

“The tears ran, hot and salty, down the sides of my face into my ears ... I hurt everywhere ... and my tire was flat. Again. I didn’t know if I was going to make it. I just wanted to curl into a ball and give up ... What was I doing, racing across America?”

Moving from Singapore to California was a breath of fresh air for Angie. With the curiosity and spunk of an animal let loose in the wild, she began to explore her surroundings on her bicycle. The idea struck her: Why not cycle across America? And why not film a documentary to chronicle the adventure?

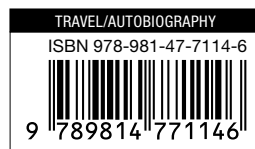
She would eventually complete the Northwestern-central route in under 40 days. 4,000 miles at a pace of 100 miles a day. Angie’s story of cycling across the third largest continent in the world is a story of peaks and troughs (both literal and metaphorical), overcoming physical, mental and emotional obstacles, and busting old beliefs. It is also a celebration of friendships forged with the people she met on her journey.

Angie’s account of her crazy dream, from conception to actualization, will resonate with anyone who has ever dreamed big.



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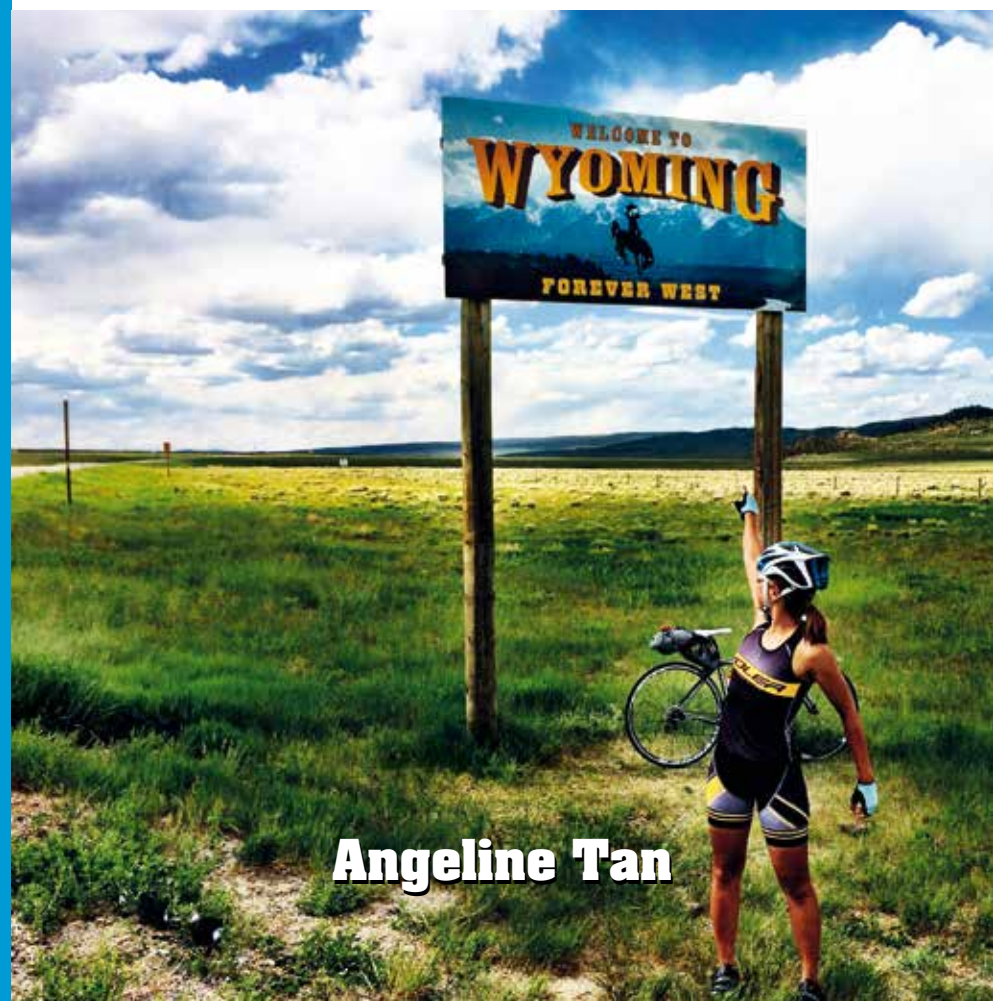
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Angeline Tan

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The Inspirational Journey of
Angie Across America



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To Jason, my husband, partner, supporter,
mentor, encourager and confidant – I thank God each and
every day for the incredible gift He’s given me in you.
Thank you for showing me how to live and love.

