

RIDER TO WRITER: COMPOSING A BICYCLE NARRATIVE

Gretchen Stahlman

Critical Paper and Program Bibliography
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the MFA (Master of Fine
Arts) in Creative Writing, Pacific Lutheran University, August 2011

Rider to Writer: Composing a Bicycle Narrative

I met my bike, Sally, in late summer of 2009. She's a road bike, sleek and smooth, and when I ride, we glide along as one. For the past two years, we've worked hard as I pursued triathlons (swim, bike, then run) and duathlons (run, bike, then run again), always looking to get faster. But the bike rides I loved the most were not the ones where I was fastest, but instead those rides that took me to places I had never discovered by car, to sights I had missed when they whizzed by the windshield, to smells that were diminished by the air conditioning and rolled up windows. I find that I want to go places but to get there with my eyes wide open to what lies around me.

Which leads, of course, to writing. The journey is not complete until I describe it in words so that others may see what I see, smell what I smell, and feel what I feel. My journeys, so far, have been short: four or five hours on the bike, seven hours at most. I want to move beyond that, to go farther, to explore more, to take a ride that lasts for days. As much as I prepare physically and logically for that kind of ride, I also need to prepare for the writing of a long-distance bike journey. Reading stories of bike rides leads me to discover what exactly a bicycle narrative is, how one might be composed, and what should I do, or not do, when I write one of my own.

Bicycle Narrative versus Travelogue

In the realm of bicycle nonfiction, the vast majority of publications concern the how-to and training needed to ride a bicycle long distances. Another large category of cycling publications are about planning and executing the journey: maps, routes, places to stay.

The smallest category is the bicycle narrative: the story of getting from here to there on bicycle. Those narratives can be further divided into those that are about the physical journey and experiences, and those that are about the personal epiphanies and transformations that occur when a bicycle journey is undertaken.

In *Where the Pavement Ends*, Erika Warmbrunn rides south from Russia, across Mongolia, China, and finishes her journey in Vietnam. She is detailed in her descriptions of her experiences, the places she goes, the things she does, the people she meets. At age 26, Warmbrunn is primed for tremendous personal growth and insight; i.e., her journey can easily be a rite of passage into full adulthood. And yet her escapades rarely transform from experience to personal meaning.

When Warmbrunn reaches China, she spends a few days in Beijing and, as so often happens on journeys, finds other Western travelers to pal around with. She becomes particularly enamored of a man from Chicago named Kirk. They make loose plans to meet in the south of China:

He joked that if I rode fast enough, I could catch up to them. "We can visit the terra-cotta warriors in Xian together," he laughed. It was a laugh that would resonate across the next seven weeks and 2,700 kilometers. (138)

As she cycles south, she declines invitations for detours or extended stays that can possibly cause her to miss the rendezvous in Xian. Warmbrunn races across China, pedaling into the night when she would otherwise ride more safely during daylight hours. She observes her environment but part of her mind is focused on meeting up with the man she had spent only a few days with. She reports her experiences the same as before the meeting, although with a sense of urgency in moving on, yet she never fully explains

why this infant relationship is such a driving force for her. In her narrative, she does not reveal enough of her past, both of her life and her relationships, for the reader to understand what compels her to rush her solo adventure for the chance of meeting up with a man she barely knows.

Warmbrunn and Kirk spend a few days together, then she continues on her journey, claiming that her longing for him is instead a desire for "the ease and comfort of a little world in which I had a specific identity. It was about being a part of something, about belonging, about being two—that odd societal definition that comes with being a pair" (189). However, the reader is left with the suspicion that there is more to the story, a deeper reason why she races through China to meet Kirk, why she sets aside her own interests in favor of the rendezvous, and then makes an easy, non-emotional departure from him to resume her own journey. While it is not necessarily desirable for her to go into detail of their time together or what it is that attracts her so strongly to him—after all, she met other Americans in her journey but did not let them overrule her journey—the narrative would benefit from the self-reflection on her own foibles. Instead she keeps tightly to the journey, letting us see through her eyes without letting us under her skin.

