

CYCLING WITHOUT AGE



WEST HARTFORD, CT

stories by CYCLING WITHOUT AGE

Cycling Without Age

**A joint project with Central Connecticut State University Students &
Hughes Health and Rehabilitation**

2016



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What's Cycling Without Age? Ole Kassow, Co-Founder and Director

We take elderly people out for a bicycle ride—through the city, to the water and the countryside. We break them free from social isolation. Make them smile. Bring back their memories. And let them be part of society again and thereby renew their appetite for life itself. We give them the right to wind in their hair. But it's not only about the elderly people. It's also about the volunteers. The pilots. Cycling Without Age is probably less about volunteering in the traditional sense of the word and more about active citizenship. It's about creating relationships between people.

Who we are

We—Cycling Without Age—aim to reach and improve the lives of elderly people making nursing homes a place of joy and continued mobility. We believe that life can and should be beautiful even if you're close to a hundred years.

Our guiding principles

Generosity: Generosity permeates every single activity in Cycling Without Age and works its magic at many different levels.

Slowness: Slowness allows you to sense the environment, be present in the moment and it allows people you meet along the way to be curious about Cycling Without Age.

Storytelling: We tell stories, we listen to stories of the elderly people on the bike and we also document these stories when we share them via word of mouth or on social media.

Relationships: We create a multitude of new relationships across any border in our society.

Without Age: We let people age in a positive context - fully aware of the opportunities that lie ahead when interacting with their local community.

INTRODUCTION: EVERYTHING SHE PROMISED



None of us knew each other, but all came together around wine and fine food in the cellar of a restaurant in Brooklyn on a Saturday afternoon to talk about Cycling Without Age. Each person at the table had either started a chapter in his or her town or wanted to. Our leader, Ole Kassow, Co-Founder and Director of CWA, was there from his native Denmark to travel to various spots in the U.S. to help promote further expansion of his vision: bicycle rickshaws ridden by volunteer pilots that bring seniors back into their communities, especially elderly confined to nursing homes.

I had seen Ole's TED talk online. But here, in person, over lunch, I sensed something deeper at play beyond the charming stories about happy seniors getting outside and well-intentioned volunteers. Later, after dessert, I pressed him about what had motivated him to immerse himself so fully into the CWA mission. He told me he remembered as a boy riding his bicycling while pushing his father, who was confined to a wheelchair because of multiple sclerosis.

After hearing that story, and visiting the residents at Hughes Health and

Rehabilitation, which houses the rickshaw for the West Hartford, CT program, I knew this was about way more than wind in the hair. Who is getting more from the experience? The boy pushing his father or the father receiving the assist? The resident in the rickshaw or the volunteer pilot? It's a circle of giving and taking, of relief and gratitude. For all, it's a humbling, positive experience about the power of small gestures. Ole understood that at some deep level and has made it his life's mission to keep it all rolling.

Fortunately for the state of Connecticut, Lene Bruun, also from Denmark, came to West Hartford because of her husband's job at LEGO. She had a friend who knew of Ole Kassow's program, and Lene herself was in search of something engaging to do during her two-year stint in the United States.

"At first people were not sure about the commitment from the [CWA] group," Mark Finkelstein, Vice President of Hughes, says. "But then after just one meeting with Lene Bruun, we knew this was for real. She delivered on everything she promised," which included raising thousands of dollars for the purchase of a

rickshaw, getting the West Hartford Bicycle Advisory Committee's support for the chapter, and securing Hughes' approval to pilot what proved to be one of the first CWA chapters in the U.S.

"I never imagined it would be this amazing," Mark says.

Read these stories from Central Connecticut State University students to find out more about what people gain from bringing Cycling Without Age into their communities.

Mary Collins
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Spring 2016



Ole Kassow

International Director,
Cycling Without Age



Mary Collins

Associate Professor, English
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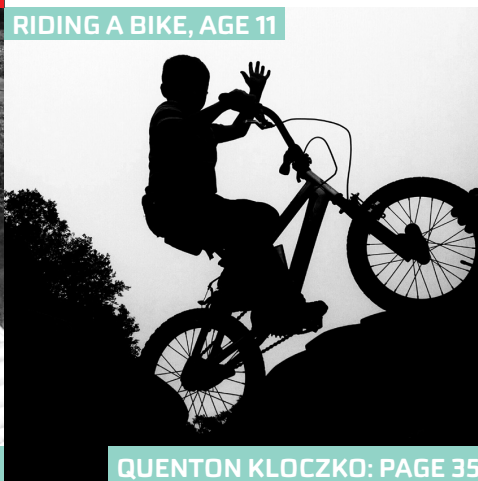


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THE RICKSHAW

Each rickshaw has a seat placed purposefully in the front of the bike so the elderly can hear the pilots clearly and the pilots are close enough to hear them—literally designed with the intention of good conversation in mind.

