

THE BEST AMERICAN SERIES

2010

A black and white photograph of a baseball field. In the foreground, a baseball is positioned on the grass, partially overlapping the word 'SPORTS'. The background shows a baseball field with a fence and trees under a cloudy sky.

# THE BEST AMERICAN SPORTS WRITING

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## The Impossible Redemption of Jonathan Boyer

FROM BICYCLING

THE CHILD MOLESTER prays before every meal. He offers thanks for his friends, and the food he is about to eat, and the wonderful day ahead. When he wakes at 6:30 he brews himself a cup of tea and answers e-mail and he walks his dog, a twelve-year-old rottweiler named Cody, three blocks to the beach next to the Pacific Ocean, where they walk some more, and where the child molester thinks about his purpose in life, imagines ways he might help others.

He rides his bicycle an hour and a half a day, longer on weekends, and, afterward, he takes a sauna beneath ceramic infrared heaters. He drinks water that is alkalized with cathodes and cleansed of microbes by ultraviolet light. He sleeps on an electromagnetic pulsating pad. He doesn't smoke, or eat processed foods, or drink alcohol. He has been drunk twice in his life, both times when he was fourteen years old. Once was from drinking champagne, the other, whiskey. He doesn't eat candy. "And I don't do Halloween." He doesn't watch television, or listen to the radio, or read the newspaper. He lives "in a media void." The books he reads are "biblical, or historical, or nutritional." He says he avoids fiction because, "I have so little time and I don't want to waste it." That said, he has a weakness for Jack London and has read every Sherlock Holmes novel, as well as *Crime and Punishment*. One of his favorite movies is *Gladiator*. He is slightly cold-blooded, with a temperature that runs from

95.8 to 96.5. He comes from money on his mother's side; his family owns a summer estate in Gloucester, Massachusetts, and a ranch in Wyoming. He has a pilot's license. He doesn't care for eggplant. He loves olive oil, but hates olives. He sells bicycle parts and nutritional supplements from a shop on a lightly used municipal airstrip. Many of his clients are middle-aged and they want better lives. "Being able to help them," he says, "is incredibly fulfilling." He thinks fluoridated water is bad for people, and that it was foisted upon the nation as part of a government conspiracy to cover up poisonous byproducts created by atomic weapons. Saturday mornings he attends services at a Seventh-Day Adventist church, and in the summertime he travels to Moab, Utah, where he joins other men as they sit around campfires in the high desert and talk about finding meaning in the world. He says things like "Iron sharpens iron and one man sharpens another," and "Regardless of my mistakes, [God] will take them and make them blessings." He is fifty-three and he lives in Carmel-by-the-Sea, California, with his mother, in the house in which he grew up, and on the rare occasion when he eats at a restaurant in his hometown, people look at him funny and ask how he's been, if he's okay. One of his closest friends is the chief mechanic at a local hotel. Another is a man who has been divorced five times and who lives on a hilltop nearby, behind an electronic gate, at the end of a driveway in which sits a black Porsche 911, in a house filled with centuries-old wooden carvings imported from Afghanistan, with a pet macaw named Lorenzo and the hide of a snow lion on the floor of one room and the hide of a mountain lion on the floor of another room. The mountain lion had eaten Lorenzo's cousin, Harpo, and tried to eat Lorenzo, and the child molester's friend had shot it.

The child molester and I spend four days together in late spring 2007. It's terrible and perhaps unfair to refer to him as "child molester," because he accomplished things as an athlete that few others have, and over the past few years he has, by almost any measure, lived the life of a world-class do-gooder. But "child molester" is exactly how a lot of people who know a little bit about him, especially those who have never met him, think of him even if they don't refer to him that way.

We share meals, before which we always pray, and he makes me a salad at his mother's house, and we walk on the beach and he

suggests some foods I might try to lose weight and improve my health. We have dinner at the house on the hilltop, where I admire Lorenzo and the hides on the floor. We talk a lot about cycling and how the child molester came to be the first American to race in the Tour de France and why European racers seemed to accept him more than his countrymen did. We talk about amphetamine-aided descents and the transience of athletic glory and how society can corrupt a man and how we all have choices, that we all need help.

We talk about his improbable triumph, as a middle-aged man just three years out of jail, in the 2006 Race Across America (RAAM), a three-thousand-mile coast-to-coast bicycle race. We talk about his participation in Project Rwanda, a nonprofit organization working to improve the lives of the impoverished citizens of that country. We talk about religion and television, organic food and how, as a child, he dreamt of being a veterinarian in a game park in Africa. The subject he wishes didn't have to come up, but that he knows must, comes up on our third day together. We're up to 1997, when the cyclist was newly and, as it turns out, unhappily married, stagnant in his professional life. We both know what happens next. Silence. The longest silence in the time I have spent with him.