In Jim Malusa's *Into Thick Air*, the narrative is also focused on the journey, experiences, and people he meets. However, his narrative becomes personal in a very understated manner. When he starts his series of rides to the lowest point on each continent, he is married but he and his wife do not yet have children. At the start of his second journey, this time to Asia, his wife is pregnant. By the time he leaves on his third journey, a ride through Europe, his son is crawling, and the boy is a toddler when Malusa leaves for South America. By the time he takes off for Africa, he has an infant daughter in

addition to his son. On his final journey to Death Valley in North America, he cuts his journey to four days, venturing not far from his home in Tucson, because of the impact on his family. From the time he starts his quest to the time he completes it, Malusa becomes a father, so he begins to perceive the world as a dangerous place. He senses his own mortality as he has not before.

Just before leaving, Malusa receives a contract from Discovery Online (the online publisher of his daily updates), which he wants to review with his friend Jim Boyer, a climber and law student. Instead of reviewing the contract, they go mountain-biking, drinking, and talking into the dark of evening. Malusa isn't worried because he believes there is all the time in the world.

Two days later, amid the pines on the north slope of the Santa Catalina Mountains, a piece of climbing gear gave way under Jim's weight. He wasn't particularly heavy, but he was a hundred feet above an outcrop of granite knobs. . . .

I was horrified—at the loss, and the way he was lost. I'd long been afraid of heights. For the next month I would wake from falling dreams with a gasp. It wasn't insomnia; it was cold fear and hot tears.

Then it was October, and spring was surely waking the southern tip of South America. At the airport Sonya held Rudy in her arms and number two in her womb. Nobody had to say *be careful*. (166)

Malusa does not dwell on Boyer's death although he is plagued by dreams of Boyer falling throughout his journey through South America. Malusa does not expound greatly on his own family but references them sufficiently that the reader knows they

form the background of his thoughts. Malusa changes on the page over the course of his journeys: whereas before his quest Malusa is intent on adventure and wandering, after he has children and after Jim Boyer's death his focus and tone change. The journey that Malusa takes us on is more than a travelogue of places, sights, sounds, history, and interesting people. He is very present in the writing, letting us watch him change as the journey unfolds.

Purpose of the Bicycle Narrative

The question to why a person writes a bicycle narrative may be as unanswerable as is why a person undertakes a bicycle journey in the first place. Rarely is the question answered within bike narratives, although writers might mention circumstances that mask the calling, if that's what it is: the desire to go for a once-in-a-lifetime ride before settling down, or riding as a work assignment, or recreating a past experience. But at the heart of setting out for a destination is the desire simply to go, to see, to try, to be in a different way than one can be when at home.

Erika Warmbrunn answers inquiries about the inspiration for her ride through Mongolia, China, and Vietnam in *Where the Pavement Ends: One Woman's Bicycle Trip Through Mongolia, China and Vietnam*:

The things I wanted to happen were things that only happen if you don't plan them. The things I wanted to find were things you can only find if you aren't looking for them, things, contrary to my nature, that I couldn't put on a list and check off as I went. (151)

Warmbrunn undertakes the journey in order to discover herself and find her limits. She wants to be a different person, one who relies more on serendipity, less on

checklists and plans and schedules. However, throughout her narrative, she is always firmly in control of where and when she is going. The bicycle, because of its very nature to put the rider in greater touch with the environment, opens up opportunities for Warmbrunn to go with the flow instead of constantly pursuing control of her environment.

David Byrne, in *Bicycle Diaries*, rides to learn about the places he visits in his work as a musician and artist. Starting in the late 1980s, he brings a folding bike (or later, a bike that can be easily disassembled, boxed up, transported, then reassembled). He looks for opportunities to ride in foreign cities as he does in New York City, where he makes his home.

I felt more connected to the life on the streets than I would have inside a car or in some form of public transport: I could stop whenever I wanted to; it was often (very often) faster than a car or taxi for getting from point A to point B; and I didn't have to follow any set route. The same exhilaration, as the air and street life whizzed by, happened again in each town. It was, for me, addictive. (13)

Byrne's journeys are not the long-distance, time-intensive journeys that other writers often choose. His rides are often short, roughly an hour or less, taken when the opportunity presents itself. He rides with not so much of a sense of self-exploration but rather as a discovery of environments, both foreign and in New York City. As a result of his short, often daily rides, he has become an urban bicycling advocate, working to make American cities as bike friendly as European cities.

In *Bicycling Beyond the Divide: Two Journeys into the West*, Daryl Farmer undertakes two journeys, both of self-discovery. The first takes place when he is twenty years old, after quitting college, moving back home, and working three part-time mundane jobs.

