“Pour ne pas avoir le regret éternel de se dire "si j'avais su, j'aurai donné avant d'en avoir besoin"

Julien Leblay just turned 16 on August 27, 1997. That day he had a serious accident on a tractor. He swung back into a ravine, made two somersaults in the tractor, was thrown out and landed on the ground. While he broke no bones both of his lungs were severely damaged. A blood transfusion and 2 days in an induced coma were necessary to begin to heal his lungs. He also needed huge amounts of blood to stay alive. For four days he hung between life and death.

“Thankfully, I'm alive today. I had lots of opportunities but I'll never forget those persons who dedicate their life to others: firemen, in particular, medical teams that give their best and also those who decided to give their blood to save lives. This near to death experience made a big impression in my life and turned me into a more conscious and stronger person aware of real life values.”

“I was 18 when I proudly went to give my blood at university, but the Doctor announced it is something I will never be able to do again. Unfortunately, in France, people cannot give their own blood once they have received a transfusion.

“That was a real shock to understand I will never be able to contribute my blood to save other people lives.”

When he was released from the hospital, Julien started to ride a bicycle to improve his respiratory capacities. He said that sports were the only way he could keep healthy. To recover, he had to find an activity that would improve his lungs. He chose cycling because he believes that it is complete exercise, close to nature and practical to anyone.

After he had been training for a number of years, Julien made two Tours of the Massif Cental (Auvergne), an elevated region in south-central France, consisting of mountains and plateaus. One of his bike trips was 850 kms and the other1050 kms. In July 2003, Julien and his best friend, Fabien, decided to go for a trip together! Fabien bought his first motorcycle: a 600 bandit, Suzuki.

Julien recalls:

“And the dream came true: facing the Alps like in the Cycle France Tour!”

We both agree getting a bicycle and a motorbike together is very interesting and everything but contradictory. Both vehicles are closed to nature; both are not respected by car-drivers. Moreover, it's quite funny to "marry" the slower means of transport to the fastest!

We had a good time in the Alps. Fabien was in charge of the luggage, I was riding. Five stages, eight passes, 8600 metres difference in height, 500 kilometres ridden for an average of 21 kms per hour. On the last top, the Col de Vars, we already felt nostalgia. We had such a great time! I felt so well, our team went perfectly. While admiring the Alps, we were already thinking about a program for the year to come, something big…

We had an idea for a Europe Tour! We have friends in Slovenia, Slovakia, Poland and Germany. What about visiting them?! Our project was born: we'll ride throughout Europe. That day, we went down the Col de Vars with lots of ideas in mind…

We developed the project. It's an ambitious, original and unseen one. Why should we keep it for ourselves?

As a transfused and cyclist, we thought about Blood Donation. This trip would be a great opportunity to make people aware of the importance of giving blood, of saving life simply. It is also my way to thank all those anonymous persons who, by giving a bit of themselves, give a lot to others.

WE WOULD MAKE A EUROPE TOUR FOR BLOOD DONATION.

Julien has ridden worldwide (Europe, New Zealand, South America and Balkans) to promote blood donation. Today at 28 years old he has a wife, Marion Dumos Cheilletz, 23. Together they will take the next ride. They are leaving France on July 4, 2010, starting a 20 month trip through Europe, Asia and Oceania. They plan to arrive in Auckland, New Zealand in September 2011. Their goal is to raise awareness of the need for donor blood. Through his many travels, Julien, a former member of Rotaract stays in close touch with the group. He is no longer active because he travels so extensively. In many cities he is supported and sponsored by the local Rotary Club.

Blood donations are organized and publicized in the countries where he travels. Back home, he continues to keep promoting blood donation through public lectures, books and exhibitions everywhere in France.

Not being able to donate my blood anymore, my bike tours are the only way I found to return the favor to generous and unknown blood donors who saved my life.

Thanks again for such a gift.

Please, donate your blood before you will regretfully think:
"If I knew I would have given it before I needed it

Quotes from Julien Leblay
President of foundation les Voyageurs au grand Coeur
http://voyage-grand-coeur.org