime soon. The brick & mortar side of the bicycle business is tough with steadily-increasing costs of keeping the doors open, difficulty finding employees and suppliers that are sometimes more interested in selling directly to customers than to shops. Add my wife's cancer to the mix and I should consider myself fortunate that I've been able to keep my routines going as long as I have.

But yes, there is some feeling that time is not my friend.