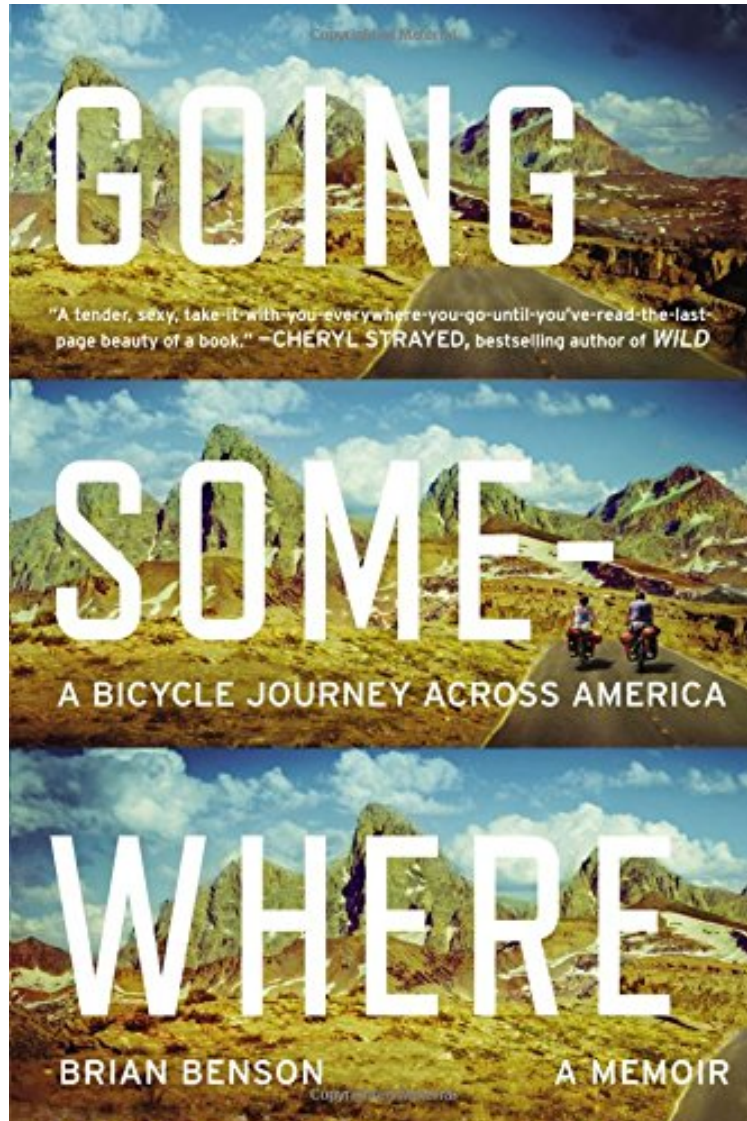


(Library ebook) Going Somewhere: A Bicycle Journey Across America

## Going Somewhere: A Bicycle Journey Across America

Brian Benson

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#126700 in Books Brian Benson 2014-06-24 2014-06-24 Original language: English PDF # 1 7.98 x .57 x 5.301, .48 #File Name: 0142180645288 pages Going Somewhere A Bicycle Journey Across America | File size: 40.Mb

**Brian Benson : Going Somewhere: A Bicycle Journey Across America** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Going Somewhere: A Bicycle Journey Across America:

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. A coming-of-age story with many hidden treasures!By VijayPendakurI read Going Somewhere in smaller snippets so I could savor the journey with Brian and Rachel across the western United States. Brians prose is beautiful, funny, and painfully honest. As a non-biker, I felt like I learned so