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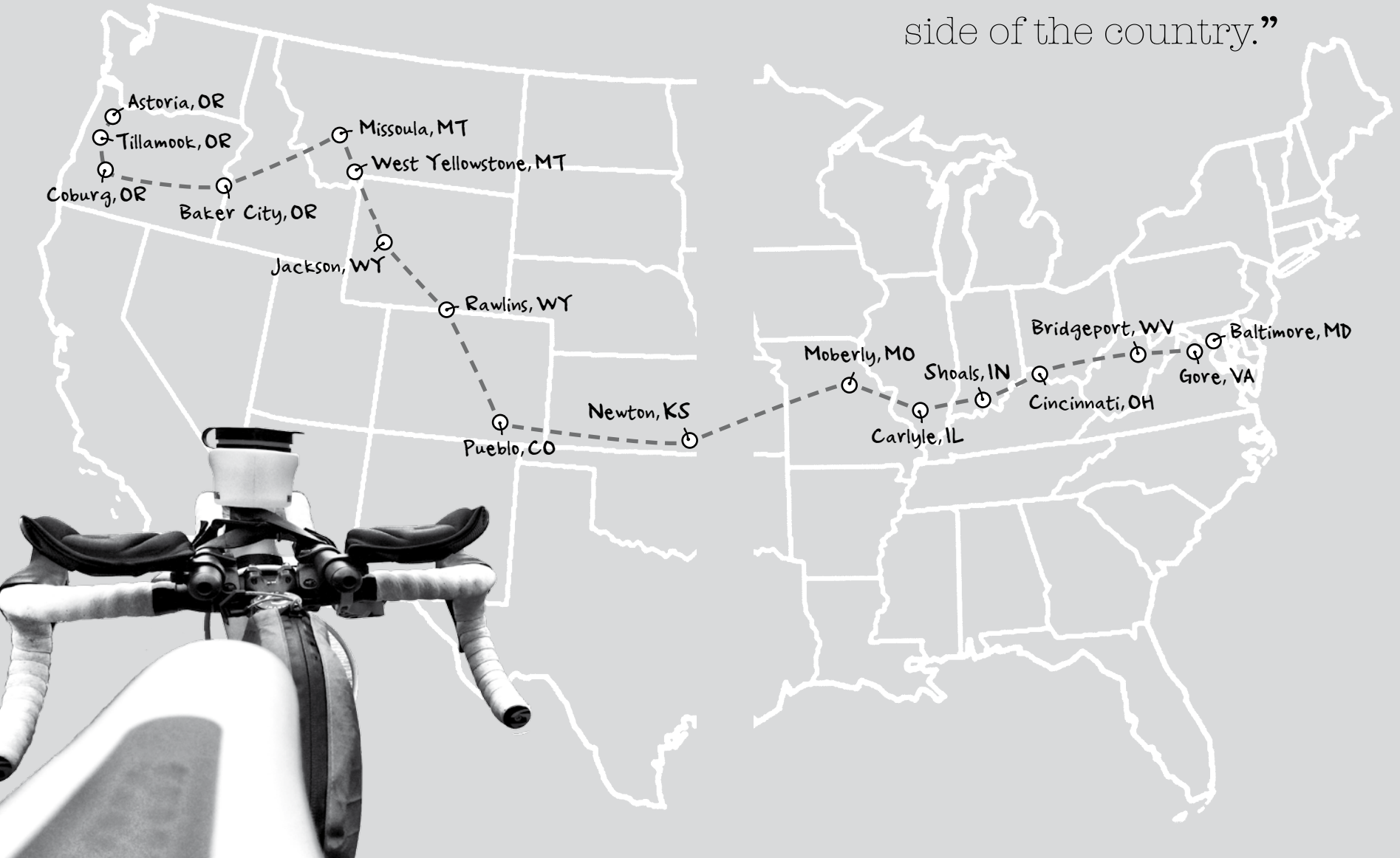
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“All I had was a game plan:
pedal 100 miles or more each day,
stay in a different town each
night until I got to the other
side of the country.”