"Now," he says, "starts the whole different chapter in my life."

Of course, a lot of people don't care about the different chapters in the child molester's life. One chapter will do. That one chapter—the one titled "child molester"—is enough for them. The child molester prays? Good for him. Let him pray. He wants to help poor Africans? Keep him supervised and far from minors. He was a great athlete and he wants to be a good man? The first doesn't matter, and he gave up his rights to the second. That's what happens to child molesters. That's their fate. That's how a lot of people think. That's how I thought when I flew out to California to meet Jonathan Boyer. And then we prayed together.

He was so chubby as a toddler that people called him "Fatso." That's a fact. Here's another: his father was a dreamer and a drifter, a man who, after a bar-stool conversation in the desert with a stranger about hidden treasure, would leave his wife and three children and disappear into Mexico for weeks at a time. "A man who had a natural lobotomy for responsibility," his wife, Josephine

Swift Boyer, told her oldest son, Winston. The family lived in Moab, Utah, until 1961, when Josephine packed up her three children—eight-year-old Liza, six-year-old Winston, and the baby, five-year-old Jonathan, whom everyone called Jock (after a friend of Josephine's)—and took them to her parents, the Swifts, in Pebble Beach, California. Moab was so remote in those days that Winston Boyer, senior, had to flag down the California Zephyr at the Crescent Junction station to get it to stop. As the train pulled away, the elder Boyer drove alongside for twenty miles in his red Ford station wagon. ("The cheapest one made, with two doors," Liza remembers.) He waved at his departing family, and the family waved back, at their father and husband, and at their dog, a black, tan, and white sheepdog named Timbo. "The saddest day of all of our lives," Liza says. Jock says, "It was like yesterday. Indeed, the saddest day of my life."

Liza says that Jock "went from being the happiest, hugging-est, most generous and least shy, quickest to make friends, of all of us, to a child who was worried and sad. It took him a while to bounce back."

Two years later, the brood moved to Carmel. Their next-door neighbors in Carmel rode bicycles, so Winston and his little brother would tag along. Jock wouldn't see his father for six years. Other men in Carmel, though, took the boys under their wings. Sam Hopkins, another neighbor and a local cycling icon who had started racing competitively at age fifty, encouraged the Boyer boys to enter some events. Jock loved it from the beginning.

A local restaurateur, Remo d'Agliano, who had raced in Europe, coached the Boyers, and though there was no cycling culture to speak of—this was the early '70s—the Boyers finished at the top of almost every race they entered, along with another local boy named Tom Ritchey. Jonathan rode a black ten-speed Raleigh Competition, which was stolen from school after two weeks. Hopkins sold him a blue LeJeune for \$180, which happened to be exactly the amount the insurance had paid for the Raleigh.

Winston drifted away from the sport because competition made him nervous. Ritchey liked long rides in the hills, and didn't enjoy the criteriums, with their short, narrow courses with tight corners, so he stopped road racing too. That left Jock.

Partly because of d'Agliano's urging, partly because of competi-

tive zeal and adolescent restlessness, he decided he wanted to race in Europe. The summer before his senior year (at Monterey's York School), he enrolled in an intensive course in French at the nearby Monterey Institute of Foreign Studies, where for nine weeks, seven hours a day, he studied the language. He also rode and waited tables at d'Agliano's restaurant. When he graduated high school, he had been accepted at the University of Colorado. He had also qualified to ride in the junior world championships in Munich. He asked the university if he could delay his freshman year. Then he took the \$350 he had saved from waiting tables and bought a plane ticket to Paris. From 1973 until early 1977, he raced as an amateur for little-known teams such as UVSE Saint Eloy les Mines and ACBB Paris. Like almost all new racers at that level, he traveled between hotels where, he says, "the water smelled like urine, the beds sagged, and the sheets were made of that stuff that doesn't even feel like fabric." In one of the hotels, he got fleas. In another, crabs. Always strong in the mountains, he grew stronger, fashioned himself into an elite climber. He learned, and he won, and he learned and he won some more.

In May 1977, a professional team, LeJeune BP, invited him to join. That's when he realized how little he knew. "It was incredibly hard," he says. "There were more riders, better bike handlers; people were smoother in the pack. And the fitness levels were hard to believe. As an amateur, when you thought you were tired, that was nothing compared with the pro level. What I learned was that as an amateur, you don't know what being really tired is. Think of being completely exhausted, then train and ride as much as when you're fresh. That's what it means to ride as a professional."