much about the challenges and the beauty of travelling by bicycle. As someone who has never seen the upper mountain region, I felt intimately connected to new ecosystems and the wonderful people who Brian and Rachel encountered on their trip. Going Somewhere has so many buried treasures in it different themes emerge over the course of the book that make it SO much more than a travel memoir. Its also a powerful coming of age story that I could totally relate to falling in love and searching for an adult identity what more do you want? Well, Brian offers more. The book is also an extended meditation on the nature of community big cities, rural life, and friendships over distance and time. Brians reflections on the friendship of strangers gave me many moments of pause while reading to consider the kindness of strangers in my life. Brians struggle with being in the moment and trying to get to Portland reminded me of my own struggles with mindfulness versus pursuing long-term goals. All in all, Going Somewhere is a book I will return to many times and Im sure Ill carry away new revelations with each visitation. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Bored with Your Ride Across America By Don Sanders The author did not take the time to write an intro that would have made all the unknown references he uses throughout the book make sense. We don't even know who his riding companion is or anything about their bikes. Worst of all, he seems to dislike the ride, he is bored and unhappy much of the time. If you are not happy on the bike, why are you riding? I got the sense that someone said to the author, "Hey you can make some money if you turn your blogs into a book and you don't even have to make it make sense; they will have bought it and it will be too late." it was for me. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Okay read, but I wouldn't recommend By Mystufffl bought this book primarily because it was recommended by Cheryl Strayed and was disappointed. The author came across as self absorbed and not particularly interesting. Midway through the book I lost interest and just rushed through it to get it over with. The chapters seemed repetitive and didn't provide great descriptions of the landscapes. Also, I wasn't thrilled with constantly reading about what they ate or how often they had sex. I wouldn't recommend this book.

Lets hope Benson has more travels in mind. He is a gifted writer, an observant human with an eye for the telling detail and how to tell it. Booklist Brian has a million vague life plans but zero sense of direction. So when he meets Rachel, a self-possessed woman who daydreams of bicycling across the States, he decides to follow her wherever she'll take him. Brian and Rachel soon embark on a ride from northern Wisconsin to Somewhere West, infatuated with the promise of adventure and each other. But as the pair progress from the Northwoods into the bleak western plains, they begin to discover the messy realities of life on the road. Mile by mile, they contend with merciless winds and brutal heat, broken bikes and bodies, each other and themselves and the looming question of what comes next. Told in a voice "as hilarious as it is wise" (Cheryl Strayed), Going Somewhere is a candid tale of the struggle to move forward.

"Brian Bensons memoir about riding from the hinterlands of Wisconsin to Portland, Oregon on his bicycle is as poignant as it is gripping, as hilarious as it is wise. Going Somewhere is a tender, sexy, take-it-with-you-everywhere-you-go-until-youve-read-the-last-page beauty of a book. Cheryl Strayed, New York Times bestselling author of Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail Irresistible. . . Lets hope Benson has more travels in mind. He is a gifted writer, an observant human with an eye for the telling detail and how to tell it. Booklist Charming His travelogue is vibrant and engrossing, with wonderful portraits of Western landscapes and scruffy small towns, Job-like ordeals of gusty headwinds and breakdowns, and piquant portraits of kindly, parental folks who offer the cyclists food and shelter and another of a menacing drifter on a dark road. Publishers Weekly About the Author Brian Benson grew up in the Northwoods of Wisconsin. He now lives in Portland, Oregon, where he teaches writing at the Attic Institute. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. \*\*\*This excerpt is from an advance uncorrected proof\*\*\* Copyright 2014 Brian Benson CHAPTER 1 Here or There or There or Here I pressed my cheek to the clouded glass, took a deep pull of diesel and wood smoke and rain-kissed leaves and sweat-soaked cotton, and watched as ayudantes swarmed the pavement, hoarsely exhorting ancient women in Technicolor traje and cow-eyed backpackers in full-zip rain pants to go here or there or there or here. A Guate a Guaaaate! A Solol! A Xela a Xela, a Huehue! My heart was pounding. My skin tingling. Because, here or there or there or here. Because maybe I was on the wrong bus. Because Cuatro Caminos looked a lot like Los Encuentros looked a lot like every other traffic-jammed junction town Id seen from a sticky vinyl seat on El Madre de Dios or El Don Diego or the dozen other buses that had carried me from destination to destination, from this dusty market to that Mayan pyramid, from that must-see waterfall to this realization: I had mistaken distraction for destination. I had no destination. Beside me, Dave choked on a snore. I turned to see his head listing toward port, his drooping lower lip on the verge of spilling saliva onto a faded brown T-shirt. Somehow, amid all this, he was sleeping. El Madre coughed a Rorschach of smoke, shuddered to life, and lurched forward. Again we were moving, and again that goddamn song was looping through my head: The wheels on the bus go round and round, round and round, round and round. The wheels . . . I knocked my forehead against the window, hard enough to wake Dave. He blinked his eyes open and rolled his head from shoulder to shoulder. Almost there, Barney? he asked, yawning. Id met Dave two years earlier, back in Madison. Hed instantly forgotten my name and the second time we saw each other had called me Barney Bosworth. Id been Barney ever since. I nodded. I think its like fifteen more miles to Xela. So three hours, then. Right. He pulled a ratty paperback from his bag and opened to the

