

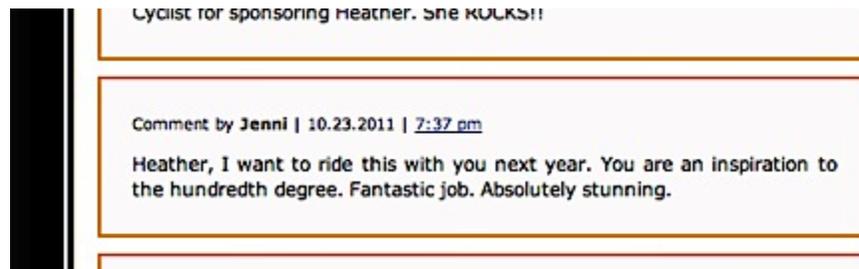


## Guest Post by Jenni Laurita: 2012 Tour de Pink Ride Report

10.22.2012 | 11:12 am

*A note from Fatty: Jenni Laurita was the ambassador for Team Fatty at the YSC Tour de Pink. I've asked her to tell her story, as well as give us a video. I think you'll agree she gets an A+. Next year I want to ride the Tour de Pink as the number one fundraising team. I'm just putting it out there before we get started.*

I love it when a plan comes together. One might say this plan started a year ago when [Heather rode the TdP](#). I was excited and inspired by her ride report and by her story.



Like Elden, I believe I have superpowers. To date, my superpowers have proven to be holding things until they dry, standing in the light (any light source for anyone working on anything important, that is), and being able to sing one song while a completely different song is playing. The mark of a good ride I think forces you to discover new superpowers.

By that standard, this ride was a winner. I discovered two new superpowers: fearless switchback descending and that I lack any knowledge of my personal limitations. I obviously can't tell you what my personal limitations would be since I lack knowledge of them, but what I can tell you is that I entered this commitment of 206 miles in 3 days and 12,000 feet of climbing without having trained or even ridden very much in the preceding months. I arrived with a fresh bruise on my arm from my most recent blood test and lingering pain from recent biopsies, but none of it would matter in the slightest.

I arrived at the hotel nice and early the day before the ride, and immediately had a chance to start getting to know people. Everyone was super friendly and happy to be reuniting. Organization and information was the best I've ever seen on any organized ride anywhere, and that's saying a lot. I've ridden many events around the country—the care for the riders was absolutely top-notch, start to finish, morning to night. In fact, the worst thing I could say about the whole weekend was they were out of sandwiches by the time I finished Sunday afternoon.

Before I flew to California, Giant offered to hook me up with a loaner bike: A TCR. I usually travel everywhere with my pink custom Sweetpea, but I was excited to demo a new bike on what I already knew would be a tough course.