His first professional contract was three thousand francs, or four hundred dollars a month, which was about five hundred francs more than most newly minted professionals. That's because Boyer was an American, a novelty. His citizenship wasn't the only thing that set him apart. By 1980, Boyer was showing up to races lugging suitcases packed with twenty pounds of fruits and nuts, and a blender to mix them. He was also reading the Bible regularly. Later, reporters would say that other riders perceived him as an oddball. (If true, it would be impressive; cycling counts as its recent champions a marble-shooting, pigeon-hunting, disco-hopping Italian who died of a cocaine overdose; an ecstasy-ingesting German

who most experts—and riders—believe might have beaten Lance Armstrong had he been able to stop overeating during the off-season; and an American whose lawyers said a never-born twin might have been the cause of the positive blood test that got him banned for two years from cycling.) The fruit-and-nut eater won the 1980 Coors Classic, where overexcited and underinformed television announcers referred to him as “Jacques BoyAY,” instead of “Jock BOYer.” The same year, he finished fifth in the world championships, then accepted an offer from another team, Renault-Gitane, that wanted him to help Bernard Hinault in the mountains of the 1981 Tour de France. (Hinault, the Badger, had already won the Tour in 1978 and 1979, would win in 1981, then go on to win the race in 1982 and 1985.) No American had ever raced in the Tour before, much less finished, much less helped a teammate win. Boyer did all three.

Like winning a Pulitzer Prize, or discovering a distant comet, the distinction of being the first American to race the Tour de France might have furnished a first sentence for future obituary writers when they considered the life of this quiet, wiry vegetarian. His thirty-second-place finish paved the way for Greg LeMond, who became the first American to win the Tour, in 1986, as well as the 7-Eleven team, which with sprinter Davis Phinney and mountain climber Andy Hampsten was the first American squad to successfully race in Europe, serving as a model and an inspiration for modern-day stars such as Lance Armstrong. Boyer was twenty-six, and though he might not have known it, his fame was already receding. Infamy was decades away.

He has long eyelashes, graying hair, hazel eyes, and the kind of looks that in another era might have been called matinee idol. He is five feet ten and a half inches tall, and his weight ranges from 145 to 150, as it has since he was a teenager. He looks about fifteen years younger than his age. He credits this to clean living, which I presume includes the electromagnetic pulsating pad and the infrared sauna and the ultraviolet-treated water, and not just exercising a lot and eating vegetables. He favors black jeans and pullover sweaters, athletic sandals with socks. On Saturdays, when he attends church and celebrates the Sabbath, he wears a button-down shirt and polished black boots. He walks slightly duck-toed.



The first time we meet, at a restaurant in Carmel, he says he likes snakes, especially pythons and boa constrictors, and loves roasted potatoes. Before we eat, he says a prayer. His voice is nasal, slightly high-pitched, absent any strong regional accent. He is something of a flirt, and when the waitress comes to take our order, he asks her how to say "poached" in Spanish and is rewarded with a big smile.

I ask how he'd like to be remembered, and he says, "I don't know. It's not something I think of. Perhaps as someone who made a positive impact on people." I ask if he has any regrets and he says, "I could have raced a little less," which he believes would have prolonged his career. He tells me that he knows himself better than he ever has. He says he realizes now that there was a lot of anger in his life, that "I have always had difficulty dealing with emotional issues."

He admits that he avoids television as much from weakness as strength. "If there's a program on, I'll get sucked into it, and then before you know it, two hours are gone. I'm a very emotional person. I get very affected by things."

He says that people are capable of great good and great evil. "I think we need to realize any one of us, given the right or wrong situation, we will do anything . . . Iraqis are no different than Americans. Muslims have the same makeup as Christians. We're all from the same stock. We can't point fingers and say 'I would never do that' and 'Those people are monsters.' We're part of the same race."

For three days, he doesn't mention his crime and I don't ask about it. We don't discuss how it has changed his life, how it has altered the way people relate to him, how it has changed how he moves through the world. He talks about God a lot and forgiveness and meaning, and I imagine it must be exhausting, not talking about something but talking about it all the time. I imagine it's what his life is like every day.

He generally shuns interviews, but he has agreed to meet because he is proud of his work for Project Rwanda, and he believes the publicity for it will be a good thing. He has been to Rwanda recently, will be piling a group of Rwandans into a 1972 Bluebird bus and driving them to race bicycles in the Utah desert the week after we meet, then will be returning to Rwanda a month after that.



