

Photo of Jacob by Mark Petinga taken at Camden Yards, home of the Baltimore Orioles

Jacob's Ride

Do you remember when your mom let you ride your bike down the block to your friend's house for the first time without being accompanied? Then, you were allowed to ride downtown or to school. I remember feeling so free and big on my bike that I just wanted to ride to the next town and maybe beyond that. But that was only my little-kid dream.

Some people live their dreams. Jacob Landis (24) is a man who is not only riding his bike to the next town, but to the next state and beyond until he touches down in every Major League Baseball park in the country. What would compel someone to do such a feat that for most of us would be unthinkable? For some of us, we ask "Why would someone want to even do that?"

Combine Jacob's three passions—baseball, cycling and helping people with hearing loss—and you have one determined man whose goal is to raise money for those who would benefit from cochlear implants and hearing assistive technology but can't afford them. He's doing this on his bike and getting a lot of attention and hopefully, accomplishing his fundraising goal.

The Background

Randy and Lois Landis took Jacob when he was two for a hearing test after noticing his speech development was not on track. He was fitted with his first hearing aids in kindergarten. His hearing loss became worse and by fourth grade, the hearing aids weren't helping him beyond environmental sounds. As a good student and an athlete, he got really frustrated and mad...really mad, especially when he saw his brother and sister running to

answer a ringing phone when he couldn't even hear it ring.

In June 1999, when Jacob was ten, he received a cochlear implant. Jacob went on to finish high school with less frustration and anger, got an associate's degree at Anne Arundel Community College in Maryland, and began classes at the University of Maryland while he works at Whole Foods. He is a serious baseball fan and has season tickets to the Baltimore Orioles. He also is a serious cyclist who rides to work and to Orioles games where his favorite team is a 60-mile round trip from his home in Annapolis.

Last October Jacob felt stuck. Baseball season was over, his job and school continued, but he felt an itch to do something more. It was then that the idea for "Jacob's Ride" was born. By riding across the country and stopping at 30 baseball stadiums, including a stop in Toronto for a Blue Jays game, Jacob hopes to raise \$1 million for others who could benefit from cochlear implants or hearing assistive technology but cannot afford them. He will make stadium appearances with the help of sponsors and support from Major League Baseball. At each game there is also an opportunity for fans to make donations via a smartphone text.

The Deep Background— In Jacob's Father's Words

Randy and Lois are like any other parents, they want the best for their kids—a home filled with love and support and the chance for them to get a good education. Maybe because Jacob is their first born and has had a hearing

Meet Jacob Landis and learn about his most exciting cycling adventure across the United States to raise money for those with hearing loss.

By Barbara Kelley

loss since it was detected at age two, they are keenly aware of helping Jacob live up to his potential. (Randy told me how Jacob is a math whiz and does calculus problems for fun.) Sensing all this, I was pretty sure Jacob's parents had some strong opinions about Jacob's Ride so I asked Randy how he reacted when his son told him he wanted to ride his bike across the country.

Randy remembers the encounter vividly and recounts it with great detail. Here is what he told me:

"Back in 1973, after my freshman year in college, a good friend suggested that we go and work on the Alaska Pipeline. I took the safe route and continued with college. My friend went to Alaska, worked for three hard years, and returned to Minnesota with \$250,000 and was a totally different person. He was a grown man! I have often wondered how my life would have differed had I gone with him.

"With that playing in my mind, I think of my conversation with Jacob when he told me about his idea. In October 2012, here's what the dialog sequence was between me and Jacob."

Randy: Have you decided what classes you are going to take during the spring semester? [At University of Maryland, College Park]

Jacob: Dad, I've decided not to go back. I am going to take a bike ride.

Randy: Jacob, you ride your bike every day. What does that have to do with not completing your degree?

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Jacob: Dad, it's going to be a *long* ride. I'm going to all 30 major league ballparks.

Randy: Gee, Jake, how are you going to do that?

Jacob: I'm just going to buy a couple of saddle bags and go.

Then, there was a long pause and dead silence.

Jacob: But Dad, I want to raise money for kids and others who need cochlear implants.

Randy: Wow ... I think that will be a big job.

Jacob: I know. Will you help me?

Randy Continues...

"At that point, I was speechless. I had two flashbacks:

"I thought about the pipeline opportunity in Alaska and the decision 40 years ago not to do it. Maybe this 'bike ride' was Jacob's life-changing opportunity, and how dare I stop it?"

