

## CROSS-CANADA ride to raise awareness.

BY JEAN COMPTON  
THE NEWS BULLETIN

Although mental illness will affect one in every six Canadians, it is little understood.

And the stigma attached to it can be more harmful than the illness itself.

Three Nanaimo men have decided to do something toward shedding light on mental illness and in particular, its connection to homelessness.

Charlie Fox, 70, Jan Nilsson, 62, and Gerry Owen, 57, are leaving May 1 on a cross-country bicycle trip they are calling Ride Into Light.

The three, all members of the Hope Lutheran church, hope to make connections with church congregations and other groups on the three-month odyssey and to spread their message of tolerance and compassion.

They are hoping for endorsement from the Canadian Mental Health Association.

"Mental illness is a much more common ailment than we would like to think," said Owen.

Now semi-retired, his work as a lawyer/mediator has made him aware of the connection between homelessness, mental illness and the court system and the lack of social resources for the mentally ill.

But, aside from the serious aspect of their journey, the trio also plans to have a lot of fun.

"It came out of chatter over coffee four or five years ago. I said to Jan,

"when we retire, why don't we ride across the country?" said Owen.

"I said it to the wrong person. Jan took it seriously and ran with it."

Nilsson, a recently retired B.C. Hydro manager, started working out a route and schedule and in 2005, the two started training weekly, riding an average of 80 to 100 kilometres per session.

Fox, a retired pastor and probation officer asked if he could join them on their training runs and before long he was caught up in the excitement and asking to join the trip as well.

The trio plans to cover 100 km per day, riding for six hours each day, resting every fifth.

They anticipate reaching St. John's, N.L. by the end of July.

"The toughest section will be the Kicking Horse Pass," said Nilsson. "It's seven per cent uphill for 14 kilometres."

The group is hoping to find a used Westfalia van to buy as a companion vehicle or to find a sponsor willing to provide a vehicle. They are also looking for drivers as well as cash or in-kind donations to defray expenses.

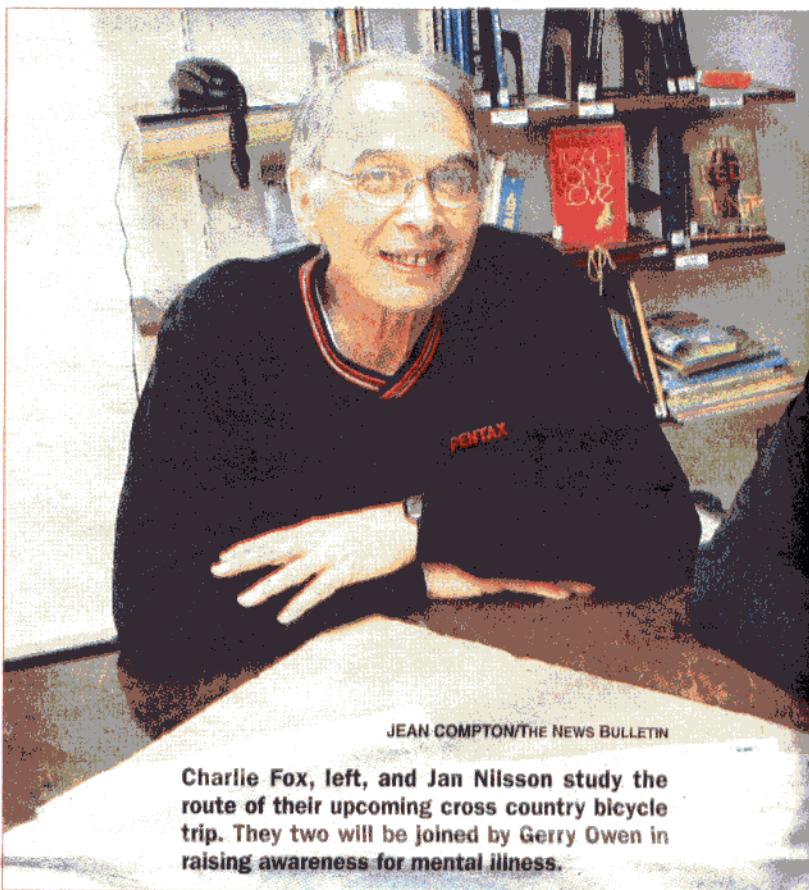
"We're going to go, whatever," said Nilsson, who said they will stay in churches along the way.

"We're not fooling ourselves that it will be easy," said Fox. "It's tough already, training."

"Our struggle to do this is similar to the struggle of a mentally ill person just getting through each day," said Nilsson.

Anyone wishing to help the cause, please call Nilsson at 756-3927.

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Charlie Fox, left, and Jan Nilsson study the route of their upcoming cross country bicycle trip. They two will be joined by Gerry Owen in raising awareness for mental illness.

## Protect yourself from

Statistics show a residential break and enter occurs every few minutes in Canada.

It only takes a thief two or three minutes to break into a house. It's just a matter of a few more minutes before they grab whatever they can find and leave.

No one is completely safe from such theft, no matter what type of security system they may have. There are, however, steps that you can take to make a thief's job more difficult.

Bolt all the doors whenever you leave. It's amazing how often a thief simply takes advantage of a door

that has been left open or is not securely locked.

Make sure your basement windows are especially secure.

They are the point of entry in one-third of all break and enter thefts. In fact, in a majority of cases, the thief doesn't even have to force the door to gain access.

Finally, consider investing in a home alarm system. It's generally an effective way to discourage thieves.

And, of course, you should never tempt thieves by placing the packaging from expensive consumer

durables with you.

If, on arrival, you have reason to believe there are thieves in your neighbourhood, do not hesitate to call your neighbour's police cell to call.

If your home is ever robbed, you should report the crime to the police and file an insurance claim.

It is in your best interest to know which insurance policies are available and if there are any conditions that will void a policy.

You don't need an insurance policy to make sure your possessions are protected.

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