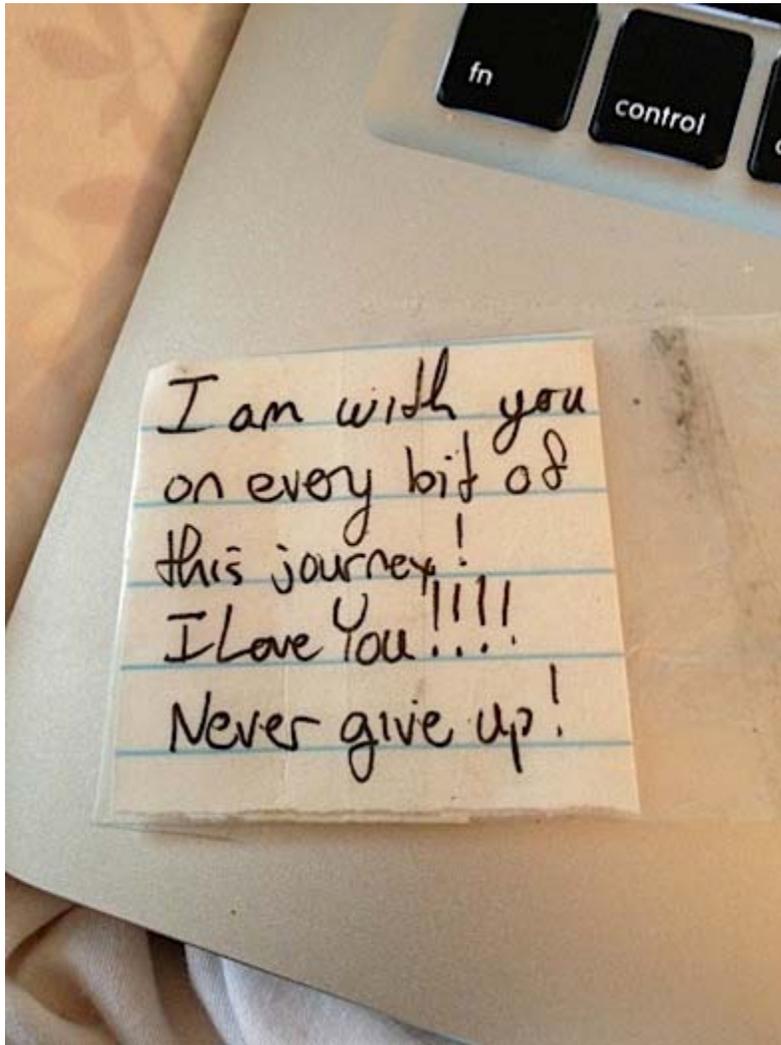
Thursday night, Giant, whose headquarters were just 3 miles away, showed up with trucks of loaner bikes. As I approached my bike, I couldn't help but notice it was just a wee little thing. I was the Gulliver to its Lilliputian. Ironic it was a "Giant" frame, the XS sticker giggled noticeable at me as I stood and frowned. I'm 5'7". Not going to work. Val, the amazing bike rep for Giant's woman's line, Liv Giant, tried to talk me into riding one of "her" bikes. Unfortunately for me, she used the word "comfort," which evoked baskets and step-through imagery. I was not a willing participant, I pushed for an appropriate TCR.

I was given a less diminutive full-carbon/ultegra TCR and enough adjusting of saddle height to make me feel ready to ride. I happily told the mechanic my crotch was going to friend him on Facebook, I was so grateful for the care he took making sure I was comfortable.

The skies had finally stopped raining and everyone was astounded by an extremely rare (for SoCal apparently) double rainbow. Here's my new friend, Val.



I made quick work of outfitting my bike with GoPro, Garmin, and an amazingly reassuring and motivating message from my sweetheart.



I totally got caught by surprise singing these words out loud as I rode up some huge hill and a pack of riders passed me. Awwwkard.

I can't count the number of times I looked down at this, knowing people were pulling for me while I was pushing myself really made so much of an impact- this note stayed taped securely to the top tube of the bike all weekend. I loved watching people walk over to the bike to read it, more than one woman teared up at its awesomeness. I highly recommend before embarking on a tough ride to tape something inspirational to your handlebars or top tube, or surprising a friend and doing it for them.

### **Day 1**

The first day's ride was relatively flat except for a massive downhill on some of the best switchbacks I've ever ridden. Ok, they're the only switchbacks I've ever ridden but that's where I discovered my superpower of downhill bombing. We were told to go only one at a time on the switchbacks, but I quickly realized I had to pass, and pass I did, with aplomb.

Many years ago I famously missed the century cut-off time on the Austin Livestrong course because I stopped to pet the llamas. It has been a recurring joke in my core group that I am not to pet llamas anymore, and I was determined this time to make good time. I was nervous about being able to finish such an ambitious course each day, sagging out just wasn't an option, but then I found too many reasons to stop. There were fields of red peppers . . .



There were interesting people with unique ideas of where to store what clearly must be an extra helmet or perhaps a woolen sweater...(how YOU doin'?)



There were diversions aplenty...



