

KEEP THE CHANGE

by Sarah Raz Photograph by Greg Siple



NO ONE IS EVER LEFT UNCHANGED BY A BIKE RIDE ACROSS THE U.S. Minds are made up, paths become clear, and whole parts of yourself that you didn't even know existed become obvious. By the time Ryan Conaughty visited us in Missoula in 2008 during his east to west TransAmerica ride, he'd already learned a great deal about the person he wished to become. This is his story.

"Riding my bicycle across the country has been the greatest thing I've ever done in my life. Along the way, I cliff jumped in Missouri, got chased by a three-legged pit bull in Kentucky, rode all night and into the dawn in Kansas, and saw fire dancers. I slept in a cabin on the side of a mountain in Colorado, had a grizzly bear sniff my tent at the base of the Tetons in Wyoming, and swam naked in a river in Montana.

"I now know pain like I'd never felt and happiness that can't be described. I've experienced the kindness of strangers and I've seen the mind-numbing poverty of low-income America. I had never ridden a bike for more than 20 miles before my tour and I'd still consider myself a beginner to bike touring. Kentucky almost destroyed my dreams with the 103-degree temperatures in the shade. But I drank bourbon next to a river under a Missouri sky with perfect stars and I loved every breath I took out there.

"Since my tour, I'm working on getting my Master's degree in English in creative writing, inspired from my journal entries about my TransAmerica journey. I am trying to become a teacher in the hopes that I can show others the beauty of bike travel. Of course, there isn't a day that passes that I don't dream about being back on the road again. Happiness, to me, is to get on my bike and pedal."

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