

Somewhere & Nowhere

*A Bicycle Journey
Across America*

EMILY BUEHLER

Two Blue Books
Hillsborough, North Carolina

SOMEWHERE AND NOWHERE

by Emily Buehler

Published by:
Two Blue Books
PO Box 1285
Hillsborough, NC 27278 USA
emily@twobluebooks.com
<https://www.twobluebooks.com/>

Visit Emily online at <https://emilybuehler.com>

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the author, except for the inclusion of brief quotations in a review.

Copyright 2017, revisions 2021 by Emily Buehler
Cover design by Tugboat Design

ISBN: 978-0-9778068-2-9

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016915598

This is a print-on-demand book.

*This book is dedicated to everyone who gave us somewhere to sleep,
who refilled our water bottles (or bought us beer),
who made us dinner or paid for our pie.
To everyone who shared a kind word in the middle of a hot and endless day.*

And especially, to Mary.

Contents

Prologue.....	7
The Beginning: In Which We Battle Hills, Rain, Cold, Wind . . . and More.....	11
The Midwest: In Which the Road Flattens and We Play Connect the Dots.....	73
South Dakota: The Spiritually Moving Part of the Trip.....	117
Wyoming: The Most Fun Part of the Trip.....	151
Montana: Where All Traces of Shade Disappear and the Sun Beats Down.....	207
The Northwest: Where Temperatures Soar to One Hundred and Ten.....	237
The End Draws Near.....	269
Epilogue.....	299
Author Note and Disclaimer.....	305
Endnotes.....	307
Photo Captions and Credits.....	314
Thank You and Acknowledgments.....	317
About the Author.....	321



Prologue

I SAW THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS ON July 3. At first I thought they were a low bank of white clouds, hovering over a blue haze on the horizon. Unsure, I watched as I pedaled, hoping they'd resolve into clouds or mountains.

The sun beat on my back. I moved slowly, pedaling my hundred-pound bike up a hill until I crested it and rolled gratefully down the other side. The forms ahead disappeared behind a distant butte, then emerged unchanged.

The road started up another hill with a longer climb, and I shifted to my lowest gear and settled in for it. Today was two months since Mary and I had left from the beach in Cape May, New Jersey. Before that I'd been in North Carolina, working in a bread bakery. What was everyone in the bakery doing right now? I checked my watch—almost noon. The bakery shift finished at noon.

But I'm in Wyoming, I remembered. It was two hours earlier here. The bakers would already be done.

I'd gone to Chapel Hill, North Carolina, to attend graduate school in chemistry. I'd liked chemistry, but it hadn't been all I wanted to do. I'd had this idea that life would *really* start when I finished school. But then, as the end had

neared, I'd caught myself thinking, I'll get a job for a few years, and *then* life will start.

But I hadn't wanted to wait any longer. After graduation, I left science.

I took a job in the bakery at the local food co-op. On my first day, I arrived before dawn and joined in the activity as the others taught me to shape boules and baguettes. I took my "lunch break" at eight in the morning, sitting on a bench under an oak tree and eating a French roll warm from the oven.

I can't believe they're going to pay me to do this! I thought.

After struggling with depression through four years of college, followed by five years of intermittent misery in graduate school, the bakery was heavenly. I would be happy from now on.

But three months later, my happiness had eroded back to its usual level. Every day, something upset me. If my roommate was in a bad mood, I wondered what I'd done wrong. I pined over a coworker who flirted with me but dated someone else. I couldn't talk myself out of feeling sad. I'd been this way ever since college, when my parents had stopped being around in the evenings to provide distraction.

Maybe this is just how I am, I thought. Maybe I'm just depressed.

But I couldn't accept it. There had to be something better: a happiness that would last.

When I first moved to Chapel Hill, I'd started riding a bike to save money and to exercise. A guy in my program also biked to school, and he described a cross-country trip he'd done.

"I'd like to do that," I found myself saying.

But I was not athletic—a slow runner, too passive for sports, picked second-to-last for teams in grade school only because I had more friends than Deanna Abernathy. I'd never done anything remotely like a bike trip. I'd never even been camping.

"Why don't you start with North Carolina?" my schoolmate said.

So I planned a four-day trip with two friends. Setting off was easy for me, bolstered by my friends' confidence. On the road, our only concerns were staying on our route and finding restrooms and campsites. The clutter of life disappeared. I became irritated only when I grew hungry, but the irritation evaporated as soon as I ate. My thoughts and emotions felt clearer. I knew I'd gain something on a longer trip.

The summer after I graduated, two friends rode cross-country. They invited me, but I didn't want to be a third wheel, and besides, they rode faster than I did. But seeing their trip made mine seem possible. I already biked every day—I even sold my car. I didn't stop to think about what might go wrong, or how

scary a trip would be. I just kept asserting to myself that I would do it and did not leave any room for fear.

I talked with Mary, a friend at the co-op where I baked, about biking cross-country. She was younger than I was, but I biked more regularly, so I thought our speeds would match. And she worked behind the bakery counter, interacting with customers; being comfortable talking to people would help when traveling. She probably wouldn't share my goal of finding happiness. But she planned to hike the Appalachian Trail the next summer, and the physical challenge of a cross-country bike trip might appeal to her. When her hiking partner backed out a year before their summer hike, she suggested we do the bike trip the following summer instead.

I'd already saved thousands of dollars. I'd always been saving for something, and this was it. I arranged a leave-of-absence from the bakery starting in May. I sent away for state maps and brochures, picking places I'd like to see, and daydreamed endlessly about what the trip would be like. But Mary, who'd been living in the apartment next door, moved away. That winter, we kept in touch about our jobs and crushes but didn't talk much about the upcoming trip.

My parents didn't want me to go. All winter, every time we talked on the phone, Dad brought up terrible things that might happen: flat tires, tornados, rapists.

"If you change your mind," Mom said as spring arrived, "we won't think any less of you."

April came and I packed my things for storage. With the trip only a month away, it became more scary than exciting, but I wouldn't back out. My panniers arrived and sat in a corner, as if I could slow down this last month by ignoring them. Finally, I forced myself to attach them, loaded them with random books, and biked thirty miles out into the country and back. Friends talked of their own travels and how jealous they were of my trip. I just felt mildly sick whenever I thought of it.

The last day of April came. Mary arrived in town.

"I can't believe it's here," I said as I wheeled my bike out to her car.

She grinned, and I grinned back. But my insides careened from dread to nervousness to an unstable excitement. We loaded my gear into her car and left.

On the eight-hour drive to Mary's sister's house in New Jersey, a panorama of worries played through my mind. Would we find places to sleep? Would I have to knock on strangers' doors and ask to camp on their lawns? And what about the Rocky Mountains? After seven years of biking every day, I knew I could make it across the country, but everyone mentioned the Rockies. Was I being naive—were the Rockies impassable by bike?

What would happen after we reached the Pacific? I'd taken six months off

work, but Mary had only four. Would another friend join me to bike the West Coast? Would I keep biking alone? Would I meet someone on the beach, and we'd fall in love and bike together into the sunset?

Don't worry, I told myself.

By the end of the trip, surely I'd be more confident—after continually being forced outside my comfort zone to ask for water or for permission to camp. And the trip would be fun, just as the four-day trip across North Carolina had been.