I felt an anxiety I didn't understand, a longing for something I couldn't define. So I did what countless other lost young men have done in this country. I headed west. (xiii)

Farmer heads west from his home in Colorado, looping up to Washington State, down the coast of California, then across Nevada back home. He keeps a journal during that journey so he has a record of not only where he went and what he saw and did, but also of who he was.

Twenty years later, he feels a middle-age sense of dissatisfaction that he believes can be cured by making the same journey again. His body has adapted too well to a sedentary life, but, more importantly, he has lost his sense of self and a relationship to the West that he relished during his first journey. He sets out to make the same journey again, following the same path as before, even riding the same bike.

What I fear is that all I learned on that journey is lost. I'm a different person now, thank God, but I want to feel the road beneath my tires again. I want to apply what I've learned in the last twenty years to the journey, and I want to apply the journey to the next phase of my life. In February I will turn forty. My longing for the West has never diminished. To think of that summer on the bicycle is to dream myself home, and home is an endless space, a roof of big sky, a bed of dry earth.

I've decided to retrace that route, to ride it again. (xiv-xv)

In contrast to other riders who want to explore every bicycle-accessible place on Earth, Farmer makes only two bicycle journeys in his life and it is the same journey repeated. However he is a different person for the second journey and that shows in his narrative. In his book, Farmer focuses on the current ride but reflects just enough on the ride twenty years past to give the reader a reflection of who he used to be, i.e., the self he wants to recapture. Just as the ride twenty years ago changed him, he sets out on this journey to find the changes he needs for the next twenty years of his life.

Destinations

The decision of where to ride most often comes from a desire within. An idea, a place, an adventure strikes a chord in the writer and the idea grows until it becomes an obsession that turns into a plan.

In *Where the Pavement Ends*, Erika Warmbrunn's initial decision to bike through Mongolia, China, and Vietnam occurs simply because these places exist, because she has never there before, and because she has a free flight to Russia where she can start her journey. Warmbrunn's fluency in Russian has taken her to Russia several times and, through these trips, she has developed a fascination about Mongolia to the south. As the journey progresses, another reason emerges:

By the time I had gotten on the train in Ulaanbaatar, it had become about doing what I said I would do, about making the idea reality. It had become about keeping the daily experience new, about not letting myself get too comfortable, about continuing to immerse myself in the cleansing, healing

powers of the unknown. So now, even though the mirage of Saigon shimmered occasionally in the distance . . . the days—the hours and minutes—were about China, about the thrills and challenges of new words and new customs, about the tiny triumphs of learning a new way of life, about knowing how to sift the cold ashes out of the stove and add more coal after the teacher and his uncle had said good-night, about washing my feet in a plastic basin, about heading to the restaurant across the street and ordering a big plate of vegetables. (151-152)

In *Into Thick Air: Biking to the Bellybutton of Six Continents*, Jim Malusa finds his quest by perusing *The Times Atlas of the World*. He loves maps and, while casually studying unknown places, he discovers a lush green oval set in the middle of the yellow Takla Makan desert. The towns in the region are “oases, and the one called Turpan sat within a deep green oval. That shade of green appeared nowhere else on the map, because no other place was like Turpan—it sunk five hundred feet below sea level” (2). Fascinated by this green spot amid the map’s brown areas, Malusa and his wife bike to Turpan together. They travel simply out of curiosity; the thought of biking to the lowest point on every continent has not yet occurred to Malusa. When he conceives of the quest, his enthusiasm for out-of-the-way places is contagious and the reader wants him to take the journeys too, and to take the reader along for the ride.

Down was better than up, and it was only a matter of time before Turpan's burnt hills and friendly desolation gave me an idea: why not visit the lowest points on the planet? The bellybutton of each continent. The

scheme had two golden attributes: I wouldn't need insulated underwear, and I could ride my bicycle. (3)

Malusa's work for Discovery Online brings his idea to fruition. When Discovery Online pitches an idea to Malusa of dropping him off at an unknown location in the world, then watching him make his way home, he pitches a counter idea: biking to the lowest point (i.e., the bellybutton) of each continent, except Antarctica. Discovery agrees to support him on the first journey with a "we'll see" about the other continents. This moves Malusa's journey from the realm of idea to the beginning of a quest.

Journey Duration

From David Byrne's brief explorations to Annie Londonderry's epic 15-month sojourn, the length of time spent traveling varies from writer to writer.