He doesn't take antimalarial medications before his trips, because he says he doesn't need them. On his most recent trip to Africa, he says, "I ate enzymes, herbs, and mushrooms. I was incredibly healthy the whole time. I made it so my body was impossible for any parasite to live in." He says he is working on developing a wafer that will help mitigate the effects of giardia, "that will prevent against microbes and viruses and parasites you catch in foreign countries." I dutifully take notes and wonder which is more delusional, Boyer's efforts to develop a cracker that will save the planet, or his belief that his good works will make anyone forget—or forgive—what he did.

He finished tenth in the world championships in 1982. In 1983, he finished twelfth in the Tour. Boyer thought he would be in the top five in 1984, but he fell to thirty-first because of two crashes, dehydration during a stage he thought he could win, and the vagaries of athletic chance. In 1985, the American who started it all did something odd. Instead of racing in the Tour de France, he entered RAAM. The year before, he had been discussing, with a television producer, a feud in American cycling. A group of ultracyclists, who specialized in riding hundreds of miles at a time, were touting the cross-country race as the ultimate test of cycling prowess, and then there were racers like Boyer. "The ultracyclists wanted to be recognized as serious athletes," he says. "We just thought they were good at staying awake."

On the day after Thanksgiving in 1984, Boyer told the producer, "I could beat those guys," and the producer said, "If you really mean that and are really serious about that, you owe it to the racing cycling community to do it."

He enlisted a van and a crew. He invested in a motor home, a motorbike, a pickup truck, and a rented sedan. The first day, he rode 445 miles. The second day he made it 400 miles, then another 400 miles after that. He was going so much faster than anyone else (he averaged 14.3 miles per hour, including rest breaks) that he could sleep more than his competitors. He rode into Atlantic City more than four hours ahead of his closest competitor.

"I won five thousand dollars," he remembers. "And I spent twenty-five thousand dollars to do it."

In 1986, still recovering from the physical stress of his costly vic-

tory, he skipped the Tour. In 1987, living in Italy and racing with the 7-Eleven team alongside Eric Heiden and Bob Roll and Andy Hampsten, he finished ninety-ninth, his worst finish ever. It was his last year as a pro and his highest-paid. He made \$50,000 and retired. With LeMond's victory in the world championships and the Tour de France, and Hampsten and Phinney's stage wins in the Giro d'Italia and the Tour, everyone was talking about American cycling. People were already starting to forget the man who had helped start it. "As I look back," he says, "I should have gone straight into mountain bike racing. When you stop racing, I think every athlete goes through the same thing, you go through a real serious depression . . . you're completely lost, nothing grounding you . . . I just remember it as being a really hard period."

He started a new career importing bicycle parts into the United States, in partnership with a Dutchman he knew. He traveled to twenty-six countries a year, worked with eighty customers. He lived in Holland, would drive five hundred miles to the French office, near Lyon, in the afternoon, and back the next morning. He rode a motorcycle, drove 150 miles per hour on the autobahn.

"I had a house," he says, "but no home. I was fried." In 1992, he moved back to the Carmel Valley, and after his Dutch partner severed business relations (" . . . a disaster. Basically I was kicked out without any shares . . ."), he imported and sold bicycle parts and supplies on his own. In 1992, he was baptized at the Seventh-Day Adventist church in Pacific Grove, six miles from Carmel. Two years later, he met a woman at the church who lived in Seaside. They started dating, and in 1997 they married.

Seaside, California, police officers arrested Boyer on May 16, 2002, after a seventeen-year-old girl told them the cyclist had molested her from 1997 to 2000. She was barely twelve when it started. On September 12, 2002, he pled guilty to seven counts of lewd and lascivious acts upon a child, and three counts of penetration by a foreign object or genital penetration on a person younger than sixteen. He said he was remorseful. On November 19, he was sentenced to twenty years in state prison, a sentence that was immediately stayed, then he was put on probation for five years, and sent to the Monterey County jail for a year. At the sentencing, state superior court judge Gary E. Meyer noted that Boyer posed little

threat to the girl or to others and that he was a good candidate for rehabilitation. Those are the facts. He slept in a dorm with sixty other men. Breakfast was served at 4:00 A.M. He read fifty books, including the complete works of Christian evangelist Philip Yancey. He was released on July 7, 2003, after serving eight months. In 2006, at age fifty-one, he won the solo enduro division of the Race Across America. His probation ended November 7, 2007. Those are facts too.