**—Dan Firestone
Incoming Director of CWA**

DESIGNED FOR CONVERSATION

BY ALLISON COOKE



“Want me to show you how it works?” Dan Firestone, the future director of Cycling Without Age in West Hartford, Connecticut, asks me with a smile. He turns the bike battery on and sits on the seat.

“This rickshaw is designed for conversation.”

I’m curious about his comment, thinking maybe he means when people of the neighborhood pass by and ask about the bright red bicycle that cruises through West Hartford and into Elizabeth Park. While that’s true, what Dan was really talking about are the conversations he gets to have with each of the riders that hop on the rickshaw. The elderly that ride in that front-facing seat get to share a little about the weather, memories from the past, or just sit in silence; and that’s okay too.

Each rickshaw has a seat placed purposefully in the front of the bike so the elderly can hear the pilots clearly and the pilots are close enough to hear them—literally designed with the intention of good conversation in mind. The bikes even have a button to ensure a smooth and easy ride for the pilot. These bikes are not for pilots who want to get a strenuous cycling workout into their day. Dan and Kevin showed me how this organization is truly for people who love people.

Dan Firestone and Kevin Sullivan are just two of the pilots that visit the Hughes Health and Rehabilitation Center in West Hartford a few times a week. Elderly residents will bundle up and snuggle into the red-cushioned seat that awaits them outside the doors of their home.

“There’s always a little hesitation when it’s cold. They always think it will be cold because they bundle up for 70 degree weather. It amazes me,” Dan laughs, and then seems more somber. “So many of these people are used to a life that only involves sitting in a corner.”

Cycling Without Age allows them to get a little wind in their hair, a truly invigorating feeling.

Dan and Kevin have loved cycling since they can remember. Kevin bikes about 10 miles on his trip to West Hartford from his home in Wethersfield, saying how a car just doesn’t do it for him. Dan received his first bike when he was 11 years old and still has it somewhere in his house.

Their passion for cycling inspires me; I can see the joy in their eyes and it doesn’t come from a bike.

“It’s not my love for biking. It’s my love for seeing the expression on people’s faces, their stories.”

The pilots get a range of riders from the chatty, charming and overzealous to the more reserved and even hopeless. The pilots only hope the biking experience can change the moods of the latter.

“I once met a woman who came on the rickshaw and the first words she said was ‘No one wants anything to do with me.’”

Her sons had never visited her. Her nurses were the only people in her life. She's one of the ones that always comes back, though. Each time with a bigger smile. "That's the most rewarding part."

Dan laughs when remembering one particular man.

"I once had a rider who had dementia and couldn't remember anything. Saddest part was he was younger than me. During our whole ride he pointed out every single thing we saw. First it was each car we passed, then the colors of the cars, then license plate numbers. After that got old he looked to the sky. He pointed out each airplane."

A few days pass and he saw that same man sitting in the home. While he thought it was a shot in the dark, Dan asked, "Do you remember me?"

The man's eyes lit up and he immediately began to list: "Chevrolet, Volkswagen, Buick." He remembered every single detail of their ride, proving how much it truly meant to him.

"This isn't for pilots who are interested in riding bikes around. This is for the people."

Dan walks over to the bike and turns off the battery.

"God truly blessed me."



“I used to go everywhere on bicycle. I never drive a car.”

Gabrielle tells me that she stopped riding at 72.

“I miss my bicycle.”

**—Gabrielle Bakasys
Interviewed by Taylor Lukeski**

THE PASSENGERS

QUEEN OF THE RICKSHAW

BY SHANNON BUCKLEY



"I can't wait to bust out of this joint and go to McDonald's, and play bingo and win free cheeseburgers."

Miriam, a petite middle-aged woman tells me that her favorite activity is bingo. She explains that she is the best bingo player at Hughes. Recently, after not only a five-game winning streak, but Hughes running out of prizes, Miriam was placed on bingo probation, in hopes she can return next week to her beloved game.

When not playing and beating everyone in bingo, Miriam is riding in the rickshaw. The "Queen" of the rickshaw, Miriam who has taken over ten rides, probably a record at Hughes, says it gives her sense of freedom. The wind whipping in "my hair, the feeling of fresh air on my skin and the people waving brings me happiness." It allows the Queen to see something else, other than the white walls she resides in.

Last October, Miriam was selected to ride in a parade for the founder of Hartford, Thomas Hooker. The Queen explains that she was selected to participate because she doesn't require an aide.

"I felt so fortunate to be selected to participate in the parade. I gave candy to the kids. I saw smiling faces and people in the crowd were waving and cheering for me."

When the Queen passed each group, she gave them the honored wave back. As she reflects on the parade, she has hope that they will select her again. The parade made Miriam so happy and so proud that she couldn't say enough about the uplifting experience.

Miriam explains that residents, much like her, have their days scheduled for them. "We eat breakfast, lunch and dinner at the same time every day. We either have painting, movie time or bingo every day. Sometimes I need something different to look at."