Over all my reasoning hung a hope that out there—living outside on the road under a big, open sky—life would be clearer, and the chaos of moods I experienced would finally settle.

My daydreams coalesced into one scene: me standing on the beach at the Pacific Ocean. By that moment, by the time I reached that place, I would finally know how to be happy. Inspiring music swelled in my imagination as the camera panned around me standing on the smooth sand. I faced the water as the sun sank down the western sky, my hand on the handlebars of my bike. Waves rolled in to tumble at my feet.

THE HILL BEGAN TO FLATTEN, and my mind returned to the heat of Wyoming in July. Mary's bike leaned on a chain-link fence at a gravel turnout. As I ascended, Mary appeared over the ridge, swigging from her water bottle before pushing it into its holder on her bike and digging in her panniers for her camera. After two months on the road together, the familiar sight of her buzz-short hair and small frame could trigger relief or annoyance, but right now I felt nothing. I chugged toward her, and she looked up.

"This is two thousand miles!"

I managed a smile. She'd added up our miles last night—just in time. I rolled to a stop and paused, catching my breath and balance before lifting a sore leg over the bike and wheeling it to lean by Mary's. Looking through the chain-link fence, I saw the white forms, clearly resolved into snowy peaks. The Rocky Mountains. They stretched north and south as far as I could see, forming a barrier to the West.

In two days, we'd be biking up them.

*The world is indeed full of peril, and in it there are many dark places;
but still there is much that is fair. . . .*

—Haldir, in J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings, The Fellowship of the Ring*, 1965¹

PART 1: The Beginning

**In Which We Battle Hills, Rain,
Cold, Wind . . . and More**



Cape May, New Jersey, or the first day

A BURST OF SALTY AIR HIT me as I tugged open the minivan door. The beach began a few feet away, at the edge of the parking lot. An expanse of empty sand spread between me and the ocean, where small waves rolled under a blue sky.

I guess May 2 is too cold for tourists, I thought.

My insides turned, the familiar feeling of dread, and I tried to push it aside. At least it was sunny.

Around me, Mary and her family bustled out of the van. We'd spent last night at her sister Laura's house, an hour away, and the whole family had come to see us off. They weren't the only ones. As we set off down the sidewalk, I noticed the Victorian bed-and-breakfasts until familiar figures appeared on one porch: my parents.

Mary and I had picked Cape May for our departure so our families could come. But also, on its website, Cape May looked quaint, and I wanted the trip to be scenic. I'd pictured my parents in a Victorian just like the one they were now exiting, along with their friends Nan and Frieda. Mom hugged me when we reached them, and everyone else shook hands. Then we continued on to breakfast.

“So the Lenni-Lenape Indians!” Nan began in his usual abstract manner.

“The who?”

“Lenni-Lenape, lived in Cape May. Named after a sea captain, Cornelius Mey, spelled M-E-Y.”

Thank goodness for Nan. His rambling conversation would keep my nerves at bay. I let him talk on, nodding and trying to focus.

Mary chatted with everyone and, once we reached the restaurant, ordered a stack of pancakes, which she smeared with peanut butter and doused with syrup before digging in. I forced down some eggs and toast, trying to ignore the weight settled in my chest. Was I the only one who was nervous? Maybe setting off on a trip wasn't frightening to Mary; she'd lived in Thailand for a semester, and she had traveled around Asia. If we'd been alone, I would have asked how she felt, and she probably would have reassured me. We'd had lots of heart-to-heart talks. But with our families there, I kept quiet.

After breakfast, we returned to the van and unloaded. We rolled our bikes onto the sand. Our entourage followed with cameras clicking and a video camera rolling. After a few yards, I hefted my bike onto my hip to avoid getting sand in the tires. I had a twenty-pound mountain bike, and I'd swapped the nubby tires for slick ones.

Mom hurried over. “Let me help.”

As she took some of the weight, the center of gravity shifted away from me, which made carrying the bike awkward, but I didn't want to hurt her feelings. As soon as the sand became packed, we lowered the bike to the ground.

Cameras snapped as Mary and I neared the water and circled around to face west. We backed our rear tires to the surf line. A wave crashed, and we smiled at the cameras as the water swirled around our tires. Another crashed.

Hurry up, I thought, before a big one soaks our shoes!

At last the clicking of cameras abated, and we headed back.

“I got it okay,” I said when Mom came to help carry my bike. She continued to walk by my side.

Back at the van, Laura passed out our bags. We each had two panniers that hung on a rack over the rear tire. We bungeed our sleeping gear on top, making the bikes camel-like. I hadn't practiced riding with the smaller front panniers, which I now attached.

Loading wound down and departure grew imminent. The sick feeling I'd been ignoring reared up in my chest. Mom wiped a tear as it rolled down her cheek, her eyes hidden by sunglasses. A lump rose in my throat, but I swallowed it.

Mary began hugging her family, and I turned to mine.

Dad held aside the video camera to make room for a hug. “You can still change your mind.”

“Okay.” I wished he’d said something encouraging.

Mom slipped me a note before hugging me. I tucked it away for later.

What if it expressed worry, or anger about the trip?

“Remember to call,” she said.

“Or email,” I replied. We’d agreed on every other day. “I’ll try, but we might not be able to find a phone.” I didn’t want them worrying if I didn’t call. Mary’s family hadn’t placed any obligations on her.

Laura hugged me, and then there was no one else.

Should I get on my bike and go? It seemed like the only way to start.

I wheeled my bike a few steps, and the crowd drew back. Mary wheeled hers around, too, so we both faced the parking lot exit. Dad resumed filming. I threw a leg over my loaded bike, which wobbled. I’d have to adjust to it being this heavy. After a weak smile at my parents, I faced ahead and pushed off.

My bike wobbled again as my legs strained against the pedals. I steered left and the handlebars swerved, pulled by the added weight of the front panniers. I teetered back to my course, steering carefully and pushing hard to build speed.

Don’t let me fall over, I prayed, thinking of the video camera at my back. Was Mary following? I couldn’t risk looking.

The end of the asphalt drew near, with a slope down to the road followed by a sharp turn to the right.

How am I going to stay balanced? I thought.

There were no cars. I focused on keeping upright and moving as I went over the bump and made a wide turn into the street.

I wanted to look back at the spectators, to give a final wave before I disappeared behind buildings, but I didn’t think I could do it without falling over. Would my parents think that I didn’t wave because I didn’t care? The buildings closed in, and the crowd of cameras disappeared.

I took in the street, quiet now that buildings blocked the crash of the waves. Now I could hear Mary behind me.

Thank you, Universe, I thought, for the absence of traffic!

I settled on my seat and relaxed my grip on the handlebar. The sick feeling was disappearing. Puffy clouds hovered in the blue sky, and the breeze blew cool air across me. It was perfect weather for our first day.

Was the group in the parking lot dispersing?

I’d memorized the route out of Cape May and also tucked directions behind the window on my handlebar bag. We neared the first turn. I risked a glance back. “Right turn, up ahead.”

I turned, and a half-minute later, Mary panted up beside me.

“Well, here we are!” she said, and we both smiled.

The downtown had given way to small houses with lawns. We rolled past one after another. The trip had begun! After months of anticipation, it was happening. Right now. I couldn’t stop grinning.

