“I SWEAR I SAW JACK JOHNSON AT WEIR CREEK HOT SPRINGS IN THE CLEARWATER NATIONAL FOREST,” wrote Alivia Michalski. “When I rode out in the morning, there was a car with Hawaii license plates. I know it was him.” The 22-year-old from Lincoln, Nebraska, wrote this while visiting the Adventure Cycling headquarters on July 13, 2019, during a solo tour from Astoria, Oregon, to Yorktown, Virginia, on the TransAmerica Trail. “I also encountered two farmers who lectured me on why I shouldn’t label myself as an environmentalist in eastern Oregon. After calling me an ‘earth muffin,’ which I quite like, they fed me and offered me a campsite with their family.”

As a young woman traveling alone, Michalski received countless lectures on the danger her trip put her in. “Rarely a day passed on my bike tour without someone commenting on the fact that I was a woman travelling by myself,” she wrote. “Sometimes I received supportive, positive comments coupled with food or a bed for the night. Other times I got fear-based warnings of mysterious murderers and wolves (I would actually love to see a wolf). Something that had never seemed to be an issue to me was brought up on a daily basis.” One such encounter occurred as Michalski dried off in the sun after a rainy morning, relaxing on a cliff overlooking the Pacific Ocean, when an older couple in a car pulled up nearby to take pictures. The woman, after noticing Alivia was alone, asked her if she carried a personal weapon and proceeded to lecture the young cyclist when she admitted her pepper spray was on her bike some 20 feet away. “We could have just pulled over and taken you away in our car!” the older woman exclaimed. Michalski nodded and smiled, and the couple drove away. At that moment she noticed a bird flying out above the ocean. “They’ll shoot you down, little birdie,” she called out, mimicking the tone of the older woman. “Don’t fly up there! They’ll shoot you down.”

“I stood up and brushed the gravel off my legs,” she wrote. “I am going to ride. I understand that seeing a young woman traveling by herself evokes fear in many people, but that worried couple could have offered to fill my water bottles — or anything more constructive than telling me not to do something that I am inevitably going to do. Ignore the warnings and follow your gut. Being a woman is no excuse to deny yourself an adventure.”

Bird Will Fly
PHOTOGRAPH BY MAXTON CAPLANIDES  STORY BY GAGE POORE

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