Sitting in the white wall open room I look around. To my left I see a group of residents propped in front of the television, to my right an instructor setting up the activity of the day, which is painting. Miriam explains "I'm not too good at painting, bingo is my game." But sitting right in front of me was a sixty-year-old woman who was eager for her first ride of the season.

As we concluded our conversation, Miriam smiles and waves, asking me if I want a bag of chips she won at bingo the other day. Thanking her for a wonderful conversation, and politely saying no to the bag of chips, I leave.

But moments later, the Queen comes walking out the door with the biggest smile on her face.

"I'm getting my first ride of the season," she says to me as she waves to all the other students. Miriam climbs into the rickshaw and poses for pictures, once again in the spotlight.

Pictures end, and Miriam takes off on her first ride of 2016.

She says, "Everybody should experience the rickshaw. It gives you something more beautiful to look at."



TO JUST TAKE OFF

BY JOANNA HEATH



On one of the first truly warm days of spring, the dayroom is full of caregivers and visitors dressed in short sleeves, everyone eager to feel the long-anticipated sun on their skin after the lengthy winter. Shirley is sitting by the window when an aide comes to wheel her to the table. Her hands stay knotted against her thick vest, eyes searching below her wooly knit hat. “I belong out there,” she says, her impossibly quiet voice floating up in the direction of the window.

Before transitioning to Hughes, Shirley spent her life giving in to the pull of the outdoors. In college, as she worked to earn her teaching degree at Central Connecticut State University, Shirley and her girlfriends—some of whom still come to visit her in the nursing home—would steal off for weekend hiking and camping trips. “We’d get the feeling to go, and we’d just take off,” Shirley says, seeming to marvel at how easy it was.

Later, that easy energy defined Shirley’s role as a mother. As the leader of her two daughters’ Girl Scout troops, she remembers dragging her only son along on the girls’ frequent outings and camping trips. “One night my son Jay went racing through the campsite; he was the only boy so he had to stir up the girls,” she says with a small smile. “We had such good times, and always—we wanted to be outside.”

The memories get caught in Shirley’s throat as she speaks, looking again toward the window. “I was always active. You don’t even see it happening, and then one day... you’ve lost it.”

Like many residents living in facilities, she sometimes longs for the parts of her life that she can no longer access. She collects photographs to preserve those parts of herself – small reminders that serve as proxies for the people she wants to see and the things she wants to do. Still glancing toward the window, she asks about a photo she was promised for her collection.

“They took a photo of me on the ride with my daughter and Lene from Denmark—the one who took us out. Do you know if they’re going to give it to me? I’d like to have that.”

Last fall, during a visit with her daughter, the nursing home staff offered Shirley a ride on a rickshaw. As Lene Bruun piloted through the center of town in West Hartford, she humored Shirley’s requests to hear about Lene’s life and family. Shirley recounts how the trio stopped for coffee, giving her a chance to “just do regular things and socialize.”

After their cups were empty, Lene pedaled through the nearby park.

“The air was a little breezy—it felt so nice,” Shirley says, recalling that detail in particular, several months after the ride. Making their way back to Hughes, Shirley had watched the trees pass overhead, admiring the New England turn of the leaves into the colors of autumn. Under the blanket, she leaned into her grown daughter, reminded of those Girl Scout outings they took together when it was easier to honor the impulse to just take off.



I MISS MY BICYCLE

BY TAYLOR LUKESKI



She is still, but her hands shake. Seated beside me, Gabrielle Bakasys stares straight ahead toward the windows at the front of the room. Her short white hair remains sparse until the curls at her forehead, where her skin is freckled and wrinkled. As she speaks, her words give way to small dimples in her cheeks, and her conversation is somewhat caught beneath a heavy French accent.

“Oh, I was born in France. I used to ride bicycles myself. Oh yeah. We used to just ride on the streets.” She tells me that she left France for America with her husband at the age of 22, moving first to New York, then Hartford, and finally West Hartford. He got his license, but she never did.

“I used to go everywhere on bicycle. I never drive a car.”

Gabrielle tells me that she stopped riding at 72.

“I miss my bicycle.”

Now, at 86, she remains stagnant in posture with her walker perched at her knees. She tries to sign her name but fails, letting her hands rest once again on the arms of the chair. But, they don’t rest. They shake with each word, seemingly moving up and down with each breath she takes. “My hand is not too steady. Both of them. I have to practice.” I expect to see anger in her eyes, to hear resentment in her voice, but she remains absolutely calm and content.

When I ask her about her only ride in the rickshaw last August, she answers

with a simple, “It’s nice,” before adding, “I go back to where I used to live, and see my house. I lived 42 years over here. I go back to Elizabeth Park. I know the place very well after 42 years. I know the place,” in a very pleased and relaxed voice.