In *Around the World on Two Wheels: Annie Londonderry's Extraordinary Ride*, by Peter Zheutlin, Annie Londonderry took an alleged bet that she could circumnavigate the globe in 15 months. Starting in Boston, she rides to New York City, then to Chicago, then backtracks to New York before boarding a ship for Europe. She spends several weeks being feted in France before continuing on, partially by bicycle, but also possibly by train, then sails to India with a few stopping points in Asia before landing in San Francisco. The remaining months are spent biking east across the Southwest, Midwest, and finally back to Boston, although the speed at which she travels suggests that she might have been covering some of this distance by train. Her trip is funded solely by the money she raises during the journey. To this end, Londonderry sells advertising on her

bicycle and clothing, arranges for speaking engagements about her journey in the cities she visits, and accepts accommodations and gifts whenever possible.

On the other end of the time-spent spectrum, David Byrne's journeys are often only an hour, sometimes an afternoon, but never longer than a day.

I found that biking around for just a few hours a day—or even just to and from work—helps keep me sane. People can lose their bearings when they travel, unmoored from their family physical surroundings, and that somehow loosens some psychic connections as well . . . I myself find that the physical sensation of self-powered transport coupled with the feeling of self-control endemic to this two-wheeled situation is nicely empowering and reassuring, even if temporary, and it is enough to center me for the rest of the day. (16)

Correspondingly, Byrne's entries in his "Bicycle Diary" are fairly short, under 2000 words. He often uses the sights encountered as a launching point for a discussion of ideas or memories of people encountered, often mentioning the bicycle journey only in the opening paragraph of each entry.

In *Travels with Willie*, Willie Weir prefers his journeys to be as long as possible. He would find Byrne's short journeys to be uninteresting, as Weir questions whether anyone would be interested in "Columbus' voyage in school if it had only taken him four days to sail to the New World? Would authors still be penning books about Lewis and Clark if their expedition had spanned a weekend? I think not." This sets the reader up for the expectation of a long journey, and Weir delivers. (41)

Bicycle Expertise

Although the bike is the center of each journey, it is rarely mentioned in bicycle narratives. When the writer does make mention of the bike, it is usually the first few pages of a longer narrative. The writer notes the type of bike, usually a mountain bike or a touring bike, occasionally the quantity and configuration of bags, and their contents. This information is not provided as instructional or as a suggested packing list, but instead so that the reader will understand the parameters and limitations of travel.

In *Over the Hills: A Midlife Escape Across America by Bicycle*, David Lamb is not an experienced bike-tourist. He smokes and drinks and has never ridden more than a leisurely Sunday afternoon ride.

The bicycle I chose to carry me to California was a Trek 520, forest green, American-made, with twenty-one gears and a sleek, handsome appearance, not at all like the fat-tired, aluminum-coated Schwinn I had ridden as a teenager and relegated to a basement closet when I turned old enough to drive. (6)

For Lamb, choosing the bike was the easy part, although his lack of experience and fitness generate worry in the reader about whether or not he can complete the journey. His lack of experience and self-knowledge sets up a pleasing suspense for the reader, not just about the completion of the journey, but about exactly what sort of awareness Lamb will develop.

Once he acquires the bike, Lamb must decide what items he will take with him. His initial choices reflect his comfortable, white-collar life:

It was the ultimate test of reducing life's necessities to the bare minimum. . . . Reluctantly I returned the pint of Seagram's V.O. to my bar. I removed a hardback copy of Cormac McCarthy's *The Crossing*, two of five notebooks, the nail clippers, three rolls of film, an extra pair of chinos, the three-pound tent, the yellow rain gear (on the premise that if it rained I was going to get wet anyway) and, ludicrously enough, a pack of gum. What remained registered thirty-one pounds on my bathroom scale. (24-25)

It is not long into the journey that Lamb discovers the difficulty of pedaling up hills bearing the extra 31 pounds. Popular cycling knowledge indicates that one pound on the flat is worth two pounds on the rise: soon Lamb discovers what that really means when he tries to ride an extra 62 pounds up even slight grades, which in turn leads the reader to understand more about Lamb as he deals with his physical limitations.

Cyclists, whether riding for an hour or on an extended tour, expect a flat tire now and then. Occasionally, the chain will drop off the chainring but a chain is easily slipped back on. Sometimes a more severe issue arises. In *Riding Outside the Lines*, Joe Kurmaskie is a highly experienced cyclist who rides all over the world. When logging so many miles, it is inevitable that problems arise. When riding in Australia, Kurmaskie meets up with another cyclist, Norbu, who develops a problem with his chain that must eventually be dealt with on the road.

