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## 'Your bike and your brothers'; WKU students make annual ride for Alzheimer's

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A group of 12 students at Western Kentucky University have spent the summer months riding their bikes to raise money for research into Alzheimer's. The riders made a stop in Bowling Green on Monday to support the annual Bike4Alz ride. The annual Bike4Alz ride was started in 2010 and covers 3,600 miles.

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When Tanner Blood dipped his bike tire in the Pacific Ocean on May 21, he knew he had a grueling 3,600-mile bike ride ahead of him.

However, he said, "no matter how hard the ride is, nothing is as hard as what some of these people are fighting with" – Alzheimer's. One of those people is his grandmother, Terry Beckham, who is living with dementia and is the reason Blood is on this journey.

"I'm doing this for her ... all the guys on my team are also riding for my grandma," Blood said. "We're doing this for everybody who is affected by this ... . It inspires us and motivates us to keep going every day."

And while most would want to indulge in something of personal enjoyment following a tiring 56-mile stretch from Nashville to Bowling Green, Beckham had a different approach – attacking Blood with something she was sure he would not appreciate.

"I'm gonna hug him to death, and he doesn't like that, and I don't care," Beckham said. "I'm gonna hug every single one of them."

Well Beckham was wrong. "I love it," Blood said.

Blood was one of 12 Western Kentucky University students who pedaled back to Bowling Green on Monday, welcomed by their friends and family who were anxiously waiting to see the team pull into the Creason lot on campus.

"It's incredible. When we got to the stoplight back there on the other side of the bridge and we could see everybody waiting, it was almost butterflies in my stomach," he said. "It's been a long summer. The days are really hard. It's a lot of phone calls and texting, to be able to hug everybody and see everybody. It's great."

Following a tradition started by five brothers of the Phi Gamma Delta fraternity in 2010, the group has traveled from San Francisco to raise money and awareness of Alzheimer's

disease. While the break in Bowling Green is sweet, there is still a long road ahead for the team as the ride will officially come to an end on July 28 in Virginia Beach, Virginia.

"It's good to be here but we've got a long way to go," Blood said.

With a goal of \$150,000 at the beginning of the trek, Blood estimated the group has raised \$75,000-\$90,000 so far. Those interested in donating can find more information at <https://www.bike4alz.org/support-us>.

"We've got a lot of work to do, so we need all the help we can get," Blood said. "Even though our ride may end in Virginia Beach, the fight against Alzheimer's will continue, so we'll look to keep raising money all throughout the year until the next team takes over."

Tanner Redmon is another member of the 12th Bike4Alz team with a personal connection to disease. Although he admitted to not having much of an interest when he first

heard about the trip, thinking "these guys are crazy for biking across the country," it was his grandfather's diagnosis that gave him "no option but to get involved."

"From then on, I was all in," Redmon said. "I got on the team and we began to work relentlessly. All of a sudden, we blinked and it was May 20, and we were pulling out of Bowling Green and driving out to San Francisco to get on our bikes."

Redmon said Monday morning "was pretty tough" as he and the team were leaving his family's home where they had stayed the previous two nights, however he said what made that tough morning better was knowing he was coming home to see his "Western family."

"Seeing all the friends that I know here, it's exciting, but it's also bittersweet knowing we've still got 20 days of cycling left," he said.

Aziz Umarov, a WKU student heading into his fifth year at the school, still remembers where he was when he first heard about Bike4Alz in the

spring semester of his sophomore year. He said learning about the ride is what hooked him into the FIJI fraternity and has been something he's wanted to do ever since. He said visiting memory care facilities along the trip is really what pushed him to continue, especially through the hardest days.

"When you're in the memory care facilities and you're talking to these people, it's crazy and ... it really puts it into perspective. For me, memory is a super important thing ... For somebody to lose all of that and have no idea who you are ... I just can't imagine that," Umarov said. "It's not about me. That's what pushed me. I take myself out of it, and I think about the other people we're doing this for."

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