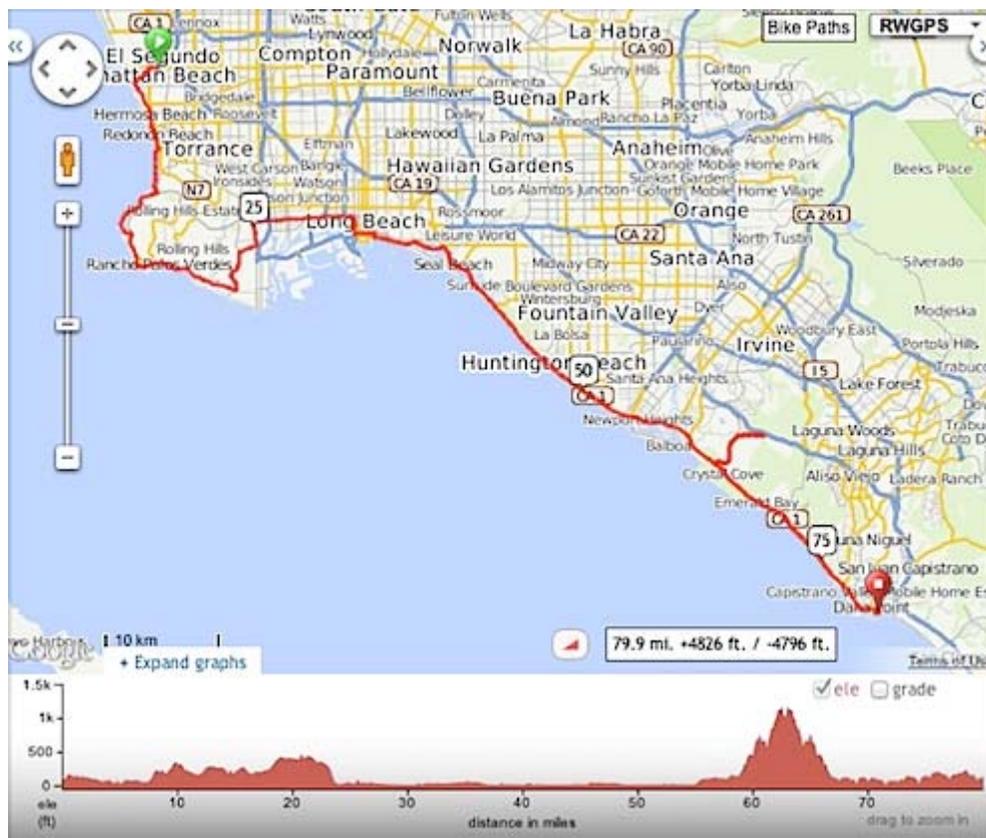
Fortunately, I made good enough time to enjoy myself every step of the way throughout all days.

Day 1 finished with a horrific climb up to the night's hotel; on this organized ride, hotel stays are included each night, along with all food. An absolutely incredible joy, you really only have to worry about riding your bike.

## **Day 2**

Today was going to be a tough day, it was the longest and contained an optional massive climb. I was fortunate enough to have roomed that night with Val, that rep from Giant. We discussed how unhappy I had become on the TCR. It's a fantastic bike, but completely wrong geometry for me; I was in a lot of pain. The handlebars were too wide and with an exceedingly long stem, I was reaching and suffering the whole day.

She offered me Giant's AMAZING "Avail"- full carbon, Di2 shifting, women's geometry- it was the "comfort" bike from day one, and I have to say I was never more comfortable. It's absolute dream bike I started instantly planning to steal. On more than one occasion I was so impressed with the stiff response to my efforts I thought surely the electronic assist was helping to pedal.



It was on this day that I realized there is an absolute science to understanding route advice from other riders. I overheard one woman telling another that the beginning of this ride was going to be "brutal", which scared me and likely the woman receiving this information.