bookmark. I slumped down, jack-knifed my legs against the seat in front of me, and stared out at the roadside market, at the mangy dogs and roasted corn and stacked tortillas and seven-cent avocados and people, so many people, headed here or there or there or here or . . . Honestly, I could no longer tell the difference. Just a year earlier, I'd graduated from UW-Madison with a fill-in-the-blank lib-arts double major, a glut of idealist energy, and the deeply felt conviction that I was meant to be a union organizer, or a high school history teacher, or a writer, or the second coming of Che Guevara, or, ideally, all of the above at once. But I'd missed the app deadline for Union Summer, and getting a teaching certificate seemed like a lot of work, and I hadn't ever written anything more than term papers and student-rag op-eds, and so, having just watched *The Motorcycle Diaries* for the third time, I decided what I really needed was that whole if you want to change the world, let the world change you thing. I thus used my degree to land a job waiting tables at a suburban Chinese restaurant, spent a year shoe-boxing tip money and highlighting *Lonely Planet* pages with Dave, and soon enough we were buying plane tickets, packing bags, and setting off on an epic, yearlong journey from northern Mexico to southern Argentina to *Real Life*. I slid deeper into my seat, my knees now above my head. Already, just four weeks in, I was ready to admit it: I hated backpacking. I hated the waterfalls and the ancient ruins and the repetitive conversations with wayward Scandinavians, and most of all I hated how, in the space between these supposed high-lights, I always felt so lonely, so indecisive, so guilty. I had a college diploma and no debt and a supposed commitment to Fighting for Social Justice, but somehow I'd ended up here, folded into a bus seat, being not just a pampered tourist but an unhappy pampered tourist. I couldn't keep this up. I needed to stop somewhere, do something. I needed some sense that by going somewhere I was going somewhere. I reached into my bag, pulled out the guidebook, and flipped to the pages I'd read a dozen times over the past few days pages focused on the Guatemalan city of Quetzaltenango, also known as Xela. It was supposedly a beautiful spot, frequented but not defined by foreigners, full of Spanish schools and seemingly righteous nonprofits. Also, it was like fifteen miles away. Xela was the closest emergency exit, and I was about to kick the crash bar. I turned to Dave. He was still holding his book, but his eyes were shut, his mouth an oval. Dave, I said. He opened his eyes. Barney. We need to talk. Two days later, I was at Xela's bus terminal, waving goodbye to Dave and my delusions. Those first few weeks in Xela, I was desperate for a sense of belonging. I needed to meet real people, not just the ghost people who moved in and out of hotels and hostels, and so I enrolled in Spanish classes and joined a gym and helped pour the foundation for an elementary school and chatted up strangers in coffee shops and city parks, and soon enough I found a room in a house with a Guatemalan, two fellow gringos, and an Irish guy named Carl. The night I moved in, Carl invited me to catch a jazz banda woman from his Spanish school was the vocalist. The band was already playing as we walked up to El Royal