As I neared a stop sign, I braked, and my heavy bike leaned left. My foot hit the pavement, and I held tight to my handlebar and forced my bike upright. Next to me, Mary stopped, her foot jerking in her clipless pedal, which attached her shoe to her bike. The shoe wouldn’t come loose, and unable to lower her foot, she fell sideways. Her panniers hit the pavement with a thunk.

I began to laugh but stopped myself. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah.” She wiggled out from the bike, her feet still attached. I hadn’t meant to laugh. I’d just been so scared of falling, and then it happened to Mary, and it wasn’t a disaster.

Mary yanked her foot out of its pedal and extracted herself. She stood, examining a bruise on her knee, and heaved her bike upright.

Two women marched up the sidewalk, arms swinging in a power walk. “How far have you come?” one asked as they slowed.

“One block!” We laughed.

They smiled as they passed. “Good luck!”

FOR THIRTY MINUTES THE ROADS stayed peaceful. Then we turned onto Route 47, a four-lane highway lined with businesses.

It’s just New Jersey, I reassured myself as cars whizzed past. It won’t be like this all summer.

My thoughts flitted from the busy road to my bakery job to my family.

Were Mom and Dad back on Interstate 95? Or had they stayed in Cape May for the day?

My left knee twanged. I had knee exercises to do each morning to strengthen the muscle, but the appearance of the discomfort made me feel unsettled. But still, in spite of the drab scenery, my spirits stayed up.

The trip has started, I kept reminding myself. We’re actually doing it.

I was twenty-some years old, and at last I’d made something happen in my life.

“Let’s take a rest stop!” Mary called.

I scanned the roadside. Would these businesses let us use the restroom? A cinderblock building appeared with signs: Men and Women.

After that first public restroom, we stopped at gas stations. Each time, I felt compelled to buy something. This posed two problems: snacks were pricey, and I didn’t want to eat the junk they sold—colorful cubes of gum, blaze-orange corn chips, cinnamon rolls with artificial icing stuck to cellophane wrappers.

But I felt uncomfortable using the restroom for free. At our fourth rest stop, I settled on honey-roasted peanuts. Outside, Mary sat on the curb and munched on almonds from a baggie she'd packed at home. She hadn't felt obliged to buy anything. I wished I felt the same.

I pulled out the map and joined her. Our destination, Parvin State Park, beckoned, a green block amid the clustered roads of New Jersey, fifty miles from Cape May. We hadn't calculated how far we had to go each day; we didn't even have a set end date, although Mary had a new job as a field organizer with an activist group that started in four months. I'd made a safe estimate—about three thousand miles in three months was about thirty-three miles a day—and had felt sure we'd travel faster than that.

But the fifty miles to Parvin that I had thought would be an easy ride were taking longer than expected. Was it because of our heavy bikes? I couldn't wait to arrive at the park, to set up camp in the quiet woods.

Mary traced a road on the map. "Bobbie's house is a mile from the gate, Laura said."

Laura had suggested we camp with her college friend Bobbie and Bobbie's husband, Brett, who lived near Parvin State Park.

"Would you rather go there?"

"It just might be easier, for our first night. Cooking in a kitchen and having a real bathroom."

I didn't want to camp in a yard with people nearby. But I didn't want to deny Mary the house. There'd be more parks, later in the trip. Maybe I could bike over to Parvin just to see it.

"Okay. You have their number?"

Mary nodded and looked at the office building across the lot. "Let's go see if we can use a phone."

We wheeled our bikes over, leaned them on the building, and entered a deserted lobby. A brown phone hung on the wall.

"What time is it?" Mary asked as we crossed the room.

She couldn't find her watch and had been asking the time all day. "Just about four o'clock." I crossed my fingers that the phone would work as she picked up the receiver. A dial tone hummed into the air. The phone—like the public restroom earlier—had come along when we needed it. We got directions to Bobbie's and headed on.

The roads grew busier. My head buzzed with the echoes of the passing cars. The wind buffeted me, my legs began to tire, and the bike seemed heavier and slower. Since Cape May, I'd taken only one picture. I'd thought I'd take lots, but I kept passing interesting sights because it would take too much physical effort to stop. But I'd have plenty of time for pictures in the days to come.

An hour later we neared the turn to Parvin State Park and Bobbie's. By now, all the adrenaline of the morning send-off had dispersed. My legs didn't hurt, but my shoulders were stiff from hunching all day; unexpectedly, my elbows hurt, and I had to shake out numb hands.

We turned, and the road at last grew quiet. Buildings gave way to farms and fields. My legs circled endlessly. So much for riding an "easy fifty miles" on the first day! We passed a sign for the park, and my heart sank because I no longer had the energy to bike an extra mile to see it.

We turned onto Bobbie's road. The first house stood three stories tall, with leaded glass in the front door and spiral-cut bushes lining the front walk. The second had a portico like a miniature Greek temple. Did Bobbie and Brett live in a palace like these? It would be fun to tell friends about our first campsite—outside a mansion.

We reached Bobbie's driveway and our bikes rattled as we rode over the gravel. A hum grew into the roar of a lawnmower. I glimpsed a manicured yard over the bushes: a too-short lawn, one trimmed shrub, a perfectly stacked woodpile, a cheap tool shed plonked in the middle of the space. The noise grew louder, and a small, prefabricated house came into view, followed by a man on a lawnmower. He looked up. As we stopped, he cut the engine, slid off his seat, and swaggered over. I thought of a seedy bar.

He's a friend of Laura, I reminded myself. *Well, his wife is.*

Mary smiled as he reached us and held out his hand to shake.

"I'm Brett," he said loudly. "Bobbie's not home yet."

We introduced ourselves.

"So . . . you're riding across the country? You know there's the Rocky Mountains out there, don't you?" He smirked, his voice ringing in the silence left by the mower.

I tried to grin, as if he'd made a joke. After a pause, he snorted. "You can pitch your tent over on the side," he said, pointing to the edge of the yard and returning to his mowing.

Mary and I wheeled our bikes toward the woods that bordered the yard and leaned them on a tree. We unsnapped the bungee cords and took off our sleeping bags and pads. Mary had the tent; I had the stove and gas. We'd pitched the tent at Laura's house to practice, and now, as we fumbled to fit the poles into the right grommets, I was glad we'd done it once. Just as we finished, car tires crunched down the drive. A bark drew my gaze to an enclosure behind the house. Behind the fence pranced two dogs.

The car stopped, and a dark-haired woman got out. She walked over, smiling and looking over our tent and bikes.

"Hi, I'm Bobbie," she said. "This is so exciting! How was the first day?"

“It was okay,” Mary said.

Bobbie turned to me.

“It was farther than I thought. . . . Our bikes are so heavy, we went slower.”

“Well, come inside when you’re ready.” Bobbie walked to the cage, where the dogs leapt about, tails frantic. When she opened the door, the dogs bounded out, turning to jump on her but torn with the desire to run. The dogs dashed away, past our tent, then looped back to jump on Bobbie again.

I unrolled my pad and laid it on the floor of the tent. Bobbie petted the dogs, put them back into the cage, and went inside. Another cage stood under the trees with two cats inside, one pacing the way tigers did in the zoo. It made me feel sad.

As the sun dropped, I set up the camp stove on a patch of dirt. We’d practiced lighting the stove at Laura’s, and after several tries it had produced a roaring flame. Tonight I got a normal flame on the first try.

