

The Buddha and the Bee: Biking through America's Forgotten Roadways on a Journey of Discovery by Cory Mortensen

EXCERPT

DAY TWENTY-TWO

(Takes place September 12, 2001, the day after the terrorist attacks against the US.)

Soon after the Continental Divide, I came across what would become my favorite sign in the world—a yellow diamond shape with a truck going downhill. It was time to stop, check the tyres and brakes—it was peanut butter and jelly time!

My emotions went from dread to elation in mere moments. I found myself overtaking my first car. Pedaling was useless, I didn't have enough gear to make it worthwhile, so I rode at the speed of gravity. I smacked my lips, eager to rejuvenate them with water. My main focus was on my speed and keeping my pack from swinging side to side on the turns. I regulated my speed by using my posture. Tucked down, speed increased; straightened up, my body served as an air brake. The brake pads were useless on a downhill like this. Coming to a slow stop in town? No problem. Trying to come to a complete stop doing forty miles per hour plus? Forget about it.

I passed another car, my speed maxing out at forty-five miles per hour. After fifteen minutes, I could see Steamboat Springs in the valley. I couldn't believe this downhill. It was a present—nay, a reward. It was nine miles of bliss.

Steamboat Springs was more beautiful than I remembered. The last time I had been there was in 1995, when some buddies and I decided to road trip to Moab, Utah, to camp and mountain bike.

My choices of places to stay were abundant, but since I spent the last few hours tackling it, I opted to stay at the Rabbit Ears Motel. I checked in, ordered some Chinese, and turned on the TV. I was eager to finally see the events of the prior days.

The replay of the airplanes smashing into the towers wasn't resonating. I watched the event repeat itself for thirty minutes, interrupted only by tone-deaf commercials. The reporters and news commentators talked, but I didn't listen to their words. I couldn't figure out if it was real. How many times had I seen Hollywood blow things up with breathtakingly realistic accuracy? I was more confused than I was upset or angry.

The footage moved from the Twin Towers to a field in Pennsylvania, the wreckage of a smoldering plane, Flight 93, which had crashed in Stonycreek Township. Although the passengers fought with the terrorists to regain control of the plane, in the end, the plane crashed. They

played recovered audio of passengers praying, leaving voicemails for loved ones, and planning to fight back. Then they played a voicemail from a man who had been on Flight 175:

“Jules,

This is Brian. Listen, I’m on an airplane that’s been hijacked.

If things don’t go well, and it’s not looking good, I just want you to know that I absolutely love you.

I want you to do good, go have good times—same to my parents and everybody.

I just totally love you... and I’ll see you when you get there.

Bye, babe. I hope I call you.”

At that moment, it all became real. I sat on the bed and cried. I felt so removed from it all.

The crew, the passengers, the people in the buildings and on the ground, the firefighters... they were all somebody’s dad, mom, wife, husband, brother, sister, son, daughter, friend. But they weren’t any of those things to me.