Link removal is delicate work. Even with the right tool, if you push the post too far and it falls out, you will spend the better part of an afternoon trying to get it back in place. Thing is, I'm the guy to call if you need a car

demolished with a sledgehammer or fish loaded off a truck—not detail work. Norbu appeared to be cut from the same cloth. We huddled over the chain for the better part of an hour, cursing and sweating as we tried to turn it into something resembling useful equipment. (120)

Kurmaskie deals with mechanical issues with humor, even situations that others might complain or worry about. His tone suggests that he is easygoing and nothing much upsets him, an important trait for touring cyclists. Difficulties with equipment never end Kurmaskie's journey prematurely; to the contrary, problems often provide for a good laugh.

Maps

In *Bicycling Beyond the Divide*, Daryl Farmer includes not one but two maps, one for the journey he undertakes at age 20 and another for the journey at age 40. The map that precedes the Prologue shows the route he rode in 1985. The map that shows his 2005 journey is after the conclusion of the book. Although he sets out to repeat the exact same route he rode as a young man, events occur, such as his bike being stolen on the second journey, that alter his course so that he is forced to use standard transportation until his bike is recovered. Also, Farmer meets his wife in San Francisco in the midst of his cycling journey in Oregon; he flies to San Francisco, spends a week with her, during which his bicycle is miraculously recovered just in time for his vacation to end and his ride to resume. If the map of the second journey appeared in the front of the book with the original map, some of the wonder of the second journey would be diminished because the reader would know that he didn't complete the ride exactly as before.

In *Annie Londonderry*, Peter Zheutlin does not include a map. Possibly because the absolute specifics of Londonderry's journey are unknown, especially when she isn't in the United States. However, a map would be a benefit to readers even for her travels in the United States. A map with dates of her appearances in various cities along the way would be interesting so that readers could make their own decisions about whether or not she actually bikes the distances or if she hops a train as the author suspects.

Taking Notes

Most authors choose to write their complete story after returning from a journey, keeping copious notes each evening about the day's adventure.

Jim Malusa is the exception. He writes and uploads daily dispatches to his sponsor, Discovery Online, who equips him with a laptop, digital camera, and satellite phone that he carries in his packs in addition to camping gear. Each night after making camp, he writes of the day's journey and uploads it to Discovery Online, thus creating a column of his journey as it occurs. This is surely both a blessing and a curse: even if he is tired at the end of a long or hard day of cycling, he still must produce and transmit polished prose. However, at the end of the journey, he has more than scribbled notes and snapshots to use to recreate his journey in book form. He can shape the columns into the essays that make up his collection, adding more historical content and personal reflection to flesh out the prose into full-fledged essays.

The disadvantage to creating daily polished prose is that he must carry the laptop, camera, and large satellite phone while riding, adding extra weight to the supplies he needs to live: food, water, clothing, and a sleeping bag. When he seeks the lowest place in

the Middle East, he runs into another problem: the laptop, camera, and satellite phone are the same tools that spies and terrorists carry. He must get these suspicious items through customs. In Cairo:

The notarized forms for my gear emitted a glow of authority that impressed the customs men at the airport. The camera wasn't a problem. Nobody asked if I was going to bicycle in the nude. But the satellite telephone caused a minor sensation. It looked like an office phone in a folding box the size of a laptop computer; the lid was the antenna. The device had power enough to talk to a satellite flowing 24,000 miles above the equator. Warning stickers with lightning-bolt graphics suggested that the user shouldn't point the antenna at children or reproductive organs or anything you hoped would last a long time. (62)

Malusa eventually gets his phone back. When he encounters this situation again in Russia, he keeps his equipment hidden rather than risk having it found during searches at customs. This approach is successful, a good thing for readers.