Paris, a warmly lit fishbowl on a second-floor balcony. From the stairs, I could hear a lazy walking bass line, a keyboard tinkling over guitar triads, and horns murmuring in harmony. We approached the door, and through floor-to-ceiling glass walls I saw that the band appeared to be a mix of Guatemalans and gringos, all men. Carl shrugged. Maybe she's sick, eh? He grabbed a table, and I headed to the bar for bottles of Moza, the least offensive of Guatemalan beers. As I set the bottles on the table, I noticed a woman stepping through the door and slipping a phone into her purse. She was unfairly, disorientingly attractive: silver-blue eyes against olive skin, watercolor collarbones over a silky subcollarbone swell, and a downright mythical strawberry blonde mane. Now she was shimmying past four-tops and awkward couples, sliding onto a stool by the guitarist. She noticed Carl and waved, and he waved back. I half-raised my own hand, then dropped it, unsure of the etiquette for greeting a beautiful woman who doesn't know you exist. Over his shoulder, Carl said, That's Rachel. Cool, I heard myself say. I watched Rachel lean toward the keyboardist, a scruffy gringo in a baggy button-down. They exchanged whispers, and she tossed her head back in laughter, then theatrically pulled the mic to her lips. The band stayed silent as she sang the first few bars of *In My Solitude*. All around, conversations stopped. Heads turned. I felt my jaw dropping, my eyes deadening, but I could not control myself, could not do anything but absorb. That someone so young could sing like this, with such smoke and power and clarity, seemed impossible. Minutes, hours, millennia passed. Glaciers advanced and retreated. And suddenly the band was starting an instrumental, and Rachel was walking over to say hi to Carl, and I was panicking, because I hadn't prepared for this, hadn't considered that I might need to speak to her, and so I just did the midwestern thing and defaulted to effusive praise. You've got a really amazing voice, I said. Thanks. Rachel pulled up a chair, sat down, and produced a pack of American Spirits. Really, I owe it all to these. Do you mind? I did not mind. She could do whatever she wanted, so long as she stayed at this table. As Rachel exhaled cones of smoke and surveyed the room, I tried to make conversation, but her friends kept interrupting, stopping by to plant kisses on her cheek and ask about evening plans. So I just sat back and listened as she talked about an upcoming nonprofit fundraiser/cum dance party and some guy named Paco and how tired she was of organizing despedidas for every freaking student who'd spent five days studying Spanish at her school, and, well, at some point I lost track of what she was saying and just listened to how she was saying it. That voice. So sexy and strong, so utterly entrancing, even offstage, even when she was just talking about . . . . Actually, she now appeared to be talking about stomach parasites. Whatever. She plainly had a life here, a community, and her rootedness and confidence added to her beauty. Or rather, they complicated it. After a few minutes, I wasn't sure if I wanted her or wanted to be her. Now the band apparently called *Soltura*, which roughly translates to flowiness/took a set break, and Rachel introduced me to Andrew, the guitarist, and his brother Galen, the

