

Ride On!

A true life story of love,
courage, and commitment in the face of
life's greatest challenges

A photograph of a male cyclist riding a road bike on a paved road. He is wearing a white and purple cycling jersey, black shorts with yellow accents, a white helmet, and sunglasses. He has a blue backpack and is holding a small orange object in his right hand. The background shows a concrete wall and distant hills under a clear sky.

Stephanie M. Saulet



***Ride On!** is an inspiring memoir about a couple's faith, hope, and love during the most challenging race of their lives - fighting a rare type of cancer. The author uses many analogies of cycling and scriptures within the story about her husband, her love for the man, and his fight to beat cancer at any cost. Throughout their journey, they stayed strong in their trust in God, belief for healing, and love for each other.*

Ride On!

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by

Stephanie M. Saulet

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Some people's identities have been changed and any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

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Prologue

“You’ve all been to the stadium and seen the athlete’s race. Everyone runs; one wins. Run to win. All good athletes train hard. They do it for the gold medal that tarnishes and fades. But you’re after one that’s gold eternally.”

- 1st Corinthians 9:24 – 25

When you go to a race, you go for the thrill of the competition, to see how someone would win it. After the winner has been declared and the prize has been rewarded, it’s over. What do you do then?

You go back to dealing with your reality – *your life* – which is your own personal race. Each of us is in our own kind of race, enjoying the thrills or enduring the different obstacles in it.

What part of the race are you in right now?

Are you on an easy course? One in which your job or career, your finances, your home, and your personal life are all in order. Perhaps you’re in the midst of or have already achieved a goal, a dream, experienced joy and love?

Is it a difficult course? Are you in the middle of a war, unemployment, financial problems, or homelessness? Maybe you’re dealing with an addiction, an illness, or a disability. Perhaps it’s the daily challenge of stress, depression, loneliness, grief.

If you are like me, it’s easy to forget to pray when things are going well enough to keep riding on. But pray we must because sometimes you may come to a dead end where things go wrong. You may recognize the road because you’ve already been on it once, twice, more. You may find yourself struggling on a steep hill, wondering if you’ll ever make it to the top and finally reaching the summit and enjoying the thrill of riding downhill, only to crash when you hit a pothole. What will you do then?

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I have come to believe that we shouldn't wait for that bike wreck to put on our protective gear. We need to be proactive, because we don't always know what's up ahead or around the corner. But how do we protect ourselves? By believing God's Word.

All great athletes who have won medals have done so with much determination and faith. They *believed* they could win and dug deep within themselves to discover their capacity to achieve their goal. If we deepen our faith, hope, and love, then

"...we are more than conquerors through Jesus who loved us."

- Romans 8:37

Like an athlete, each of us has this amazing will. There is so much more in us than we have ever experienced and it all begins with our faith – our trust in God – to give us the strength we need to keep going in our race. Faith is knowing you can get through the obstacles of your race only with the help of God. Faith is knowing all things are possible with and through Him.

"[We] can do all things through Christ who strengthens [us]."

- Philippians 4:13

Whatever course you are on, keep going – run, ride, walk, or crawl if you have to. Faith is knowing it will all work out, you *will* make it, and victory *will* be yours with Jesus cheering for you at the finish line. It is up to us to grow, to train, to learn, to improve and to perform with endurance our life's race to,

"...press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call in Christ Jesus."

- Philippians 3:14

How did Chris and I persevere in the biggest race of our lives?

Through the long flat stretches, tailwinds, crosswinds, hills, dead ends, blowouts, crashes, and storms, we rode on, side by side across the finish line – victorious.

On Your Mark

"Keep sight on what is ahead and your eyes directed straight in front of you."

- Proverbs 4:25

Even though the weekend flew by, Monday seemed to take its time. When the final dismissal bell rang and the last of my students excitedly left the classroom, I snatched my purse from the desk drawer and bolted out of my chair. The last thing I did before racing out of the room was slam the light switch down, causing dark shadows to play across the ceiling, the desks, the walls, and on the floor. The lack of light and the shadows made me uneasy, almost as if they portrayed Chris' outcome. I shivered. I flipped the light back on and took a deep breath. *Oh God, shine your light of wisdom and show us what to do.* I closed my eyes and let my hand drop over the switch, turning my back against the darkness.

I darted around the slow-paced cars hoping to get to the cancer center within 20 minutes before the appointment. It was easy to find the small brick building and I saw Chris walking with his oldest brother, Mark, and his wife, Toni, across the barren parking lot. They drove in from Kansas to be there for him. I ran to the entrance and Chris squeezed my hand.

"Hi babe. We have plenty of time," he whispered. When we stepped through the automatic doors, I was surprised at how bright it was in the wide open room. *Thank you, God, for the light in this place.*

Throughout the lobby, chairs and loveseats in soft cream with a hint of mauve and blue hues were conveniently and purposefully scattered, accompanied by mahogany tables with various informational brochures and current newspapers and magazines. When we turned toward the elevators, there was soft, calming music from the piano playing itself off to the side of the entrance. Chris ran his finger down the list of doctors from a plaque on the wall and found Dr. Needles' office. We exited the elevator and the view of the lobby added to the serenity of the place. We walked to the end of the hall through the large double doors into a spacious waiting room decorated in deep

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colors of hunter green, navy, and maroon that enhanced the quietness of the place.