Erika Warmbrunn keeps a handwritten journal as she pedals through Mongolia, China, and Vietnam. For most riders who are not professional writers, this is the mode of note-taking most often used. Warmbrunn wrote *Where the Pavement Ends* about ten years after undertaking her journey, presumably working through the notes she gathers during the trip. When writing a journey in hindsight, there is ample opportunity for additional research—to add historical references or more detailed descriptions of the natural environment or culture of the indigenous people. However, Warmbrunn rarely

does this, telling her tale strictly from the things she observes, explaining the environment or traditions only when they come within her realm of contact:

Now, from a cafeteria-style cubbyhole in the wall came a stir-fry of mutton, cabbage, and noodles, and a bowl of weak, stale bullion. The stir-fry was bland but good. I wasn't sure what to do with the bullion. The woman, who seemed to be waitress, manager, and for all I knew, cook, had brought a fork along with the food, but no spoon. I decided it was probably all right to drink straight from the small bowl, as from a large teacup in a Chinese restaurant. Tea. Of course. It wasn't soup at all, it was tea. Salty Mongolian tea. (28)

Warmbrunn neglects to do post-ride research about the salty tea so that she can explain to readers exactly what the tea is, how it is made, and what role it plays in the lives of the indigenous people.

Daryl Farmer keeps a paper journal on both the first and second versions of his bike journey. He uses the original notebook as a guide for the repeated journey, carrying both the old and the new journals with him.

Then, the writer's worst imagined event occurs:

At the foot of the bleachers, turned top side up, lay my helmet. I stood looking down at it. Weird. Had it been that windy in the night?

And then I looked over at the shed where I'd parked my bike. I stood staring. I closed my eyes tight, tried to shake off the sleep. I opened them, not wanting to accept the obvious truth.

My bicycle was gone. (220)

A non-writer would be aghast that his bike and gear is gone. A writer frets about the lost journal. Farmer reports the theft to the police, then seeks solace in a church service, then finally he mentions the journal in his narrative:

There were larger problems in the world—natural disasters, poverty, brutality, war, terrorism. Every kind of heartbreak imaginable can be seen on any given week on CNN. A forty-year-old man losing a bicycle was not a tragedy. And yes, that bicycle had been with me for over twenty years, had gained for me a certain identity, a definition I had relied upon. My original trip was an accomplishment often worn on my sleeve. No matter how unhealthy and sedentary my lifestyle became, I could always recall that summer. The bike, though, could be replaced. What I mourned more than anything was the loss of my journal. (224)

In *Bicycling Beyond the Divide*, Farmer uses the incident as an opportunity for reflection. The actual loss of hardware is nothing; as a matter of fact, he's likely to end up with a much better bike. But the true loss is in the one part that is unique to him: his journal. His bike and journal are eventually recovered so his journey and bike narrative, gratefully, can continue.

Journeys by Others

In *Two Wheels North: Bicycling the West Coast in 1909*, Evelyn McDaniel Gibb recreates a journey that her father took from Santa Rosa, California, to the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition in Seattle, Washington. Together with his friend Ray Francisco, Victor McDaniel covers a distance of almost a thousand miles in 54 days. The young men, fresh

out of high school, ride secondhand bikes over roads ranging from paved to dirt, sometimes nothing more than a dusty rut. They walk their bikes over roads paved with corn stalks and over corduroy roads made from logs laid side by side. Where roads do not exist, they follow the railroad tracks, including over high trestles and through a tunnel where they meet an oncoming train. The boys send letters back to Ernest Finley, the editor of the Santa Rose Press Democrat, who prints them in his newspaper.

Gibb reproduces her father's journey using those newspaper reports, the picture postcards he sent to family, and stories the elderly McDaniel tells her. She uses first person narrative, attempting to write the story not just from Vic McDaniel's point of view but also "with dialog drawing on my memory of his speech patterns and penchant for word pictures." Gibb makes this language choice because she believes this most accurately portrays her father's "excitements and fears."

"You trampin' to 'Frisco?" The pinstriper sat down next to me, puffing on that stogie.

I inched away. "Wheel trampin', not train trampin'."

"Yeah? Don't see your bicycle." He looked around.

"Out in the hayfield," I said, then wondered why I told him.

"Stacks are fine bedding down all right. I'd say you're better off on wheels than rails. Fellas running the trains these days are mighty picky-minded. Lines out of 'Frisco, Kansas country, none hold with folks doin' other sorts of business. Ordinary men like you and me, they're quick to chuck us out. Bicycle, now that's a smart one." (22)

Use of language such as "trampin'," "on wheels," and "fellas" reflect the vernacular of the time. In addition, such language creates the character of the narrator who is young and would likely use colorful slang and lends to the authenticity of the tale. If the reader is unfamiliar with the terminology being used, it can usually be determined from the context.

