

Husband of cyclist killed in P.E.I. begins cross-country trek



Elizabeth Ann Sovis and her husband, Edmund Aunger while on a bicycling vacation in P.E.I. on July 13. Sovis was hit by a vehicle and killed the next day. Photo courtesy of the Edmonton Journal

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One year ago, on a sunny summer evening in P.E.I., tourists Edmund Aunger and Elizabeth Sovis were cycling along a highway in Hunter River when a drunk driver tore the couple apart forever.

Sovis, 63, was struck and killed by a van driven by Clarence Arnold Moase, whose blood alcohol level was almost three times the legal limit. Aunger has been devastated by the loss of his wife, his soulmate.

In a weekend interview with The Guardian, he said he struggled to find meaning in his life after her death.

But then he remembered what she had planned to do this year. Sovis, an avid cyclist who believed sharing the road with motor vehicles was too dangerous, had resolved to devote her upcoming retirement, beginning on July 1 of this year, to the development of safe cycling trails.

Aunger has now taken up his wife's cause.

On July 1, he set off from Victoria, B.C., on a cross-country cycling trip to advocate for safer cycling trails in P.E.I. and across Canada.

"I don't know how I could keep on living if I didn't have something to do that was meaningful," Aunger said in a telephone interview from Hope, B.C., where he was resting up for the next leg of his journey.

"I'm very grateful because this gives me something I can do for her, something that she would have wanted."

But he is not happy with the P.E.I. government.

Prior to their visit last year, the couple requested brochures from Tourism P.E.I. for information about a cycling vacation. Aunger says the brochures they received indicated P.E.I.'s Confederation Trail could take them across the Island without having to travel on the shoulder of any highways.

This is not the case.

After his wife was killed, Aunger sent a letter Tourism Minister Robert Henderson, Transportation Minister Robert Vessey and Justice Minister Janice Sherry calling on the P.E.I. government to build a safer transportation network for bicycle riders.

He received only a letter stating the matter was still before the courts, as Moase was facing impaired driving charges, and they could not comment.

After Moase's conviction last December, Aunger sent another letter to the three ministers and one to Premier Robert Ghiz.

To date, he has received no response.

But he has received three emails from Tourism P.E.I., asking him to fill out surveys about how much money he spent in P.E.I. during his visit.

"I can't help feeling insulted because it's as though the major concern for me and my wife was, did we contribute to the P.E.I. economy?" Aunger said.

"Well, I spent personally out of my own pocket \$600 on an ambulance ride to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. I paid \$3,100 for a cremation. I spent about \$15 in food. So I guess, since we were only there for the afternoon — my wife was killed just a few hours after we arrived in P.E.I. — we were pretty good tourists."

He hopes the province will consider his request and make P.E.I.'s roads safer for those who travel by bike.

His cycling trek across Canada will be made in five stages over the next five years. He has posted a detailed itinerary online and is blogging his journey. He hopes those who support his cause will follow his progress, lobby governments and even join him for a leg or two of cycling.

He plans to end his trek on July 14, 2017, at the place on Rennie's Road where his wife was killed. It will be the five-year anniversary of her death.

This weekend marks the first anniversary. Aunger says this weekend will be difficult for him, but no more so than every day has been since he lost her.

"Every day seems like an anniversary of her death. It's just very difficult."

You can follow Aunger's journey at his website www.ridethetrail.ca