

BikeMS [presented by David Bexfield on August 29 before 250 participants and volunteers]

[The following presentation has not been screened or preapproved by the National Multiple Sclerosis Society. Uh, oh.]

Before I begin tonight, I just want to issue a few disclaimers to absolve the MS Society of any potential liability. Our little chat probably would be rated PG-13 in the theaters, so I wanted to list a few of the red flags. Nothing too major.

**[Drug Use] [Bathroom Humor] [Profanity] [Alcohol Use] [Lewd Gestures] [Sexual Innuendo]
[Brief Nudity]**

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[DAVID & LAURA]

My name is Dave Bexfield. I'm 41 years old, madly in love with my wife Laura, and the managing editor and co-owner of an international car magazine. Four years ago, I could have been sitting right next to any one of you.

I was in the best shape of my life—tree trunks for legs, the endurance of a diesel, and a six-day-a-week exercise routine, one that I had followed for years, that I was sure would keep me fit well into my old age.

And then 3 years, 337 days and 20 hours ago all that changed. I reached over to scratch my right side, and it was gone. Vanished. I couldn't feel anything. I was about to get diagnosed with multiple sclerosis.

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I'd like to begin today by giving you a little idea of what it's like to have the disease. Now I'd like to note that MS is different in everyone. Indeed, seven people with MS rode today. To show you where I'm coming from, me personally, let's go on a short bike ride—a virtual, interactive bike ride. In my shoes.

Here's a picture of me.



[MOUNTAIN BIKE FLYING]

A picture of me in my dreams. And actually in my dreams I wreck catastrophically after this jump, but I digress. So let's get started and clip in. Oh, and please temper your disappointment, no groans, but you're riding a mountain bike today.



[ME AND BIKE]

A vintage Gary Fischer steely, some 37 pounds, with, if you look closely, an embarrassing seatpost suspension. I apologize that I have a tender ass. **Okay, are you all set!?**

Um, you do understand for this whole interactive bike ride thing to work, I actually need it to be interactive—you know, I talky, you talky. I want to hear a little emotion. So let's try this again.

Are you clipped in!?

Uh, actually, no you're not. See, everything neck down is pretty numb, especially my feet. I can barely feel them and don't really know where they are in space. So it'll take you about minute or so to clip in. Okay, now I think you're ready. Are you ready to roll?!

Oh, hold on.



[PEE]

Um, you gotta pee. And it can't wait. Often with MS, when the urge hits, it hits fast.

To give you an idea, you go from zero to seeing yellow and entering the "why won't these shorts come off any faster" panic in about five minutes. Or less.

So you're not taking any chances. Unclip, potty break, reclip. *Now we're ready.* Where do you want to take your Hoo-Koo-E-Koo? How about the Foothills? Foothills?! **Wrong.**



[BOSQUE TRAIL MAP]

You're riding on the bosque trail. You need to avoid singletrack and any roads. Here's why. I want you to spread your fingers and put them up to your face. Now squint your eyes so you can barely see—everything should look fuzzy with some annoying blind spots. Perfect. This is what my vision looks like after five minutes of riding—it goes whack.

Now I always ride with my wife in the lead so she can warn me about any obstacles. She's sort of like my seeing eye dog. Only, waaay sexier. And not as furry. Now you're five, ten minutes in, about to hit Paseo. Are you warmed up, ready to get it into another gear!? Oh, wrong again.



[BONK]

You're bonking. The worst bonk you've ever had. But like me, you're stubborn, so let's see if you can get in a few more minutes. It's not as easy as it sounds because every few pedal strokes or so, your knee smacks the top tube. Hard. And no matter how much you focus, you can't stop it from happening. Your legs are that weak. Even when you coast, both legs are doing the sewing machine so fiercely you're practically bunny hopping down the trail.

Okay, you're totally gassed--you need to get off and rest. But there's a problem. The muscles in your legs are hosed, so they won't be able to support your body weight unless you lock them straight. So clip out and coast to a stop. Legs down. Now you are straddling the bike and... you're stuck. Now for our next interactive stage of your bike ride.

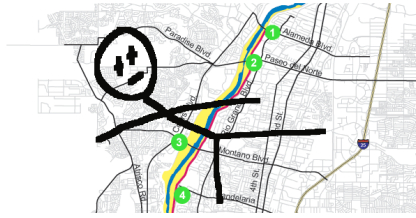


[Tequila!]

Tequila! To simulate my stability issues, I'll need you to take four to five tequila shots. The bad news, you'll have to supply your own tequila.

With your balance gone, it's damn tricky to get off your bike. Here's how I do it. Slowly lay your bike down while inching your leg up between the fork, down tube, and chain ring, holding on to the end of the handlebars sticking up in the air.

All you have to do is lift your leg over the top tube, which is now only a few inches off the ground. **Did you make it!?** Ah, no. You gouged your calf on the chain ring, giving yourself a bloody, greasy tattoo. Sucks for you.



[Splayed]

Okay, you are now splayed out on the ground, ride complete. Blind, bonked, and balance-challenged. You're also thinking maybe, just maybe, you should invest in a recumbent trike. But there is still one more critical element of your ride that's missing.

Take your index fingers and put them here ... and here. Now curve them upward, because you have a shit-eating grin on your face. You were on your bike—doing something you love, having the time of your life, all while giving MS ... the middle finger.



