

Bicycling beyond the Divide: Two Journeys into the West

Daryl Farmer

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In 1985 President Ronald Reagan was publicly sworn in for his second term, *We Are the World* was recorded by USA for Africa, *Back to the Future* was the number one movie at the box office, and Daryl Farmer, at the age of twenty, began a bicycle tour through the western states of America.

Twenty years later, at the age of forty, Farmer decided to reenact his tour. Farmer writes, "Saturday, May 7, I said good bye...wobbled down the driveway, pedaled to the end of the street...not used to the altitude, or the climb, I was already panting. I hadn't ridden for nearly three weeks, was probably in the worse shape of my life, and it was clear I packed too much gear." After he traveled a mile and a half, Farmer realized his cyclometer wasn't working and he called his wife to come and get him. His first attempt at reliving his twenties was aborted.

Daryl Farmer lyrically meshes his traveling experiences of 1985 with 2005 in his book, *Bicycling Beyond the Divide*. He defines 1985 as pre-9/11, where people invited him into their households and allowed him to pitch a tent in their front yards. By 2005, or post-9/11, it was longer safe or legal to spend the night in an empty football field or on some high school bleachers. In the age of high fences, the IED, closed circuit cameras, child predators, and massive, paranoid, and/or greedy litigation, sleeping on school grounds is unconditionally against the law.

With writing that compares favorably to Paul Theroux, William Least Heat Moon, and John Steinbeck, Farmer assures us that the American spirit hasn't been completely deflated. "The country had changed since 9/11, but people were still living, embracing the world, defiant in their passion for life, drinking and dancing and worshipping and lusting and loving...and doing the right thing by others."

LEE GOODEN (February 15, 2008)

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