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In memory of his beloved Elizabeth

Cross-country pedal for wife's legacy arrives in Barrie

By Sue Sgambati



Edmund Auger was in Barrie Tuesday as part of his cross-country ride on the Trans Canada Trail to honour his wife's memory and promote her vision. Sue Sgambati/BarrieToday

Edmund Auger and Elizabeth Sovis met when they were 12-years-old and growing up in Toronto.

They were married for 34 years and together as a couple even longer.

"Many people said to me when Elizabeth and I got married that we'd been destined for each other and it was just an incredibly special relationship," reflects Aunger, his voice softening as he stands with his bicycle near the Trans Canada Trail Pavilion at Barrie's waterfront. "She was always the one, right from 12 years old, that I loved."

Aunger arrived in Barrie Tuesday as part of a cross-Canada bicycle ride to promote Elizabeth's vision of the Trans Canada Trail as a safe place for people to ride and walk.

It's a journey fuelled by grief and a broken heart.

Four years ago, on one of the couple's annual summer cycling holidays, Elizabeth was struck and killed in Prince Edward Island.

The impact threw her body 150 feet and sheared off the seat of her bike.

"The first day we were riding, we had to leave the trail and go onto a two-lane road with no shoulder. Five minutes later she was hit by a truck driven by a drunk driver and she was killed," said Aunger.

"It's been four years and I didn't think I was going to make it after my wife died. I thought I would die. It was very, very traumatic," he said.

"I don't think I could ever explain just how devastating it is to see the person you love the most in the world dying on the side of the road."

After his wife's death, the father of three sons quit his 36-year career as a professor of political science at the University of Alberta.

Elizabeth was several months away from her retirement when she was killed and had planned to fight to get the Trans Canada Trail off the roads.

Aunger took up her cause and is pedaling the 12,500 km from Victoria to Charlottetown over five summers, averaging about 2,500 km on each instalment.

"Next year, the final summer, I'm planning to arrive at the spot in Prince Edward Island where my wife was killed on the fifth anniversary of her death and I'll be holding a memorial service," Aunger said.

The couple's families had cottages in this area and cycling through Simcoe County brings back many memories for Aunger.

He applauds the Simcoe County Rail Trail, linking Barrie, Orillia and Penetanguishene, as "an outstanding example" to the whole country of what the Trans Canada Trail could be and should be.

Right now he says, claims that the Trans Canada Trail will be fully connected by July 1, 2017 in time for Canada's 150 birthday are a "dangerous hoax."

"It's a lie. It's a dangerous one. I know for my wife and I we thought we could ride our bikes safely and we were continually finding out we were riding on very dangerous situations all over the country."

In his campaign, Aunger is calling on the Ontario government to intervene and collaborate with the federal government to establish the Simcoe County standards for the entire Trans Canada Trail.

"Promoting the Trans Canada Trail was very close to my wife's heart. And mine too."

For more information on the "Ride the Trail for Elizabeth" campaign go to www.ridethetrail.ca