[WSJ Bexfield]

So what's my story? Why did the MS Society ask me to speak tonight? And what was my mug doing in the *Wall Street Journal*? Here it goes. When I got diagnosed, I made it my mission to stay as active as possible. On my bike. On my snowboard. On the hiking trail. In the gym. In foreign lands.



[BHUTAN]

And I wanted to share my active passions—and my optimism—with others who felt the same way ... but there was a problem. I knew those people existed, but finding them, connecting with them, virtually impossible. That wasn't acceptable. So I stopped looking and started a not-for-profit website called ActiveMSers.



[LOGO]

I designed the website to help, motivate, and inspire those with multiple sclerosis to stay as active as possible—physically, intellectually, and socially—regardless of physical limitations. I review and test gear, from cooling vests to trekking poles. I provide exercise and stretching advice.

And I've developed 100s of helpful tips and tricks on living with MS, from dealing with the heat to traveling afar. There's also an active blog, a newsletter, and a forum to help fellow MSers connect and share experiences. I'm proud to say it's received national attention and I've helped thousands of people around the world.

I try hard to practice what I preach.



[MOROCCO PIC]

Here I am earlier this year when I was camping in the Sahara desert, tending to my herd of Moroccan dromedaries. Just four months ago, I was hitting black diamonds at Wolf Creek.



[BOARDING]

I exercise for an hour a day—cardio, strength, stretching. And I still manage to bike. So when I get e-mails from fellow MSers telling me I'm an inspiration, a champion for getting people with the disease off their ass, I'm flattered.

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Where do I get my inspiration? Above all, my best friend of 21 years and my wife of 16, Laura. She is my everything.

But do you know who else also motivates me? You and your fellow riders—who have given so unselfishly. Your time. Your money. Your compassion.

Don't underestimate the power you have to change a life. See, by raising critical funds for multiple sclerosis, you give those of us with this disease four huge letters of the alphabet. H-O-P-E. ...

[HOPE]

Hope. That's a big word, hope, and one that means a hell of a lot to me right now. Let me explain.



[BRAIN MRI]

This is my brain. On drugs. I've always wanted to say that. For the past three and a half years I've taken over 1,000 injections—1,195 give or take... in my arms, legs, hips, stomach. And to remind me of what I've been through, and what I'm working for, I've saved every shot I've ever taken.

-----SHARPS CONTAINERS (10) LOADED INTO LAURA'S ARMS-----

The drug is supposed to slow the disease down some 30 percent. But statistics and reality don't always mesh. Lately the only thing that has been slowing down ... is me. It's gotten harder. Much harder.

Just weeks ago, my doctors gave me the news that unfortunately too many people with multiple sclerosis will hear. Your drugs aren't working. Your disease isn't slowing down.

That's life with multiple sclerosis. While the current medications to treat MS absolutely help, it's like beating back a forest fire with a garden hose. The disease can be relentless and my MS happens to be aggressive. And no amount of positive attitude or willpower can change that. So I did what any typical guy would do when faced with such a challenging situation.



[MOHAWK]

Yeah, I got a Mohawk! Now gentlemen, before you run out and get your own Mohawk, I do have several words of advice. ... DON'T DO IT. I discovered, I know this is going to sound crazy, that wives don't like Mohawks. So I immediately shaved it off and told Laura I'd look just like David Beckham. Oh, and here is the "brief" nudity. Get it? Sorry, bad joke. ...



[BECKHAM]

But no. I ended up looking like a goof with a chia-pet hairdo.



[ME SHAVED]

Laura even gave me a nickname: BP, short for brillo pad. Niiice. Handy for scrubbing the shower. Not so handy for getting your wife into the sack.

[BLANK]

So what's next? I started on a new treatment the other day. It too is supposed to slow down MS by about a third. Will it work? I hope so. I really, really hope so. The side effects are daunting—but I'll give it my best—I have to. I don't have many other options.

That said, there is one other option that holds great promise. But with it, great risk. This afternoon, a couple hours ago, I returned from Houston. I was visiting the world-renowned Baylor College of Medicine to be considered for a novel stem cell treatment sponsored by the NIH. The process would harvest my own stem cells and clean them of the damaging T cells thought to cause MS. But before injecting the refreshed stem cells back into my body, my immune system would have to be obliterated, essentially resetting it.

If I'm accepted into this study the results could be groundbreaking. It could stop the disease in its tracks. ... Or it could kill me. The consent form I signed yesterday listed the odds of death at 1 in 20.

My wife and I may have to make some impossibly difficult decisions in the coming weeks and months.

Now, I don't intend what I say tonight to be, quote, my Last Lecture. Because I want to come back here next year to give you all an update. And when I do, I want to hear that you cyclists set a record for bike rider participation ... and helped raise the most money in the history of Bike MS. Remember, don't underestimate the power you have. Don't underestimate.

I'd like to leave you with you the following thought. It's one I coined for ActiveMSers that helps keep me looking forward to a brighter, much brighter, future. A future where I can run, where I can chase down a piece of mail taken by the wind. A future where I don't have to wear clothing that boasts one-size-fits all, super absorbent. A future where I can give a speech... standing up. A future where I can feel Laura, her every caress, her every kiss.

[MS is BS]

MS is BS. The BS? Beatable someday.

[Multiple sclerosis is beatable someday]

Multiple sclerosis is beatable someday. Someday. And with your help, someday soon. Ride hard tomorrow and be safe. Thanks.