Gabrielle had asked the pilot to bring her by her old house, something she’d had to sell to pay the bills. For her, the ride was not just about seeing the blooming flowers at the park, but also about remembering her life. The series of steps that it took to realize Gabrielle’s request stretch through my mind like a street full of stoplights changing from green to yellow to red, before sounding the signal for pedestrians: Denmark’s Cycling Without Age Co-Founder, Ole Kassow, sparked an idea that spread throughout 24 countries; Lene Bruun, inspired by the idea and getting Ole enthusiastically on board, started one of the first chapters in the United States.

Lene, like Gabrielle, left Denmark and came to the United States with her husband, who had a two-year assignment with LEGO. As part of the 90 percent of people who ride bicycles in Denmark, she had spent her life riding on the country’s five foot wide bike paths protected from traffic with a curb. When she arrived in America, she felt isolated with nothing to do and nowhere particularly safe to ride her bicycle. With an aching desire to get outside, she joined West Hartford’s Bicycle Advisory Committee meetings, and recommended they create a chapter of Cycling Without Age.

The committee liked the idea. They helped raise money to pay for the rickshaw; Hughes Health and Rehabilitation Center agreed to store the rickshaw and

help find senior riders; pilots volunteered and trained. All West Hartford residents, including all elderly, were given the opportunity to volunteer for a ride.

Finally, when the pilots arrived at Hughes and readied the rickshaw, Gabrielle was able to ask for her own special route. She was brought past her house in a way that her health would allow, and in a way that would keep the wind in her hair and the sun on her delicate hands, even if she wasn't the one pedaling.

"It's something different, something different. Get out of here for a little while. I feel a little bit better. Fresh air."



COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS

It helps put West Hartford on the map as a bicycle-friendly town. I have kids [in college]. I want them to have a reason to come back to their hometown and have a bikeable, walkable community where you don't have to get into a car to go to Whole Foods or CVS.

**—Scott Franklin
Chair, Bike West Hartford, Inc.**



LENE BRUUN: VOLUNTEERING, MOVEMENT AND COMMUNITY

BY LILY GRON



Lene, a naturally passionate person, gives our small group of students a rundown of the rickshaw. I can sense the bike has become a form of comfort in her new home. During the summer of 2014, Lene moved from Denmark to West Hartford, Connecticut. She was accompanied by her three children and husband, who works for the Danish company, LEGO. After all the bustle of relocating had settled into a domestic schedule, Lene found herself feeling secluded. With her children in school, she decided she needed to be engaged in something and started attending West Hartford Bicycle Advisory Committee meetings, which regularly drew 30 to 40 local bike enthusiasts eager to improve bike safety and routes in the town.

Tall and lean, Lene glowed as she moved gracefully around the rickshaw outside the Hughes Health and Rehabilitation facility.

“Would anyone like a ride?”

I immediately offered myself and a classmate to be the first passengers.

As I sat and chatted with her about life in Denmark, she explained children are raised to be responsible members of their society.

“Joining a sports team is less about competition than promoting volunteering, movement, and community.”

She realized by helping to launch a Cycling Without Age program in her adopted new home of West Hartford she could hit all three goals: to volunteer, to celebrate movement and help others do the same, and to connect with the community.

As I sat in the rickshaw as a passenger, I couldn't help but smile. It was a cool

day, but the wind still felt nice rushing past my face as I looked at buildings passing by.

“Would you like to try?” Lene offered as she paused the bike at the end of the street.

I timidly passed, not ambitious enough to try the funky bike yet; however, my co-passenger was up for the test. Lene patiently showed her the brakes one more time and trotted next to us as I rode with my new driver.

When we finally looped back around to the facility, we were met by students who have been conversing with habitual passengers from Hughes.

“Miriam wants to go out on the rickshaw” one of the students called. Without a second thought, Lene was already in search of her next passenger eager to take a ride.

Her selfless motivation to provide a stimulating activity for the elders in the center is amazing. People who once had the freedom to go wherever they pleased were now more confined. Lene could relate to their sense of isolation, the same sense of stir-craziness she felt during her first autumn in the U.S. The rickshaw and Cycling Without Age program wound up working for all involved—Lene, the volunteer pilots and the seniors seeking rides.

By pioneering the Cycling Without Age program in West Hartford, Lene started something that has gained tremendous momentum; from zero chapters to dozens of CWA programs across the country in less than 18 months.

She will be moving back to Denmark, but her volunteerism set in motion a joyful sequence of events that the local community hopes to sustain after she's gone.



AGELESS

DAN FIRESTONE WITH JAZMINE NIEVES



I spoke with Dan Firestone at Hughes Health and Rehabilitation in April 2016 about his role as one of the first Cycling Without Age pilots in West Hartford. This is an edited version of that interview. (Jazmine Nieves)

In mid October I took a Hughes patient for a ride through Elizabeth Park. She was quite sullen and not very talkative, try as I might to get her to come out of her shell. Once we got to the park she became a different person. She began to point out the different Halloween displays. She was especially thrilled by a display of a witch on a bicycle hung from a tree, which gave the impression that she was flying on her bike through the trees. I felt good that I was able to give a little levity to her life and brighten her day.