scruffy keyboardist. I peppered them with questions about the whens and hows and whys of their lives in Xela, and as I listened to their responses, my gut twisted and clenched. They were speaking a language of shared experience, a language of belonging. I wanted to learn it. The next weekend Andrew invited me to sit in at a show. I knew next to nothing about jazz but I'd played guitar for years, and so I kept up, even shone from time to time, on twelve-bar blues and A-minor bossa novas. As for all the other standards, with their dizzying modulations and impossible melodies, I just held on to whatever I could grasp and focused on not falling off. As the weeks passed, I sat in for more shows, every one a roller-coaster ride, terrifying and exhilarating. Most afternoons, I'd lock myself in my room for a DIY crash course in music theory. I practiced scales and voicing, obsessed over these Rhythm for Dummies worksheets I'd gotten from Andrew, and soon, rather than watching her from the crowd, I was tucking arpeggios under Rachel's melodies and eliciting the occasional smile or compliment. One night we all headed from a gig to El Duende, a reggaeton-all-day-every-day bar that was hosting a fundraiser for the shelter where Rachel volunteered. We ordered Cuba Libres and pulled stools around a table. That night's show had been particularly good, and I was swimming in booze and endorphins, was witty and sharp and asking all the right questions, and soon it was just Rachel and me, leaning close and straining our voices over the music. We were laughing and buying more Cuba Libres and grasping arms while asking, Could you repeat that? And then she was asking if I'd like to walk her home, and I was saying yes, yes, I would. As we wound through cobblestone streets, I was sure this was the moment I had been waiting for. We would have earth-shattering, teeth-shaking, uninhibited-but-of-course-respectful sex, and then do it again, and then fall in love and never grow old but stay young together, making beautiful music and saying beautiful things and being beautiful forever. But when we got to her place, Galen was there supposedly displaced by house-guests, definitely ruining my life. He followed us into Rachel's room, grabbed a guitar, and started playing Silvio Rodriguez covers. An hour later he finally headed to the couch. By this point I'd lost my buzz, my momentum, my moment. Rachel and I kissed for a few minutes, but we were both exhausted. She told me she couldn't keep her eyes open, but that I should stay, and so I tucked up beside her, not removing my jeans or my button-down shirt. I didn't want to be presumptuous. The next day Rachel told me she thought we should keep things platonic. I thought keeping things platonic was a terrible idea. But I nodded as if I had been thinking the same thing. Andrew soon left Guatemala, opening up a spot in Soltura and a room in Galen's house. I took both and began pouring all my energy into the band. I spent my days studying and practicing and talking about how much more I'd need to study and practice if I was ever going to keep up with my bandmates. Galen joked that if he were to make a talking doll in my image, its catchphrase would be, I suck! I suck! My newfound status as sucky guitarist meant Rachel and I were together pretty much daily. I felt increasingly comfortable around her, and the less I acted like a tittering, wide-eyed fan, the more she seemed to enjoy my company. It turned out we had a lot in common, from our lefty politics to our crazy Jewish aunts to our mutual tendency to go a bit too far with vulgar humor. We got into long conversations that ranged from bell hooks to Boyz II Men, and stuck our tongues out at Galen every time he forced us to play My Way, and one night, at a postshow dinner, when I blurted to the band that I'd sell my best friend's firstborn to see Beck in concert, Rachel not only laughed but responded with something frankly unpublishable. Soon enough, I again found myself sitting around with her and Galen until well after midnight. Again Galen bid us adieu, but this time Rachel and I stayed on the couch, listening to music, playing nostalgic favorites, and sharing for what or whom that nostalgia was reserved. Eventually a silence fell between us. Rachel stood and started for her room. Over her shoulder, she said, You can come with. We took our time that night, preserved some boundaries, all of which evaporated within days. But in the weeks that followed, we remained cautious. We decided not to tell Galen or anyone else in Soltura, didn't even talk about it to each other. This thing was new and fragile, and I was afraid if I looked too long it might explode. At any rate, I knew it would be over soon, as we both had commitments that would call us back to the States, she to Oregon and I to Wisconsin. So we just enjoyed the moments we had. I loved how she would look at me during a set, tilting her head and smiling. I was by no means the first or last guy to admire Rachel from afar, so sitting up there with her with her felt like the sweetest secret in the world. And I looked forward all week to Sunday afternoons, when we would finish our last gig, walk back to her house, climb into bed, and spend the rest of the day intertwined, drifting in and out of sleep. During the week, it was harder to find these quiet moments. Whereas I had little going on outside Soltura, Rachel's days were ridiculous. Between her Spanish classes, her despedida planning, research for her thesis on machismo, volunteer work at a domestic-violence shelter, and her quasi-religious yoga regimen, she barely managed to make our gigs, let alone the bi-weekly practice sessions. But she made time for me. Soon we were seeing each other every day. And as my departure date crept closer, I began to question where I was going, why I was going there, and whether the answer to both questions might be Rachel. The trip was her idea, really. On an August afternoon, a few weeks before I was to leave Guatemala, we were walking back toward San Pedro, having just spent a few hours at an ugly but secluded beach on the shore of Lake Atitlán. An immense crater formed by an ancient volcano and filled with sapphire blue water, this was our go-to vacation spot when we needed a break from the tough life of getting paid to play music in a foreign country. The path back to town was bumpy and overgrown, and I was out front as always. Whenever I'd walk behind Rachel, I'd fall prey to my long legs and unbridled extroversion and ride her heels, so she always insisted I lead. We'd been walking in silence, enjoying the sun and the lake view, when Rachel spoke. Es

