

## Bicycling alumna taking ◆Loong Way Home◆

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**Editor&s Note:** *Melissa Pritchard, AU Class of 2001, notified the Office of Communications about her plans to take a sabbatical from her teaching position at The Benjamin Franklin International School in Barcelona, where she has been living since 2002. We think alumni and friends will enjoy reading about her experience so far. Her project “The Loong Way Home” - includes traveling, by bicycle, to her home in Eugene, OR. The trip began Aug. 23, 2013 and will take her through four continents, more than 15 countries, and over 24,000 kilometers. She hopes to arrive in Eugene in time for her birthday in October 2014. We recently asked Melissa to provide an update on her journey.*

“The Loong Way Home began on Aug. 23, when I set off from the gardens of Gracia, in Barcelona, my bike club&s meeting point for their weekly Saturday rides. I was joined by friends, teachers, students, and members of my bike club to see me off. A lot of time and energy went in to the planning of this, and I honestly never thought I&d see the day come when I embarked on my dream. A friend accompanied me for the first week, and since then, I&ve been on my own, making my way home to Eugene, OR, the Loong Way!

“The idea came to me about three years ago, just after I started road cycling. After buying a touring frame to use for short trips while home over the summer, I encountered many trans-continental tour cyclists on my first trip around the Pacific Northwest, who sparked my interest in doing a longer tour. After lots of thinking and research, I decided that I would start in Barcelona, and make my way home .... I wasn&t bothered by not riding through every single continent, nor was I trying to go through as many countries as possible. I was eager to explore destinations that I&d been curious about, where I felt I could manage on my own, traveling on bike and be safe. I also knew that time and money were two limiting factors, and timing the climate and weather added an extra layer of complication.

“Just a little over a month into my trip, I&ve made my way to seven countries and cycled just over 3,500 kilometers (1 mile = 1.6 kilometers). I try to cycle about 100 kilometers a day, although I&ve been doing longer days more recently. I start my day around 8:30 a.m. and stop about every two-and-a-half or three hours to fill up on water and snack. I like to reach my destination by about 4:30 p.m. so that I can explore the town where I am, wash up, and research anything I might need for the coming days. I make a point of trying to connect to the Internet once a day if possible, to post, share photos, and send a few emails. I have a general idea of my route, but I&m pretty flexible and open to suggestions from the locals and what I research.

“There&s not a day that goes by that I&m not content with my decision to follow my dream and carry out this trip. In fact, at times I think, ‘Wow, I only have a year, with all there is to see!& I absolutely love pedaling to different places. You take in your surroundings from a different perspective on a bicycle because you&re moving at a much slower pace in an intimate environment. You also have a unique type of interaction with the people. I find that most people

automatically respect you when you ride up, especially when they realize I&m traveling solo. Hands down, ‘You’re traveling alone?’& Is the most frequently asked question and the truth is, I have yet to feel alone! I&m on my own pedaling, but I&m constantly interacting with people when I stop for food, to rest, and spend the night. I&m also thoroughly entertained by my environment, taking in the scenery. This month I&ve been hosted almost every night by cyclists in the warm shower network, friends of friends, and teachers at the schools I visit.

“The school visits are a huge added bonus. I wasn’t sure how the teaching element was going to play out on my trip when I first launched the ‘Teacher on 2 Wheels& project, but so far, it is turning out to be incredibly fulfilling. My project .... combines my passion to cycle, travel, and teach. I believe there are a lot of other ways to contribute positively to a community without attaching a monetary value. Rather than raise money for a charity, I decided to work and talk with students as I go cycling around the world .... I use the data I collect along my route and the bike as a topic of conversation when I visit schools. I update my website weekly with resources that teachers can use in their classroom, all based on my experiences and thoughts while cycling the long way home.

“I find that no matter where I am visiting a school, it is always a familiar and inviting environment! I love seeing kids engaged and their approach to learning all throughout the world. They are a great audience and eager to ask questions and participate in my project. Initially I had to send emails to schools to seek out invitations, but little by little the word is spreading and teachers are contacting me via my website, friends, friends of friends, and former students and parents of mine. There is a huge network out there of international schools and I&m trying my best to get the word out. I&ll be happy if I manage a school visit in each country! I&ve had to turn down offers from Central China, Bangladesh, India, and Japan, which makes me think, this might not be the only time in my life I do something like this!

“If someone would have told me while I was going to Alfred, that I was going to cycle around the world 10 years after graduating, I don’t think I&d believe them. This wasn’t necessarily the life I imagined for myself when I was growing up, but I don’t have any complaints. Living abroad, in Barcelona, for the last 10 years, has exposed me to a whole other world and way of life. It was a unique opportunity to grow and discover who I am. My curiosity has led me to where I am now, here, on my way home by bike, doing what I love most in life: cycling, traveling, learning, and teaching!

“I never miss an opportunity to thank my friends and family for their support, my sponsors in Barcelona for all the gear and material they set me up with prior to departure, and to those who continue to encourage me on my journey. I invite you to spread the word about my project to teachers you know stateside or abroad who could use my website as a resource in their classroom, or who might be abroad and interested in having me visit. Thank you!

Learn more about Melissa&s travels, check in with her, offer encouragement at:

[www.theloongwayhome.com](http://www.theloongwayhome.com)

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