We were the only ones there and I wondered if we were the last appointment of the day. Chris signed in on the clipboard and the receptionist told him to fill out the new patient paperwork while she copied his insurance card. Several minutes later, a nurse stepped out from the closed door and called Chris' name. He handed over the paperwork to her as she led us into a long, narrow room where they would check his weight, temperature, and blood pressure before seeing the doctor. Stunned, I watched her work with Chris. *What? How often would he have to come here?*

But it didn't faze him. Chris let the nurse take his vitals and pretended to leap off the scale.

After recording the information in his crisp new medical file (that I would soon come to hate), we were led down a long hallway, past many rooms, until she opened the door of one and told us that Dr. Needles would be with us shortly. Chris sat on the examining table and we settled into the hard chairs. I opened my notebook to the page of questions Chris wanted to ask. Looking over them, my heart was pounding so hard I was sure it echoed in the tiny room. I caught Chris' eye and he smiled. I started to calm down when the door swung open and an averaged-height man with salt and pepper hair, dark rimmed glasses, and wearing a white lab coat entered. He shook Chris' hand first, and then greeted the rest of us. He sat down on the small stool and asked a series of questions to learn more about Chris' medical background. Overall, Chris was a very healthy 46-year-old man who never smoked and had only a few drinks in his life. The only history of cancer in his family was from his mother who died of breast cancer after it recurred the second time. No one else had been diagnosed with cancer. Dr. Needles wanted to examine Chris so we stepped out of the room. I stood next to a stained-glass window in the hallway and rested my head on it, allowing the primary colors to dance on my face. *Lord, I have to believe that we're in the right place with the right doctor. Show us how we can fight this cancer.*

The door jerked open and Chris waved for us to come back in.

Dr. Needles finished writing his notes then crossed his arms across his chest and sighed.

This can't be good.

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"The mass located inside the urethra is called 'urethral cancer.'" He paused.

"I've never heard of it," Chris said, puzzled.

"This is a rare type of cancer in which malignant cells form in the tissues of the urethra," Dr. Needles explained. "I've already called the cancer centers in Houston, Chicago, and New York to get input on how to treat it." Focusing on Chris, he continued, "Because this cancer is so rare, there is no consensus on what to do to cure it – chemotherapy, radiation, surgery, or a combination of any of these three."

I froze. I couldn't bring myself to write what I had just heard and kept staring at my notebook, afraid to see Chris' reaction. A heavy weight filled my chest and my heart sped up. *Chris has a rare cancer. The doctors cannot agree on how to treat it?*

All at once, Chris, Mark, and Toni began firing questions at the doctor:

"What is the cause of this cancer?"

"How big is the tumor?"

"What stage is it in?"

"Is this the only tumor?"

"Will Chris have to do chemo and radiation to treat it?"

"Can it be removed surgically and then do treatment?"

Dr. Needles waited patiently, listening to them while I struggled to keep up the notes.

"We need to do some tests to learn more about the cancer and hopefully we'll find some answers. I recommend a complete blood count, an MRI of the pelvic area, a CT-scan of the lungs, liver, and abdomen, and a PET scan of Chris' body."

We sat there in silence. I wrote the long list, feeling overwhelmed. Finally, I looked at Chris, who was rubbing his chin thoughtfully.

"Okay, let's do it," he said. Dr. Needles wrote out the orders and explained that we may or may not be able to do the PET scan – it depended on the type of health insurance Chris had. I stopped writing and spoke for the first time.

"Really? Do we have to worry about insurance coverage on top of this?" *God, can you take care of this? This is too much already!*

No one answered me.

"I don't know," said Dr. Needles, "but talk to Nancy who deals with insurance companies. She can work wonders for our patients."

"How soon can I get in for these tests?" asked Chris.

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Dr. Needles explained that one of the receptionists would put the order in and Chris would get a phone call with the time, place, and instructions. He reassured all of us that he would continue researching for a treatment regimen and he hoped to have some ideas after reviewing the test results.

"When we meet again, we'll go over everything and decide what to do," said Dr. Needles.

It felt as if we had just gotten on a rollercoaster and took a sudden drop and turn after a long climb. With the orders in his hands, we quickly followed Chris, who was already halfway down the hall toward the receptionist. We found out there was a lab on the second floor for the blood work where he could go without an appointment. She told us that Chris would be able to get in for the other tests before returning to Dr. Needles. Checking my calendar, I saw that we'd have to wait 10 days to find out more about this cancer. *How are we going to get through this long waiting period?*

While Chris went to the lab, I walked around the small library on the main floor, searching for any resources that would be helpful for us. There were plenty of pamphlets on breast cancer, prostate cancer, lung cancer, colon cancer, skin cancer, but none on urethral cancer.

