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Son hits road to give mom a special gift

Like any good son, David Pokorny is thinking a lot about his mom, Pat, this weekend.

He recalls her joy at preparing meals for her own family of five and the students her husband, Dan, would bring home in his ministry to the deaf at Gallaudet University. He thinks about her return to school after Dan's death, earning a master's degree and working with the blind in Indianapolis. He recalls her courage as she underwent dialysis, spending her time on the machine by writing a to-do list for her life after a transplant. He admires her each time she checks off another item — running three half-marathons, visiting the Galapagos Islands and Machu Picchu, competing in the Transplant Games.

He's planning a big gift. It won't be ready in time for Mother's Day, but it should be worth the wait.

David, 38, and Pat, 69, will hit the open road in August on a most ambitious buddy adventure. They have borrowed from sources as diverse as Lance Armstrong and Zebulon Pike in charting their course from St. Louis to Colorado Springs.

Two centuries ago, Pike toiled in the shadow of Lewis and Clark, blazing the

Santa Fe Trail and giving his name to Colorado's tallest mountain. The Pokornys will retrace Pike's route as closely as possible.

Three years ago, Armstrong and his sponsors launched the Tour of Hope, a cross-country bicycle trek that shed light on clinical trials in the fight to cure cancer. The Pokornys' version is more intimate. David plans to ride the route on his bike, in daily chunks as large as 100 miles, and hopes others will join him to raise awareness of PKD. Pat will ride in support in her new RV.

PKD — polycystic kidney disease — is the most common genetic, life-threatening disease, affecting about 600,000 people in the United States. The cysts on the kidneys grow and multiply, eventually causing the kidneys to shut down. The disease has no cure; the only treatments are dialysis and transplant.

The disease can devastate a family. The youngest of 10 children, Pat had three siblings who died from brain aneurysms resulting from PKD and three others who were on dialysis before passing away. The Pokornys consider themselves especially blessed because neither David nor his siblings, Phil and Elizabeth, have been diagnosed with PKD.

David got the idea for the trip about nine months ago, when he flew into Colorado Springs to participate in the Pikes Peak Marathon. A veteran of endurance challenges, he has finished seven marathons and competed in the Ultramax, an Ironman-distance triathlon. He tried to resist this one, until he stumbled upon a cheap spinning bike, which he could use



David Pokorny with his mother, Pat Pokorny, and her grandchildren, Andrew Pokorny (right) and Clayton Pokorny.

to train over the winter, then broached the subject with Pat in December.

"I've seen my son go from one thing to another in sports," Pat said. "When he did his first marathon, I thought that was fantastic and cheered him on and gave him some gel. When he did the Ultramax, I said, 'The human body wasn't made to do that all in one day,' even though I knew he'd do it. When he said he would bicycle, I said, 'That's a lot to ask yourself,

but I'll be there.' If he's willing to put forth the effort, I'm willing to give him a glass of water."

Well, she's supplying a little more than water. She sprung for the RV, a 24-footer, another of those things on her dialysis to-do list.

The timing of the purchase was perfect. The timing of the trip had to match. David will leave Aug. 3 from Belle Fontaine Park, site of Pike's departure. The night before, he'll stop by the Cardinals' broad-

cast booth to drum up support. He's also scheduled to be on the field and in the booth for an interview during a Royals game in Kansas City on Aug. 6. He'll repeat the procedure at a Rockies game in Denver on Aug. 17 and line up for the start of the Pikes Peak Marathon on Aug. 20.

The ride has something to offer everyone.

- For those who have been diagnosed with PKD, David said, "My mom can be such an inspiration. Since her diagnosis, she has led such a full life. It shows that people can rise above the disease and be amazingly productive."

- For bikers along the route, David would love some company. He has outlined his route and schedule at <http://ridetopikespeak.blogspot.com>.

- For those who don't have the disease, consider organ donation. "We have dialysis to fall back on, but life on dialysis is not life with a capital L," Pat said. "You're there three or four days a week, tied to a machine. You see people gulping down 64 ounces of Coke and all you can do is suck on an ice cube."

- They didn't set a goal for organ or monetary donations, though David has included a link to organizations that accept donations on his Web site.

The synergies, history, logistics and noble reasons behind this trek can get a little overwhelming at times.

At its heart, though, the journey is achingly simple: A boy is taking off on a bike, knowing — treasuring the knowledge — that at the end of the day, Mom will be waiting for him.