



Long Distance: Testing the Limits of Body and Spirit in a Year of Living Strenuously

By Bill McKibben

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Long Distance: Testing the Limits of Body and Spirit in a Year of Living Strenuously By Bill McKibben

A new edition of a classic McKibben book about what it takes to be a world-class athlete and where the true meaning of endurance can be found.

At 37, the celebrated writer and environmentalist Bill McKibben took a break from the life of the mind to put himself to the ultimate test: devoting a year to train as a competitive cross-country skier. Consulting with personal trainers, coaches, and doctors at the US Olympic Center, he followed the rigorous training regimen of a world-class athlete.

Along the way, he learned to cope with his physical limitations and, when his father was diagnosed with a life-threatening brain tumor, discovered something about the real meaning of endurance.

Told with his trademark intelligence, humor, and honesty, *Long Distance* is an insightful examination of the culture and mind-set of endurance athletes, and a moving and inspiring meditation on finding balance in our often harried lives.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

At the age of 37, bestselling author and journalist Bill McKibben stepped out of the ordinary routine of his life to spend a year in "real training" as a cross-country skier. With the help of a trainer-slash-guru, McKibben took on a regimen equivalent to that of an Olympic endurance athlete's, running and skiing for hours every day in preparation for a series of grueling long-distance ski races. What prompted this successful writer with an admitted aversion to competitive sports to push himself so hard, for so long?

Partly it was pure selfishness; after a decade as an environmental writer and activist, I needed a break from failing to save the world. But mostly it was curiosity that drove me. By year's end I hoped I'd have more sense of what life lived through the body felt like.

If *Long Distance* begins as a story about the transformation of the body and what it means to challenge one's physical limits, it evolves into a thoughtful lesson about a wholly different kind of endurance. Halfway through McKibben's training, his father was diagnosed with the most virulent form of brain cancer. As McKibben was reaching peak condition, his father's life lurched toward an end, forcing McKibben to snap out of his self-inflicted self-absorption. He had tried to think of endurance as "the ability to fight through the drama of pain. But now I understood it, too, as a kind of elegance, a lightness that could only come from such deep comfort with yourself that you began to forget about yourself." And the elegance of *Long Distance* is in its ultimate lesson that each of us has a mind, a body, and a spirit, and we must find our strength in all three realms. --*Svenja Soldovieri*

From Publishers Weekly

McKibben's description of his decision at age 37 to hire a professional exercise guru and undergo a grueling, year-long regimen of cross-country ski training on a par with that of an Olympian is as well done as his project may seem ambitious. McKibben (*Hundred Dollar Holiday*) admits early on, "I'm not sure where my wimpiness came from." He describes how, through all his tortuous physical training, his most rewarding results have been psychological. "I came seeking sweat," he writes, "and found only enlightenment." A balance of humor and healthy cynicism keeps the sentiment from overwhelming the text. McKibben also steers clear of an obsession with chronology or a journal-entry style that often dogs such projects, instead telling his story in anecdotes and asides, which allows for shifts in scene and subject that keep the story fresh. He incorporates an account of his father's battle with brain cancer, which coincides with his training, but he avoids melodrama when ruminating on his father's decline and weakness in light of his own increasing vigor. The result is a short and satisfying read that, like the author's experience, may not completely alter one's life, but certainly supplies plenty to think about. (Jan.)

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From Library Journal

This book documents one man's training to become a world-class long-distance cross-country skier. Throughout, essayist, journalist, and author McKibben (*The End of Nature*) shares the lessons he learned while skiing on three continents. As he states, "I came seeking sweat and found only enlightenment." This quote summarizes McKibben's mid-life journey of physical and spiritual renewal, in which he pushed his body and soul to the brink of collapse. A well-written, honest, and insightful look at what it takes to reach the threshold of competitive athletics, this is a story of endurance and finishing what you start. Recommended for most collections.

-*DLarry R. Little, Penticton P.L., British Columbia, Canada*

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Users Review

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Richard Dunn:

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