

Sidney Schuman - a brief autobiography

Born 12th September 1930, while the family (including 2-year-old sister Muriel) was living at 229 Hackney Road. At age 5 the family moved to flats in Dalston Lane. There was always music on the radio - I found I had a good memory and enjoyed playing pieces through in my head. Went to Sigdon Road primary school (round the corner) until 1939. Evacuated to Norfolk, back a year later, evacuated again to Northampton, back home in 1941. Got my first bicycle and passed the 11-plus exam but didn't go to Hackney Downs grammar school as it was evacuated.

At 13 went to Hackney Tech for a 3-year engineering course and enjoyed the maths. I started to make cycling friends and organised a 1,000-mile tour of southern England for 4 of us, staying at Youth Hostels and eating at British Restaurants. Joined Hackney Clarion CC, leading to some enjoyable club runs but also to my first accident and 3 weeks in hospital. At 16 started a 5-year apprenticeship at BTH in Willesden which enabled me to become a draughtsman. Cycling to work I met other cyclists and was invited to join the North London CC. Sunday club-runs became my main outdoor activity.

My sister Muriel had joined the YCL and now I did too. We argued with dad about politics, but he and I didn't get on anyway. I never had a chance to have a sensible relationship with him as he died (aged 62) when I was 19. After that mum's sister, Auntie Ettie, came to live with us and I didn't get on with her either. But then I wasn't at home all that much. I started racing in road time-trials and rode in 25, 50 and 100-mile events. Cycling holidays became training exercises - club champion Del Rolt and myself cycled to Lyon and back (1400 miles) in a fortnight.

At 21 I was sent by the trade union at work to the Berlin Youth Festival as a delegate. At 22 I became club champion and then started my 2 years of National Service. Joined the RAF and trained for air-crew as signaller (ie morse!) with 18 others in course NS25. This started at RAF Halfpenny Green (Shropshire) and continued at RAF Swanton Morley (Norfolk) when HG closed. (The others travelled by lorry but I chose to ride the 95 miles on my bike.)

After graduation, we were all posted to Ballykelly, Northern Ireland, but my posting was cancelled and I ended up at RAF Hullavington, 100 miles from home. (The reason for the cancellation was probably my past membership of the YCL.) This meant I could get home easily at weekends and on one of these I won the cycling team selection race for the "Jewish Olympics", the Maccabiah. Naturally, the RAF were not keen to let me attend so nothing came of it.

At 24 I was home again, but not for long. I'd discovered sex and needed my own space - well, shared with a friend at least. So I left home, left my wonderful mother who loved me whatever I did but also left Auntie Ettie (whew!). By this time I was working as a contract draughtsman and moving from place to place.

While working for CEGB at Bankside Power Station (now Tate Modern) I met Anne at a social. We married in 1957 and Anne gave birth to 3 boys, Mark (later Zero) in 1958, Ross in 1960 and Donald in 1962. We lived in a rented flat to start with but her stepfather Joe helped us to buy a house. In 1963 I worked in Amsterdam for a year, we rented a house in Bussum, I commuted to work and the boys went to a Dutch school. I was still cycling but moving to South London meant I lost contact with the club. We cycled as a family, complete with sidecar at one stage. Anne was later put off cycling by an accident but Zero went from strength to strength and eventually became a courier.

My life changed in 1967 when I met Mary and 5 years later Anne and I separated. Mary worked as a teacher with reception-class children and also cycled to work. During this time we bought a large house and invited friends to share it with us. There were 9 of us living in this 'commune' and it lasted for 2 interesting years. Also I had worked in Rome as an electrical designer for a year, living with Mary in a rented flat in the centre of town.

Julie was born in Lewisham Hospital in 1971 and lived with us in the commune. In 1972 I had to sell the house - Anne and I each bought a small terraced house on the proceeds and lived separately. Mary, Julie and I moved into a tiny house in Catford and in 1974 I became a student at Stockwell Teacher Training college in Bromley, eventually teaching at Lewisham College while Mary returned to teaching, now at a Home Tuition Centre.

We rode our bikes whenever we could, carrying Julie on a seat, then on a tandem with special pedals and then on a trailer. We were a bit hard up after I graduated, so I got another job as a designer in Holland for 6 months and the three of us lived in a rented house in Haarlem. Julie (age 6) went to school and learned to speak Dutch and ride a bike.

Ruby was born in the tiny house and was 4 when we moved to our present address. (We loved it but she was not impressed because the garden was not on one level and she couldn't ride her trike around it.) We used our bikes all the time, Julie progressing to full-size and Ruby going through the seat, tandem, trailer, own bike process. I began to enjoy teaching and we made full use of the summer holidays in Cornwall, exploring it on our bikes every year.

Julie was getting stronger as a cyclist and in 1989 the two of us decided to ride the End-to-End. We covered 1200 miles in a month, finishing in Coverack, where we joined Mary and Ruby. In 1993 I rode 30 miles uphill from Granada to the top of the Pico Veleta, the highest road in Europe. In 2004 Mary and I went to the French Alps so I could ride up 4 of the cols that feature in the Tour de France. In 2012 Julie and I rode up Mont Ventoux, the Giant of Provence. In 2014 I set a new hour record for the 80 to 84 age group at the Olympic Velodrome.

Became a grandfather on 31st December 2011 and started a new life including Jem.

Born 1930 in Hackney, Sidney lived a normal life until he was given a bike at age 11 and with it the freedom of the city. He started a campaign, with three other like-minded fanatics, to seek out every nook and cranny of Hackney, then Islington, then the rest of North London. Joining the Hackney Clarion he discovered the countryside and even South London. At 15 he organised a 1,000 mile youth hotelling tour of the south coast and invited others to join him. The lessons learned were never forgotten, in particular that every road junction is the opportunity for another argument.

At 19 Sidney joined the North London CC and quickly learned to explain to others that no, it wasn't the North Road CC. The North London was a middle-markers time-trial club whose members had a zest for living. We may not have broken any records but boy did we enjoy ourselves. Sidney did moderately well and became club champion by default in 1952 while the real club champion was away in Canada. Then National Service in the RAF put a stop to any later improvement and after that life got in the way.

In 1989, now a family man, Sidney planned an End-to-End ride starting from the top and going downhill all the way to Land's End. His 17-year-old daughter Julie, looking over his shoulder at all the maps, said "Can I come?" So it was that the whole month of August was dedicated to the best holiday of our two lives. Much later, when he was 82, they rode up Mont Ventoux together and two years later Julie was again active in supporting Sidney's world hour record attempt at the Olympic

Velodrome. He had checked the Men's Best Performance list on the UCI website and noted that Jim Turner at 75 did 38.4km in 2014. But there was no record listed for anyone over 80, apart from Robert Marchand.

Thus it was that Sidney, a track novice, twiddled an 81-inch gear on a borrowed bike for 114 laps and claimed a world hour record of 28.4km. I seem to have become the fastest man over 80 solely because no-one else has tried it. Following this Julie and I had complimentary tickets to see Wiggins break the hour record with 54.5km. I was in a state of shock at the raw power on display and the excitement it generated. Before the ride we met Miguel Indurain and David Millar in the VIP area, after the ride we met the great man himself. On learning that I too had set an hour world record, he wondered if my bum had been as sore as his. I thought not as I had covered only about half the distance in the same time.