After riding the decidedly not-brutal-for-me beginning of the ride, I started to qualify people in their ability to give route advice. I'm from New York, we have hills and mountains all over my base riding area. Another New Yorker needs no qualification, I'd accept their route advice point blank (unless of course they're not a cyclist, I've fallen for that one before). If you're from Iowa, or say, Kansas, your route advice comforts me, knowing full-well a brutal hill in Iowa can be the highway overpass. If you're from Colorado and your route advice includes the word brutal, I'm going back to bed.

In any case, I got through the initial ride and set my sights on the who-was-I-kidding-it-was-never-actually-optional mountain.

At the decision point, my bike instinctively turned toward this climb, it was something like 1000 to 1400" climbing in just under 4 miles. Lacking knowledge of my limitations served me well here through the 6-13% sustained inclines. Along the course the organizers arranged for us to be riding with a team of professionals, the team name escaped me partly because I'm forgetful and partly because I sucked wheel so closely I could only ever focus on the space between my bike and whomever was fortunate enough to be pulling for me.

## Cry O'Clock

The point is, on this climb there were a few pros peppered throughout the climb to help us along. Gil first came to me, and I told him to go away, I prefer to climb alone, partly because I was going just fast enough to stay upright, and partly because I was entering what I like to call, "Cry o'clock".

Cry o'clock happens on every cancer-focused ride, and it's probably the main reason I subject myself to suffering on the bike; cry o'clock gives me the opportunity to release what I'm holding and experiencing about the pain of cancer. As I struggle, I'm able to leave it all on the road. Sometimes I cry for myself, sometimes it's for someone I know, but I always cry. I did not want someone with me for cry o'clock, it's a somewhat sacred time. Admittedly, more than one Team Fatty member has helped me (or joined me) in cry o'clock, and I've always been grateful for them.

After finishing the — ok I'll say it — *brutal* climb, we had time for a few pictures before zooming back down. The view was fantastic, but the people were better. What a great bonding moment to stand with other hypoxians.

SAG met us at the top and refreshed our water, and everyone was off again.

We continued on more or less together until we arrived at the hotel, which — we were not told — was on a cliff. At the end of the day where I climbed thousands and thousands of feet, the last .1 mile was straight up the driveway at easily 12% grade. It was like a fart in your open mouth. Just nasty. I cursed the whole way, and I was not alone or unjustified, but seeing the other women standing and cheering at the top made it almost worth it.

Almost.

## Day 3

Day 3 seemed to be sketching a lot of people out- it was the shortest ride, 53 miles, but was supposed to have over 5000 feet of climbing up and through a canyon. At the morning mandatory meeting the organizers shared two short-cuts with us; one would end at about 35 total miles and cut all climbing, one would cut 8 miles and route around the worst of the climbing.