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Introduction

The days and months following my bicycle ride across the United States, I was often asked what inspired me to do it, how the adventure felt, what I saw and experienced, who I met, what I ate, what the challenges I faced on the road were.

But more often, I'd be met with expressions of, "You what?" or "No way!" or "You're kidding ..." and when they realized I wasn't, they'd say, "Wow, that's very impressive. Really impressive. Wow." And they'd be silent for a little while, as if to wrap their heads around the idea before asking more questions about cycling across a continent.

In between those awkward moments of silence, I'd squirm a little because the truth was, I didn't think that what I did was extraordinary. All I had was a game plan: pedal 100 miles or more each day, stay in a different town each night until I got to the other side of the country, heave a sigh of relief, and declare to myself, "There, you did it. You rode across America."

While I certainly felt stronger mentally, like I had been forged into indestructible steel after being riddled with very

◀ Railroad tracks along the coast at Nehalem Bay State Park in Oregon.



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harsh weather and a host of physical and mental challenges associated with a multiple-week bike ride, I felt no differently about my personal identity. In my heart and mind, I was still the same ol' Angie. I didn't feel superhuman or that I was a super endurance cyclist like Mike Hall or Juliana Buhring who circumnavigated the globe (18,000 miles) on their bicycles in 92 and 152 days respectively.

Following the earlier exclamations of "Wow!" or "Oh my gosh, you did what?", there would often be two groups of people asking different sets of questions.

Firstly, the athletic ones, you know, the cyclists, runners, hikers, gym-goers, Cross-fitters. They'd ask technical questions concerning the ride: "How did you plan your route?", "What did you eat?" and "How did you fill up on water?"

The second group, usually the non-athletes, would be more baffled than the first group, and they'd ask more fundamental questions like, "Why would you do something like that?", "What inspired you to ride your bike across the country?", "Why didn't you drive instead?" and "Did you do it to raise funds or create awareness for something?"

Both sets of questions are valid, and in the pages that follow, I have attempted to answer as many of them as I can.

More importantly, the primary motivation for this book is to share as honestly as possible, the journey of a dream from conception to reality.

Growing up as a highly-driven and motivated child, I often saw men and women accomplishing great successes or feats and thought to myself, wow, that's incredible. I want to be like that.

What I didn't realize then as a child, and what I now know as an adult, having personally met and spoken to people with considerable achievements in their lives, is that behind their accomplishments was a huge amount of hard work. Behind the scenes, away from the public eye and spotlight, is a journey riddled with doubt, discouragement, and disappointment, topped with incredible amounts of sweat and grit, pain and conflict, determination and perseverance.

I want my journey to be an open book, where I candidly lay out my struggles in the pursuit of my dream to cycle across America. This is my story.

Author's Note:

Throughout this book there are mentions of 39 and 40 days. While my goal was to cross the country in 40 days, I eventually did it in 39.



Prologue

“Men who go looking for the source of a river are merely looking for the source of something missing in themselves, and never finding it.”

– Sir Richard Burton on the mental state of the explorer

I was flat on my back. The tears ran, hot and salty, down the sides of my face into my ears but I didn't care. I could not lift myself up at all. I could not even muster an ounce of strength to sit up. I hurt everywhere ... and my tire was flat. Again. I didn't know if I was going to make it. I just wanted to curl into a ball and give up. Call home and maybe get my husband to send an emergency helicopter to airlift me home to sunny California, away from the summer snow, the mosquitoes and endless miles of nothingness. What was I doing, racing across America?

I looked at Derek's face and saw the same, desperate empty hopelessness I felt in my soul. That was it. We were done.

But we still had 1,800 miles to go ...