In some states, a sixteen-year-old who fondles his fourteen-year-old girlfriend is guilty of a crime, just as guilty in strict legal terms as someone who stalks playgrounds, snatching and raping children. If you can accept that when it comes to sex offenses, even child molesting, there is a moral spectrum of heinousness, then should we try to put Boyer's crime—and Boyer—in some sort of context? Boyer thinks we should. "It's too bad all those [criminal] charges get put in the same box," he says. "The fact is they're so varied, the charges . . . they go from one end to the other . . . you do have predators out there, the perverts, you do have people who are bent on molesting countless kids and who have issues with children. Then you have others who have overstepped certain boundaries and get put in the same . . . uh . . . same sort of description."

What exactly did Boyer do? According to court records, he twice "puts [his] hand inside of Jane Doe's pants and touches Jane Doe's vagina," and "digitally penetrates Jane Doe's vagina" a total of eight times. Once, during the act, he spoke French.

Boyer refuses to discuss the specifics of the crimes. His friends say his public silence is to protect the girl, now a young woman.

Lars Frazer is a photographer based in Austin, Texas. He has known Boyer for twenty years, and says the cyclist "became best friends with a thirteen-year-old girl who fell deeply in love with him. She had a high level of maturity and he showed poor judgment. When Jock said, 'This is not appropriate, it's not appropriate for us to have this level of friendship,' she lashed out," and the police were notified.

"Knowing what I know," says Frazer, "he shouldn't have spent a day in jail. He's not a predator. I have two daughters, six and three and a half, and there's no question I would let them spend time alone with Jock. They know who he is, and they love him."

David Frost, a friend of Boyer's for thirty years, who works as a

deputy district attorney in Monterey County, says, "I purposefully didn't read the files and I don't want to. I'm sure it'll never happen again. It's not something anyone will have to worry about. He's got a very strong character."

Others aren't quite as sympathetic.

In a precise and careful e-mail, Monterey chief assistant district attorney Terry Spitz said, after reviewing the file, "We are prohibited by the state bar ethics code from charging a crime based on a hunch or suspicion. We must have probable cause to believe the defendant actually engaged in the conduct charged. Of course, Boyer admitted to . . . engaging in such conduct."

Facts matter. Even a man as heavily invested in intention as Boyer knows that. He also knows that while facts might be immutable, faith is redemptive. "We can't go through life without tragedies," Boyer says. "It's what we do with the tragedies that define us. It strengthens our ability to help. One thing I've learned is that all of us are hurting. Each day we're given opportunities to help people. My purpose is to take those opportunities. Each day people cross our path who need some sort of help. Not necessarily something that's life-threatening. I think it's important, as a Christian, to help. You get lifted up when that happens, you get encouraged, you get hope, your trust grows. With every opportunity taken, you're given a bigger, better opportunity later."

I ask Boyer about the girl. Does he worry about her? I don't know how she feels, because I haven't been able to track her down. (The fact that I tried angers some colleagues, who tell me that I would be victimizing her all over again if I contacted her. The fact that I fail distresses others, who argue that a story containing even a measure of sympathy for Boyer, without his victim's perspective, is an outrage.) Absent her thoughts, I ask Boyer how he thinks she's doing. I ask how he thinks what happened affected her.

"It depends on which direction she chooses," he says. "If you let something destroy you, whose fault is that? God doesn't want you to be destroyed. We all have an opportunity to choose a path that will make us stronger. I just hope she's making the right choices in her life despite the past. We all are responsible for our choices. I was responsible for my choices and I take full responsibility."

Then he tells me the story of Corrie ten Boom, the Dutch Chris-

tian woman who hid and saved Jews during World War II, and was imprisoned in a concentration camp for her efforts. He recounts the story of how, after the war, a concentration camp guard from Ravensbrück, where she had been imprisoned, approached her.

"He said to her," Boyer tells me, "I know that God forgives me, but my question is, do you?"

("For a long moment we grasped each other's hands," ten Boom wrote in her book, *Tramp for the Lord*, which I looked through after I left Boyer. "The former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God's love so intensely as I did then.")

"We can't look at the pain we've caused," Boyer says. "We have to look at the good we can do, and though it can't erase the past, it certainly can eclipse some of the damage. Our choices are today."

Does Boyer see that the tale's power comes because it's the victim who is the narrator, the *victim* who is extolling the virtues of forgiveness? Does he understand that he's not the best person in the world to be suggesting that the child he molested would be better off if she would simply forgive and move on? Then again, what's the difference what he says? Or what anyone says? Don't a man's actions matter more than his words?