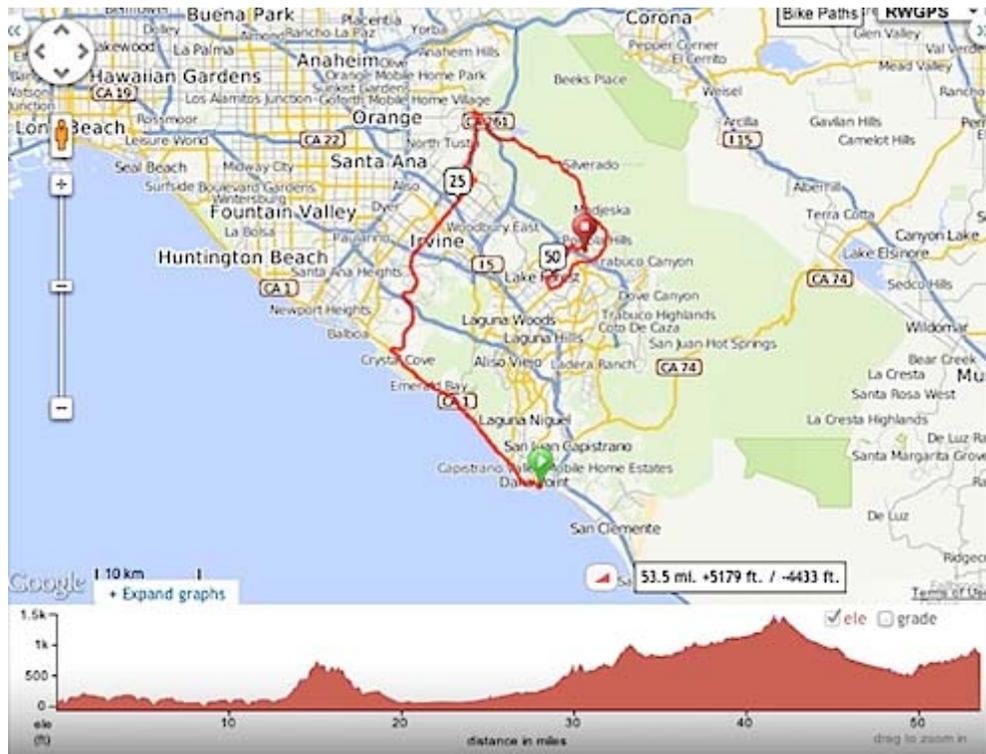
I really wanted to finish the whole course, but at this point my body was hurting, my energy was zapped, and I wanted to take the shorter routes. I had suffered enough, I did well enough. But something in me wouldn't have it. There is such a beautiful synergy between battling whatever is going on in your life to battling against yourself on a bike. Perseverance takes over where physical ability wanes. Fortitude develops where fatigue festers. So, at each marking on the course, I put my head down into the wind and fought forward.

