

Mark Bredin writes:

Some time ago you may have received an email regarding my intention to do a fundraising cycle ride around Norfolk to raise money for The House of Genesis to purchase a 3rd house for the homeless and particularly for homeless ex-prisoners in Norwich. This became more than a fundraising venture as Orin and Geordie Mark joined me. I am pleased to say we all completed the bike ride beginning 22nd August and completing it on the 25th. So far £10,000 has been raised. We are getting closer to a total £100,000 and so can look at buying a house in the new-year with a mortgage.

If you donated or prayed for Genesis and the bike ride, then I thank you for it. If you still wish to donate please send a cheque to Val Dodsworth. See <http://www.thehouseofgenesis.org/> for details.

I will share some reflections about this bike ride and the people we met. I must begin by stating that Orin and Geordie Mark have either been a beneficiary of House of Genesis and its support/mentor work, or mentored and offered accommodation to others. Neither have ever cycled any distance and never dreamed of doing something like this. It was, therefore, with great trepidation they undertook this ride. But both felt so strongly about the importance of The House of Genesis that they challenged themselves to do this ride, especially Geordie Mark in well-nigh heroic terms including two falls.

We began our journey on Monday 22nd August from Norwich HMP Prison. Governors, Senior officers, House of Genesis workers and volunteer supporters, local TV, Managing Chaplain and other chaplains were all there so see us off to a trumpet fanfare. I most certainly wish to thank all those who turned up and gave us such a great send off and for Fr Paulinus' prayer for us, especially we were amused by his prayer to keep us from temptation. We wondered with anticipation what temptations would be presented. Sue (the community chaplain) who followed us in the car was the biggest tempter as she became engrossed with the beautiful countryside and wished to share such beauty with us while we were panting half-way up a steep hill; even on one occasion, trying to stop us. I was impressed to see the local TV presenter turn out and she interviewed several of us and gave us a good 10 minutes on the local news. She was warm and enthusiastic. I was given a camera for my bike to show grimaces of pain on my face while riding, I fear alas she saw my frustration at speeding drivers skimming past us in a hurry to nowhere. You can see this coverage by Googling Anglia TV news

We made great progress with several stops along the way. What became apparent very soon was the three riders (including me) were well-suited to each other. Geordie Mark who was the least experienced rider, kept us laughing with his humour and accent. We also had a support vehicle with Sue and Val encouraging us and making sure we went in the right direction. We camped out on Monday along the coast. I was amazed by Orin and Geordie Mark's pop-up tents that were up in 5 seconds. We had a wonderful night. We relaxed, prayed together, and spent time on our own. Orin took a long walk along the coast. It was clear that this young man was very moved by his journey especially given that he had spent several years in prison and was homeless until The House of Genesis had brought love and prayer to his life.

Tuesday morning began early. I am not a morning person and my sole purpose was to make myself coffee without conversation. Geordie Mark and Orin's Pop-Up tents however became

the source of attention to all the campsite. As I said, I was much amazed that a tent could be put up in less than 10 seconds. Alas, however, it took 35 minutes to pop their tents back. By this time I had made my breakfast and put my own tent away while in a constant state of laughter while watching my 2 fellow campers aiming to figure out how to get their tents in their bags. I offered expert advice such as "sit on the tent"!! Those on the camp site were also provided with great hilarity at this sight. We were generously not charged for our night. Val turned up with the car and her warmth and smile picked us up no end.

So we began our 2nd day's ride. Geordie Mark, who no one believed would get through the 1st day, clearly was struggling. But with much encouragement and his own self-determination and coffee we made great progress. At lunch time we were kindly welcomed by Prison Fellowship at Sheringham. We had a delightful time with them and ate much. I learned much about what these women do for those in prison. It was very inspiring. We then made steady progress to Wells. We made several stops including being stopped by the local radio station who wished to interview me about the ride. We had the back up of Sue in the support vehicle tempting us to throw the bike in the back of the car.

Finally we arrived in Wells. Geordie Mark and Orin were offered accommodation by the local Quakers while I stayed the night with David and Joolz Saunders. Joolz was my predecessor as prison chaplain and present mentor. She had planned a great evening of eating and fellowship. The room was full of people. People came from all over including King's Lynn and Norwich. Geordie Mark sensibly called it a day quite early and retired to his bed. Joolz's attention to detail is impressive, and I appreciated a proper sit-down evening supper with good company. I was seated next to two very thoughtful women, one a Quaker and the other Roman Catholic.

Sue, and then Orin spoke powerfully after supper of the work of the House of Genesis and the need to respond to homelessness especially among prisoners on being released. Orin spoke movingly of what God has done for him through prison chaplaincy and then through The House of Genesis. He spoke of his despair while in prison and being released after several years with no home to go to. He spoke with praise for everything The House of Genesis had done for him and particularly the Roman Catholic chaplain at Norwich. Sue talked about her work as a community chaplain and her vision for churches to open their open spaces and kitchens to the homeless. I spoke of the need for Christians to be expressions of God's hospitality and generosity. The people in the room were generous in the attention they gave to us.

On the Wednesday it was our intention to get to King's Lynn. We went via Walsingham. This seemed appropriate given that the journey had become more than a fundraising activity for the riders, but one of spiritual journey and discovery. Orin was particularly moved by Walsingham and plans to return. Sue, myself, Orin and Geordie Mark enjoyed our relaxing time there. We then began our cycling in earnest covering the miles quickly. Geordie Mark by this time had clearly got the hang of long-distance biking and was enjoying himself. We made great progress and had a relaxing evening at my home. Orin slept the night in the garden and was treated to thunder and lightning, but in spite of this he also slept well.

We began our final day, riding from King's Lynn to Wayland Prison. We set out with prayer led by Geordie Mark. We were due to be at Wayland Prison for 2pm. Two friends met us at Swaffham. They are an inspiring couple in their 80s who have farmed the same 16 acres organically since 1963, the year I was born. They were generous in every way in meeting us

and sharing their story and hearing ours. They invited those at The House of Genesis the opportunity to come and camp on their land.

We had an uneventful ride to Wayland, although the back-roads taking us through beautiful country-side was pleasant, it was disturbed by lorries that seem to be everywhere. But we each had much to keep our minds occupied with the stimulation of the last few days. There was a big part of us that did not want the ride to end. We arrived at Wayland at 1.45, ahead of time. The security governor and managing chaplain came and welcomed us as well as Trustees of The House of Genesis. Our time was up. We were so happy to have finished the journey together but at the same time sad it was over. I was so pleased to see that Orin had discovered something new and he seemed a young man to whom life promised much more than he had ever previously imagined, and all because a few people cared and did something rather than talking and writing about it. Geordie Mark was in disbelief that he had completed the journey but mentally refreshed and looking forward to getting back to his important work with the homeless and sharing his delightful Geordie accent and his witness to God's love. The bike ride had become one of those very memorable moments in our lives that will never be forgotten.

We were taken back with our bikes back to The House of Genesis in Norwich. There we were welcomed as heroes. Local TV were present as well as Genesis support workers, volunteers, residents, and two chaplains from Norwich Prison, who were clearly happy to be present. There was much fellowship and banter. But also the shadow of homelessness and the number of prisoners being released into homelessness which never lifts. One thing that does stand out when at Genesis is how Geordie Mark led myself, Father Paulinus and Val in extemporary prayer with Fr Paulinus giving a blessing. There was a deep sense of unity and vision driven by the hope that the resurrection promises.

So, it's been a great privilege to have been involved in this great venture. Again thank you for your support.

Blessings,

Mark