

# No bridge too far: Calif. fire fighter biking across country to benefit sister

**A new Big Brother volunteer with Big Brothers Big Sisters, California resident John Byrne started thinking about what more he could do for his own sister.**

**By Associated Press**

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El Dorado, KS

A new Big Brother volunteer with Big Brothers Big Sisters, California resident John Byrne started thinking about what more he could do for his own sister.

His sister, Lauren, 22, is a quadriplegic, the result of a swimming accident when she was 15.

He had completed a three-day bicycle ride and mentioned the idea of doing a longer ride to raise money for his sister, who was wanting to get a vehicle she is able to drive.

He posted the idea on Facebook one day and got a call from a friend who wanted to know more of his ideas about such a ride.

By the next morning, there was a Web site set up for Lauren's Ride and there was no turning back for John; he was riding from the Golden Gate Bridge to the Brooklyn Bridge. He left California on Sept. 9 and will ride approximately 36 days.

That idea brought him to El Dorado Friday evening, where he enjoyed dinner and a night at the El Dorado Fire Department.

He arrived in El Dorado after riding 115 miles from Pratt. From here, he is headed to Fort Scott, where he will stay Saturday night.

"It always feels good when I make it," he said.

A firefighter himself for the state of California fire department, CAL FIRE, John stays at fire stations when he can on his trip to save on costs.

John is joined by Tony Hernandez, a fire captain with the San Diego Unit of CAL FIRE.



John Byrne is greeted by El Dorado fire fighters as he stops in El Dorado for the night on his ride from the Golden Gate Bridge to the Brooklyn Bridge to benefit his sister.

John said they had barely ever talked when Hernandez learned of what he was doing and said he was going to help him make the trip safely. Hernandez is following him in a vehicle with supplies and offering support throughout the trip.

"I have a lot of people who made it safe for me and possible," John said. "About 1,000 people have made it possible."

The ride has been a challenge for John. He got lost on the first day, had to ride over the Rocky Mountains, and Hernandez's vehicle had a flat tire in the Mojave Desert, to name a few obstacles. The last three days he has been riding into an east wind.

He is currently riding an 11-day stint of over 100 miles every day, with him being on day three Friday. Then his pace will slow down to 60 miles per day.

"Every time we have a challenge, something great comes out of it," he said.

They have received a lot of help from people along the way, such as when they had the flat tire, so they decided to return the favor and start helping others along the way such as with flat tires or if they have run out of gas.

"I told my sister, 'I never knew how much I would get out of this,'" John said. "It is unreal how many people have gotten involved."

When he first told Lauren about his idea he said she was nervous about it because she didn't want people to feel sorry for her.

Lauren hasn't let her accident define her. She plays wheelchair rugby, goes to college, travels with her family and friends and has recently been able to walk a short distance, with the help of her therapists and some electrical stimulation.

The one thing that has limited her independence is transportation. She has had to rely on family and friends to drive her places. Although they are happy to do it, she wants to be able to get around on her own. That is important for her to fulfill her dream of going away to a four-year college.

The cost of a vehicle for Lauren is approximately \$50,000, and John is using this ride to raise money for that. Before he ever left California, he had raised about \$30,000. He is asking people to just donate \$10. To date he has raised about \$47,000.

"Every day has been unbelievable what we run into," John said. "I just want to thank everyone for their support."

One hundred percent of the money he is raising will go toward the vehicle.

"You can do anything you put your mind to," John said. "If you believe in something and it's right, anything is possible."

To follow his trip, like their Facebook page set up for Lauren's Ride.

Donations can be made at [www.laurensride.com](http://www.laurensride.com).