

A photograph of George Pollock Jr. on a boat. He is in the foreground, wearing a green cycling jersey and a white helmet, leaning forward on his bicycle. Behind him, three people are standing on the boat: a man in a light blue shirt and striped tie, a woman in a black lace top, and a woman in a black and white striped sleeveless top. The background is a body of blue water.

George Pollock Jr. '85 is *Racing Across America* to Help Fight His Rare Muscle Disease

Pollock, pictured riding along Bayshore Boulevard, has a team of support behind him in his cross-continent quest



Among the millions who would not be candidates to compete in a bicycle race across the length of North America, from California to Maryland, from the Pacific to the Atlantic, over mountains and across plains, day and night, non-stop start to finish, as part of a team competing in the legendary Race Across America, would be someone with FSH Muscular Dystrophy.

Which is exactly why George Pollock Jr. '85 is doing it.

Pollock has been an avid cyclist since graduate school in Gainesville, where he competed for the University of Florida. A few later years later in 1997, he noticed something was wrong with his right leg, in the shin muscle, causing foot drop.

For years, it was misdiagnosed.

Then, a decade after the muscle weakness began in his lower right leg, something was amiss in his lower left leg. More and varied symptoms this

time. He saw doctors again, took more tests, and finally, at long last, received a definitive answer.

It was 2006 when Dr. Jan Korthals at the University of South Florida administered some painful tests that confirmed Pollock had FSH Muscular Dystrophy.

Now, Pollock has vast knowledge about Facioscapulohumeral Muscular Dystrophy, or FSHD for short. In February 2016, he was elected to the Board of Directors of the FSH Society, a 25-year-old, Boston-based charity that funds research to find a cure for FSHD. The Society has earned the highest rating, 4 stars, from Charity Navigator for eight straight years.

There are an estimated 870,000 individuals worldwide living with FSHD. For many, it is extremely debilitating – there is no cure or treatment. Pollock has been fortunate. His muscle weakness has been progressing slowly,

beginning with his lower legs and now just beginning to cause noticeable weakness in his shoulders and upper arms.

“FSHD typically causes weakness in an asymmetric manner, which makes it hard to diagnose,” Pollock said. “There is a dead gene that for some reason is reactivated and is toxic to certain muscle cells. FSHD is typically genetic and always progressive. Symptoms typically start in the face, shoulders, and upper arms and people who get it earlier in life will have much worse muscle loss and weakness.”

Pollock no longer races for fear that a bad moment with a leg muscle could cause him to momentarily falter. He still rides regularly, albeit at somewhat less than 100% capacity.

As he continued to live with a muscle disease that will lead to more muscle loss and less mobility as time goes on, Pollock wondered what else he could

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do to help others with FSHD, how he could help with awareness and diagnosis, and help researchers develop treatments and a cure.

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With his cycling background, the Race Across America (RAAM) – the renowned “World’s Toughest Bicycle Race” – was a natural, albeit daunting challenge.

“This is an epic adventure,” Pollock said of the 35-year-old race, which is 50% longer than the most famous bicycle race, the Tour de France, and completed in one week instead of three because it is continuous racing, not a stage race.

So in 2016, Pollock began putting it all together, recruiting a team, planning, and targeting the June 2017 race.

Tampa, a business owner, and had a significant influence on his life. Pollock said she lived a life in accordance with the Jesuit motto of ‘Men for Others.’ She left each grandchild some money, and Pollock used his to seed this effort.

Bear was 100 years old, in her 101st year of life. So \$101,000 became the goal.

Pollock, of course, also had to convince seven of his cycling comrades that they should join him in this endeavor to conquer the renowned Race Across America. Some of them he rode with back when he raced. Some he met more recently and are partners on training rides.

Six live in the Tampa area. One lives on the east coast of Florida, another in Asheville, N.C. They all have manipulated their training, their work schedules, and their lives, to be a part of this. To put this treasured notch in their bike frames, and to help a friend with a noble purpose.

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Pollock believes the FSHD Cycling Team’s quest will help continue the great strides made recently with FSHD.

“The researchers and scientists are making progress,” said Pollock, who is a co-founder and Chief Financial Officer of a Tampa-based company called vXchnge, which owns and operates Internet data centers across North America. “More drug companies are working on it, there are dozens of clinical trials, and there is more cross-pollination in research.

“If we can create awareness and fund more research, we can make a difference. These efforts will lead to tremendous changes in the quality of life for those affected with this disease.”

Pollock has set a goal to raise \$101,000 for the FSH Society. Why \$101,000? Pollock’s maternal grandmother, Mary Bear, died in the fall of 2015. She was a lifelong resident of

Pollock, who turned 50 in April, is training 4 to 5 days a week on the bike, covering more than 200 miles. The FSHD weakness requires more rest for his muscles, and he is more wary of cumulative fatigue, though he believes the training is good for the muscles.