In January 2008 I receive a telephone call from Dan Cooper, a stock trader in Chicago. Cooper, one of the central supporters of Project Rwanda, is devoted to financing it and getting others to finance it. He has heard about the time Boyer and I spent together, and he is worried. "This is going to have a direct impact on my ability to keep the team sustainable," he tells me. "Project Rwanda has become the good-news story of cycling. *Bicycling* magazine comes out with a story about Jonathan Boyer being a child molester, that good-news story could very easily evaporate."

The next day, Cooper would fly in a private jet with the president of Rwanda to meet the president of Starbucks, who was hosting a dinner at the behest of the president of Costco. Cooper was hoping to raise a lot of money. "We got to know Jonathan before we invited him to be part of the Rwanda team," Cooper says. "We know the background and the drama that unfolded there . . . Externally, it's a little bit of a wild card when it comes to public perception."

Cooper and I talk for almost thirty minutes. He says Boyer would resign from the program "in a heartbeat" if he thought his pres-

ence would hurt the project. He says that only two people know exactly what happened between Boyer and the child. He says Boyer "is as close to a walking angel as I've met. I've never seen a guy who's been more self-sacrificing of himself than Jonathan . . . being around Jonathan makes me better. There are very few people I can say that about."

Cooper is more reflective than insistent, as interested in talking about pain and redemption as he is about corporate sponsorship. It's easy to understand his success at fundraising.

"This guy is wearing this huge, horrible scarlet letter," he says. "And at the end of the day, a guy can't keep paying for his crimes over and over and over again, especially someone doing so much good and spreading so much love as Jonathan."

Getting arrested and serving time for child molesting—no matter the circumstances or mitigating factors—tends to winnow the number of a man's friends. Tonight, Boyer is having dinner with three who stuck by him. There is Ricky Gonzalez, chief mechanic for the past twenty-six years at the nearby Bay Park Hotel, a regular customer at Boyer's shop, and the crew chief on the latest RAAM victory, who Boyer says "is like an older brother to me." Winston Boyer, Jock's real older brother, who is as impish and bawdy as Jock is pious and tightly wound, is there too. The host for the evening is Peterson Conway, owner of Peterson Conway Imports in Carmel, speaker of six languages, ex-husband of five wives, world traveler since he joined the Peace Corps thirty-eight years ago at age seventeen and landed in Afghanistan, where James Michener hired him as his translator; he is also the owner of the Porsche and the mountain lion rug and Lorenzo the macaw, as well as the 8,500-square-foot house on the seventeen acres sprawled near the top of Jack's Peak, the highest spot on the Monterey Peninsula, where we are all gathered. "What Sean Connery is to cinema, he is in my life," Boyer had told me earlier. Maybe it's because I had already been overloaded with sentiments about men sharpening men, and Nazi criminals seeking forgiveness, and the dangers of fluoride, but at the time, the statement didn't seem as weird to me as it does now.

We sit at a counter made of Italian marble, beneath ceilings that once covered a maharaja's harem quarters, behind a door built in

the eighteenth century, shipped here from India. Winston Boyer and Conway drink wine and Jock and I and Garcia have water as we talk about cycling and love and Lorenzo's dead cousin, Harpo, whose sad fate had led Conway to climb the tree outside his house with a shotgun and spend a night waiting for the animal that is now a rug. We swap stories. Conway remembers a moonlit night in Katmandu, and bowls of hash, and the strange sensation of cold cobblestones and hot liquid on his bare feet, and the stoned realization that it was the blood of oxen whose throats had just been slit, in an adolescent rite of passage, by teenaged Ghurka soldiers. Winston Boyer recounts the time he was scheduled to show a collection of masks he had photographed at a famous New York City art gallery, until, he says, the gallery owner ran into some financial and legal difficulty and got caught up in a murder investigation that involved sadomasochism. The man with the most notorious stories of all doesn't mention them. Conway flambés a flan with a miniature blowtorch and we all sample the best cheese I have ever tasted and then Winston's phone rings and he looks at it while we all look at him.

He smiles a tight smile. "Mom," he says, and he and Jock look at each other and we all chuckle.

Jock leads us in prayer before dinner, thanking God for the food, and his wonderful friends and the blessed day. I hear Conway mutter something I think is Farsi before he serves chicken in herbs that taste better than any herbs I have ever tasted, and the best tea I have ever tasted. "Don't bother asking him for the recipe," Jock says.

Over dinner we discuss Boyer's latest RAAM victory. There was a bad crash in Kansas, a potentially lethal hot-rodder in Arkansas, and dead-of-the-night searches for fresh fruit in East St. Louis, Illinois. There were terrible digestive problems and a racing heart rate and chafing so severe it required massive applications of lidocaine, which made it necessary for Boyer to drop to all fours in order to urinate. There were sleep-deprivation-induced hallucinations from coast to coast.