Could I live with myself if I quit now?

The pain in my limbs would go, the ache in my chest would heal, but would the torture of quitting haunt me the rest of my life?

Was this really the end of myself I had reached, or just a version of the infamous “wall” that athletes hit?



▲ Derek and I at Stites, Idaho.

view only



Here We Go!

Derek Wilson

“So, you wanna ride together?” I asked enthusiastically.

“Yeah, sure. I’ll like to. I mean, I think it’ll be fun to do that,” Derek responded, trying to match my enthusiasm. I would later discover that he is an overall nice, accommodating and always agreeable fella.

“Yeah, I’m thinking it’s gonna be such a long journey, it’ll be great to have someone to talk to. Beats riding alone, don’t you think?”

“Yea, definitely ...” And then a silence that lingered a tad too long.

“So, you think we’re gonna get along well and not kill each other on the road?” He laughed nervously. Poor guy, what was I expecting him to say? Laughing was the best he could do to thwart the awkwardness.

That was one of two conversations I had with Derek Wilson, a stranger who promised to ride with me cross-country. We would keep each other safe on the road.

I met him for the first time a day before we were to set off on the longest ride of our lives. I had seen pictures of him on Facebook and knew what he looked like. Long hair, bushy

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beard, always in cycling clothes, posing gleefully with other cyclists. I thought he looked like a very happy hipster on two wheels.

We had planned to meet in the historic fishing town of Astoria in Oregon on June 6, 2015, the starting point of the Trans America Bike Race (details of this race to follow in a later chapter).

That afternoon, after having settled into a handsome boutique hostel together with other racers of the Trans America Bike Race, I explored the quaint little town with my husband, Jason.

Coming out of a bookstore, I saw a young man in a crumpled T-shirt, shorts, and flip flops, pushing an old, worn bike. I recognized him from across the street, and gestured to Jason beside me, “Look, that’s him. Derek.”

In person, his beard looked larger and bushier and his hair longer and messier than his pictures portrayed. There were several small holes in his white T-shirt.

We exchanged courtesies, like two people meeting for the first time, except it wasn’t the first time; we’d spoken on the phone twice and exchanged several emails while we were hammering out the logistics of the ride. He spoke with a certain drawl, like some Midwesterners. I later found out he’s from Kansas.

It was awkward because here we were, meeting for the first time, and from the next day on, we were expecting to be best friends for the next six weeks. It was a case of intentional friendship – the situation required that we become friends, and not just ordinary friends, but fast friends, because we

would be counting on each other to survive the next six weeks together.

As we spoke, I studied his bike – an old, 1984 Schwinn. Its frame was a pale blue, like the color of a cloudless sky, except it was duller, because it was matte, and not the soft and serene blue you see in the sky. A metal rack perched precariously on the front of the bike. On it rested a black burlap sack full of what looked like clothes. Protruding from the sides of the rear was another bike rack with pannier bags on each side.

His bags and metal racks looked heavy, bulky, and uncooperative for cycling uphill. I was doubtful if we would achieve a comfortable pace cycling together, with him lugging all that extra weight. He didn’t even look muscular.

I had my doubts but managed to crack a joke. “So Derek, are you ready to be my best friend for the next 40 days?”

He laughed a dry laugh. “Yeah ... I think so.” I would later be accustomed to his long drawn “yeahs” which carried an air of uncertainty about them, the kind of yeah you’d hear prefacing an “I don’t know.”

And so here I was, on the verge of taking off for several weeks with a man I had just met, who looked, smelled and spoke like a Bohemian, and Jason did not betray a single misgiving, although he too had his doubts if Derek would be able to ride with all that extra weight. Derek would later mail his bags home.

The Idea

How did this crazy cross-country idea come about? Well, this takes us back to July 2013.

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I had just completed an Ironman distance triathlon in Northern California. As many athletes would agree, the day after a hard race is when you slump back into reality. I found myself lolling about at home aimlessly. The high and adrenaline of the race had worn off. All that was left was an empty void and I ached on the inside. It's the kind of feeling you have when you've just taken the wildest roller coaster ride of your life, which terrified you beyond your greatest fears, and after you have sat through it like an adult, no doubt screaming your lungs out in the process, you step off the platform and think, "Whoa, that was insane. I'm never doing that again," and seconds later, as if struck by momentary memory loss, you say, "What's next?"

