

Caroline Frances Sandow

You know, I never knew what her middle name was until I read the Obit in the Gainesville Sun. It's the same middle name my Mom had. But Caroline had another name that was much more familiar and renowned in the cycling community; Thumper.

Actually, it was a mixed metaphor. As you may remember, Thumper was the name of a character in the movie Bambi. A very recognizable name for a rabbit. But that wasn't Caroline. No there was an irrepressible bunny that exemplified the undaunted character of a shy, slender cyclist that could ride the legs off of cyclists of any age or level of fitness – The Energizer bunny. That bunny had no “name” so when we all decided that Caroline was the spittin' image of the Energizer bunny, we needed a recognizable bunny name, et voila! Thumper! She took to the name immediately and loved the analogy. She WAS the Energizer bunny.

But, I'm getting ahead of myself. Originally we got Caroline in the middle of a prayer. In 1991, I was heavily involved in a bicycle club by the name of the International Christian Cycling Club or the I Triple C. We were one of about 60 “Spokes” Worldwide with the Hub in Denver Colorado – Cycling Heaven. It was our practice to gather around in a big circle before a ride or an event, hold hands and pray out loud. Often, when we opened our eyes after the prayer, our circle would be bigger with people who had seen our witness and joined in. Caroline was no exception, but with a twist.

One of our members, Foster Atteberry or “Foz” as he was known, had noticed a female cyclist that was obviously in distress as she slowly circled the parking lot on her bike. She had just purchased a new pair of clipless pedals and was

riding them for the very first time that morning. They were so new in fact that she couldn't clip out of the pedals to stop and put her foot down – so she had to just keep pedaling slowly around the parking lot trying to figure out what to do. Well, Foz knew what to do. As she came around slowly the next time, he just put his arm around her and held her up while we finished the prayer. So, when we finished the prayer and opened our eyes, there was Foz with his arm around the newest member of the IC3. She just hadn't filled out the membership application and sent off her check yet.

From that moment on, Thumper was a vital and active part of our cycling ministry. We had no idea how big a part until the years rolled by and Caroline blossomed. She discovered her “voice” in a ministry that has touched literally thousands of people over the last two decades. Thumper had the Word of G-d deep down in her soul and she had to share it with people everyday. In fact, in the height of her ministry, she personally reached out and touched about 40 different people a day. How did she do it? Ink and paper. Not just any ink but every color and type of ink imaginable; bright primaries, brilliant dayglo's, shimmering iridescents, glittery metallics and subtle earthy tones. The very Words of G-d in His scripture came to life and flowed off the tip of her pens in elegant and studied calligraphy. Not just with one pen at a time but sometimes with two or three pens in the same hand at the same time as she scrolled out praise, worship and encouragement to hungry souls thirsting for the words of life. I know. I was the recipient of her art.

Postcards. Hand caligraphied and sent from all the far flung places that she went on business. But the amazing thing wasn't the beauty of her script or the origin of the mailing, but the timing. The timing of her post cards was uncanny, no I dare say – miraculous. But then again, that's how G-d

works. I would not always check my mailbox every day. Sometimes I would go for several days with even thinking of seeing what the world was demanding from me in a letter. But whenever I received a postcard from Thumper, The Scripture verse was perfectly timed and just what I needed. Caroline couldn't have timed that . Only G-d can.

And it wasn't just the occasional "Coincidence". No, it was a regular occurrence. She was anointed in her ministry. Far more than she realized. When friends would get together, we would comment on the most recent Postcard we had gotten and how much it meant to us. And there was always one common denominator, divine timing. And we were silly enough to think that we were the sole recipients of her ministry. Caroline was sending out about 1,200 postcards a month! All over the world! And not just postcards. Once she got a laminating machine, it was Katie bar the door! Bookmarks galore, bundles of luggage tags pocket cards of every description. If it stayed still long enough, she put a verse on it and laminated it. We're all thankful she never had a cat.