Fortunately I've ridden long enough courses through my life to know I can handle 53 miles of just about anything. Well day 3 was all of the above; it started with having to climb a large section of the previous day's "optional" climb, it had fierce headwinds AND rounding out the hat-trick of awesome, the temperature eventually read 100 degrees.

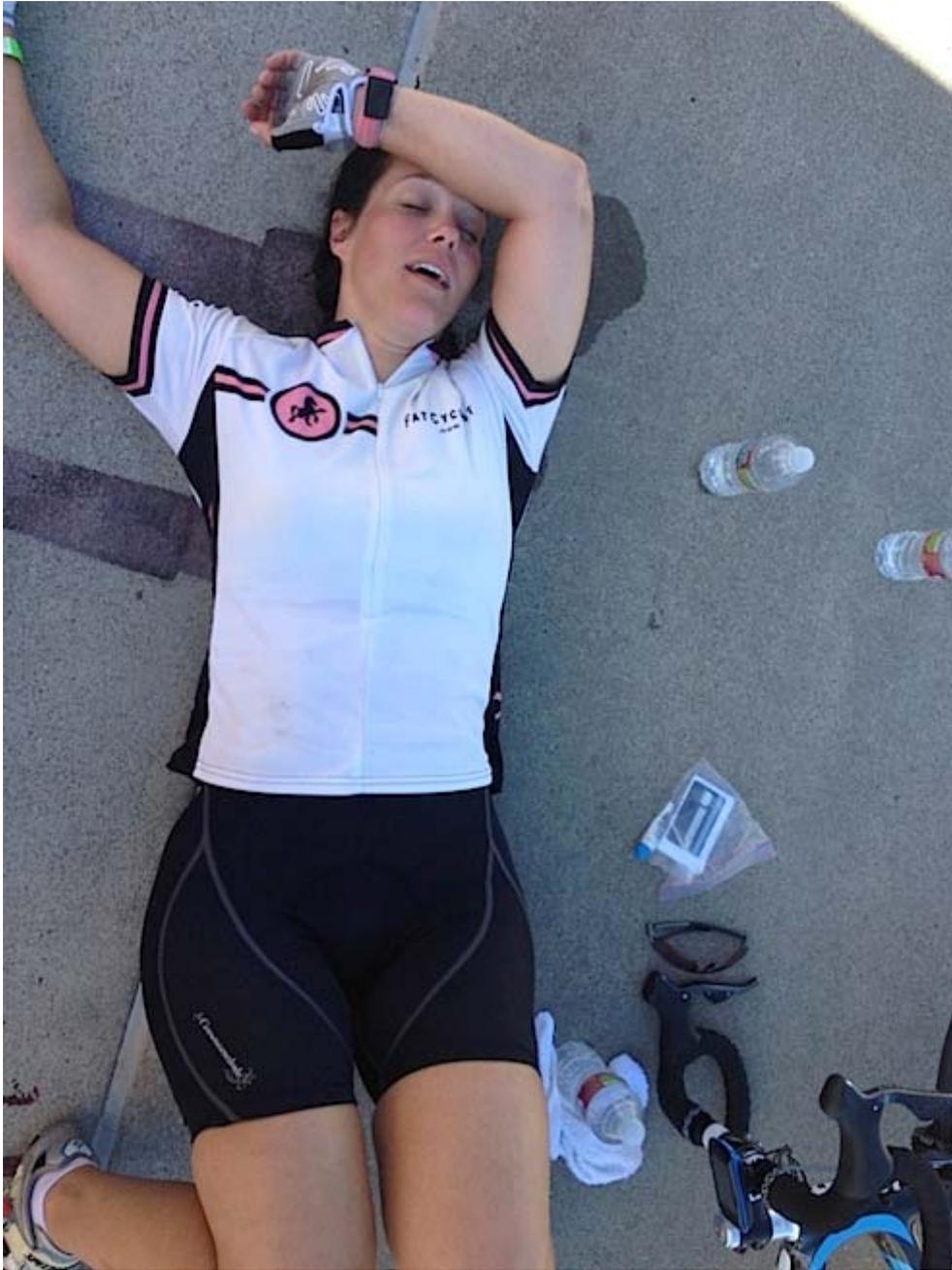
I rode mostly alone; climbing just isn't conducive for me to stick with someone. I employ the JenniMethod™ of riding my friends have come to know as yo-yo riding. Sometimes I'm very fast, sometimes I'm incredibly slow. I have no interest in altering this method to try to stay on someone's wheel. So day 3 was me and the road.

