



SPOTLIGHT ON

Graves' Disease and Thyroid Foundation

Becoming "Greater Than Graves"

Graves' disease took Michaela Cui on "the ride of her life" in 2011 — a 3,200-mile bicycle trek from Anchorage, AK to San Francisco, CA to become "Greater Than Graves" and raise funds and awareness for Graves' disease and other thyroid-related disorders. This year, a new team of riders is taking up the cause, setting out on a coast-to-coast journey from Boston, MA to San Francisco, CA.



Inaugural Trek

Ms. Cui was diagnosed with Graves' disease while studying aerospace engineering at the University of Colorado at Boulder. "I was having all these weird aches and pains, and my heart was going crazy," she recalls. Michaela also dropped down to 85 pounds, despite the fact that she was "eating bowls of ice cream and cereal and pop tarts." Family members were initially concerned that she was suffering from anorexia nervosa. A routine checkup finally led to a diagnosis of Graves' disease.

The idea for the trek began when Ms. Cui was in the early stages of treatment. "I began to feel alone and uncertain of my future," Ms. Cui recalls. "So I decided to do something about it and focus my energies on building awareness and understanding of this disease."

Michaela contacted the Graves' Disease and Thyroid Foundation who agreed to be her sponsoring organization. Funds raised by the ride support the patient education and support programs of the Foundation. Friends Chris Doudna and Ben Weerts signed on to support her efforts by participating. Brother Jeremy Cui designed a special logo for the journey, a silhouette of a biker with butterfly wings. Father Dan

Cui set up a "Greater Than Graves" web site, and mom Deb Cui agreed to drive a support vehicle.

The ride kicked off in Anchorage, AK. Fifty days and 3,200 miles later, Michaela and Chris crossed the

Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco and hoisted their bikes above their heads for a final victory photo.

Continuing the Tradition

With Michaela moving on to a new job after her epic journey, the story might have ended there. But in late 2011, Elias McQuade of Manchester, NH and two friends – David Britton and Keating Tufts – had decided to undertake a cross-country bike trek to raise funds and awareness for Graves' disease.

"I drew the inspiration for the idea from my sister, who has had to deal with the challenges of Graves' disease," Mr. McQuade explained. "I decided on a cross country bike ride because I feel that the ride would challenge me physically and mentally and could give me insight into the daily problems that face those who have diseases that affect their lives."

The team came across Michaela's story and were surprised to find out that Michaela's family lived in New Hampshire, only about 30 miles away. With this new connection forged – and support from the Graves' Disease and Thyroid Foundation – plans for the 2012 ride rapidly unfolded.

With support driver David Casinghino rounding out the team, the 2012 adventure began at Christopher Columbus Waterfront Park in Boston, MA on May 26th. The riders kicked off the journey by dipping their bikes in the Atlantic Ocean – and plan to repeat

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the ritual when they reach the Pacific Ocean on July 31st.

The team reached Ann Arbor, MI on June 8th, where the University of Michigan Kellogg Eye Center hosted a special patient education workshop and picnic in conjunction with the event. The “Greater Than Graves” team also made a special presentation at the event, sharing photos and stories from the road. Even though the ride had only been underway for two weeks, the team was surprised at how many people they had already connected with whose lives had been impacted by Graves' disease.

The next major stop scheduled after Ann Arbor is Chicago, IL, followed by Madison, WI and Minneapolis, MN. The team expects to reach San Francisco on July 31st. Another patient education workshop is planned at the conclusion of the ride, co-sponsored by the Graves' Disease and Thyroid Foundation and the Let's Face It Together Foundation, founded by Dr. Kimberly Cockerham, MD, FACS.

— **Kimberly K. Dorris**
Graves' Disease & Thyroid Foundation
Executive Director

You can follow their ride on Twitter at @GTGride.

For more information, please visit:

www.lfitfoundation.org

www.greaterthangraves.com

www.gdatf.org

www.kellogg.umich.edu