

## **How it All Started**

**by Paula Matzek**

You're surely familiar with that wide-eyed look that you get when you tell a non-cyclist or a newer cyclist that you just rode 35 miles (or 50 or 75 or...) It is usually accompanied by the words, "Oh, my gosh, I could never do that." I always reply that I didn't start out doing big miles and that anyone who wants to can gradually build up to longer rides.

Three milestone rides remain in my memory as steps toward my current cycling enthusiasm. The first was a proposal by a few of my teacher friends early in my career that one Saturday we should all ride our bikes up the Palatine Trail to Deer Grove and have a picnic. "It's just 7 miles," they said. *Seven miles?* I had two issues with that — one, I was pretty sure I had never ridden more than about two miles in an outing, and two, I didn't currently own a decent bike. The second problem was solved by my younger brother, who had just upgraded to a better bike and was willing to give me his old 10-speed Schwinn Continental. So to Deer Grove we rode, and I made the entire seven miles.

The second significant milestone was my first 10-mile ride. It was a fundraiser for the Wheeling Senior Center, and my friend Suzi and I decided it would be a worthwhile event. Neither of us had ever ridden that far before, but we easily completed the route through Wheeling, Buffalo Grove, and Arlington Heights.

Around that same time I found out about and joined the Arlington Heights Bicycle Association (as it was known then) and dabbled in some of the easy Tuesday night rides. Looking at the schedule, I eventually decided that it was time to try a Saturday ride. The ride I chose was a 40-miler to Mundelein for lunch. I figured that if I just thought of it as two 20-milers with a meal break in between, I could make it. About the time we hit Long Grove on the way north, rain started and we decided to turn back. I was unprepared for the weather — in short sleeves with no rain gear. Luckily, a kind veteran member who no longer rides with the club (I can remember only her first name, Nancy) loaned me a long-sleeved t-shirt, and I made it back to Frontier Park unscathed. On that ride I learned a lot about the kindness and camaraderie of bike club members.

Obviously, I stuck with the club, enjoyed meeting more of the members, and started doing more riding. As they say, the rest is history!