



Never Say "If Only": Journeys Through Life

Allan Pendleton

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Never Say "If Only" is an inspirational memoir from a man who grew to become a more loving husband because of his worldwide experiences.

In *Never Say "If Only"*, Allan Pendleton turns his biking journal into a comprehensive tale of world citizenship.

The text chronicles sixty-three tandem bike rides on three different bikes and nineteen hikes undertaken in nearly thirty countries. Pendleton's wife, Maggie, was his companion for these trips. More than a simple record, though, this travelogue is about becoming a better person.

Throughout the text, the couple are constant companions, whether they are camping in Alaska or navigating thronging Asian cities. "Somehow," Pendleton says, "being on a bike exposes you to all sorts of experiences," and the Pendletons are shown to prefer this kind of open movement: they prefer buses to planes, and hostels and host families to hotels. Their approach to travel is to accept opportunities as they come.

Each chapter summarizes a trip or imparts Pendleton family stories and personal highlights, with lists of sights, sounds, and impressions. The book moves quickly through its mountain, plain, coastal, and forest landscapes. Chapters focused on family members break up the travel sequences, resulting in a nice balance of excitement with seriousness. Bookended by Maggie's health crisis, the cycling sections fit into the context of the Pendletons' marriage. Intended as a legacy gift, the book also becomes a bigger project with a wider scope.

In addition to route information and details regarding flora, fauna, and folks, the narrative is enhanced with quotes at the start of every chapter, photographs, maps, and social, religious, political, and historical commentary. Encounters over beer bring out the particulars of the characters the couple meets, and the book progresses toward an introspective end—less about what the couple did and saw and more about how Pendleton's experiences and actions reflect on him, particularly regarding his marriage.

At one point, Maggie accuses Pendleton of being self-centered, and he regrets the little torments he inflicts on her. She is a constant presence in the text, save a period of a few months when she is visiting family, but does not speak for much of the text; a part of one chapter comes in her words. The Pendletons' daughter contributes one chapter, too.

Prose is communicative but not obsessed with style, and there are some errors in the text. The tone is upbeat, even in sections where Pendleton faces physical challenges or his own demons. Dialogue is sparse.

More than a travelogue, *Never Say "If Only"* is an inspirational memoir from a man who grew to become a more loving husband because of his worldwide experiences.

MARI CARLSON (January 9, 2019)

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