Feeling a headache brewing, I rubbed my forehead, wondering where to go to find information on this type of cancer. Standing there in the middle of the room, I noticed a secretary typing speedily on her keyboard. *Well, I can find almost anything on the Internet.*

I turned around and saw Chris strutting down the hall, rubbing the Band-Aid on his arm, smiling.

"So, who's hungry, because I'm starved?"

I looked at him and laughed. Only Chris would still have an appetite after all this.

During dinner, Mark and Toni asked Chris how he felt about Dr. Needles.

"I like him. I have a positive feeling that he'll be a good doctor for me." He looked around the table, "I have a good team," he said. "This cancer doesn't know who it's messing with. I'm going to beat this."

I leaned back and watched him with his family. He wasn't overwhelmed by this cancer. He was ready on his mark, anxious to begin his fight – his race. It reminded me of Chris' determination in the Labor Day bicycle race a couple of weeks before and how he kept an optimistic attitude despite its challenges.

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Throughout the summer, Chris trained hard to prepare for the criterion race. He competed several times and had to be pulled out each time. This year, his goal was to finish the race.

We arrived early that morning so Chris could have plenty of time to preview the course and get ready. He was so focused that he barely spoke. I gave him plenty of space while he stretched, warmed up, and did a final check on his bike – a professional road bike made of light carbon steel that allows the rider to increase their speed, slice around the corners, and easily pedal with a steady cadence.

“Good luck,” I told him and watched him pedal off on his bright red, black, and white bicycle. He chose to wear one of his favorite jerseys in bold red, orange, yellow, black and white that showed off his biceps. Waiting for the people to pass by, I noticed how his long, muscular legs moved gracefully, clicking his shoe into the pedal and crossing the street.

When the race was about to begin, all the cyclists rode up to the starting line and got into position while everyone rang their cowbells for them. Someone was shouting directions to the cyclists in a microphone and I wondered if they could hear what was being said with all of the excitement. It was so crowded that I barely got close enough to see Chris. He found me, smiled and then bowed his head.

The starting gun echoed a loud *BANG!* and the cyclists clicked into their pedals and darted forward in one swift, choreographed movement. In a matter of seconds they rounded the corner and disappeared. About 10 minutes later, we saw them sprinting around the corner at the opposite end of the street and everyone started going crazy again. I squeezed my feet in between the poles of the barricade and stood up on my toes to look for Chris. I found him keeping up the pace in the middle of the group.

“Go Chris, go,” I yelled.

They whisked by and I felt the wind blow on my face. With wide eyes, I shivered, feeling the energy flow through my body, making me want to get on a bike and join them.

After the third lap, the cyclists still had a lot of energy and the race was getting more intense. There was a small group of riders several feet ahead of the rest of the pack. I gripped the fence, looking for Chris and found him at the back of the larger group.

“Come on Chris, you can do it! Ride hard,” I shouted.

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This time, the wait seemed more like a half-an-hour rather than just several minutes longer. I kept checking my watch, bouncing my foot and tapping my fingers.

"Here they come for the fifth lap," the announcer bellowed. The riders flew past us so quickly, it was all a blur. Not too far behind, there was a smaller group of cyclists pedaling hard. I found Chris' jersey in the lead.

"Come on guys, let's do it!" Chris yelled out and everyone rang their cowbells to cheer them on.

Sometime during the lap, the riders in Chris' group separated. They veered around the corner, one by one, riding on their own and falling further behind. I wondered why they didn't stay together, but Chris kept his head down and pedaled harder.

"Keep going, Chris. Stay strong. You can do it," I screamed.

He pushed himself off his seat, sprinted and turned the corner for the sixth time. I had no idea what it took to endure this kind of race and admired his perseverance.

Toward the end of the lap, Chris and the other cyclists were too far behind and had to be pulled out of the race. He dropped his head over the handlebars and slowly steered off the course. I could only imagine how disappointed he must have felt. He tried so hard. I left the race and waited for him by his truck. Eventually, I saw him pull into the parking lot. He stopped in front of me, took off his helmet, riding gloves, and sunglasses, and then kissed me.

"I'm proud of you, Chris. You're a winner to me."

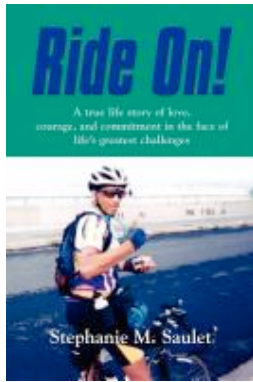
"Thanks babe," he smiled, wiping the sweat from his forehead.

After Chris loaded up his bike and changed, we watched the race winding down to the final laps.

"Steph, this was the best I've ever done. Last year, it was at the end of the fourth lap when I got pulled out. I rode two more laps. Next year, I'm going to finish this race."

"I believe you will, Chris."

Mark's boisterous laugh brought me back to their conversation. I looked at my fiancé' and felt his confidence. *Yes, I believe you will beat this cancer, Chris.*



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