I'll be 75 in another month. A lot of these people, the only outside exposure they get is when someone walks them or wheelchairs them to the car, and when they get home they sit in the corner and everyone ignores them, and at the end of the day, they get in the car and come back here.

I come down here, I ride for an hour, here and back, so that's two hours out of the day that I gotta give up, but I enjoy doing it. Most of these pilots enjoy doing it also. We've got Bill Dunnakin [another pilot]; Bill was 78, he may be 79 by now. We'll take them to Elizabeth Park, and over to see the ducks, or take them to the West Hartford Center, stop and have an ice cream.

I have spoken to a few trained pilots who have yet to offer rides to patients. The biggest problem they encounter is timing. Most work during the day and

thus are limited to offering rides in the evenings and weekends, which is also family time. Also, the old format for offering rides suggested the offer of a ride be submitted a day or two in advance. I hope to have resolved that issue by speaking with the Hughes Director of Recreation, who agreed that one need only call the facility two plus hours in advance and ask for someone in recreation to schedule a rider. That means if you have the time and the urge you can be more spontaneous.

Volunteering to do this is truly rewarding!



“Continue for 1.9 miles, then the destination is on your right,” I hear Siri say from my cup holder.

My knowledge of West Hartford is scarce, and I didn’t want to be late for my interview. As I approach a stoplight I look to my right and see a bicyclist, decked out from head-to-toe in yellow spandex. I notice the shoulder of the road is a decent size, essentially acting as a bike lane. As I get closer to West Hartford Center, however, I realize that now not only is there not a bike lane, but the shoulder has shrunk considerably. I think for a moment about how unsafe this is, and notice the bicyclist in my rearview mirror, about to reach this risky road.

“It scares the crap out of you, it really does,” says Scott Franklin, head of Bike West Hartford Inc. and Chair of the West Hartford Bicycle Advisory Committee. From the minute I start talking with him, I could tell this is someone with immense pride in his hometown, but who wants to make some positive changes in the community as well. It soon became clear that the worries I had for that bicyclist while driving were legitimate.

“I’ve been all over the world bicycling, and the place I felt it is most dangerous is my own hometown. We don’t have very many bike lanes, we don’t have very many main roads that have shoulders. If you really need to get somewhere, you need to go on a main road, and many main roads are not conducive to cycling.”

It comes as a bit of a surprise, then, that when Lene Bruun approached Franklin a year ago with the idea of creating one of the first Cycling Without Age chapters in the U.S. in West Hartford, he was very receptive. “If someone comes to me with incredible energy like Lene, I’m gonna let them run with it. I’ll back them 100 percent. Let’s make it happen.”

The idea resonated with Franklin, who has members of his family at various

SCOTT FRANKLIN: SPANDEX - OPTIONAL

BY TYLER CRANDALL



nursing homes as well. “You have these people in nursing homes and they’re there all day every day. They almost never get out, and now you get them out with the wind in their hair, and they have something to look forward to.”

Many of the passengers have praised the work that Cycling Without Age has done, and Franklin says he can already see the impact it has had on the community. Franklin, who took pilot training himself this spring, hopes that more rickshaws are in the near future for West Hartford, and that they can inspire more towns around Connecticut to follow suit. It is also an effective way to show the Town Hall that West Hartford does have a growing bicycle community, and more steps need to be taken for it to become a safe, bicycle-friendly town.

Franklin has been part of an effort to do just that. One of the policies he has helped introduce is Complete Streets, which sees that roadways in West Hartford accommodate all users, not just drivers, and that the town adopts easy and accessible transportation through town for all bicyclists and pedestrians. Out of more than 70 Complete Streets policies passed last year in the U. S., West Hartford’s was rated the second best by a national watchdog group.

Another effort put forth was the idea of “road diets,” which takes a wide street and tries to compress it in order to slow down traffic. When Franklin begins to talk about the upcoming efforts to perform a road diet on Main Street, the sense of urgency is palpable; it could be a game changer.

“Main Street between [West Hartford Center] and Bishops Corner is essentially a four-lane highway, you cannot bike there. If you do, you’re taking a huge risk,” he says.

They received a \$75,000 grant from the state in order to perform a feasibility

test, and are currently going door-to-door and conducting open houses to see if it is feasible to reduce the four lanes down to two, add a middle turning lane and dramatically improve the size of the shoulder and sidewalks. It would certainly be more bicycle friendly, though the plan is more about cutting back on the ridiculous car accident rate along that stretch of road by slowing the traffic down with the narrower lanes.

With the efforts he and his team have put in to make streets more conducive to biking, as well as Cycling Without Age offering exciting ways to get the community involved, Franklin seems hopeful for the future.