Gibb writes her father's journey very convincingly. She includes more than was available in the original newspaper stories and postcards home. Although she is clearly the author, she works collaboratively with her father, each day reading to him what she writes the day before so that he "would then amend, add on, scratch out: "That's just not how it was," or "I forgot to mention . . ." Through this method, she discovers stories that can be yielded only from him since he has not written about certain incidents, explaining, "Heroes in those days, well, it wouldn't do to admit fear or uncertainty or a lot of other things, not for folks back home to read about" (viii).

Gibb includes her father's confessions of fear or disappointment, desire for beer, and lusting after young women, which certainly does not appear in the original published accounts. Despite the story being told in first-person in language the protagonist would have used, the story feels told, not lived. The reader never fears for the boys' safety and always believes that they will make it to the exposition despite all the obstacles encountered. Even when Ray falls ill and takes the train to his uncle's farm 100 miles away while Vic rides there on his own, the reader never feels an emotional impact of Ray's departure or Vic's fear. Possibly because it is not written by the person who takes the journey, the book contains no reflection that comes from quiet moments on the road,

especially those moments when the body is spent from fatigue and beaten down by the elements.

The story might be more effective if the author entered into it. For example, the author could show the gathering of the story from her father, showing him as an old man contrasted against his youthfulness in the adventure. This gives the author an opportunity to reflect on her father's life and on what this journey means to him as he progresses from optimistic young man to seasoned old man. Was this the greatest thing he ever does? If so, what is the effect of having such an extraordinary journey—disappointment that nothing else ever came close to this experience, or gratitude that he seized this wonderful opportunity? How does this journey affect his life when he returns from the trip, ten years later, twenty years later, fifty years hence? Who does he become because of this journey?

The author could reflect on her own life, whether she wishes to take such a journey, any regrets that she may have for not doing so, what effects taking such a journey might have had. She could reflect on how her father's journey affects her life and how her life compares to his. Does she measure up or does she fall short?

Peter Zheutlin attempts to uncover and relate the journey of Annie Kerchopsky in *Annie Londonderry: Around the World on Two Wheels* who, in 1894-95 under the name of Annie Londonderry, claims to ride her bicycle around the world. Londonderry never writes a book using her own story as she claims she will, so the only words in her own voice are newspaper articles that appear when her journey is complete. Using this story and doing extensive research, Zheutlin tries to find the dates, routes, and details about Londonderry's journey. However, as Londonderry travels from place to place, she

changes her story to fit her audience or perhaps just on a whim, so Zheutlin cannot distinguish which incidents actually occurred.

Annie often lived on the edge of reality and fiction. Simply put: when it suited her, she made up parts of her own story. Her real goal wasn't to circle the globe on a bicycle, but to become rich and famous in the attempt, or at least in what appeared to be an attempt. (80)

Throughout the book, Zheutlin tries to figure out what Londonderry did, where she went, how she accomplished her journey. Perhaps he believes that these things will reveal her to the reader, but it does not succeed. It reads like a dossier, one gathered through a lot of skepticism. Through the unsympathetic, scrutinizing eye, it feels as if Zheutlin doesn't like Annie Londonderry very much. He certainly doesn't have much respect for what she accomplished.

But after her story is finished, he tells his own story that explains why he has pursued the history of Annie Londonderry like a zealot:

A few weeks after I started my research, I was diagnosed with thyroid cancer. I was nearing fifty, and although this disease is generally treatable, my deepening obsession with Annie and my cancer diagnosis were more closely linked than I understood at the time. . . . Through family history we seek our connection to the past and the future and an appreciation of our place in the long human chain.

After my cancer surgery and treatment, the bicycle was my path back to health and a sense of well-being. . . . That I was finding my solace, and my strength, on two wheels, as Annie had, connected me to her in

ways that I could not have imagined before. . . . In different ways, Annie and I each found freedom on two wheels and used the bicycle to exercise control over our own destinies. For both of us, the bicycle became an implement of power. (167)

Zheutlin spends 73 pages of a 245-page book explaining his research and listing the references he uses. It is detailed and painstaking and, for the most part, unnecessary for the reader. He loves researching and provides a reference for every statement in case anyone doubts what he writes. “The process of resurrecting Annie’s story was endlessly fascinating because every tiny shard of evidence had to be held up and examined to see where else it might lead. It was, in essence, one long scavenger hunt and it was really great fun to pursue Annie across time and space” (176).