“Do you want to use the stove first?” I asked Mary.

“Nah, I’m going to use the kitchen. It just seems easier.” She rummaged through her supplies.

Bobbie’s stove *would* be easier, but I wanted to jump right in and cook the way we’d cook all summer. Plus, Brett had gone inside, and it was peaceful in the yard.

I had Boil-in-Bag rice for easy camp-stove cooking, but I had some ordinary rice to use up first. I put my pot of water over the flame and poured in the rice. As the water heated, something poked my neck. I reached up, and my necklace came loose in my hand. Pieces fell to the ground. Two years earlier, I’d strung metal bike hardware onto a cord and tied the necklace on. I gathered the pieces. The remaining cord poked me again.

“Hey Mary? My necklace broke—can you cut it off?” I picked up my pocketknife and searched for the scissors. “It seems like kind of a bad omen.”

Mary considered. “Maybe when you put it on, it was about doing the bike trip. And now here you are doing it, and you don’t need the necklace anymore.” She was so positive; I wished I could feel the same. She snipped off the remaining piece and handed it to me. Then she went inside.

The water was boiling, so I got a spoon to stir the rice, but it had already begun to stick. I scraped it off the bottom and turned the gas down. The stove flickered out. A lump formed in my throat.

I removed the pot to relight the stove, but now the stove was hot and the fuel evaporated as it left its bottle. I’d have to let the whole thing cool. I took a deep breath, trying to swallow my disheartenment, and waited a minute, then two. I relit the stove and returned the pot over the flame and stirred: gooey

water swirled over a block of rice. I added more water because most had boiled off.

After twenty minutes of stirring and adding more water, I gave up. As I dished out the burnt, undercooked rice, the hard spot in my throat swelled. I picked up my packet of instant gravy. Tears pricked at my eyes while I mixed the powder with water and, sure I'd destroy it if I tried to heat it, poured the lumpy sauce straight onto the rice. I crunched through the disappointing meal.

By now the sun had set and darkness neared, and I still had to wash the dishes, repack the stove, brush my teeth, and find my sleeping clothes. I gave in and took the dishes inside. In the bright kitchen, Mary and Bobbie sat talking. They both smiled. I gave a brief wave and went to the sink.

After dishes, I used the bathroom, and when I flushed, I watched with apprehension as the toilet clogged and the water began to rise.

Don't overflow, don't overflow, don't overflow, I prayed.

The water stopped rising and swirled in the bowl—I needed a plunger. I went out to the kitchen to ask Bobbie. To my embarrassment, instead of getting me a plunger, Bobbie sent Brett in.

I escaped into the twilight. I'd hoped to be meditating in Parvin State Park, writing in my journal as the sun set, enjoying the peace of nature and life outdoors. Instead, I was stuck with loud Brett, the caged animals, my broken necklace, burnt rice, and now the humiliation of stopping up the toilet! And I hated the traffic we'd had all day. My elbows hurt, my hands hurt, and my knees felt unhealthy. I was terrible at cooking on the camp stove. My bike was awkward and heavy. I felt the same desperate loneliness I'd felt as a sixth grader when none of my friends had made it into the all-state orchestra, and I'd gone to the two-day festival with seventh and eighth graders who didn't talk to me. I'd eaten all my meals alone.

Mary bustled around near the tent.

She had a nice dinner, I imagined, enjoying Bobbie's company, while I fail at everything.

I tried to stop the tears as I dug out my pajamas.

Mary looked over. "You can start crying if you want to," she said.

When I smiled, my tears overflowed.



Spotted Horse, in which I let go

I PLUGGED AWAY IN THE AFTERNOON heat, looking for Spotted Horse on the horizon. We'd reached Gillette, Wyoming, at lunchtime—a sprawl of gas stations, fast food chains, parking lots, and intersections, all of it hot and dusty and not desirable for camping. So after taking refuge at the library and finding cheap Mexican food for lunch, we'd continued on. It was thirty-six miles to the next town, Spotted Horse. It would be a long afternoon.

We'd ridden out into a bleak, grassland landscape. On the map, the road crossed three creeks, but all I saw were watery ditches reflecting the sky. Other than a distant factory with sloping conveyor belts, but no driveway, there were no buildings. The mile markers were our only excitement.

Biking across the rolling hills grew harder as the afternoon wore on. At each crest, I hoped to see Spotted Horse even though I knew I couldn't have covered the miles yet. Few cars passed. I caught up with Mary, snacking at a dirt driveway. The location had no benefit as a rest stop, but the intersection made it into more of a stopping place than the side of the road.

The western sky grew dazzling as the sun moved behind clouds that glowed white and silver, with beams shining out as if angels were singing inside. For a while, the gray pavement turned red. Then it turned black with a new coat

of asphalt and a taxicab-yellow dotted line that smeared off to one side. Soon Mary and I overtook the paint truck, trundling along as workers dropped yellow dashes onto the road. I slipped my bike between two dashes, glad the line wasn't solid, and passed the truck.

But a minute later, Mary and I hit an uphill. The truck gained on us. It couldn't move out to pass because it had to keep painting, so we pulled off the road to let it by. When the road flattened, we overtook the truck again. We played leapfrog until the truck fell behind.

All the while, I kept a constant hope for sight of Spotted Horse. But each time I chugged to the top of a hill or rounded a bend, I scanned the new landscape and saw nothing but bare hills. The sun sank lower. As I came up the next hill, sunbeams radiated from a cluster of clouds, silhouetting a fence above me and a deer, frozen on the hilltop.

From the crest, I saw a few buildings on the next hill.

It might not be the town, I told myself.

But as I coasted down and then began to climb again, I saw a horse—a fiberglass horse, white splotches sprawled over its brown sides, with a white mane and legs. Maybe it had once stood in an amusement park for kids to pose on. Someone had propped it vertically to make its legs paw at the air.

Overhead, in a mod font, a white oval sign read, Spotted Horse.

I climbed slowly toward the horse. A white building sat at the back of a tiny parking lot. A tour bus with Powder River on the side was parked there. A tree spread overhead, an ice machine stood out front, an American flag hung limply, and an old phone booth stood deserted. Behind the building a few old-fashioned trailers, a rundown farmhouse, and a shiny, white home peeked out. In the lot sat an old car with double headlights, a red truck, and a bigger, white truck pulling a trailer with unidentifiable equipment chained on. As I arrived, I heard the engine of the white truck running. The cab was empty.

I stopped at the sign, then lifted a weary leg over my bike and stood up straight, adjusting my shorts. It felt like a hundred degrees. Ahead, the road dropped, continuing across the barren land. Power lines came through Spotted Horse and skipped off across the hills, not bothering to follow the road.

For a minute, I waited for Mary to arrive, but then I thought, I can ask to camp, instead of hoping Mary will do it.

I walked to the building and pulled open the door.

Inside stood a pool table. Dozens of framed pictures covered the walls. Behind the bar stood a woman with short blonde hair, bright in the dark room, and a big man stood across from her. "Here they are!" she said, grinning.

"Hi," I said, suddenly feeling awkward. I forged ahead. "We're biking, and I was wondering if we could camp here."

“No!” Her smile disappeared.

I stood with my smile frozen.

Then she burst into a cackling laugh and grinned again. “Of course! Come on in! Donnie said, ‘You’ve got a couple of thirsty bikers on the way!’”