“It helps put West Hartford on the map as a bicycle-friendly town. I have kids [in college]. I want them to have a reason to come back to their hometown and have a bikeable, walkable community where you don’t have to get into a car to go to Whole Foods or CVS. Why should you get into a car to do a three minute errand?”

As our conversation comes to a close I begin to think about what “bicycle-friendly” means. In a way, it is an encompassing term for a healthier, happier community, and Franklin is trying to achieve this for his town through the medium of his favorite hobby.

“You don’t have to be wearing spandex to just get on the bike and go to the Center to get a cup of coffee, you know? Just don’t automatically get into a car. If you don’t bike, we’re happy to support pedestrians walking,” Franklin says.

As I leave the building to get in my car that message sticks with me. Come to think of it, I did need some milk.

I’d better walk to Whole Foods.

My mouse clicks on a cluster of the logos over Denmark; I zoom in closer and lose my count hovering close to my screen. I move to countries like Italy, Germany, Brazil, and Sweden that house many CWA programs. Co-Founder and Director Ole Kassow has created an uplifting movement for the elderly around the world.

—Annette Skrzypinski

INTERNATIONAL REACH

PEDALING BACKWARDS

BY ANNETTE SKRZYPINSKI



The light hairs on my arms stand up to the cold, spring air. I shiver and peer at the flowers and a cream-colored building with a sign that reads: Hughes Health and Rehabilitation Center. I look at the sky, anxiously hoping for the sun to appear as I walk inside to seek warmth.

The beeping noises of various medical machines fiddle with my ear as I squeeze myself through a narrow hallway. A staffer pushes an elderly resident in a wheelchair then pauses for me to make my way through a tight fit between them and a food cart. Linen bags are plopped outside of rooms. Residents peer out to the commotion with muted faces, their eyes leveling with mine. I see a break, an open room full of residents just several floor tiles away where my classmates sit interviewing elderly who have ridden in the rickshaw as part of the Cycling Without Age program.

That night at home, I glare into a bright screen with images of the smiling elderly being cycled around in different parts of the world on the Cycling Without Age website. I click on a map of the United States and Europe, seeing many small squares of their logo—a pilot with a red rickshaw and passenger. I think about how the elderly around us are aging globally; in countless countries, the United States and places much closer to home, New England.

My mouse clicks on a cluster of the logos over Denmark; I zoom in closer and lose my count hovering close to my screen. I move to countries like Italy, Germany, Brazil and Sweden that house many CWA programs. I skip over the Atlantic Ocean to the United States. More logos follow across in California, Texas, New York, Utah, South Carolina, Florida, Minnesota and Wisconsin, with several of the logos popping up in each of these states. For a program that has only been active for two years in the U.S., the growth has been tremendous. Co-Founder and Director Ole Kassow has created an uplifting movement for the

elderly around the world.

Thanks to Lene Bruun, the West Hartford Cycling Without Age program was one of the first pinpoints on the U.S. map. Eager to get involved after arriving in a new country without enough to do, she told the local West Hartford Bicycle Advisory Committee about the program and then ran with it from there. She knew it would be a challenge—the town hardly has the bicycling infrastructure she's accustomed to in Denmark, but it still took less than six months to get the program up and running.

As I close my laptop, I think about my grandfather, who passed away 12 years ago. When I was just 14, I often visited him in a place similar to the crowded hallways of Hughes. A disheartening fight with prostate cancer put my grandfather in and out of hospitals and nursing homes for several years. A man who was once active and mobile was separated from the outdoors in countless rooms that he could never call his own. He felt a great disconnect between the man-made walls and the natural outdoors.

As I continue to think about my grandfather, I sit in class the next day and listen to my classmates talk about their interviews with the Hughes residents. Shannon giggles and chats excitedly about Miriam, who she dubs “Queen of the Rickshaw,” since she has been on countless rides, and who would do anything to get out and go to McDonald's. Joanna speaks about her resident who had gone for a ride in the rickshaw, a former teacher who lived to be in the outdoors with her gal pals.

I wish my grandfather could have experienced this program. He could have been in the outdoors, active and mobile once again, with me nestled by his side in a red rickshaw.



FLASHBACK

It was a time before school cliques and the opposite sex, before the grind of reality and responsibilities, when all that mattered was simply finding the next hill to climb and rocket down. Embracing the feeling of freedom that ensued was everything.

—Quenton Kloczko

WELCOME, PLEASE SIGN IN BY MARISSA RIOUX



My great grandmother loved the salty air and sound of the waves at our beach house, her favorite place to be. She would walk to the beach every day with my great grandfather up until the day he passed away. After he died, my great grandma's health began spiraling downwards. Her memories began to mush together and one day she wasn't able to drive herself home; she had forgotten her way.

