



Name: Bruce Weber

Age: 58

Activity: long-distance bicycling

Location: New York, New York



Cycling Through Life

Repeating a road trip you did 18 years ago is humbling, of course, but it proves the second time around can be even better.

**As told to Carsten Knox
Photograph by Joshua Simpson**

When bicycling long distances, you have to pay attention all the time. What kind of a sound is coming from the chain? What do your tires sound like on the road? Are there cars zooming by you? How thirsty are you? Do you have to go to the bathroom? Is there a shoulder to ride on or do you have to navigate a jagged road? Because if you lose concentration and slide off, you're going to end up on your ass in a cornfield.

These things run through your head all day, and I like that. If you're not paying attention, you run the risk of something dreadful or at least inconvenient happening. It's all in service of the day's simple goal: getting where you wanted to get when you started.

I was 39 when I rode across the country for the first time. I did it again when I was 57. What was different the second time? It was harder, I was slower, I got tired much more quickly. But the other side of the coin is that cycling only 60 miles in a day is now a lot more satisfying than it was when I was 39. I have more patience and I'm less judgmental—it's okay to spend the day getting less accomplished. My first trip cycling across the country took 75 days. The second time it took me 90. Does that make it a lesser trip? No, it's just a trip of someone who went a little slower.

There were three or four days where I thought I wasn't going to make it. I was anxious, I missed my girlfriend, and I

was asking myself, do I really want to do this? It was a period of self-doubt. Every pedal stroke seemed too hard.

Two things happened that got me back on track. Outside the town of Eureka, Montana, I stopped at a campsite where a woman was selling homemade pies. I said, "Gee, I'd really like to buy this cherry pie," and she said to me, "Where are you staying? I'll take it over for you." And she dropped the pie off at the motel where I was staying. I thought that was such a terribly nice thing. (And I ate the entire pie.)

Then the next morning, I rode to Whitefish, Montana, where I had a conversation with a perfect stranger in a diner. I said, "I'm riding across the country from Oregon to New York City. But I'm really tired and I don't know what I'm going to do." He asked me, "You're not going to take the Sun Road?" I said, "No, it's too hard." He told me, "You're out of your mind. You're 40 miles from one of the great bike rides in the United States." I thought, you know, the guy is right.

So I cycled the Sun Road. It was an unbelievably difficult ride—21 miles, 11 of them straight uphill. But at the top, the entire continent stretched out before me. It was one of the most thrilling moments of my life. From then on I knew: I can do this.

It was pretty much that dramatic. Just a cherry pie and a guy at a café. ●