

Lauren's Ride: A Q&A With the Man Behind The Bike

A Q&A between John Byrne and I discussing his perspective of his sister's accident that left her quadriplegic and what inspired him to plan a bicycle ride from SF to NY to raise funds for her.

By [Cheyenne Protz, Patch Poster](#) | Aug 16, 2012 9:34 pm ET | Updated Aug 21, 2012 6:00 pm ET



When I first started emailing John Byrne about [Lauren's Ride](#), his passion about the project and for his sister was inspiring. There were many parts of our conversation that couldn't make it into my previous article, so with John's permission I decided to publish our emails so that everyone could get an in-depth look at the guy who made an idea become a reality within days using [Facebook](#), friendships and the kindness of others.

Lauren's Ride is a pledge by Newark native John Byrne to ride from San Francisco to New York all while raising money to go toward the purchase of a wheelchair-accessible vehicle for Lauren Byrne, John Byrne's 22-year-old sister who became quadriplegic after a pool accident that happened when she was 15 years old.

Q: What was is like for you watching Lauren go through her recovery and therapy?

JB: Seven years ago on the afternoon of June 21st, I received a call from my mom telling me that my sister had a spinal cord injury and she might not survive. The next few days were the hardest days of my life. The first night being the hardest, not knowing if my sister would be alive the next day. The hospital said they would only call if something went wrong.

After the first week, Lauren became able to speak and became stable. All of our lives changed. From the beginning of the accident we worked as a family. We had support from our family, friends and community. Looking back, those days were so hard and unreal. They made me become a more sensitive person. At this time, I was attending college during the summer at [Allan Hancock College](#) in Santa Maria, CA. I would attend classes and drive home every Thursday and stay to Sunday night.

In the first few weeks, Lauren was very, very limited in anything she could do. With this she kept a very positive attitude and would ask me to sing to her. This is when I realized she may have had some brain damage for I am not the best singer, but that was the only thing she would ask me to do for her. My family would take turns at the hospital, and they were really strong in such a hard time. I remember the first few months being very life changing for Lauren as well as her friends and family.

When Lauren came home from the hospital, we had a lot to figure out. Lauren had many obstacles to overcome and a new life to learn to live. I feel that Lauren had a lot to overcome. More than I, or almost anyone else, may ever have to overcome in their entire life. It was hard for me to see some of the

struggles Lauren had in the first few weeks. It was hard not knowing how to help. Today, I am in disbelief to see where Lauren was then, and where she is now. She worked very hard to achieve many goals. She inspires me!

Q: How does it make you feel seeing her try to accomplish her goal of becoming independent?

JB: Seeing the struggles and where we are going, words have not been enough. Everyday I see an act of kindness from someone that I just can't believe. I am very confident that Lauren will get a vehicle, go to college, get a degree, and change many people's lives.

Q: What do you think when you watch her play rugby? How does it make you feel?

JB: I would be scared to be on the court. It makes me realize that people can almost lose everything and not let it get them down. They can rise up and do so many great things. I have learned the last few years that we usually allow our brains to limit us. Not having function of legs and seeing what the players do is unreal! It makes me feel good that Lauren can see other people with problems that they only truly fully understand. The other players have adapted cars. They travel. They allowed Lauren to see some of the things that are possible that she may not of knew.

Q: What gave you the idea to want to ride to raise money for her?

JB: Three parts...

1. Right decisions we make may affect us months or years later: Lauren and I have become very close the last few years. We used to have a hard time getting along and expressing how we felt. We have learned to be completely honest about everything in our lives. We have realized that being open may be hard, but it allowed us to have a closer relationship. On a trip back from a cruise, Lauren and I changed what we did and talked about our feelings in life. She told me about frustration with driving. We had a good breakdown on how things were in life and the struggles we were facing. I decided to stay an extra day in the bay area. We drove to the [DMV](#) the next morning and Lauren Byrne passed her DMV Test!!!!

2. Kind acts inspire kind acts: My dad had just retired and I went to New Jersey with him. While there I met Andy Meuerle, my dad's best friend and the man that introduced my mom and my dad. We had a lot in common. I did triathlons and so did he. Matter of fact he asked me if I wanted to do one while I was there. He even had a bike and all the gear I needed to compete. He showed me this bike. World CLASS bike!!! A bike model that won the [Ironman](#). I had never been on a bike so nice.

At the marathon, when I ran to my transition area, I put on all the proper gear then picked up the bike and ran to the bike start. I flew. I have never raced on a bike that was so smooth. My bike was a \$60 used bike that I had purchased about five years prior. I could not believe my speed [on the borrowed bike]. I did my laps and I was unstoppable. I got off the bike and ran it in. My father and aunt were also at the event cheering me on. I did the run and took first place in the Clydesdale section.

A few months later, we spoke on the phone and he said he was going to be mailing me something. A few weeks after that, I flew out to New Jersey for my godfather's funeral. While I was there, Andy and I had met up where we had dinner while I was out last time. We talked about the different physical training I had been doing. That is when he told me the thing he was sending me was the tri bike! I was

shocked! I felt like I didn't deserve it. We talked about how I have used my [attention deficit disorder](#) to do good things in life. I have energy and have to use it. I have surrounded myself with a good job full of a lot to do and many physical challenges. I still did not think I deserved the bike. We met at a bike shop later that week and we took a photo together. He had them break it down and send it to the fire station I work at out in CA.

3) Being a volunteer: I feel very blessed to have what I have in life. I have a respectable job, the best friends, a loving family, and I live in a great country where I have never had to worry about having my basic needs unmet. My captain and best friend volunteers for many organizations. He invited me to be an EMT at a cancer camp he goes to every year. I loved it. It felt great giving back. Enough where I started looking into more programs.

I found the [Big Brothers of America foundations](#) and started that process. As I got near the end, I thought I could be a big brother to my sister who probably could use a big brother to help her in a few places. She is applying to college and has wanted to drive for seven years and was not making huge forward process due to funds.

I went to work on April 20th and talked to my captain about doing a bike ride for my sister and I posted a [Facebook](#) status at 6:53 p.m. that changed Lauren's and my life:

I have an idea and am looking for advise. I would like to ride my bike across the United States in 30 days. I would like to do so to raise money for my sister so she can get a car that has hand controls. I would like to stay at fire stations across CA to be cost efficient for travels. Anyone have any ideas or how long it would take to organize????

The rest of John's story can be followed on [laurenside.org](#) or by following them on Twitter [@laurenside](#). The facilitators of the site and Twitter account (John, Lauren and Lyn) update daily on the status of the ride as well as any news.

They have even had celebrity attention on Twitter and online. The ride is less than a month away with two kickoff fundraising dinners planned for September 7th and 8th. You can get your tickets and more information on [laurenside.org](#)