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# Ride for Roy

## Bike buddies



Marty Perlmutter, right, shares a laugh with fellow rider Diane Sawyer, left, and coach Tom Holland during his 1,400-mile bike trek up the east coast.

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### Ride for Roy

By **BILL BULEY**/Staff writer |

In 17 days, Marty Perlmutter biked 1,400 miles and went through 13 states.

He pedaled in rain and heat, dark and light. He powered along highways as cars whizzed past, up monster hills, along endless straight-aways. He kept going

when his legs were tired, when he was covered in dirt and sweat, when he would rather have stopped.

He knows what drove him on.

Or rather, who.

Roy Gross.

“He was, without question, my best bud,” Perlmutter said.

On Tuesday, the Kendall, Fla., man wrapped up his journey that took him on two wheels from Jacksonville, Fla., to Kittery, Maine, a little weary, but a whole lot elated, too.

Perlmutter dedicated the ride, “Cure for Cancer,” to Gross, who died at age 59 in March after being diagnosed with stage four multiple myeloma last June. His goal was to raise \$20,000 for the Multiple Myeloma Research Foundation, a private funder of myeloma research.

“It’s hard to put into words some of the things we’ve done together and what he’s meant to me over the years,” the 61-year-old business man said.

Alicia O’Neill, spokeswoman with, MMRF Endurance Events Program, tracked Perlmutter’s progress and promoted his ride. She said the foundation is the No. 1 funder for research of “this little known cancer.”

Multiple myeloma is an incurable blood cancer, and it is the second-most-common blood cancer, she said.

Watching Perlmutter’s effort was encouraging.

“This friendship they have, it’s so inspiring,” she said. “They really had a very special friendship.”

They did, said Pam Gross, Roy's wife. She said the two men shared "an epic friendship" of more than 30 years.

Roy and Marty met in 1985 in Miami, where Perlmutter owned a service station, and Roy and Pam often stopped in at the business on South Dixie Highway.

Over the years, the couples vacationed together, traveled together, skied together and shared dinners together. Even when one couple moved to Idaho and the other stayed in Florida, their friendship endured.

"We traveled all over the place together," Marty said.

Pam recalls one of the first times they arrived at the Marty and Bobbie Perlmutter home, and Marty came to the door wearing pink piggy slippers.

"That is when I knew I would love this guy," she said, laughing.

Through it all, Marty and Roy formed a bond marked by belly-busting bouts of laughter and grins.

"These two guys pranked each other at every occasion," Pam said.

They nicknamed each other "Putz" (Roy) and "Moron" (Marty) after the two characters in the 1993 movie, "Grumpy Old Men," starring Jack Lemmon and Walter Matthau.

And they loved practical jokes.

There was the time, for instance, Roy stuffed Marty's ski boots with tissue paper.

And then, there's that birthday card that went back and forth between the men, after Roy and Pam moved to Hayden in 1992.

That year, Perlmutter found a birthday card in his home that was addressed to "David." He crossed out the name, wrote in Roy, and sent it to Gross.

Gross responded with a few barbs back at his friend, and later repaid the favor.

“In December, guess what? I got the card back,” Marty said.

The card went across the country twice a year, and is today filled with notes and photographs from both men.

“It just goes on,” Pam said. “There was just amazing interplay between these two. You’re so lucky if you have a friend like that in a lifetime.”

She said Marty committed to the bike ride while Roy was alive, and believed he would be there when he finished.

“Man plans, and God laughs. Sometimes, we just don’t get what we want,” Pam said.

She remains proud of Marty Perlmutter.

“The fact he would be this selfless totally humbles me,” she said. “I can’t say enough about Marty and his friendship with my husband, Roy.”

Perlmutter said when he heard his friend had stage 4 multiple myeloma, he knew it was grim.

“Unless it’s an Apollo rocket, stage 4 is not a good thing,” he said.

It was then he vowed to ride in his friend’s honor.

“When I told him that I’m definitely doing the bike ride, he started crying,” Perlmutter said.

In March, after much drafting and editing, Marty sent an email, a thousand words or so, expressing what their friendship meant to him, what Roy meant to him. It was difficult to write, tougher to send.

At home in Hayden, Pam printed it out, then read it to her dying husband.

“He took the paper, put it on his chest, hugged the paper to his chest,” Marty said. “He was crying like I’m crying now.”

Two days later, Roy Gross died.

“So at least I had a chance to say goodbye.”

His memory lives on.

The 5-foot-7, 179-pound Perlmutter began rolling on his 1,400-mile quest in Jacksonville, with wife Bobbie as his support crew.

The back of their van was decorated with two small American flags, and a banner that read “Florida to Maine. Cure for Cancer Tour,” and a map of their route.

Along the way, some drivers stopped, pulled out \$5, \$10 or \$20, and donated. Others offered a place to clean up.

During one break in a parking lot, a man came outside of the building and asked what was happening. Then, he offered a hose and water, and chipped in \$50.

“That, to me, is the most amazing thing,” Marty said. “The generosity, the kindness of the people.”

Perlmutter, an avid cyclist, said the ride went well. He covered 50-80 miles most days, with a long ride of 122 miles. In some cities, such as New York, he was escorted through traffic by a convoy of cyclists. In the country, he enjoyed the scenery and just relaxed, thankful for what he had.

“Once I got into the routine, it was good,” he said.

Perlmutter said the ride was important because even if he couldn't cure cancer, he could raise money to help others do just that. He wasn't even sure how much of a difference his \$10,000 or \$20,000 might make.

It didn't matter.

This one was for Roy.

"If it helps one person's life, then I think I've done my job," Marty said.