
Uphill all the Way is a documentary about five high school-aged females who ride from Canada to Mexico on mountain bikes, criss-crossing the continental divide on the longest mountain bike route in the world. We follow these five girls and two chaperones as they become the first all-female group to ride the 2,500 miles. The challenge of the ride is not so much the ride itself, rather how these young women cope with their pasts and emotions along the trip. These are not ordinary girls; they have psychological, emotional and social struggles that kept them from graduating with their peers at their previous high schools. From this video, we can witness first-hand the turmoil that many teens experience, and use this account to foster ideas about helping troubled teens.

The story begins in Stockbridge, Massachusetts at a high school designed to help teenagers, both male and female, with "real" social problems. Here we learn a bit about the way the school works (e.g. the whole student body and all parents must vote someone eligible to graduate). It is not so much on scholastic merit that these students earn their high school degree, rather their personal development and growth. We are also introduced to the five young women who will participate in the bike trip. After learning a little about each individual, the trip begins. The girls get a short bike lesson at the Canadian border in Montana (e.g. clip one foot in a pedal, push, and when you get your balance, put the other foot in) and off they go.

Led by a teacher and an assistant (who is a recent graduate of the school), these seven young women take on nature, bike riding, and each other. All involved agreed upon the following rule that was established before the ride: the only way the ride will be completed is if all the girls ride every mile together. This challenge of working together plays a role early - and throughout - the trip. Early in the trip, one rider rode much more slowly than the others. The rest of the group was extremely frustrated by having to wait for her. This frustra-
Book Review

tion caused much friction within the group. When this conflict was resolved, another student had a major emotional meltdown on the ride, resulting in two runaway attempts. The group was forced to remain in the camp for a couple of days because she refused to ride. So we don’t give away all the details of the video, rest assured that the anguish felt by the group eventually turns to reconciliation and the girls continue on their journey. Eventually, the group reaches Mexico.

Upon reaching the Mexican-American border, we witness the joy in their accomplishment, the teamwork that has been established, and the confidence that the girls have developed. Through their dealings with one another and their descriptions of past experiences with their families the disturbing lives of these girls are exhibited clearly. Each threw a temper tantrum at some point, and they yelled at each other, using colorful expletives, constantly. Initially, there was not much love for one another and the idea of having to finish the trip all together did not create love - it created resentment (e.g. "If you don't go, I won't finish the trip, and I want to finish.") However, by the end we can see the personal growth that has occurred, not only among the group, but also the conquering spirit within their own lives.

The actual documentary is not of the best quality, despite the fact that Susan Sarandon is the narrator. The use of Sarandon as the narrator seems like a good match because of the number of strong female characters she has portrayed on the silver screen. However, we feel as if the background information on the school, the girls and their preparation for the trip, and during the trip itself is inadequate. One nice analogy used throughout the video is that we do see them riding uphill quite often - which is an excellent representation of their inner trials and struggles. Unfortunately, the negativity of the situation is too often the center of attention and there is little emphasis placed on any positive aspects of the trip - until the very end. We felt that the immense growth and development that occurs throughout the ride is not highlighted enough.

The unrefined nature of this film, however, may be worthwhile for several different groups. The lack of narration and summary allows