"I also remembered the talks Jacob and I had when he was six to eight years old. He would be in my lap, usually misty eyed, asking me why he was losing his hearing or asking me to fix the hear-



Jacob (left) with his parents, Randy and Lois, and his brother Noah (22) and his sister Sarah (19)

ing problem. At that time, all I could do was to assure him that he was going to get through this ordeal and he was being prepared to do mighty things with his life. Those comments probably didn't make things easier for Jacob, and maybe he had no idea what I was talking about, but it gave me comfort as I tried to make sense of it all.

"The next morning, I made a few phone calls, scribbled several pages of to-do items and before you knew it we were off and running...or riding, rather."

How the Ride Came About— In Jacob's Words

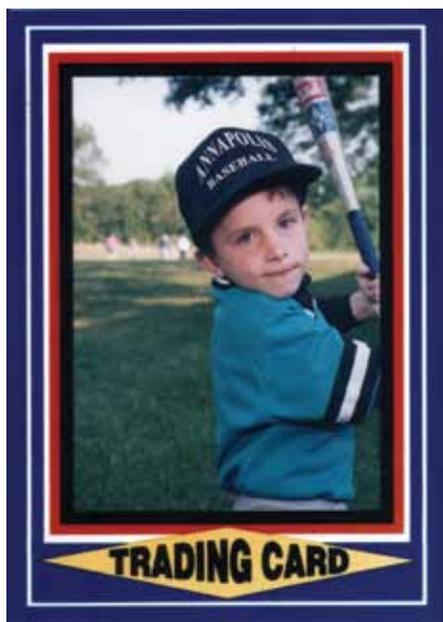
I've been cycling for only about two years, but it's become my favorite pastime. I bike to work every day. There are times at 6:45 a.m. as I reach work, I feel like riding past my job and cycling down Route 2. Cycling makes me feel really awake and gives me a great deal of enjoyment.

I'm also huge baseball fan. The Orioles' announcer Joe Angel is a treasure—he really makes me laugh. For a long time I considered Opening Day of Major League Baseball the best day of the year, but that was before the Orioles made it to the playoffs for the first time in 15 years! I love the O's and listened to games even when they were pretty bad, but this past season gave me about 10 different 'best days.'

I share my passion for baseball with my younger brother, Noah. We share our love through scorekeeping the games we attend. He's been in Los Angeles for almost four years, and when the Orioles go to Anaheim he goes to the Angels game and sends me the ticket stub and scorecard. He buys mlb.audio so he can listen to Joe Angel too and we text during every game.

To make a long story short (it involved a promise I made in July when I was a 'hater' but Noah insisted the Orioles were 'for real'), I got Oriole playoff tickets. I flew my brother to Baltimore to watch the Orioles beat the Yankees at Camden Yards in the most electric atmosphere either of us had ever experienced. We hugged and almost cried at the beauty of it all. We beat the Yankees in the playoffs!

Afterwards, Noah returned to Los Angeles and I continued to work at Whole Foods. Before October was over, I felt the need to do something. While I make enough money to live on my own, housing is expensive in Annapolis. If I moved into a place I could afford, I'd have to give up cycling to work. So I moved back with my parents. I was also taking a break from school for the first time since kindergarten. Plus, there were five long months before Orioles spring training games came on the radio. I felt stuck somehow.



Jacob (8) on a baseball card

That's when I began thinking about a long cycle ride—a really long ride. I knew if I was going to pull this ride off it would have to be for a great cause that I believed in and could get others to believe in too.

My father has always considered my cochlear implant a miracle. But I've always thought that my miracle wasn't really that special because so many others could benefit from a cochlear implant just as I have. There's no way to make a deaf person hear normally again. I still face challenges linked to my hearing loss, but with a cochlear implant, you're talking about giving people the ability to listen to the Beatles or hear the crack of the bat at a baseball game. Thinking about it can really get me emotional. Being able to hear again just adds so much to life. It's sometimes hard to be 'normal' when you can't understand what's been said in certain situations—but you can hear!

Modest estimates have the cost of a cochlear implant in the \$50,000-\$100,000 range. That doesn't include the diagnosis, the specialist appointments, or, in the case of my dad, an all-out effort to find the cause of my hearing loss as it was happening (the cause was never found). I know my parents spent more than \$600,000 in the process of getting my implant. I am fortunate that my family, despite hardships, was able to do this. For many, this kind of financial invest-

*Appearing with the Pittsburgh Pirates' mascot, Jacob stands before the crowd at PNC Park.
© James Campbell*



ment just isn't possible. And I know there are so many people who can benefit from cochlear implants.

So that's it in a nutshell—cycling, baseball and cochlear implants. Potentially, this ride could be the most fun I've ever had in my life. I get to ride my bike all day, see all the stadiums, and help others. But the tradeoff is that I don't get an unscheduled rest day when I'm tired, it's going to rain probably more than a few times, and I feel some pressure because I don't want to let anyone down. Oh, and the ride is really long!

