

The Intern's Turn
Destiny
MAKER

By *Jessica Wilkins*
PhillyFIT Intern



SOME COULD JOKE THAT GLENN FENSTER TOOK THE LONG WAY TO PHILADELPHIA—OVER SIX THOUSAND MILES BY BICYCLE FROM DENVER, COLORADO, UP THE EASTERN COASTLINE TO CANADA AND DOWN THROUGH NEW YORK. FENSTER, A PHILLY NATIVE, TOOK A MUCH-NEEDED REPRIEVE ON JULY 1 WITH FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS AT CHICKIE AND PETE'S IN THE NORTHEAST.

Those who know Fenster know that his cross-country trek has a specific purpose; to raise awareness about epilepsy, a disease his son Nyle was diagnosed with at age two.

The story goes as follows: father and son were playing tennis one day when Nyle suffered a seizure. Glenn says his son hit the ground hard but when he went to help him up, Nyle refused. Perplexed, Glenn asked how he had the ambition to keep getting up. Nyle's reply was that he had never seen his father stay down before. Fenster says it was then he was inspired to do something radical.

A few days later he sold his car and began training for his first long distance ride. Two years later in 2006 he embarked on a 4,300 mile ride from Seattle to Miami and last year he rode 6,200 miles from Alaska to Miami. Now on his third journey across the country, Fenster says that his goal is to still raise the "level of consciousness about epilepsy in North America."

A graduate of a Northeast high school, Fenster has always been an athlete. He played baseball for Bucks County College and tried out for the Florida Marlins in 1987. He eventually took up

tennis, which he now teaches, but nothing has inspired Fenster to endure such physical challenges as his love for his son.

"I have worked my entire life athletically just waiting to basically show the world what kind of an athlete I am," said Fenster. "This has given me not only the chance to do that, but also to show my son that no matter what disability of the mind or body, anything can be accomplished."

For Fenster, there are no days off. He rides an average of 120 miles per day through all types of weather, terrain and bike troubles. "I must find the will to continue," Fenster wrote in his online journal. "There were times yesterday I just wanted to stop. I keep thinking of Nyle and those who keep coming out to support me—all those who send encouraging words. I have surpassed last years miles and I must find something inside of me not to give up."

"Everyday is another challenge," says Rein, a friend of forty-five years who has been instrumental in making Fenster's ride as smooth as possible, including an escort by the Canadian guards.

Fenster's journey has also enabled him to meet many people along the way that share his concern for epilepsy. "I have met unbelievable people and have heard incredible stories," says Fenster.

“A lot of people don’t know how terrible Epilepsy is,” said Rein. “As more people hear about Glenn, the more they get involved.” Admittedly, Fenster says he didn’t know much about epilepsy before his son was diagnosed. “It was crushing as a father,” said Fenster. “It was difficult to experience and many different things go through your mind, but you must relinquish all emotions and really focus on your child.”

According to Epilepsy Foundation, about 300,000 children under the age of fourteen have epilepsy in America. The severity of the disease varies; some children grow out of it, while others will struggle with it for the rest of their life.

Fenster says his son Nyle, now fourteen years old, has epilepsy but it doesn’t stop him from enjoying the things he loves like sports and playing the piano. “Epilepsy is something that people have, not who they are,” said Fenster. “He lives a regular life. He just has to be careful,” said Fenster. Nyle was recently named the National Epilepsy spokesperson and attended Kids Speak Up, a national conference for youth leaders with epilepsy in March.

Even through extreme heat, lightning storms and physical fatigue, Fenster insists that the hardest part of his trip is always the first mile; knowing that he must leave his son for the next few months. But by reading Fenster’s journal entries, it becomes obvious that the thoughts of his son are what kept him peddling through each challenging day.

On July 16, with 8,000 miles and three months between them, Glenn and Nyle reunited with each other in Florida. So what’s on the agenda now for Fenster? He plans to sit down and write a book about his son’s courage to battle epilepsy and the inspiration it has given him.

If you would like more information about Glenn’s amazing ride, please visit www.destinymaker.org.



Jessica Wilkins will be graduating with a Journalism degree from Temple University in May. She hopes to combine her interest in fitness with her writing skills in a way that can become a viable career.

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