He is preparing for long days in the saddle, and – as best he can prepare for such things in mostly flat Florida – some hard days in the hills across America. In order to meet the ambitious 6 ½ day goal Pollock has established, the team of veteran cyclists will need to average 20 mph. They will ride nearly 400 miles each, in rotating shifts of a few hours apiece like one continuous relay race, while riding nearly half the time in the darkness.

“We want to hit our (6 ½ day) target, and we want to be safe,” Pollock said. “Hopefully everyone gets along as we suffer together!”



Eight cyclists and 10 crew members are a part of George Pollock Jr. ’85’s FSHD cycling team in the Race Across America in June. Pictured with him here on Bayshore Boulevard in Tampa are (L-R) Jon Edwards (rider), Leah Pollock (mother, crew), Karin Kramer (crew), George Pollock Sr. ’59 (father, crew), Brian McGuigan (rider), Greg Pollock ’87, (brother, crew), Jane Pollock (wife, crew), and Adam Carnegie (rider). For bios on all riders and crew members, go to www.fshdcycling.com/team.

Pollock is in the middle layer of three generations of Pollocks at Jesuit.

His father, George Sr., graduated in 1959 and lives in Tampa. His two younger brothers, Greg Pollock ’87, a Master Detective with the Hillsborough County Sheriff’s Department, and Dr. Glen Pollock ’89, a neurosurgeon, also are Tigers, as is his son, Jacob Pollock ’15, who is completing his sophomore year Florida Gulf Coast University.

The Jesuit culture is ingrained in his DNA.

“My father meets weekly with guys from his class,” Pollock said. “You see that kind of bond, then you live it – there is just something special with Jesuit.

“The ’85s, we had lunch the other day. There were 14 guys there. That’s almost 10% of the class to show up for lunch.”

The Jesuit experience made an impact on Pollock, and ultimately on this mission.

“When you are fortunate enough to go to Jesuit, you have an obligation to give back,” said Pollock, who was a member of the baseball team in high school. “It is about ‘Men for Others.’”

Pollock’s family has jumped on board his FSHD/RAAM mission, providing several members of the crucial 10-person support crew for FSHD Cycling.



His mother, Leah, has been engaged in fundraising and planning. Dad is on the crew, too, as is his wife Jane, daughter Emily (who recently graduated from UF and soon starts graduate school), and brother Greg.

They are a lot more than just moral support. The logistics of getting a team

where all riders and crew will be, and what they will be doing at that moment (riding, driving, eating, sleeping, buying food/drink, etc.), through the rain, wind, heat and any other harsh element Mother Nature dishes out.

“I think what keeps me up at night are the logistics and safety,” Pollock said. “We are doing a ton of planning.”

The Race Across America starts on Saturday, June 17 at Noon, from its customary starting point in Oceanside, Calif. A week before the race, the FSHD Cycling riders and crew will depart Florida in the five race vehicles, stocked with all of their equipment and supplies, embarking for California.

They arrive on June 14, attend an FSH Society kickoff event the next day, go through check-in on Friday, and begin the race Saturday on the coastline of the Pacific, as one of 15 teams registered in the 8-person category.

The 2017 Race Across America

On June 17 at Noon, George Pollock’s 8-man cycling team and 10-person support group traveling in five motor vehicles will take off from Oceanside, Calif. in the 36th edition of the famed Race Across America. They’ll continuously race some 3,100 miles across 12 states and climb more than 170,000 vertical feet to the finish in Annapolis, Md. on – hopefully – June 23, to meet their goal of completing the race in less than 7 days. Each team member will ride nearly 400 miles. Follow Pollock’s FSHD Cycling team during the race via live tracking at the Race Across America website, www.raceacrossamerica.org. To learn more about his team and its mission to raise awareness and funding for FSHD research, please go to www.FSHDcycling.com

of eight cyclists and 10 crew members across the continent in less than seven days are mind-bending.

A partial list of items meticulously charted in detail on spreadsheets and checklists would include things such as rider schedules, sleep, food/hydration/nutrition, medical needs, vehicle movement, lodging, course route/traffic, gear/equipment, etc.

The team has five support vehicles, including two RVs. There will be a vehicle with a rider at all times. There are 55 time stations across the race route, check-in locations each team must pass through to satisfy race requirements.

Pollock has every 30 minutes precisely calculated for 150 hours straight,

If all goes as planned, the team will arrive in Annapolis, Md. late on June 23, having traversed the Sierra, Rocky, and Appalachian mountain ranges, crossed the Colorado, Mississippi, Missouri, and Ohio rivers, the Mojave and Sonoran deserts, and the Great Plains.

And having made a difference in the lives of those with FSHD.

“We are racing for an important cause, and we do want to raise awareness and funds for research,” Pollock said. “However, there is a deeper mission, to inspire people to live their lives no matter the challenges, and for those fortunate to be healthy to have compassion and truly live a life of ‘Men for Others.’” 