Further, I have to start thinking about my image (something I never really considered before), which will last longer

than my ride will. This ride is not about me...it's about the cause and I want to keep that in the forefront. Somehow though, I think it will all be worth it.

Posted February 5, 2012, Jacob's Ride Blog

The Blogger Cyclist

Jacob is an articulate and avid blogger and has chronicled his exciting adventure at www.jacobside2013.blogspot.com. The titles are enticing and he shares his ride complete with blunders and excitement. His cousin, Jack, follows along in a van carrying camping equipment and supplies.

Jack's dog Beaumont keeps him company as a furry supporter of the ride. Since the van travels much faster than the bike, Jack and Beaumont park and do a lot of walking, playing, planning and contemplating as they wait for Jacob to catch up.

I especially like the most recent entry at the time I am writing this article...“LOTS of Hills on the Way to Toronto.” Wait a minute, did he say Toronto? Here are some of the enticing blog titles to date:

- *Category 5 Hills, Bike Breakdown and Encouragement from a Stranger*
- *The Yankees*
- *Waiting for the Mets in NYC*
- *A Ferry Ride and a Wrong Turn(s)*
- *Skate Party, Headwinds & Arrive at Fenway*
- *LOTS of Hills on the Way to Toronto*



Jacob stands outside Citi Field where the New York Mets play.

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Catching Up with Jacob

I caught up with Jacob, not on my bike, but from my iPhone. He had just arrived in Toronto where he would appear at the Toronto Blue Jays game on April 30 and rest a bit before the trek to Pittsburgh. I asked him if he would have time to answer a few questions. He said he was honored to be asked as it will help get the message out about the ride.

He told me that to get to Toronto, he had to average 80 miles a day for seven consecutive days and then had a one-day rest for the Toronto game. He apologized for not getting back to me right away, but he and Jack were camping and had no WiFi. I have to tell you he answered me within 72 hours and he was apologizing? I was exhausted thinking about what his body just went through!

How did you plan your route?

Jacob: At first, we planned a southern route that would begin in Washington, D.C., and would end with Baltimore. It had me going from D.C. to Atlanta, then the Florida teams, and then all around the country, ending with a flourish. There are a lot of teams in the Northeast and fewer teams in the middle of the country.

After about a month or so, I really began to have doubts about being able to complete a whole circumference around the United States so I re-drew the route. Because there are no teams between Atlanta and D.C., I decided to go north first, so that we could end the ride in Florida and not have to cover that D.C.-to-Atlanta distance.

Even though this is a huge ride (10,500 miles), it could have been even longer with the southern route. Because we are limited by the baseball season (six months), chopping off about 1,500 miles really helped get the miles per day down from 100 to 80. I was surprised by how much later spring actually starts up north. In Maryland, where I am from, by the end of April we already have warm nights. Now it is May 3 and yesterday in northern Pennsylvania (close to Canada and Buffalo, New York), the temp dropped to below 40 overnight.

Yesterday, my sister sent me a photo

of my mother walking the dog (the dog I miss very much and have been pressuring my mother to walk her now that I'm gone). I was so surprised with how bright and green everything was. There are still a lot of trees not in bloom up north this time of the year. It's been all right though, because riding really warms me up. I might regret the route when we get to Texas in August. However, I might change my sleeping schedule and ride at night.

The biggest variable that comes into play is the teams' schedules. Sometimes the road trip baseball teams take are 12 games within 14 days. We had to wait one week in New York after the Yankees game for the Mets to come into town, and we will backtrack to Los Angeles from San Diego later this summer just because of the way the Los Angeles Angels, Dodgers, and the San Diego Padres schedules worked out. We'll be in Southern California right before the All-Star break, so getting all three of those teams in was critical.

When we were making the route we felt under huge pressure because of the short six-month time limit. We had to see each team and keep the miles per day low and manageable. I literally had almost 30 tabs open on my computer for each team.



*Jacob in Pittsburgh on May 5
© James Campbell*

How did you train for the trip?

Jacob: Brian Johnson of Fitness by Brian, is a personal trainer in Annapolis. I was referred to him by Chesapeake Holistic Health. I first met him in early January this year and began training immediately. He was a big proponent of core exercises. We never did a single bench press or anything like that.

By strengthening my core, it helps my whole body work better. We did bicep and tricep work, plus a lot of squatting exercises, but most of the exercises would involve something extra, like standing on balance disks, which forces the core to be engaged.

He trained me for an hour a day, five days a week for three months, all for free. He would fit me in with his sched-

Join Jacob at a Game

www.jacobsride.com
Find out Jacob's schedule and other things about the ride at his official website.

