

Interview questions

- **What is your connection with Blood:Water Mission and the 1,000 Wells Project? How did you hear about it?**

Blood:Water was started by the band Jars of Clay, and they are close, personal friends of mine. I spent two weeks touring with them, opening up for their shows with a book reading. During that two weeks I learned about their heart for Africa, and for the need they were trying to meet by drilling wells in rural villages.

- **There are so many great causes to support, why are you choosing to get behind this charity?**

By drilling wells in Africa, Jars of Clay is doing a great deal more than providing much-needed water. A well in a village affects the overall health of the village. A person suffering with H.I.V doesn't usually die of the disease, but rather of something as simple as a bacteria picked up by drinking or cleaning in contaminated water. So if a drill goes into a village, the people who use that water are far less likely to get sick. Add to this the fact that, without a well, children are often sent to collect water from the nearest source, and at times that source is miles away. The child who goes to get water, then, is not able to attend school, so by providing a clean water source, children are more likely to advance in the community. Drilling wells, then, becomes one of the most cost-effective ways to positively affect the largest number of people.

- **What are you hoping to accomplish by riding across America? Do you have any specific personal goals tied to the trip?**

The team I will be riding with is called the Ride:Well team, and together we are hoping to raise funds to build hundreds of wells that will affect the lives of thousands of people. But we are also hoping to build awareness of what is happening in Africa. In the evenings, after we finish riding that day's leg, we will often be speaking before large audiences, presenting good-hearted people with opportunities to

provide hope to those who are being affected by the crisis in Africa. So our goals are simple, to raise funds to build wells, and educate people about how they can get involved.

- **The ride is going to take over 7 weeks – how are you feeling about the trip? Are you in shape? What kind of training have you been doing to prepare? Do you have any reservations? Are you looking forward to anything specific about the ride?**

In a way, I've been training for this ride for four years. And yet I am not prepared. About four years ago I decided to get into shape. I was very overweight and sedentary. I don't exactly know how I let that happen, because I no longer completely understand or feel like that person. I have lost more than one hundred and fifty pounds. But I still have more to lose. I am not sure I will lose the rest of the weight on the trip, but I will certainly get close. I know that losing weight and battling food is a difficult journey, and I'm thankful and grateful I've come this far. But I will certainly be pedaling about forty extra pounds for the bulk of the ride.

One of the primary ways I have lost weight was to become physically active. I joined a gym and took it very slow until the gym became a habit. Then I bought a bike and realized I enjoyed riding. After finding a form of exercise that I enjoyed, the battle became easier.

I will train specifically for this ride by getting as much time in the saddle as possible. I will tackle a local mountain two or three times before we leave, getting my legs into shape. But there really isn't a way to train for a ride of this length, and so the best any of us can do is to get into good enough shape to be less miserable during the first two weeks. So all I am thinking about now is doing everything I can to be less miserable. That's been pretty strong motivation.

- **You recently went to Africa, how did that impact you, if at all? What were you doing there?**

I went to Uganda about six weeks ago with a close friend named Bob Goff. Bob is the American Consul to Uganda and is doing remarkable work to help their justice system. But Bob has also started three

schools in Africa, and has built and restored many wells. While in Gulu, in Northern Africa, our small team slept in an Internally Displaced People camp that was established nearly twenty-years ago when a civil-war broke out and people were forced to flee their villages. At one time there were more than thirty thousand people in the IDP in which we stayed, but that number has decreased since the war has subsided. Still, while in the camp, we were able to visit the various wells that had been drilled. It was odd to see such modern equipment amongst the dirt huts and primitive utilities. Seeing those wells, and the impact they made on the community, really helped me understand how simple the solution to so much plight could actually be.

Along the sides of the road from Kampala to Gulu we passed hundreds of bicyclist who were carrying large, four-gallon jugs of water from sporadic wells back to their villages. Bicycles may be the dominant form of transportation in Africa, as cars can cost three-times what they might here in the States. But these bikes were rugged, heavy, large bikes and often the riders were only children who could barely reach the pedals. Add to that the fact they were carrying up to and sometimes more than a hundred extra pounds of water and you can imagine the difficulty of that daily journey.

I know that, when I get tired somewhere in the hot desert of New Mexico, I will think about those kids riding those bikes and know that, in comparison, my job is very easy. The more the Ride:Well team can do to raise funds and awareness, the shorter the trips those children will have to make. I know that for every mile we ride, a child will have to ride one less mile and will be able to stay home and go to school. I was moved by the direct connection between our bike trip and the countless bike trips that are being taken as a way of life in Africa.

- **Do you know anybody else going on the trip?**

The team has established a website and we've been getting to know each other that way. If you visit www.donaldmillerwords.com you will find links to that site. I've one friend going on the trip, an adventurous kid named David VanBuskirk who once raised money for Blood:Water by hiking the Appalachian Trail. And as I've interacted with other members of the team, I've found equally as impressive people doing

equally as impressive things to help people. I think this is going to be a unique group of folks and I can't wait to get to know them.

- **Where will you sleep?**

Some nights we will be staying in peoples homes who will be hosting us along the way, and other nights we will be camping. We're trying to keep the cost down as much as possible so we can give as much as we can to the cause. I am also looking forward to meeting all the people who are pitching in to provide beds and couches along the way.

- **Will we be able to read about this trip in an upcoming book?**

Yes. I'm wrapping up a book called "A Million Miles in a Thousand Years" that analyzes the dynamics of a person who has dramatic impact on the people around them. It turns out there is a certain way these people approach life that gives them a lot of enjoyment and allows them to really influence people. Many of the things that I learned from these people have inspired me to do this ride. So I will be talking about that stuff in the book.