The man shifted so I smiled at him. He wore a baseball hat and a blue tee shirt with iridescent mirror shades hanging from the neck.

Mary came in, and the woman asked our names and introduced herself as Coleen. The next thing I knew, Coleen had seated us at the bar, and Donnie had shaken our hands in his broad ones, and Mary had ordered a beer. I considered the usual things I ordered in bars (like water or juice) but felt embarrassed. “I’ll get whatever Mary had.”

“You girls like *fancy* beer,” Coleen said, setting down two bottles of something called Moose Drool. I wondered if fancy beer cost a fortune, and then I glanced at Donnie and suddenly knew he’d pay the tab. Then I was drinking Moose Drool and it was the best thing I’d ever tasted, and it didn’t matter that I hadn’t eaten in hours, and I didn’t worry about talking because Coleen made the conversation happen.

While Mary answered questions about our trip, I looked around at the photos on the walls—rodeo riders, trucks, horses, and people with dogs. A sign framed with rope read: This isn’t Burger King. You get it my way or you don’t get it at all! One fabulous rodeo shot caught my eye, the cowboy hanging on as the bronco kicked high.

“That’s Paul,” Coleen said. “He lives in Interior.”

“South Dakota? We were just there!”

“You should look him up,” she said. “He’s half Sioux. He makes saddles—just ask. People will tell you where he lives.”

At a lull in the conversation, Coleen reached behind the bar and pulled out a bundle of rope. “Hey, Donnie!” she said. “Which girl should we tie up first?”

A chill went down my spine, and I didn’t react.

But then she laughed. “I’m just kidding you! Don’t be scared of us!”

I wondered, am I stupid to be here, drinking beer? I don’t *think* so. But Mom and Dad would probably disagree.

A small green sign hung over the bar, a replica of the signs posted at the edge of each town:

SPOTTED HORSE

POP 2

ELEV 3890

“Are you the two?” I asked Coleen and Donnie.

“No, Donnie lives in Ar-vaay-dal!” Coleen said, as if Arvada were the snooty side of the mountain. “Arvada is our zip code,” she said, and then continued like a cheerleader, “but we know, we live, *IN, SPOTTED, HORSE!*”

The other resident of Spotted Horse shuffled in—Coleen’s partner, Jerome. He nodded at us and then pattered quietly behind the bar, the perfect complement to Coleen’s socializing. I continued looking around the room. I couldn’t stop myself from smiling at the antelope butt mounted like a deer head, with googly eyes glued on to make it a funny face. Nearby, a tacked-up note read, “Ty’s mom beat him at pool.”

“Why do you have a bike?” Mary asked. A dirt bike lay under the pool table.

“We race it around the pool table when we’re bored.”

I imagined all the evenings they’d had here. Did they ever get a crowd? Tonight, Donnie’s hired help was playing video games in the back room, with Donnie’s yippy little dog keeping him company.

Donnie was a cattle rancher. He had a wife named Donna and two kids. I kept picturing Donna as a thin city slicker with styled hair, big earrings, and bright lipstick. She couldn’t be a suitable wife for a cattle rancher.

Married! I told myself, because Donnie had started to seem kind of cute, which startled me since I never noticed older men, and besides, a cattle rancher? You’re a vegetarian! I reminded myself.

Our vegetarian diet hadn’t come up, but wolves did: the government had recently reintroduced wolves to Yellowstone National Park, where they’d once roamed. Because the wolves were considered endangered, Donnie said, ranchers couldn’t kill them, even if they killed cattle. At home, I would’ve immediately sided with the wolves, but now, in the face of an actual cattle rancher, I paused.

“It’s ridiculous,” Donnie said. “People killed them off for a reason, and now they’re putting them back?”

Neither Mary nor I replied, and Coleen narrowed her eyes at us. “You’re not tree huggers, are you?”

I didn’t want to lie, but I didn’t want to disagree with Donnie, either. I had no idea what to say. I opened my mouth. “I think we might be.” I grimaced, and we all burst out laughing.

Coleen held up the rope.

“Which one should we tie up first?!” she hooted, and my heart thudded again. She dropped the rope and continued, “Don’t mind us—we’re not crazy.”

She’s just kidding, I told myself. I was silly to think that Coleen would hurt us; I knew she wouldn’t. But a niggling doubt wouldn’t leave me alone: that if I let go and had fun, I might end up regretting it.

Coleen was talking again, replacing our beers even though we weakly protested. In truth, I'd wanted a second one. I recognized a familiar, though not frequent, fuzziness that meant I was drunk.

We all trooped outside to take a photo before the sun set. Mary held the green Spotted Horse sign. Next to her, Coleen whooped, swinging her arm overhead as if it held a lasso. Jerome just grinned with his arm around Mary, and on the far side, Donnie stood with his hand in his pocket. Then Coleen took one with me in it. I knew it would be blurry—my camera was hard to focus—but the blurriness would fit our drunken evening.

"How many cattle do you have?" I asked Donnie as we trooped back inside.

"Four hundred. Out here they need a lot more land to graze. In Minnesota, where it's green, you only need one acre per head."

"How many acres do you have?" I guessed five per cow (two thousand) or maybe ten per cow.

"Twenty-two thousand," he replied.

Twenty-two thousand?! How did he keep track of them on so much land? Then I realized—that's why cowboys have horses! So they can ride to the cattle where there aren't roads. "Wow," I said somewhat stupidly, "You're a real cowboy!"

Donnie's forehead wrinkled. "There's a lotta men in cowboy hats who aren't *real* cowboys." He winked and drawled on, "They walk around in their *clean* boots and *big* hats with their *big* belt buckles and *clean* hands—they're not *real* cowboys."

"Drugstore cowboys!" Jerome chimed in.

Picturing Donnie riding around his land on a horse, looking for cattle, made him even sexier. Married! I reminded myself again. Older man who drinks six cans of Coors before dinner! Cattle! Cattle! I was a tree hugger who'd probably side with the wolves.

Back inside, Coleen passed Mary a guest book, and while she wrote, thoughts gushed into my head for my own inscription, "I love you, Spotted Horse! You're the best!" But I imagined the next visitor reading it and thinking, "Wow, she sounds drunk." I struggled to think of something not-drunk sounding, but honest and interesting enough to impress future readers. But when Mary handed me the book, all I managed was, "The most fun we've had on the trip."

Donnie had to go, and he shook my hand and I wished I could hug him. Mary later pointed out that his truck had been running the whole time we were in the bar, so I added this to my list of reasons why it was ridiculous to have a crush on a married cattle rancher in Wyoming. Mary and I were suddenly the only people in the bar with Coleen, who yawned as she let us out the front

door and locked it. We wheeled our bikes around the building and took out our toothbrushes. Then we followed Coleen across the grass.

They'd said we could sleep in a camper. But then they'd remembered that they hadn't cleaned up from the most recent party, so Coleen had said we could stay in her house, across the bumpy lawn past the campers. I could walk straight; my beers must have worn off. Coleen said she'd make us grilled cheeses, so once inside, I helped her find the bread and a block of cheese and hunted for the frying pan.

Now that we weren't whooping it up in the bar, Coleen's wild hyped-up attitude disappeared like leprechaun gold. I took my grilled cheese on a paper plate and sat on the sofa, where Coleen flipped through her photo album.