The toughest decision my grandfather ever made was to move his mother into the nursing home; he had no other options. I remember the last time I went to my great-grandmother's house, everything was placed neatly in boxes. While the nursing home where she eventually moved to was neat, it smelled of Bengay and flowers, something she would have tried to get rid of, but there the smell never went away. I noticed a sign to the right of me pointing to the stairs. As I headed in that direction, I overheard, "Please sign in."

Please sign in? Sign into what? To see my grandmother?

In the end she was only brought outside five times in the last 365 days of her life, something Hughes and the Cycling Without Age chapter in West Hartford is trying to combat head on.

As Hughes staffer Jennette Livingston told me, for the elderly at the Center, riding in the rickshaw, feeling "the wind blowing in their hair makes them feel alive again. The sirens, the cars, the colors allow them to use all their senses."

I think of my great-grandmother when I look at the rickshaw trimmed with red canvas in front of Hughes and imagine all the joy it could have brought her.



RIDING A BIKE: AGE 11

BY QUENTON KLOCZKO



I careen down a hill with my feet locked on to the pedals and my hands gripping the handlebars with wind streaming down my face like a gentle massage. Once again I am seeing the world through the eyes of an 11-year-old boy.

Yes, 11 seems just right.

Not four, the age my dad softly pushed the back seat of my first bike, a Batman bike, into a bigger world. A feeling of pure freedom consumed me like never before as the excitement of controlling the two wheels on my own overcame me, made me feel I had been finally granted access to the big leagues.

Not seven, when I longed for places beyond the front lawn; the driveway just couldn't contain me anymore. The world was now my playground and my

bike was passport. I freewheeled the streets, zipping from here to there. I had never traveled alone miles from home, but on that bike my horizons grew tremendously.

But even by age nine, I had not quite experienced the full freedom of my bike the way I did by the time I was 11.

Ah, yes, 11: a master and commander of all that I surveyed in my travels, a time when I was old enough to pursue adventures, knowing the confidence of my capabilities. It was a time before school cliques and the opposite sex, before the grind of reality and responsibilities, when all that mattered was simply finding the next hill to climb and rocket down from. Embracing the feeling of freedom that ensued was everything. I felt infinite. I would do this every day like a ritual and it would never get tiring.

It still isn't. Me and my bike: nothing controlling me. Well, except my mother's booming voice when she would yell dinnertime with the might of a boisterous god in the way only a mother can. I remember cutting through yards hoping that a piece of dessert was still waiting for me.

Now I'm in my twenties, but, still, when I'm riding on my bicycle I simply feel alive. Everyone has that distant memory, nestled between the humdrum of bills and work, of their childish selves perpetually on a bike. Whether it's soaring down a hill at Mach speed, being part of a convoy of bike gangs and thinking you can take on the world, or the tranquil solitude of a solo bike ride as the sun sets, it's still such a rush.

**“We were asked to participate and my first reaction was,
‘Oh my goodness, why wouldn’t we?’”**

**—Mark Finkelstein,
Vice President, Hughes Health and Rehabilitation**

GETTING STARTED WITH CWA

UP AND RIDING

BY ZELVAN PHILLIPS



A person's independent mobility is extremely delicate; it can be the deciding factor in someone being happy or sad. It's not unusual for people to become less mobile as they get older. But living in a nursing home doesn't mean you have to be completely stripped of your happiness of mobility, and this is what the rickshaw prevents; the rickshaw provides mobile happiness directly from Denmark.

To get this program started at a facility, a caring character like West Hartford CWA Coordinator Lene Bruun is needed. First, an international license must be applied for at cyclingwithoutage.org/license/. Also communicate with the local government and nonprofit bicycle groups, who are often great resources for spreading the word, raising funds and volunteers.

And you will need the help. The rickshaw alone can cost as much as \$7000 and then insurance and liability has to be considered for protection against accidents.

For most CWA programs, pilots are volunteers who must first be trained by a current pilot before they can start giving rides. This aspect of it might be the most difficult component as program leaders must find enthusiastic kind-hearted people like themselves who are willing to donate their time. A good way of acquiring pilots is to build partnerships with the local biking clubs, which is what Lene did for Hughes Health and Rehabilitation. Dan Firestone and Kevin Sullivan, both of Bike West Hartford, Inc., jumped onboard with the program. Dan will replace Lene as CWA Coordinator and both men are already trained active pilots.

After having funding, contacts and a plan in place, contact the CWA Founder Ole Kassow or his Co-Founder Dorthe Pedersen for guidance on the best way to ensure things run as smoothly as possible. Communicating with them will definitely quicken the start of a program and aid its success.

It took Lene six months to start her program from scratch, one of the first in the United States.

Unfortunately, rickshaws are only shipped from Denmark two-to-three times a year, though Ole is working with some American companies to see if they can start production here in the States. This might take some time to finalize but it will definitely make this program more cost friendly and easier to start.

Fortunately for Miriam, a patient at Hughes, West Hartford's CWA program received their rickshaw in time for her magical experience.