In the Afterword, Zheutlin explains how he came upon Londonderry's story, why it appeals to him, and how he conducted his research. None of the passion exhibited in the Afterword is apparent in the body of the book. Londonderry's story would be more interesting if Zheutlin allowed it to unfold bit by bit. The reader could experience the joy of his discovery instead of the cold reporting of facts, especially as he casts doubt on their veracity. Revealing her story as he discovers it would create a sense of suspense that leads the reader to care more about Londonderry as Zheutlin discovers his great-grand-aunt. His discovery becomes the reader’s discovery. Instead, he uncovers information, then reports it as coldly as a newspaper article, and, ironically, far more colorlessly than the sensationalized newspaper articles he quotes about Londonderry.

Conclusion

In 2011, Sally and I will undertake our first multi-day, long distance bicycle journey.

Along the way, I will watch the road unfold, count the barns, notice the changing air as we cycle north, and then I will attempt to write of my experiences. I will rely on what I've learned from the bicycle narratives I have read:

- Keep the narrative personal so that it's compelling and not a travelogue.
- Reflect on why I want to make a long distance journey, including revealing who I am now and who I hope to be at its final destination.
- Decide how long the journey should last.
- Select a destination that is important to me, one that I can explain why it is meaningful.
- Practice changing a tire and putting my chain back on, but don't worry too much about becoming an expert in bicycle mechanics.
- Take a map; mark my stops and interesting observations on the map.
- Consider writing the stories of others who may ride with me.
- Take notes along the way. Or write short unpolished narratives each evening. Write when I can.

The bicycle narrative is as varied as the riders themselves, and writers themselves are too. Through examining their journeys and the manner in which they write about those quests, I shall be better able to write a bicycle narrative of my own.

Works Cited

- Byrne, David. *Bicycle Diaries*. New York: Viking, 2009. iBook edition. 27 August 2010.
- Farmer, Daryl. *Bicycling beyond the Divide: Two Journeys into the West*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2008. Print.
- Gibb, Evelyn McDaniel, Victor McDaniel, and Ray Francisco. *Two Wheels North: Cycling the West Coast in 1909*. Corvallis: Oregon State UP, 2000. Print.
- Kurmaskie, Joe. *Riding outside the Lines: International Incidents and Other Misadventures with the Metal Cowboy*. New York: Three Rivers, 2003. Print.
- Lamb, David. *Over the Hills: a Midlife Escape across America by Bicycle*. New York: Crown, 1996. Print.
- Malusa, Jim. *Into Thick Air: Biking to the Bellybutton of Six Continents*. San Francisco: Sierra Club, 2008. Print.
- Warmbrunn, Erika. *Where the Pavement Ends: One Woman's Bicycle Trip through Mongolia, China & Vietnam*. Seattle, WA: Mountaineers, 2001. Print.
- Weir, Willie. *Travels with Willie: Adventure Cyclist*. Seattle: Pineleaf Productions, 2009. Print.
- Zheutlin, Peter. *Around the World on Two Wheels: Anne Londonderry's Extraordinary Ride*. New York, NY: Citadel 2007. Nook edition. 19 November 2010.

Chapter 7: Composing Narrative Texts. The narrative writing standards are written in a way to support all the genres of writing. By following the twelve levels of development, teachers can produce lesson plans that enhance student's writing ability across the board. The standards emphasize skills a writer will need to know to write any type of text. PDF | This paper is a review study in dynamics and rider control of bicycles. The first part gives a brief overview of the modelling of the dynamics of | Find, read and cite all the research you need on ResearchGate. A complete review of bicycle models and dynamical issues can be found in Meijaard et al. The model is composed of two components—a describing function and remnant. The describing function, which for a linear system is identical with the conventional transfer function, is established to characterize that portion of the operator's output which is linearly correlated with his input. The input, upon which the describing function is based, is selected on the basis of a priori estimates of the nature of certain human non-linear behavior. The narrative is spun into anti-bicycle propaganda. You can research this yourself. Accident statistics are recorded by state. Living in a bicycle friendly country, where the other way of cycling is the norm (that picture is the prime minister going to see the king to hand in his resignation, to give you an idea) I say bicycles are safer. While the chance of an accident are slightly bigger on a bicycle, most bicycle accidents do not cause any injury or just minor injuries, while on the other hand, accident with cars tend to cause much bigger injuries. of course, when the accident is car vs bicycle, the cyclist is the most likely to be injured, which brings me to the next point.