

## Taking on Mountains

I can remember the day vividly. I had awoken early that Saturday morning and made myself a strong pot of Starbucks' Classic Roast. Normally, I put two and half scoops of grounds in, but today I put in an extra scoop, figuring the extra caffeine would give me a helping hand in the event that was about to unfold. Pouring my first cup of java, I glanced over at the closed shades to see the sun's rays filtering through. With my fresh cup of coffee in my grasp, I traipsed across the kitchen floor towards the window. Pulling the blinds open, the sun hit my face with the warmth and brightness of its morning summer rays. I knew that this was going to be a perfect day to complete my challenge.

Today was the day that I was going to ride my mountain bike to the top of Granddad's Bluff. It was not going to be an easy task, but I knew that if I pushed myself I would succeed. This was the same hill that my friends said I was crazy for wanting to ride my bike up. The narrow, paved road climbs quickly up the side of the bluff as it meanders back and forth with its hairpin turns. It is only about a mile and a half to the top but because of the steepness, it would probably feel more like 5 miles. Crazy or not there was no turning back now because I had the idea in my head and I wasn't going to be satisfied with myself until I was on the top of that bluff.

I quickly slurped down my cup of coffee followed by one more and began to gear up for my next big adventure. As I put my shorts and jersey on, thoughts of how good it was going to feel to finally accomplish this goal of mine crossed my mind. I felt like a kid who was going to run his first foot race against his cousin again. The anticipation and excitement of this upcoming challenge created an adrenalin rush throughout my body. Now oblivious to the world around me, I pictured myself going through the motions like it was already happening. As I buckled my helmet and headed out the door, I knew I was now prepared.

The morning air was like a cold washcloth against my skin as I rode towards the base of the mountain. Although the sun was slowly climbing, it had not had enough time to heat the air yet. As I glanced towards the top of the mountain, I could see the flag on top of the rocky point wavering slightly from the morning breeze. I was like a teenager riding his new BMX bike that he finally gotten for his birthday, as fast as his legs would possibly carry him. Crossing over the railroad tracks my challenge began.

I hit the first incline like Lance Armstrong competing in the Tour de France. My speed quickly slowed to a crawl as I powered myself up the bluff. My chain made a smooth mechanical sound as it moved from the larger to the smaller gear, making it easier to turn the pedals. This in turn made my cadence quicken. My legs moved like two pistons, moving up and down creating a force that turned my wheels and carried me closer to conquering this challenge.

As I completed the first corner, my legs began to feel like a thousand tiny needles were pricking them. All I could do was block this feeling out by imagining how good it was going to feel when I reached the top. Sweat now started to bead up on my forehead, and I could feel it stream down my face into my eye. It felt like someone stuck his or her finger directly into my eye socket. I removed my glasses with one hand; steadying my bike with the other and tried the best I could to wipe my eye with my sweaty forearm. While my eye still stung, I could see enough to continue, so I put my glasses back on my face and continued up the hill.

It seemed like hours until I reached a rock outcropping that I had chosen earlier as a halfway point, but it was actually more like minutes. As I continued to pedal, I no longer had any feeling left in my legs. The only way I knew they were still attached to my body was by looking down and seeing them turning the pedals beneath me. My shorts and jersey were saturated with sweat so much so that it felt like I had just jumped into a lake. Sweat now ran off every part of my body like a river. I could taste the salty liquid on

my mouth as I pushed myself upward. My sunglasses had fogged up so badly that I had to remove them and put them into my pocket in order to see the road.

As I turned the fourth corner, I knew that I was almost to the top. My heart was pounding out of my chest. It rang in my head like a gong as it pumped blood throughout my fatigued body. I could start to see the hill gradually cresting at the top. This meant I was almost there. My legs were now struggling to turn the pedals, but I knew that I couldn't give up. I knew this was when I had to dig deep down inside and ask myself how much I wanted this. I was like a marathon runner at mile 22 with 4 more to go. This was it. It was go time.

Struggling over the crest of the hill, I could see a clearing through the trees. I knew that this was my final leg. Now rather than a physical challenge, it was becoming a mental challenge. It was mind over matter. This is where I had to ask myself. Do I quit now or do I power through? As I got closer to the clearing, the road began to level out. My legs seemed to be moving faster now than at the beginning. I finally reached the top and coasted through the clearing, completing what I had set out to do.

As I stood at the top looking down the road that I had just come, a feeling of accomplishment came over me. I felt as though I was on top of the world. I stood there for a few minutes just reflecting back on the ride up and how good it felt to finish this challenge. I knew then what people meant when they talked about having a "runners high", the feeling that runners get after completing a long run.

Although this bike ride happened in under a half hour, it has had a huge impact on how I view other challenges in life. I now look at many life challenges like this bike ride. Having a little determination can conquer mountains in life. For example, recently I decided to return to college and receive my Associates of Applied Science degree in Architectural Technology. I now look at this challenge the same way as my bike ride up the bluff. As my Uncle Arlen stated about many challenges in life, "It's uphill and into the wind for awhile, but the view is great once you crest the hill."

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