Did I mention that she liked to ride her bike? I've know her for just shy of 20 years and she was always on her bike up until recently. And I don't just mean on her bike, I mean on her bike doing amazing things. She has personally kicked my butt more times that I can recount here today. In fact, that same day that we got Caroline at the start of the Strawberry Century (a century is 100 years, so a century bike ride is 100 miles) she kicked my butt on the way in and Foz kept taunting me with, "If that little girl can do this, you certainly can!" Yes, I could, but not like that. The only time I had an advantage on her was during descents. I would shout "Team Gravity!" as I plunged effortlessly past her and she would tuck in behind me to catch a draft only to find that she

would have to pedal to keep up. Ah, but on the next hill she would pass me like a frenzied sewing machine stitching up the steepest hills without losing her breath. "Team Gravity" only worked downhill. And of course, when I tried to draft her (ride 3-4 inches behind her wheel) It was no use. She didn't even punch a hole in the wind.

She had only one speed. Not terribly fast. But she came out of the box at 21-22 and stayed there – all day. And she thought rest stops were for wimps. On a century or the Cross Florida (172 miles in one day) the tough guys would pass her disdainfully in the beginning and she would pass them at the next rest stop. Then they would triumphantly pass her again. And she would pass them at the rest stop. They might pass her one more time a bit more respectfully. But, when she passed them for the third time, they never saw her again – until the finish line where she had already showered up and was cheering for the riders as they came across the line. A lot of tough guys got humbled by that little girl. Serves 'em right. I knew better.

Her ultra-endurance cycling accomplishments are legendary, but you'd never hear her talk about them. It was just another ride. Mount Mitchell in 6 hrs 23 min. First woman across the line in the Cross Florida a couple of years that I know of. We've ridden thousands of mile together. Mountains. Flats. Rolling hills. It was during those times of being on the bike that she began to open up to me and share her life. That's when I began to think of her as a Sparrow.

Life was often overwhelming for Caroline. When it was she would flit away like a little English Sparrow. Gone in less than the blink of an eye. Then when the world has calmed down and she felt safe once again, she would appear in a flutter just as quickly as she had departed. You had to love

Caroline with an open hand and an open heart. She trusted me and shared the things in her life that touched her soul. Her fears, opinions, questions about G-d, her triumphs and her challenges. And I'm a good listener.

The overwhelming times got longer and the Sparrow would still disappear in a flash and return in a flutter. I've seen her in the dark times and she never lost hope. She never doubted G-d. I've seen her triumphant and rejoiced with her in victory. Death, where is your victory? Where is your sting? Caroline is triumphant now. And will continue to be for eternity.

Towards the end of the big ride called "Life", she had to put up the bike. One day she said "Thumper is no more." But she found a new passion to fill the void of cycling. She filled it with life abundant and overflowing. She filled it with a garden. A special place where she could feel the earth and smell its richness. She could see new growth and life every day and watch as hungry little sprouts pushed up through the rich soil to take their nourishment and then allow themselves to be the nourishment for others. Everything around Caroline was about life and life more abundantly. I had the privilege of preparing one of her final meals on the Friday before she passed. It was healthy, wholesome and nourishing food. She was careful to make sure she got all the various nutrients and supplements she needed to heal and go on. She was planning to go forward, not collapse in defeat.

So what can we learn from Thumper? She cared with reckless abandon for the people she saw in need around her. She was often overwhelmed by life, but pressed on, relentlessly and with vigor - and commitment. She was no fool and saw her transition coming and handled it with grace

and peace. Calm assurance of the reward that awaited her when she looked in her Savior's eyes and heard, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." What more could we hope for? How better can we live our life?

Caroline has passed the way of all flesh but has arrived at the goal of the upward calling of Christ. She worked out her salvation with fear and trembling and has finished the good fight. I hope I can do as well.

So long Thumper, We'll miss you madly...