"I relate to pain," Boyer says. "Even now, for some odd reason, I'm at home in pain. It seems to be some old friend of mine.

"One of the things that draws me are natural disasters . . . adverse atmospheric conditions really draw me and I have no idea



why. I'm attracted to natural upheavals . . . if there's this huge thundershower, lightning, huge windows, blizzards, I just want to be part of it."

"I attribute all this," Winston Boyer says, "to Jock not taking drugs."

Boyer and his wife separated in 2000, divorced in 2003. He hasn't dated since he was released from prison, he says, but now he's ready. He would like to meet someone, fall in love, settle down and start a family. His friends talk about fixing him up, joke that he wants a younger woman, and I make sure I don't obviously cringe. (A few minutes later, one says that thirty-two would be the ideal age.) Does Boyer know how what under most circumstances is merely manly joshing takes on a sinister, sickly cast, because of his history? If so, he doesn't show it. There is something reserved about him, guarded, which makes sense, because he's a smart man, he learned French in a summer, taught himself about nutrition and fitness, trained himself to be one of the best cyclists in the world. He forged a magnificent athletic career from—among other things—being cagey and hiding weakness.

Dinner is over, and the flan is delicious, and there is some more talk of past races, adventures, and misadventures. Soon, Boyer will drive down the mountain and to his mother's house, where he will sleep on his electromagnetic pulsing pad, then wake in the morning, to his tea, and his walk on the beach with Cody, and his professions of gratitude to God, and to his best efforts to get on with his life.

Thirty-five years ago, when Boyer was first winning cycling races and dominating the sport in California, one of his chief competitors was Tom Ritchey. When Boyer went to France and opened the era that would lead to American dominance in the Tour de France, Ritchey turned his hand to building bikes and, with a handful of other men, created and rode the first mountain bikes. He launched Ritchey Design and was elected into the Mountain Bike Hall of Fame in 1988, and today heads up his eponymous company that is one of the sport's leading manufacturers of high-quality bicycle components.

I meet Ritchey after four days with Boyer, on my way from Carmel to the San Francisco airport. Ritchey has ridden his bicycle

from his home in the lush and green Woodside hills, where it sits among those of Internet millionaires and venture capitalists. We meet at Bucks of Woodside, a breakfast joint famous for flapjacks and Internet start-up deals. People are dressed in jeans and casual-looking, high-performance, expensive athletic gear. Ritchey is tall and lean and fit, wearing cycling shorts and a bicycling jersey. He orders oatmeal.

He tells me that a few years earlier, he realized his life was empty: money and status and a home among venture capitalists and Internet millionaires hadn't brought him real happiness; his business had gotten away from him; he was in his midforties, and while he had most everything he had ever wanted, he wanted more, and he didn't know how to get it.

When an acquaintance invited him to Rwanda, to take part in a project designed to help the citizens of that country, he was skeptical. "I'm not a giving person," he says. "I had never done anything like it. And I went there with prejudices, strong opinions." In Africa, everything changed. That's where Ritchey became involved with Project Rwanda. He designed a bicycle to help coffee farmers more efficiently transport their crop, and asked Boyer to be project director and coach of the Team Rwanda racing team, to help with publicity and awareness for Project Rwanda. "To me," he says, "Rwanda represents new beginnings. Goodness, mercy, hope. Rwanda is me . . . It's anyone having to work through serious disappointments in life."

It takes Ritchey about fifteen minutes to get from his adolescent race victories, through his middle-aged despair, to rebirth in Africa, and his oatmeal sits, cooling. He weeps while he talks, unapologetically and sloppily. He weeps when he speaks of his midlife crisis, and of the joy he discovered in Rwanda, and of the men's retreats he attends in Moab once a year, where, "We have a campfire every night, talk about our lives, share each other's burdens. We're honest about what's going on. We've got to take out the sword and put each other at point all the time . . . It's a deeper way of relating, of connecting." Ritchey tells me I should think about attending one year. He gives me a Project Rwanda T-shirt and some Project Rwanda coffee.

