

# ENCOURAGEMENT FOR *Real Life*

## **51. Why I RAGBRAI: The Reasons May Surprise You**

You are listening to episode 51 of the Encouragement for Real Life Podcast, titled, *Why I RAGBRAI: The Reasons May Surprise You*. Welcome back to the podcast! Thank you for tuning in today. It's RAGBRAI week in Iowa, but if you're not from Iowa, you might not know what RAGBRAI is. RAGBRAI stands for the Register's Annual Great Bicycle Ride Across Iowa. (The Register is the Des Moines newspaper.) It's an annual event, with the exception for 2020, that takes place the last full week of July. So, if you're listening to this the week of July 26, my husband and I are already on the ride. 430 miles, 11,900 feet of climb, in seven days, with thousands of bicyclists from all across the country (and world) peddling from west to east across Iowa. Why do I ride this ride? Well, in this episode I share why I RAGBRAI, and my answer may surprise you. And, if you know me, we'll find some hope and encouragement for us all along the way. So, let's get to it.

I remember the phone call as if it happened last week. My husband on the other end said he was in the hospital and had been hit by a car while out riding his bike. You get a call like that, and life comes to a screeching halt. A million thoughts flip through your mind, along with the same amount of questions. And you realize life may never be the same again.

### **But he was talking, so I knew he was alive.**

I knew he was, for the most part, okay.

Nearly sprinting into his hospital room on that hot August day in 2013, I found him lying on the bed, wrapped in bandages, a splint on his ankle, and a smile on his face. He filled me in on how a car likely traveling 55 mph (or faster) hit him on a two-lane road. The car's passenger side rearview mirror caught Bill's left backside and sent him flying 30 feet in the air, landing on the road's right shoulder. Lying there on the side of the road, gasping to regain his breath, he thought his life might be over. He thought of his family in that moment, and how he may not ever see us again.

Thankfully, his lungs filled with oxygen again and his breath returned.

But sadly, Bill's bike, something that brought him joy and freedom and fulfillment, didn't fare so well. Its back tire popped the car's passenger side front tire and was crumpled into pieces.

### **I think we both wondered if he would ever ride again.**

Bill walked out of that hospital, and to this day I still can't comprehend how he was able to do so. Only by the grace of God. I don't understand how he didn't receive more serious injuries, life-threatening injuries. Only by the grace of God. There wasn't a scratch on his helmet. Bill said he didn't hit his head. No broken bones, except for two cracked ribs. Only by the grace of God. If he would have flown to the left, instead of the right, he would have landed on the car or gotten run over. And what if he landed on

top of something on the side of the road, instead of the shoulder? These thoughts make my stomach churn. Only by the grace of God.

The months following weren't easy. Healing was slow. Emotions ran high. Pain was real. So, I was a bit stunned when Bill asked me the following January if I would ride RAGBRAI with him in July on our tandem bicycle. He was willing to look the fear of bicycling in the face and meet it head on. He was willing to get back out there and do what he once loved.

How could I say no?

But I wasn't a bicyclist. I wasn't fond of camping in a tent in the heat for a week. I didn't want to stand in line for a shower or a bathroom break every day. And I wasn't thrilled about the thought of learning how to ride a tandem bicycle for seven long days in a row. *Could I even do this?*

How could I say no? I couldn't. So, I took a deep breath and a big gulp and said yes. I would support him in any way I could. And actually, I was honored he asked me to be a part of his healing.

### **So, July 2014 was my first RAGBRAI.**

It was one of the hardest weeks of my life, yet it was one of the most amazing weeks of my life. I got to see a side of my husband I rarely get to see. He was almost like a "kid on Christmas morning," full of life, joy, and excitement. He was in his element, and I was blessed to watch him shine. And at the same time, he faced his fear head on, and the fear of getting back on the bike had no power over him any longer. Watching him heal before my eyes was incredible.

And not only that, but something unexpected happened on that week-long ride. I caught the RAGBRAI "bug." I found out just how incredible this annual event was, and at the end of that week, I suggested to Bill we "do it again next year."