It was in this vulnerable state of mind that I found myself doodling, I mean, Googling, for something meaningful. Something more than the Ironman. What could possibly fill that void after a race that consisted of a 2.4-mile swim, 112-mile bike ride and a 26.2-mile run? It would have to be something significantly longer, harder, and more extreme.

And then it came. Like a flash of lightning it came and went. A thought. A crazy thought.

As if to justify the absurdity of that idea, I jumped on Google Maps for verification.

As clear to me now as it was then, I saw this:

San Francisco to New York City: 3,000 miles by car.

I smiled.

I would cycle across America.

|||||||

I would later realize that 3,000 miles by car didn't translate to the same distance on bicycle. Bicycles are not permitted on major freeways, and typically travel on longer routes that weave through backroads and mountain passes. There are also different routes and distances to cross the country, most commonly the northern, central or southern routes which range from 2,500 to 4,400 miles.

I would eventually complete the Northwestern-central 4,000-mile route, at a pace of 100 miles a day.

Finding Coach Colin

Cycle 4,000 miles in under 40 days. How would I train myself to do that? It was a daunting goal and it baffled my little brain.

In desperation, I turned to Twitter. I asked a simple question in 140 characters. Miraculously, a British ultra distance adventure cyclist picked up my question and suggested that I check with her coach, Colin. She didn't say much, but I was immediately sold. She was an ultra distance cyclist; I was learning to be one. She said Colin was amazing, nice and patient. As a rookie, I needed just such a coach. And if he could transform her into the ultra distance cyclist that she was, then perhaps he could do the same with me.

The power of recommendation. It never gets old, and it sure is effective.

Each year, Colin trains 12 athletes, two of whom at no charge. When I reached out to Colin, I didn't have money to pay for his coaching services. Fortunately for me, he had one more slot for an unpaid athlete.

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Power of the Human Body

On the surface, it sounded easy. In order to ride 100 miles a day in eight hours, I would have to train myself to ride eight hours daily, correct? No. That would require way too many hours of training for several months in a row. I wouldn't have a life apart from cycling. Besides, I might burn myself out before reaching the starting line.

Coach Colin had me ride for just two hours a day, four times a week, and two back-to-back days (typically on the weekends) where I would ride six to eight hours each day.

I wasn't always a good student. I would cut corners and try to ride as little as I could, especially on the back-to-back days. I struggled with motivation and discouragement but he never lost his patience with me. He never stopped believing in me and always knew the right, gentle thing to say to get me back on my bike again.

I learned that the key was consistency, not volume, speed, force, or strength. Training was simply hour after hour of saddle time and consistent pedaling. Endurance was about developing a rhythm, a comfortable pace, and settling into a routine that lasted for hours in a low heart rate zone.

Shorter rides on the weekdays helped me develop pedal-stroke consistency while longer back-to-back rides simulated a typical day's ride. It amazes me how just two days a week could get my body ready for a 39-day ride.

I began to appreciate the intricacy of the human body as I observed changes in mine over six months of training – my body was able to take little adjustments, imprint them onto my muscles and mind, and those little imprints, over time,

built my overall endurance fitness. While I had been training consistently for short durations, those replicated efforts helped me improve over longer durations and distances.

This, essentially, is what muscle memory is – imprinting a kinetic task into memory through repetition.

And this also made me realize that there are no shortcuts. Success requires a daily, consistent chipping along the path to your goal. Superhumans are really people with extreme discipline, diligence, and focus.

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About The Author



Angeline Tan is an adventurer, writer, filmmaker and motivational speaker with a special interest in inspiring change. She started writing at age five, having been greatly inspired by Enid Blyton, a best-selling English author of children's books. *Crazy Cycling Chick* is her debut book. She is the creator of an independently produced documentary, *Angie Across America*, which covers the journey in this book. She lives in the San Francisco Bay Area.

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