And one by one I watched seemingly everyone around me sag out. At one point the sag wagon came along side me (not unusual, they gave us encouragement the *entire* ride, it didn't necessarily mean they

were trying to get me in) and in the most lady-like tone I could muster, I declared I would not be getting in their pretty wagon, though I'm pretty sure instead of pretty I said muttered a vulgarity.



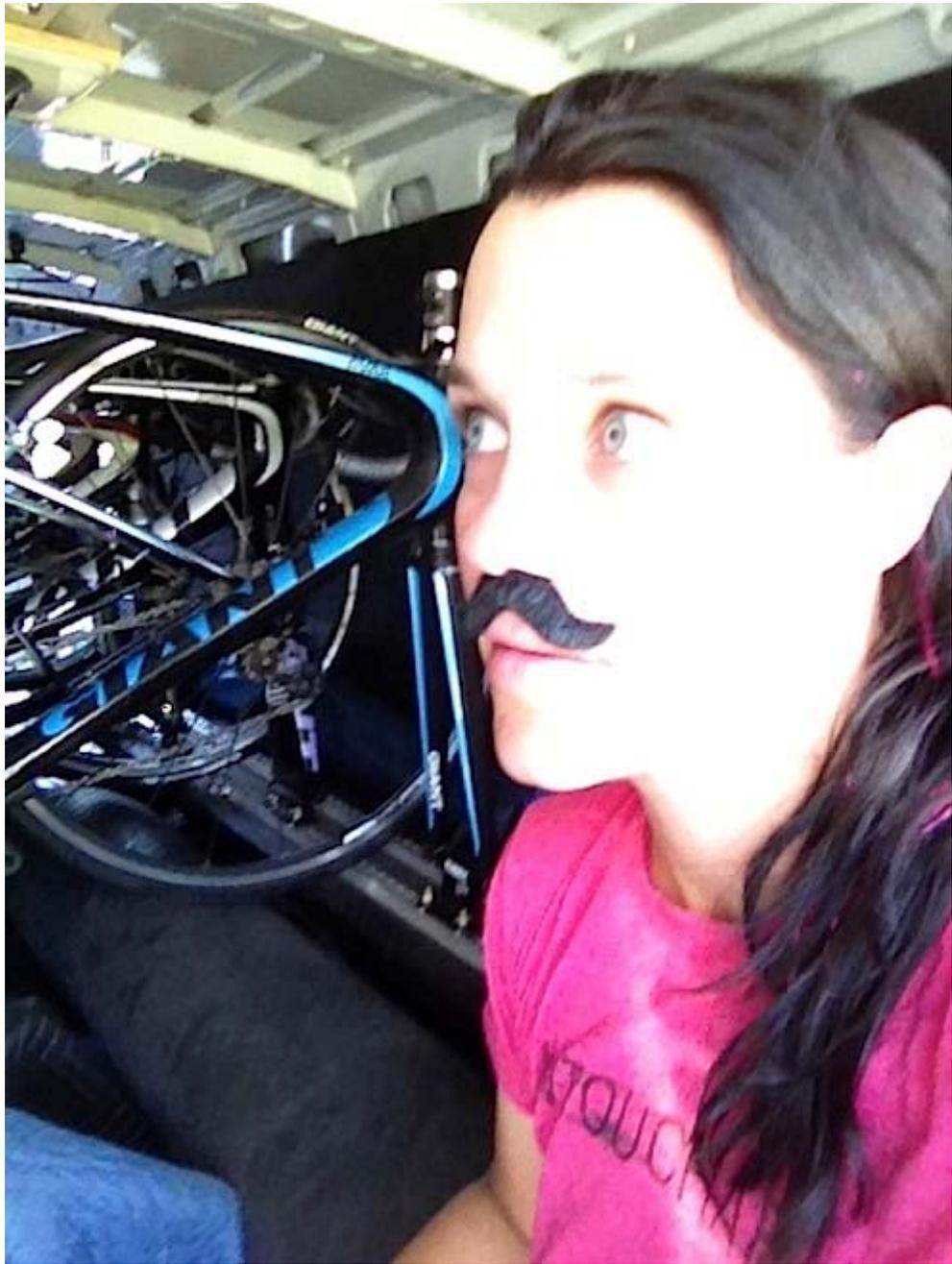
Somewhere after oh you know, the 20<sup>th</sup> mile of climbing, I got to enjoy the gorgeous sweeping downhill, and met up just at the end of the course with another survivor. We rode in the last few miles together, to (wait for it), ANOTHER uphill finish, where I first collapsed...



And then realized there was only one good use left for the buckets of then-ice water used to soak towels for our heads (by this point, the party was breaking down).



I quickly hatched a plan to steal what has become one of my favorite bikes of all time...





And finished out the night with lots of hugs and friendship, especially from Team Fatty sister, Heather, one of the sweetest people I could have ever been blessed to meet.



#### Highlights:

- **Sisterhood from everyone-** this is after all the Young Survival Coalition. I was perfectly in place to share my story and hear the stories of every other young survivor, and for once, I did not feel so alone
- **No mechanical problems at all**
- **Getting to ride Giant's Avail**
- Knowing I contributed to an amazing cause I will be supporting for many years in the future

#### Lowlights:

- **Not actually coming home with the Avail**
- Meeting and loving new sisters who are currently battling cancer- as joyful as I became to meet and bond with them, I was concurrently saddened that they are still battling breast cancer, or other kinds of cancer
- My stupid GoPro mount snapped for no reason and my GoPro camera went hurtling into traffic- the case was run over, the card flipped out, the brand new wifi attachment scratched
- Never actually got to set foot in the ocean
- Not having enough space here to write about each amazing woman or every incredible part of the weekend.

PS: My extra pictures of the trip are on [my flickr page](#).