### **And these 10 reasons are why I RAGBRAI.**

1. It transformed me physically, to challenge myself in a way I had never been physically challenged before.
2. It transformed me mentally, to do something I thought I could never do.
3. It transformed me emotionally, to face my own fears and comforts and to step beyond my comfort zone.
4. I experienced freedom from demands, from watching the clock, from wearing any sort of makeup or doing my hair for a week.
5. It transformed our marriage, because we had to rely on God and each other to stay upright and keep going.
6. It brought me closer to God as I watched Him show up each day in the big and little instances.
7. I learned I don't need all the stuff I think I need.
8. We met some pretty fun and cool people who became our friends.
9. I learned there's no better way to see our great state than on a bicycle.

10. Because my husband loves it and I want to support him in what brings him joy.

Yes, people still think we're crazy. People can't believe I'd do such a thing. They say, "There's no way I'd ever do that." Or "There's no way I'd sleep in a tent for a week." Or "There's no way I'd ride a bicycle for a week in the heat." And I want to say (but I never have), "You would if it was important to your spouse. You would if you'd help your spouse face a fear. You'd do whatever it takes to help him heal. And if you once almost lost your spouse, you'd want to make as many memories as possible with him." Because this is time we'll never get to do over.

### **That's why I RAGBRAI.**

We all have something like this, right? What is it that you do? What is it that you're passionate about? And what brings you joy beyond measure? Others may not understand why you do it or why it means too much to you, but none of that matters. You do it because it's your thing.

I applaud you, friend. I cheer you on. And I get you. Because it doesn't have to make sense to anyone else but you. So, keep doing it. Keep loving it. And keep allowing it to bring you joy.

This is our seventh RAGBRAI on our tandem, and each year as we prepare for our ride, I relive Bill's accident. And I can't help but think of Joseph in the Bible and what he said in Genesis 50:20a NIV, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good..." The enemy of our souls intended to harm Bill, intended him to shrink back from what once brought him joy, intended to cause pain and suffering and discouragement. But God used it for good, for Bill's good, for the good of our marriage, and for my good. Sure, I wish his accident would have never happened, but I can see how God brought good from it all. Good we might not have if it wouldn't have been for his accident.

### **May this encourage you and me today.**

God is good and He brings good out what appears to be bad. That difficult situation in your life? God is bringing good from it. That bad news you just received? God is bringing good in it. That thing you've struggled with for so long? God is bringing good from it. Friend, He is. It may not be what we expect or what we think it will be, but it will be for our good and for His glory.

Romans 8:28 encourages us, and I'll read it in a different translation that what we may not be used to. In the VOICE translation it says, "We are confident that God is able to orchestrate everything to work toward something good *and beautiful* when we love Him and accept His invitation to live according to His plan." Something good and beautiful. When we love Him and accept His invitation to live according to His plan.

So, let's do that today. Let's love Him with all we have. Let's accept His invitation to live according to His plan. Not our plans but His. Because His plans are better than ours anyway, right?

### **Yes, this is why I RAGBRAI.**

For reasons beyond me. And let me tell you, it's pretty incredible. I invite you to follow me on social media this week as we take you with us on our ride. You'll get to experience a little of RAGBRAI and understand a little more why I RAGBRAI all week long. (And you'll see me with no makeup and my hair undone.) Links to my social feeds are in the show notes.

Even though I'm out on the bike all week long, we're discussing this in our Encouragement for Real Life Community on Facebook. Come on over and enjoy the conversation. We're looking at why we do what we do and what brings us joy, and the good God is bringing from our situations. The link for this group is in the show notes as well.

And if you learned something new, or found some encouragement and hope in this episode, would you please rate it and/or review it so others can find it too? Subscribe to the podcast so you never miss an episode.

In closing, bicycling may not be your thing, and that's okay. But something is your thing. What is that? No matter what it is, as 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, do it for the glory of God. I'm praying for you as you do, friend. And if you think about my husband and me at all this week while we're peddling across Iowa, would you pray for us? That we do it for the glory of God, too? Thanks for being here. Live encouraged, friend. God bless you.

*Julie Lefebvre*