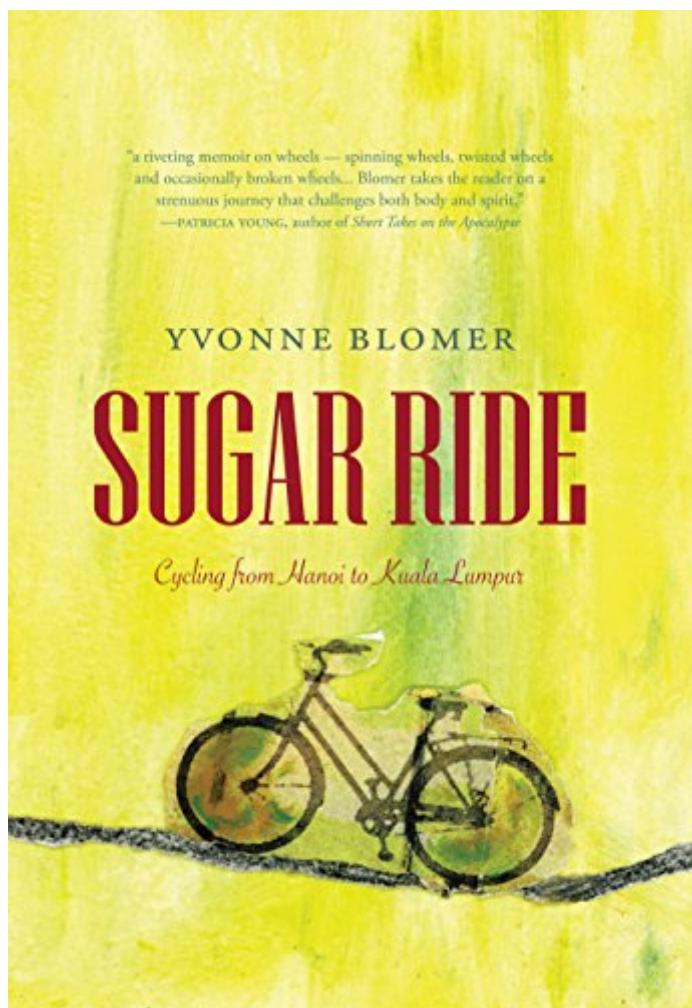


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Sugar Ride: Cycling From Hanoi To Kuala Lumpur



Synopsis

Blomer takes you into Southeast Asia by bicycle with her husband Rupert, their two companion-like bikes and her experiences cycling over 4000km through 4 countries over three months with the little devil she takes everywhere, her type 1 diabetes. A travel memoir, Sugar Ride explores the love of cycling and the roads it can pull you up, down and along while detailing the experience of having type 1 diabetes and the literal ride of sugar that daily injections of insulin, food and exercise create. Part loves story, part true cycling adventure and part dance with the body's strengths and weaknesses, Sugar Ride is an exploration of past adventures and how to feel about those experiences in the present.

Book Information

File Size: 6543 KB

Print Length: 250 pages

Publisher: Palimpsest Press (May 15, 2017)

Publication Date: May 15, 2017

Sold by: Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B071ZBM4KG

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Not Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #1,639,260 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #60 in Books > Travel > Asia > Malaysia & Brunei #69 in Books > Travel > Specialty Travel > Special Needs #866 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Nonfiction > Sports > Individual Sports > Cycling

Customer Reviews

"The roads have etched themselves into the skin of my belly," Yvonne Blomer writes in a reflection of her bicycle journey in 1999. After teaching in Japan and before returning to Canada, Blomer and her husband Rupert Gadd cycled in Southeast Asia for three months. Blomer writes in the present tense for an immediacy with the travel entries. She writes in the past tense for her current-day reflections of each day's travel, over time and terrain. Blomer's reflections are thoughtful, spirited

introspections with a sense of responsibility and awareness of the customs and the history of the countries through which she has travelled. Memories of travel aren't chronological and so it is with Sugar Ride. A few pages in, Blomer and Gadd are in Hanoi, Vietnam at the beginning of their cycling journey. She returns to Vietnam throughout the book. On October 31 in Thailand, Blomer is pedaling behind her husband, feeling dizzy and lightheaded. She recalls finding out at the age of ten that she has diabetes. A nurse at Edmonton General Hospital told her never to use diabetes as an excuse. That advice, Blomer says, "created a filter through which I looked at the world and through which I looked at myself." In Vietnam they visit the barren landscape of Ho Chi Minh Trail, "the legacy of Agent Orange." In Bangkok, headed for a floating market, they become part of a "honking-revving-coughing-smoking-stinking chug of traffic" that wears on them. Divided between the two bikes are bags (panniers) with the supplies Blomer needs for a total of 460 insulin injections (four or five times a day) over three months. She keeps the insulin, sensitive to the heat, at the bottom of a pannier with frozen bottles of water. Even in the early days, Blomer writes, "my ass hurts, my back hurts, my left shoulder is so tight . . ." At one point during the journey, she has trouble with her blood testing machine and needs to get manual strips from a pharmacy. As a vegetarian since the age of twelve, finding vegetarian options is often a challenge. And she has a rear tire blow out while in the middle of a rush-hour traffic roundabout in Malaysia. When she gets back to Canada, Blomer needs surgery as while in Thailand, her right thumb kept locking in a bent position. Sometimes "Rupert's side of the story" is included such as encouraging Yvonne to have some sips of a yogurt drink when her blood sugars are low when they sleep in one morning near the Ngang Pass, Vietnam. They were used to bowing from their time in Japan and try to honor local customs during their travels. She admits in a reflection that, "the intricacies of a deep understanding of all the cultures and languages we met in the three months we travelled were beyond us." In an earlier reflection, she writes: "We are exploring what we do not know. The things we do not know are also exploring us." It all matters, Blomer reminds herself: "It all counts: every dog that followed or chased us, every child who waved or adult who gave what we needed, who smiled or bowed or showed us how to live in this part of the world, where we do not always know our place or who we are." This is a personal book. It is about so much more than what is seen and explored and stumbled upon along the way. It's about who we are while not at home—*in this case, Vietnam, Malaysia, Laos and Thailand, four countries with long histories of colonialism and war.* Yvonne Blomer is a poet and her writing is lyrical no matter what the circumstances. Her memoir is thought-provoking, while also being a smooth ride.

by Mary Ann Moore for Story Circle Book Reviews

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