Everything about the breakfast meeting—Ritchey's existential crisis, the men's groups in the desert, the sloppy tears, certainly the

T-shirt and coffee—is slightly but not entirely surprising. Boyer and I had talked a lot about despair and new beginnings. When I had asked him for names of people who knew him, who might be able to share their perceptions of him, maybe he picked someone he thought might be in tune with the theme of his life as he had discussed it with me. Maybe he thought I was sympathetic. Or maybe he wanted someone who he thought knew him well. Certainly he wanted someone who could talk about his good works in Africa. In any case, while Ritchey is eloquent on the subject of men and meaning, and the economic calculus of African coffee production (Rwanda grows an enormous amount of coffee; the problem is inadequate systems to transport the product, which is where the bicycle comes in), his knowledge of Boyer is incomplete. Though they raced together when they were young (“We were more competitors than friends,” Ritchey says), and they ride together now (“Very few people ride at the pace I do . . . He’s someone I enjoy spending hours and hours and hours with in the saddle”), there loom three decades between adolescence and middle age. So, granted, Boyer has been wonderful at spotting talent in Rwanda and conscientious about training young Rwandans to be elite cyclists. And yes, Boyer has been giving and honest and warm during their time in Africa and in the Utah desert. And sure, pain can help heal, and the point of the sword and all that stuff.

But what about the girl? What would the young woman she’s become say? How much weight would she give Boyer’s good works?

Ritchey had told me earlier during our breakfast that even during his greatest financial success, “I didn’t know who I was.” Now, he says, through pain and self-reflection, he has found the answer. “I am who my friends are,” Ritchey says. “The people who are in my life are who I am. I had a realization: the people in my life right now are the reasons I am here. People like Jock.”

I ask about what he says to people who want to know about Jock’s crime. I ask what I can say to people who, when I’m telling them about Boyer’s good works, and his athletic accomplishments, berate me when I get to the words “child molester.” The people who tell me I’m doing harm by writing with anything other than indignation when I write about this particular crime. This particular criminal.

"You either believe people can change or you don't," Ritchey says. "It's that simple. You either experience that grace, that forgiveness, that ability to be merciful, or you don't."

Here are the facts of Jonathan Boyer's life: He won eighty-seven races as an amateur, forty-four as a professional. He was a member of the United States national team fifteen times. He competed in nine world championships.

Here are the facts: He lives with twenty-four-hour guards, behind walls, in a four-bedroom house in Musanzi, Rwanda. He has been here since autumn 2007. He travels the country looking for promising cyclists, testing them, training them, encouraging them to join Team Rwanda. He has tested fifty riders, and from them formed a team of eleven. The team has raced in Algeria and Namibia and South Africa and Morocco and Cameroon and the United States. At the 2008 Continental Championships, in Morocco, Team Rwanda placed tenth out of fourteen. Next year, Boyer hopes to test about three hundred to four hundred more riders. Virtually every one of the Rwandan cyclists comes from a place with no electricity or running water, and not enough food. "They're definitely used to hard times," Boyer says. "They have an emotional stability beyond my comprehension." Boyer and I talk in November 2008. He has just returned from a race with his team in Morocco, and the next day will be departing for Lethoso. He wants to make sure I write about his recent work; that people learn about the impact the cyclists are making in their communities, in the country, in all of Africa. "People see Team Rwanda, and their first thought is, 'genocide.' They see these guys riding, and they witness miracles happening. It blows people away." He tells me that in four to six years, he plans for Team Rwanda to be racing in the Tour de France.

Here are the facts: Jonathan Boyer closed his business, moved out of his mother's house, left the United States to make a new life in a country where hundreds of thousands of people were murdered fifteen years ago. Here are the facts: He is fifty-three years old, divorced, single, a convicted child molester living in Africa, helping people. He returns to Carmel, California, every October, for his birthday, so he can register as a sex offender, then goes back to Africa. Since he's been in Musanzi, two Rwandans he knows—

a cyclist and a cook—have become fathers. The proud parents named their boys Jonathan.

You pray before every meal. You give thanks for the food you are about to eat, and for the friends who believe in you, and for the wonderful day ahead. You wake at 6:30, and you drink two cups of coffee before you walk your dog. You ride your bike, and that helps. You keep busy, and you eat right, and that helps too. But there are quiet, still moments that must feel like lifetimes when you wonder if you will ever be forgiven.

You cheated your business partner. You lied on your income taxes. You betrayed a confidence. You gossiped about your best friend. You neglected your child. You hit your wife. You cheated on your husband. Maybe you did worse. Maybe you did much worse. You were cowardly. You acted out of lust, or wounded pride, or anger. You hurt people.

You're not a world-class athlete, and you were never convicted of a crime. You don't have to endure reporters' questions or public censure. You have to confront only yourself. You only have to make it through your own still, quiet moments. Do you apologize to those you hurt? Would it change anything? Do you give your clothes to the Salvation Army? Do you volunteer at a soup kitchen? Do you move and start your life over? Do you do good works to forget your sins or to atone for them? Does it matter? Does it change anything? Does it change what you did? Does it change who you are? And who are you? Who *are* you?