

1. Getting Started

EVERY STORY HAS A BEGINNING. Ours starts on April 22, 2010, just eight days before my retirement from a twenty-six-year career in the corporate world. There we were, atop Cadillac Mountain in Acadia National Park. What had taken decades was finally beginning to unfold with the words, “Will you marry me?” Wow, I thought. *I have always wanted to say that. I wonder what this will be like.* Debbie, a literacy specialist in Massachusetts, and that unique, God-chosen other half of me, accepted my proposal. Life was about to change at breakneck speed.

One thing was immediately clear to both of us. There was no need for an extended engagement. Fifty-two years had been long enough to wait. We soon set our wedding date for June 19.

I have also always wanted to bicycle across America. As it turned out, so had Debbie. In fact, her 1994 list of things to accomplish before she dies said so. Moments after our magical engagement, still atop Cadillac Mountain, we broached the idea of a cross-country bicycle trip as an extended honeymoon, an adventure to celebrate the union of two lifelong singles with birthdays only fifteen days



*One adventure leads to another
two weeks later*

apart. Life was about to begin in earnest. Was there any reason to put off such a grand way to celebrate our newfound gift? The shackles were off—and we had a lot of catching up to do. What better way to get started?

Within a couple of weeks, it became clear that cycling coast to coast was not just a passing fancy. We were both interested and serious about the adventure. Could we make it all the way across the country before Debbie's return to work in late August? And, with both of us fifty-two years old, could we even make it across the state of Oregon, let alone the Rocky Mountains? If we made it that far, how much time would it take to ride the next 3,000 miles?

Frankly, completing the trek seemed trivial at the time. We were embarking on the ultimate getaway for not only bicycling enthusiasts, but also a much larger populous. Haven't most people ridden a bicycle as a child and fantasized about the freedom of the open road? We would worry about the details later. Certainly, there would be plenty of airports sprinkled along our route, wherever that would take us. We were not going to deny ourselves this opportunity. We decided to pursue it with reckless abandon—and with a new companion by our side: one another!

What ensued over the next several weeks was nothing short of amazing. In just two months, we would be husband and wife, pedaling bicycles and carrying items needed for our journey, most of which we had not yet purchased, all the way across the country. And, before we left, I would vacate my apartment of twenty-five years, sorting through my belongings and placing into storage those worth keeping. From scratch, we would determine our wishes and needs for both a wedding and a cross-country bicycle ride. Debbie's teaching obligations ended two days before our wedding. Thankfully, I could now dedicate myself full-time to prepare for both events. We would worry about the rest of our lives later!