"Here's my mother," she said, pointing at a portrait.

There was Coleen as a teenager, riding in the high school rodeo. Women were allowed in only one event, something called the barrel race.

At the end of the book, Coleen said goodnight and drifted off to the room at the front of the house. I took a shower and then joined Mary in the guest room at the back, shutting the door. Except for my occasional uneasiness about Coleen's threats to tie us up, tonight had been so fun! I hadn't worried about anything; I'd just been present in the bar, enjoying the banter and the company. I wished it could always be that way, but without drinking beer.

I lay down next to Mary. In the hazy reaches of my mind, something floated, a quote I'd read once about faith. I tried to remember, but before I could catch it, I was asleep.

I AWOKE IN THE NIGHT. Mary stood by the door, rattling the knob, but the door stayed closed and she didn't leave. I sat up.

"The door won't open."

All my misgivings rushed in, and my heart pounded as Mary tried again. I recalled Coleen's jokes about the rope, but I pushed them aside and got up. The doorknob wouldn't turn either way. There wasn't a lock or a hole or anything. "I have to pee!" Mary whisper-whined in distress.

They've locked us in!

No, I told myself, the doorknob's just stuck. They're not killers, they're good people.

But I don't really know them—how do I know they're good people? I imagined Donnie going home to his kids, and it comforted me.

"Maybe we can get out the window," Mary said. We walked the narrow path around the bed to examine it. The screen didn't come out. I imagined breaking out, wheeling our bikes to the road and leaving in the dark. Would they chase us

in the morning? What would they think if they *weren't* killers, if the doorknob was just stuck, and they awoke to find us gone, and the screen busted?

Mary lay back down, flat on top of the bedspread. Here I was, imagining being killed, while she faced a more realistic problem. I lay down, too, trying to calm my crazed, middle-of-the-night fears. The room was hot, with no breeze entering the tiny window, but at least the window was there.

They probably aren't killers, I told myself, but we can break out the window if we have to. In the meantime, we'll wait until morning.

"Coleen might sleep late," I said. "We have to catch Jerome before he goes out."

Mary fell asleep, but I lay awake, the fear ebbing and returning.

They're good people, I repeated. I tried quoting *Dune*, the way I'd done when I'd felt scared at the start of the trip: "Fear is the mind-killer." I thought I'd never fall asleep.

Then I awoke. A faint light shone at the window. It was early, but I was wide awake. I lay there, waiting to escape. Minutes ticked past. Then I heard movement in the house, and I stood and moved to the door, calling out, "Jerome?!"

Mary sat up, and we listened. What if he hadn't heard me?

"Jerome!"

Shuffling steps moved toward our door.

"It's stuck! It won't open!"

The doorknob gave a rattle.

"Huh." Another rattle. "Hang on a sec." His steps retreated.

A minute later they returned, and after a couple of terrific bangs, the door swung open. Jerome stood in the doorway with a hammer. His shirt, an over-size Fat Tire Ale shirt, had a big red bicycle on it.

"Did you wear that because of us?" I asked.

"Yes." He smiled.

Suddenly, everything shifted back to normal—my nighttime-crazy-killer thoughts evaporated. The morning light had come, and Jerome had dressed in the tee shirt that had a bike on it, just for us. Mary rushed out to pee, and Jerome went to the bar.

My usual morning tension arrived: the worry about having time to write or sit, but I brushed it off. It came out of habit. Last night had broken our routine into a jumble, and the pieces no longer seemed important. We'd never had dinner so the stove wasn't out; there was no tent to pack.

I didn't think, I need time to write, or, I have to have tea—instead, I just waited to see what would happen.

Jerome reappeared and said, "I made some sausage."

Maybe they *didn't* notice that we're tree huggers, I thought. What should I do? I didn't want to hurt his feelings.

"We don't eat sausage," I said, "but we could come eat with you."

He nodded.

Later that morning, I suddenly remembered the quote about faith I'd been trying to recall the previous night. I'd read it on a bulletin board in the church where Eric and Christina-Mai, my friends in Chicago, had gotten married. It went something like, "When it's time to step into the unknown, faith means knowing that you will be given something to stand on, or you will be taught how to fly."¹⁹

Author Note and Disclaimer

I began to feel that myself plus the bicycle equaled myself plus the world, upon whose spinning wheel we must all learn to ride. He who succeeds, or, to be more exact in banding over my experience, she who succeeds in gaining the mastery of [a bicycle], will gain the mastery of life.

—Frances E. Willard, *How I Learned to Ride the Bicycle*, 1895³⁷

This is the story of a cross-country bike trip. But it's also the story of everything I learned in the ten years following the trip. I've combined the two because it made a better story. I mention this because I want to be honest, and because I don't want any readers to feel disappointed when they go on their own trip and the answers they seek aren't miraculously revealed while they ride. (Just wait ten years, get a good therapist, and write a book about your travels. . . .)

Much of the change that started with the trip continued afterward, and many of the struggles, I'm afraid, will be lifelong ones. It's like in *The Silmarillion*, where the Men and Elves will never be able to defeat the forces of Morgoth, but they have to keep fighting regardless. Or like Angel says to Buffy in one of my favorite episodes, "Gingerbread":

B: Okay, so I battle evil, but I don't really win. The bad keeps coming back, and getting stronger.

A: I do know it's important to keep fighting.

B: But we never win, not completely.

A: We never will. That's not why we fight. We do it 'cause there's things worth fighting for.³⁸

Everything that happens in the book really happened. I've noticed, however, that sometimes my memories are off. For example, I was sure that Kathy's truck was dark green, but in the photos, it is silver. And I remember the store at Corn Creek as standing at the crossroads, but when I look at Googlemaps, it is located down the road a bit. So there may be mistakes because of the imperfect nature of memory. I changed most of the names and some details where it seemed necessary to protect people's privacy. I hope I have not caused any harm.

There are many scenes that I cut to make the book readable. So although I hope I still convey the feeling of biking across America, readers should realize that there are a lot more stretches of boring biking involved in such a trip. There were also a lot more ups and downs of mood, on a daily basis, but recording them all made the story too difficult to read.

Endnotes

1. Sources of epigraphs: J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings, The Fellowship of the Ring* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1965), Book II, Chapter 6. Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The Young American,” *Nature; Addresses, and Lectures* (Boston and Cambridge: James Munroe and Company, 1849), from a speech given February 7, 1844, at the Mercantile Library Association, Boston, Massachusetts. Virginia Heffeman, “Simple Lives,” *Glamour*, September 1998, 304; copyright 1998 by Condé Nast Publications. A. A. Milne, *The House at Pooh Corner* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1928), 173; copyright 1928 by E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., renewed 1956 by A. A. Milne. Robert Specht, *Tisha: The Wonderful True Love Story of a Young Teacher in the Alaskan Wilderness* (New York: Bantam Books, 1976), 14. Norman Maclean, *A River Runs Through It* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 61. John Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley: In Search of America* (New York: Penguin Books, 1962), 4; copyright 1961, 1962 by the Curtis Publishing Co., Inc.; copyright 1962 by John Steinbeck, renewed 1990 by Elaine Steinbeck, Thom Steinbeck, and John Steinbeck IV.