Sponsors

For more information about becoming a sponsor of Jacob's Ride, go to www.jacobsride.com, call 443.876.5113 or send an email homerunforhearing@gmail.com.



Text JACOB to 50555 to give \$10 to HLAA Benefiting Jacob's Ride

Charges will appear on your wireless bill, or be deducted from your prepaid balance. All purchases must be authorized by account holder. Must be 18 years of age or have parental permission to participate. Message and data rates may apply. Text STOP to 50555 to STOP. Text HELP to 50555 for HELP.

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ule. Sometimes we were both too busy to work out, but somehow we did it.

I also rode my bike just about every day because I don't have a car. I logged 3,660 miles in 2012 for an average of 10 miles a day.

What do you eat?

Jacob: Other than training, nutrition is just as important as physical training. Brian helped me with nutrition as well. I began eating a lot more and put on more than 20 pounds of pure muscle. Eating three good meals a day is the most important thing, because I used to skip breakfast almost every day. I switched from dairy milk to coconut milk for the fat and ate almost a whole avocado every day, again, for the fat.

Do you wear any special biking clothes or gear?

Jacob: I wear all sorts of clothes. When I first got into cycling I was a little turned off by the technical garments and in some ways, I still am. I prefer to ride in thin cotton dress pants. They are not too tight and I get a nice breeze through them. Wearing long pants also protects me from the sun.

I wore padded cycling shorts under my pants when the weather was cold in April but now that it is warming up, I'm starting to return to pants and no padded shorts. My Brooks leather saddle has been broken in at this point so I might not need the padded shorts at all which would mean less laundry. When it's cool or cold I wear thermals but I prefer cotton t-shirts to cycling jerseys.

What goes through your mind on your long rides?

Jacob: When I ride, I can't give up. There is too much at stake. As of today [May 13] we have raised just \$50,000 and we hope to raise \$1 million. The ride's budget is about \$25,000, so if we don't raise another penny for the next four and a half months, we still have \$25,000 raised for the cause.

If I quit tomorrow, we haven't come close to spending \$25,000 yet (gas, food, hotels, campgrounds, etc.), and we would probably have \$45,000 left over to give. That's not bad. If I

quit tomorrow, this ride would still be a success. But I think we will get \$1 million because if I were to quit tomorrow, there goes the opportunity to raise \$950,000, so I'm not quitting! We haven't even made it to the West Coast yet, and then we have to come back to the East Coast, so if the math holds out, we will meet our goal and be able to help a lot of people.

Another thing that keeps me going is my father. He is the one who really got the ride started. It was my idea to begin with, but I couldn't dream of being able to do what he has done in the last six months. In addition to working a full time job, he called hundreds of people, solicited the initial donations, he did almost everything. All I have done is respond to e-mails like doing this article, do television interviews, and ride my bike. By doing this ride, in addition to helping others, I hope to make my father proud of me. I'm doing it, and he is proud.

Do you have any mental exercises you do to keep your body going?

Jacob: When I'm riding, I usually don't listen to music, but I play songs in my head. I like the Beatles, Sublime, Bob Dylan, Pink Floyd, a lot of classic rock and some newer alternative stuff. I play all this music in my head for hours.

I cover 80-110 miles a day, but we break it into 20-30 mile chunks. When Jack drives ahead, I live for seeing the van again, just for a 15-30 minute break. I hate it when there are mile markers that mark each mile, it makes it feel so slow. Looking forward to seeing my cousin Jack at the next stop, and that short break, is a great motivator.

If you could have anything in the world, what would it be?

(This question comes from a third grader who heard about the ride and wanted to know the answer.)

Jacob: All I want right now is for this ride to be successful in raising \$1 million and for its competition. Another thing I really want is for the Orioles to make the playoffs and let me buy tickets even though I'm not a season plan holder this year.



Jacob on his stop in New York City where he met with the HLAA Manhattan Chapter

A Game Changer

There is no doubt Jacob's Ride will be a game changer in the life of this spirited man as well as for his family, and hopefully, for a lot of people who might not otherwise get cochlear implants.

When I was interviewing Jacob for this story and arranging for photos, I was copied on a string of e-mails that included Randy, Jacob's father. The father's words to his son tells the story of commitment, passion, generosity, and love. When Jacob finishes his ride across the country and back, those involved on his excellent adventure will never be the same.

His Father Writes:

I know you have just gone through a killer day with bad rain ... many, many miles ... cold and wet. I am so sorry. I wish I could take away the obvious resulting discomfort. I love you. Keep the faith. —Dad 📺

Barbara Kelley is deputy executive director of HLAA and editor-in-chief of Hearing Loss Magazine.



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