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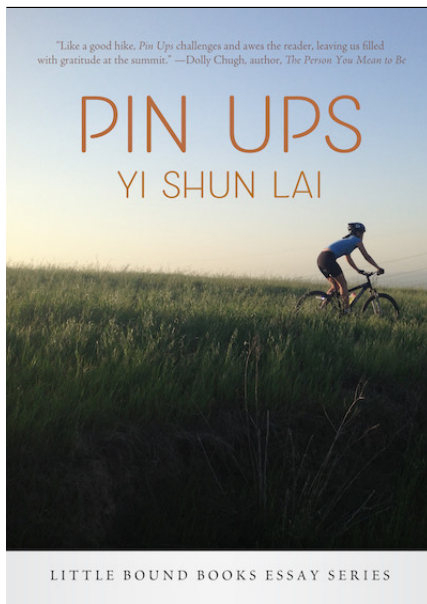
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Memoir by Yi Shun Lai

Excerpt From *Pin Ups*



Editor's Note: In her memoir *Pin Ups*, Yi Shun Lai traces her journey into the world of adventure racing, a team sport that involves traversing wilderness courses, often via trekking, mountain biking and paddling. It's a road that led her—and leads readers—through examinations of gender and race, as well as explorations of self, internal and external.

We celebrate the book's publication this month, as part of [Homebound Books](#) [5]' Little Bound Books essay series. We thank the author and publisher for their permission to run this excerpt as part of TW's Reading Series.



In my preteens, my mother bought me a subscription to *Teen* magazine. She said it was so I could be more of a girl. She hoped I'd grow out of my loud voice and predilection for jeans and T-shirts, but I skimmed past the articles about makeup and clothes: By then I was already more interested in cutting out the articles about the girls who raced BMX bikes, or the ones who played powder puff football. I remember wanting to surf and ski from the minute I became cognizant these activities existed. I clipped those articles, too, and pinned them all to my wall.

I once came close to a version of the life I was pining for: When I was a study-abroad student in Austria at 16, living with a family in a tiny village in the woods on the Yugoslavian border, my host sister and I spent a good number of evenings bolting through the woods on the bikes, rattling along on forest paths to visit this friend or that in the dappled afternoon light, and then pedaling home long after the sun had gone down by the light of our pedal-powered lamps. One afternoon, we picnicked by a stream. I leaned against a tree, feeling the first inklings of perhaps belonging somewhere, and ended up with my hair glued to the tree by its sap, which we washed off in the fresh water nearby. Another day, we picked mushrooms, gathering them in baskets. Later, my host mother fried them in butter and herbs and served them atop dandelion greens she'd plucked from her weedy backyard for a dinner salad.

The magazine clippings, the time spent in the woods—they should have made a life, rather than being aspirations and exceptions. I grew up in the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains, within fifteen minutes of a near-limitless range of trails, one that goes right up to Mt. Baldy, at 10,070 feet elevation. The ocean is a little over an hour away, and I didn't yet have my current irrational fear of sharks.

Mountain biking trails are everywhere, and my 7th-grade Computer Science teacher, Tony Condit, told us he regularly rode his bicycle to Los Angeles International Airport, 51 miles away, for fun.

But when the boys who had moved here to go to college from Oregon and Washington state asked me where to go mountain biking, I couldn't tell them. I can tell them now, but at the time, in a desperate attempt to seem with-it, or, at

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Published on Talking Writing (<https://www.talkingwriting.com>)

least, to prove my usefulness, I waved my arm in a manner vaguely northish and said, “Just go straight up the road; you’ll end up in the mountains. You can’t miss it.”

I was already terrified to be seen as not knowing.



Yi Shun Lai (say “yeeshun” for her first name, “lie” for her last) has dabbled in a great many sports ranging from rock climbing to orienteering and mountain biking and is competent at most of them. “From the Front Lines,” her column on writing and publishing, appears in *The Writer* magazine every month, and she teaches in the MFA programs at Bay Path and Southern New Hampshire universities.

For more info, visit Yi Shun’s [website](#) [6] or follow her on Twitter [@gooddirt](#) [7].

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