2. On waterproof gear: After seven years of biking daily, I still couldn’t keep totally dry in a rainstorm. It was hard to invest money in gear when you didn’t know if it would work. I had a good raincoat, but my lightweight rain pants proved ineffective, and they channeled rainwater into my shoes, turning my socks into sopping sponges. I couldn’t pedal in bulky rain boots; I’d invested in overpriced slip-on shoe covers and soon saw they only worked for a few hours before the rain soaked through. I had my coat hood up under my helmet, with the neck of the coat tugged uncomfortably through the helmet’s chin strap. If I didn’t do that, my helmet strap would funnel water inside my coat, soaking my shirt. My glasses always got wet, making biking treacherous as I peered through the smeary raindrops or tilted my head to look out above the glasses—blurry but sometimes better. Over the years I’d invested in numerous “waterproof” gloves; so far none had worked. I was testing a new pair.

3. Source of the ideas about the faith of the native Alaskans from Robert Specht, *Tisha: The Wonderful True Love Story of a Young Teacher in the Alaskan Wilderness* (New York: Bantam Books, 1976), 197–98.

4. On Wreckage Site Number 3 in Ohio: I didn’t think about the date on the wreckage site sign or notice the missile-like shape of the airship painted there. The *Sbenandoab* was a zeppelin on a promotional flight to visit state fairs across the Midwest. Thunderstorms in Ohio on its first day tore it apart, and it crashed in three sections.

5. On thoughts about Frodo in Ohio: Perhaps I should have mentioned my minor obsession with *The Lord of the Rings*. I’d seen the movies a dozen

times and found a lot of meaning in them, as well as in the books. Source of Frodo's quote: Fran Walsh, Philippa Boyens, and Peter Jackson, *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, directed by Peter Jackson, produced by WingNut Films and The Saul Zaentz Company, distributed by New Line Cinema, 2001. Copyright 2001 by WingNut Films and The Saul Zaentz Company.

6. On the shape of the hills in Ohio: Gay Atha told us that the oddly shaped hills were a result of the mining companies blasting off the hills' tops to expose coal. The companies then scraped debris from the blasts into adjacent valleys, altering the shape of the land. While most coal mining sites must be "reclaimed" after mining and returned to their original shape, waivers allow the more destructive blasting technique, stipulating that the land be returned to "a level plateau or a gently rolling contour with no highwalls remaining" (Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977). That day, we stopped at the Miner's Memorial, where we walked into a metal scooper bigger than a school bus. A poster showed the scooper in action, digging away at a cliff, a blurry dot supported by orange crane arms. The crane's body was the size of a super big-box store.

7. On Januarius MacGahan, whose statue stood in the park in Ohio: Born in New Lexington, Ohio, in 1844, Januarius MacGahan became a journalist and war correspondent. He described the massacre of Bulgarians by the Turks. His coverage outraged the people of Britain and prevented the British government from giving support to Turkey, and Bulgaria was able to win its freedom. Many streets and squares in Bulgaria are named after him.

8. Source of the quotes from *Dune*: Frank Herbert, *Dune* (New York: Ace Books, 1965), 5, 8. Copyright 1965 by Frank Herbert.

9. On the concept of clean laundry: Mary and I hadn't been to a laundromat since a visit to one in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. They didn't fit our routine—we'd have to find one, and then spend several hours unloading our bags, washing, and drying, and we'd have to pay. Instead, we rinsed our clothes in sinks and under pumps. I alternated outfits so one could dry while I rode in the other, and I often used my handlebar as a drying rack. Wearing totally clean clothes didn't matter when I was outside all day, riding a bike. But after washing up at camp, I liked to wear something relatively clean, so I kept one outfit for this purpose.

10. On the Chicago planetarium: The quoted material in the exhibits was created from memory to make the passage more interesting to read. The actual exhibit names and recordings were probably different.

11. Source of the reference to "glazed": William Carlos Williams, "The Red Wheelbarrow." First published without the title in Section XXII of *Spring and All* (Paris: Contact Publishing Co., 1923). Subsequently published

in *The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams, Volume I, 1909–1939*, edited by Christopher MacGowan and A. Walton Litz (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1986). Copyright 1962 by William Carlos Williams.

12. Source of the quote about praying in a garden: C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York and London: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1960), 39. Copyright 1960 by Helen Joy Lewis (this is printed in the book). Copyright 1960 by Clive Staples Lewis, renewed 1988 by Arthur Owen Barfield (this is from the Stanford copyright database).

13. On saunas: Only five years later, writing about it, did it occur to me that a sauna might have parallels with a sweat lodge.

14. Source of the quote about Cheyenne: Sam Cook, Tim Perry, and Greg Ward, *The Rough Guide to USA* (London: Rough Guides, 2002). I recycled the book before noting the page number. Copyright 2002 by The Rough Guides Limited.

15. On taking a ride in South Dakota: We'd taken a ride from Champaign to Milwaukee (via Chicago), but this ride took us north, so it didn't seem to me like cheating, because it didn't shorten our trip.

16. On the hog plant in South Dakota: Later, I searched "hog plant west of White River" online and read about the controversial plants, built on Rosebud Indian Reservation land by a white man who struck an economic development deal with tribal leaders but without the knowledge of most of the tribe. In addition to having environmental concerns, many people (both white and Native American) worried that the big-business enterprise wouldn't ultimately benefit the tribe, and the tribe voted out the leaders responsible for the hog plants in their next election. I don't know how accurate this account was and can no longer find it. A *New York Times* article describes controversy over the conditions of both animals and workers in the plants. The article explains that building on the reservation circumvented state laws that ban such a plant from being built in the rest of the state. The tribe claimed it had not received the 25 percent of profits that were promised. Source: Melody Petersen, "Indians Now Disdain a Farm Once Hailed for Giving Tribe Jobs," *New York Times*, November 15, 2003, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/15/us/indians-now-disdain-a-farm-once-hailed-for-giving-tribe-jobs.html>, accessed August 2016.

17. On Badlands geology: The ranger's description of the Badlands didn't match what I later read on the map, which involved an ocean that once covered the Great Plains and then drained as the Rocky Mountains formed, leaving dead critters in mud.

18. On the history of the Black Hills: Later, I googled the quote about the Black Hills and found it repeated on many websites. But I looked up the actual, handwritten Treaty of Laramie, which is posted on the National Archives

website. While it does give ownership of the land to the tribes, I did not find this quote or the president's signature, as the brochure claimed. I also read up on the history of the Black Hills: By 1872, the US government (at the time under President Ulysses Grant) had begun to want the timber of the Black Hills for building projects out west, plus it suspected the Black Hills held mineral wealth. A commission approached the tribal chiefs about signing away the Black Hills and returned to report it was, "the only portion [of their reservation] worth anything to them," and that "nothing short of their annihilation will get it from them" (Colonel Smith to General Ord, June 27, 1873, Department of the Platte, Letters Received, National Archives). Nonetheless, in 1874 the US government sent the Custer Expedition to examine the region, resulting in reports of gold. Prospectors arrived, violating the treaty. At first, the US Army stopped the prospectors, but after a while they instead moved against Lakota Sioux hunting in the region, even after the chiefs traveled to Washington, DC, to appeal for support of the treaty. From 1876 to 1877, the Black Hills War seethed, until the US government seized the Black Hills in 1877. In 1980, the Supreme Court ruled that the United States had to pay over a million dollars for the land, plus 103 years' worth of interest, but the Sioux refused the money, instead asking that the treaty giving them ownership of the Black Hills be upheld.