matamoscas. She barely got the words out before bursting into a laughing fit. I flipped her off. Matamoscas. The night before, we had been making gnocchi in our hotel. We were cooking with a cheap pan, and the onions were starting to scald, so I scrambled around, found what looked like a spatula, and poked at the veggies. A few seconds later, the hotel's housekeeper walked into the kitchen, gasped, and said, Es matamoscas. I hadn't heard the word before, but it sounded familiar, because, yes, I knew mosca, and it meant . . . Fuck. I was cooking with a flyswatter. Hey, it looked like a spatula, I muttered. Rachel, who could accelerate from zero to gasping and teary-eyed in a matter of seconds, paused in the path and started laughing so hard that she was barely producing sound. I turned to find her doubled over, heaving, tears coating her cheeks. I had been mortified about the flyswatter, but I no longer felt embarrassed. Just happy. Happy that I was here with Rachel, this woman who was so full of life, so dynamic, and so completely with me, even if I had stirred dead flies into our marinara sauce. After a solid minute of laughing, nearly composing herself, then losing her shit all over again, Rachel caught her breath. I kissed her, and when I pulled back, I had the overwhelming urge to tell her I loved her. But I wasn't sure those were the right words or, for that matter, what they even meant. What I did know was that I was leaving town in two weeks, and two weeks didn't feel like enough. Not at all. My mind drifted to a conversation we'd had earlier that day about backpacking and its pitfalls. Rachel had mentioned that while she couldn't see herself traveling that way ever again, she had for years dreamed of biking across the States. When I asked why, she shrugged and said, I don't know. It just kind of sounds fun. I waited for one, two, five seconds, and then she added, in concise, bullet-pointed afterthoughts, that she (a) biked everywhere in Portland but had never ridden farther than forty miles, (b) hadn't really seen the Midwest or the Plains, and (c) figured that riding the Rockies would give her really tight buns. I got the impression she'd produced those bullets on the spot. And I knew she'd now repeat them verbatim. This was how Rachel made decisions. Clearly. Finally. I turned and started down the path, and Rachel fell in behind me. After trying to come up with a clever segue, and failing, I looked over my shoulder, and not breaking stride, said, So, this bike trip. Is it really something you're thinking about? Yeah, I guess. She wiped the final tears from her eyes. I'll finish school next May, and I was hoping to maybe go then. Sounds amazing. I've been thinking about taking that kind of trip forever. Depending on one's conception of space and time, this was true. I had indeed been thinking about it incessantly since Rachel first mentioned it, twenty-five minutes earlier. What if we did it together? I asked, still walking. Well, it would be nice to have someone carry my gear. And, yeah, of course I'd love to ride with you. For the rest of the walk and the bus ride back to Xela, and during my final weeks in town, we batted the idea around. We figured we'd start in my rural Wisconsin hometown and head to at least toward Portland, Oregon, where Rachel had grown up. We weren't sure which states we'd ride through or when we'd leave or what gear we'd need. The details could be worked out later. The important thing was to have an idea, a commitment, and this was it. Time came, we said good-bye. As I sat on my Wisconsin-bound flight, I was already missing her but thrilled I had something to hold on to. I would follow Rachel into this bike trip, and she would pull me westward, over lakes and plains and mountains, over a twenty-five-hundred-mile bridge, toward something new, something shared. And when we reached the horizon, breathless and ecstatic, we would have solved its mysteries and begun searching for new ones, on new horizons.