"First ride of the season Miriam?" Dan Firestone gestured towards Miriam.

"Yeah! It felt good to get out, it definitely felt good to get out after being in there all winter. The flowers aren't out yet, but it was good," was Miriam's response as she glowed with glee and a sense of enchantment upon returning from her first rickshaw adventure of the warm season. Miriam's pilot, Lene Bruun, the one who brought the whole idea of Cycling Without Age to Hughes, also smiled and seemed to be having as much fun as her passenger.

SETTING UP A PILOT PROGRAM: KEVIN SULLIVAN WITH KELLY MOORE-NORWICH

The following excerpt is from an interview I did with Kevin Sullivan, the new Coordinator of West Hartford's CWA pilot program. (Kelly Moore-Norwich)

When I first heard about Cycling Without Age, it was from Bike Walk Connecticut, a statewide bike advocacy group. It struck me immediately as something very cool and something that could help promote bicycling. I donate a lot of volunteer time to cycling and advocacy. Cycling Without Age is more about service for seniors, and it's a very enjoyable experience for the seniors. When the weather is good for residents, I average about three days each month at Hughes, for about 3-4 hours on each day.

Lene was doing everything for Cycling Without Age—getting the project off

the ground, outreach, training—so when she said that she was returning to Denmark, no one wanted to take over everything, so we split up the duties. She felt like I knew the most about training and that I was the most experienced pilot, so I got the position of pilot trainer. All of the new people joining will go to me, and Dan Firestone will help if we get a lot of new pilot members. Lene

used to say they needed 20-25 pilots to fully handle a rickshaw in Denmark. We probably have about 15 right now, so we're getting there, but we've got a ways to go.



Kevin Sullivan
Pilot Trainer,
Cycling Without Age, West Hartford

FINDING PARTNERS IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Hughes Health and Rehabilitation sits in a low-level building on Highland Street near the West Hartford/Hartford line in a residential neighborhood renowned for its glorious old New England homes. Any senior citizen may ride in the Cycling Without Age rickshaw, but Hughes led the way by teaming up with Lene Bruun from the start.

"We were asked to participate and my first reaction was, 'Oh my goodness, why wouldn't we?'" says Mark Finkelstein, Hughes' Vice President.

Finding such partners willing to work with a fledgling CWA program is crucial for success, because it makes it so much easier to match the rickshaw, pilots and riders. Together, Hughes and CWA in West Hartford figured out liability issues, release forms, storage for the rickshaw, how to recruit potential riders and more. Both organizations funded this story project.

Hughes also proved an ideal location for the fledgling CWA program, because it's just a few blocks from Elizabeth Park, the oldest public rose garden in

America and on the national register of historic places. A pilot can pick up a resident from Hughes, dash across Fern Street and enter the park from the back. Once inside, there's a paved loop around gardens people from all over the world come to see.

"When someone is feeling good about life, they will be happier," says Mark.

And what better way to improve someone's day than a slow bike ride to see the flowers.



Mark Finkelstein
Vice President,
Hughes Health and Rehabilitation



Hughes Health & Rehabilitation

Caring for loved ones. *Family style.*

Proud to be the 1st skilled nursing facility in the northeast to offer Cycling Without Age – a great ride that benefits the elderly and builds strong communities across generations.

Hughes Health & Rehabilitation is dedicated to providing health care services in an environment where caring makes the difference.



29 Highland Street, West Hartford, CT – 860-236-5623 – HughesHealth.com



We are Bike West Hartford, Inc. a CT 501(c)(3) not for profit corporation focused on the development of bicycle infrastructure and education within West Hartford and surrounding communities.

There are many factors to consider in order to create an ideal environment for bicyclists, motorists, pedestrians and businesses. Through community advocacy, Bike West Hartford, Inc. hopes to achieve harmonious community development within the framework of a bicycle friendly community.

The efforts of Bike West Hartford, Inc. can be seen throughout the town of West Hartford, CT by the installation of bicycle signs, bike lanes, bike racks and programs like Cycling Without Age.

All are welcome to attend the monthly meetings of Bike West Hartford, Inc. and the West Hartford Bicycle Advisory Committee. Please visit our website for times and locations.

OUR GOALS

1. To Promote bicycle safety through education
2. To Promote bicycle awareness to motorists
3. To Develop the bicycle infrastructure of West Hartford
4. To Promote the positive impact which bicyclists have on the local economy
5. To Promote the health benefits and cost savings associated with bicycle transportation



Bike West Hartford, Inc. is able to continue its active role through the generous donations of local residents, businesses and fellow advocates.

Please visit our website www.bikewesthartford.org for more information, or, to donate, visit our Facebook page at [makewesthartfordbicyclefriendly](https://www.facebook.com/makewesthartfordbicyclefriendly).



www.cyclingwithoutage.com - West Hartford, CT 2016