19. Note on the quote about faith: The quote I remembered is similar to a longer quote by Edward Teller. Patrick Overton wrote a poem that is also similar.

20. On Ucross, Wyoming: I read the history of the Ucross Ranch in a brochure from the office, and later on their website. The ranch had originally been called Big Red, one of several belonging to the Pratt and Ferris Cattle Company in the late 1800s. Before that, it had been hunting grounds of tribes including the Cheyenne, Crow, and Lakota, filled with buffalo. The village around the ranch took the name Ucross after the shape of the brand the company used on its cattle. Later owners shifted the focus of the ranch to crops, added irrigation systems and tenant farms, and eventually sold the ranch in the 1940s. It changed ownership several times and the buildings fell into disrepair. In 1981, several people formed the nonprofit Ucross Foundation to raise money to restore the buildings and create an artist-in-residence project. The corporation that owned the ranch donated 250 acres to the effort. Fourteen years later, the Ucross Foundation purchased the remaining 21,750 acres and continued to manage the cattle operation as a "developing model for ecologically sound, holistic ranching practices."

21. On grilled cheese for lunch every day: Mary and I were both vegetarians. We often ate lunch at a restaurant, and usually the only item we could eat was a grilled cheese sandwich. Luckily we both loved grilled cheese.

22. On the large pump in the mountains: I later found out that what I'd considered pumps in parks and campgrounds were actually "hydrants" that were connected to a water system. Somewhere, electricity was doing the pumping, which is why water gushed out in a steady stream, with no effort. This was my first real pump.

23. On the Billy the Kid poster: I later read that no one has ever found an actual "wanted" poster for Billy, although Lew Wallace did put an ad offering \$500 in a newspaper in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Source: Lucky Bonner, "Wanted: Billy the Kid Wanted Poster," *True West: History of the American Frontier*, June 1, 2004, <http://www.truewestmagazine.com/wantedbilly-the-kid-wanted-poster/>, accessed September 2016. There is no copyright information on the poster I bought.

24. On the statue of a maniacal-looking man in Cody, Wyoming: I later found out that the tall statues of men are Muffler Men. Leftover from promotional campaigns in the 1960s, twenty-foot fiberglass Muffler Men dot the country, sometimes dolled up to look like cowboys, mechanics, or even Paul Bunyan. The hands used to hold mufflers, so you can tell it is a Muffler Man if it has its right hand up, left hand down.

25. On calf roping: My memory of calf roping involved two cowboys roping the calf (one aimed for its neck, the other, its hind leg), the calf being pulled down into the dirt by the ropes, and the leg-roping cowboy hopping down to tie three legs. I looked online to see if this accurately describes the event. According to 2016 *Wikipedia*, only one cowboy does the roping, first by the neck, and there is a penalty if the calf is dragged to the ground. Then the cowboy flips the calf over and ties three legs. There is also "team roping" that uses steers: one cowboy lassos the neck or horns, while the other lassos both rear legs while the steer is running. I seem to have mixed the two events in my head. I altered my description to be about calf roping, but it is likely we watched both.

26. On women in rodeos: According to 2008 *Wikipedia*, women participated in rodeos until the 1930s, when two women died and women were barred. Now they compete only in the barrel race. In professional rodeos, they might be allowed to compete in some lower-level roping. There are also, however, female-only rodeos.

27. Source of the quotes about the Great Spirit giving each person the religion he or she needs and about Sitting Bull: Ed McGaa, *Mother Earth Spirituality: Native American Paths to Healing Ourselves and Our World* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990), 205, 206. Copyright 1990 by Ed McGaa.

28. On hitchhiking into Yellowstone: Part of the day's anxiety had resulted simply because I had agreed to follow Mary's plan when I hadn't wanted to. I

might have felt better if I'd been honest about what I wanted to do, even if I'd ultimately agreed to her plan. Also, agreeing to her plan wouldn't mean that something was wrong with mine.

29. Source of the quote on the restlessness of youth from *Travels with Charley*: John Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley: In Search of America* (New York: Penguin Books, 1962), 3. Copyright 1961, 1962 by the Curtis Publishing Co., Inc. Copyright 1962 by John Steinbeck, renewed 1990 by Elaine Steinbeck, Thom Steinbeck, and John Steinbeck IV.

30. Source of the quote from *Dune* about the logic of the universe: Frank Herbert, *Dune* (New York: Ace Books, 1990), 373. Copyright 1965 by Frank Herbert.

31. On Big Hole National Battlefield, Montana: In 1855 and 1863, treaties between the Nez Percé and the United States said that the Nez Percé could stay on their land. In 1873, Chief Joseph again negotiated with the government. But in 1877, General Oliver Howard threatened to attack if the Nez Percé did not go to a reservation that was a tiny portion of their territory. Chief Joseph reluctantly agreed, but when three Nez Percé massacred some United States soldiers, he feared retaliation against his people and fled. The Nez Percé under Chief Joseph and Looking Glass planned to go to Canada to join Sitting Bull and the Lakotas, but United States infantry caught up with them. In a predawn attack, the infantry killed men, women, and children at Big Hole. Then they followed the tribe for two months before Chief Joseph surrendered, agreeing to go to the reservation. At the surrender, Chief Joseph said, "I am tired. My heart is sick and sad. From where the sun now stands I will fight no more forever." The Library of Congress website (<https://www.loc.gov/item/today-in-history/october-05/>, accessed June 2021) lists the source of this quote as C. E. S. Wood, "Chief Joseph, the Nez Perce," *The Century: a Popular Quarterly*, volume 28, number 1 (May 1884), 135.

32. On the Lochsa River: That's how the state map labeled the river: "wild and scenic."

33. Source information for *Pirates of the Caribbean*: Ted Elliott and Terry Rossio, *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*, directed by Gore Verbinski, produced by the Walt Disney Company, Walt Disney Pictures, Jerry Bruckheimer Films, and Second Mate Productions, distributed by Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2003. Copyright 2003 by the Walt Disney Company.

34. In Washington: I liked counting the days since my last shower, but the truth was, eight days without a shower didn't feel much different than one or two, after biking in the sun all day.

35. In Oregon: I later read that the Twin Tunnels through which we'd

ridden are located at the point where the climate of the Columbia River Gorge changes from the dry, barren east to the humid west.

36. On the last day, a disclaimer: I'm not actually claiming that this was the Macho Man. He simply looked and sounded like him, and so I used that name for him in my head.

37. Source of the final epigraph: Frances E. Willard, *A Wheel Within a Wheel: How I Learned to Ride the Bicycle with Some Reflections by the Way* (New York, Chicago, Toronto: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1895).

38. Source of the quotes from Buffy: Jane Espenson, "Gingerbread," *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Season 3, Episode 11), directed by James Whitmore Jr., produced by Mutant Enemy Productions, Sandollar Television, Kuzui Entertainment, and 20th Century Fox Television, distributed by 20th Television, first aired January 12, 1999. Copyright 1999 by Mutant Enemy Productions.



About the Author

Emily Buehler is a writer and an editor, among other things. She still commutes on the bike that went across the country, and she's still friends with Mary, who also still rides. She lives in North Carolina. Visit her online at <https://emilybuehler.com>.