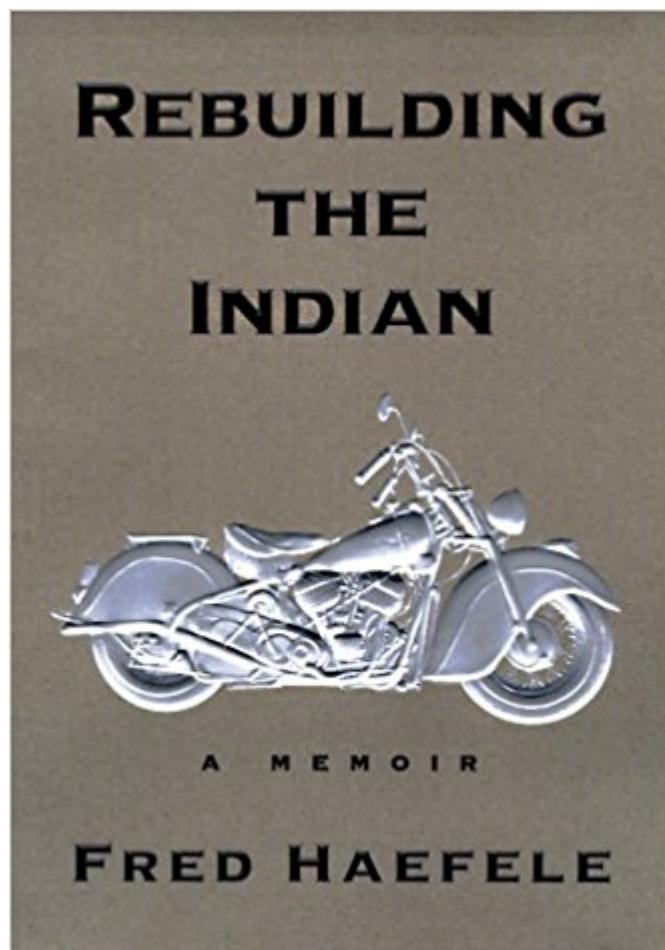


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# Rebuilding The Indian: A Memoir



## **Synopsis**

Maybe he's losing his mind. Maybe he's having a midlife crisis. Or maybe he's simply fulfilling a lifelong dream despite its near impossibility. Fred Haefele--a writer who can't get his novel published, an arborist who has sporadic work that's murder on his aging muscles, and an expectant father for the first time in more than twenty years--impulsively tackles the restoration of a 1941 Indian Chief motorcycle. This daunting project starts with a massive leap of faith--the purchase of a basket case--a \$5,000 heap of indeterminate old Indian parts in a cardboard box. From this grab bag, Haefele will slowly but surely resurrect one of the most beautiful machines ever built. With limited mechanical skills, a budget that relies heavily on a Visa Gold card, and a cast of local experts, Haefele takes us around every curve on his rocky road to restoration: the thrill of finding an original spare part; the joy of completing a repair that was previously beyond his ability; the nagging doubt that he's insane and the bike will never be finished; the suspicion that, once it looks finished, it won't run; and finally, the sheer headlong, heart-thrilling rush of riding the gleaming midnight-blue Millennium Flyer. Fred Haefele writes with poetic ease about making something--in this case, both a gorgeous motorcycle and a beautiful baby girl--and how the most versatile tool in his kit, for both jobs, was the fervent wish to do it right.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

An Indian, Haefele explains at the outset, is a make of motorcycle not built since 1953 but highly esteemed by American bikers in the 1930s and '40s. A Montana tree surgeon and an ex-teacher of

creative writing, Haefele (City of Trees) set out to reconstruct an Indian, and that task gives the principal thrust to this memoir. The rehabilitation project involved searching for abandoned machines, negotiating for old parts, purchasing replacement parts when originals were not available and keeping an eye out for "basketcases"?a motorcycle built from a hodgepodge of makes?from which valuable parts may be salvaged. Also included are accounts of the birth of his third child (the first of his second marriage), the vagaries of Montana weather and portraits of other bikers. But all else takes a backseat to the machine, and such a focus limits the book's appeal to readers equally committed to or fascinated by the construction of a what he calls a technological "work of art."

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An entertaining if somewhat flawed look at how a middle-aged hobbyist finds new meaning in life through rebuilding a classic motorcycle. Haefele is a frustrated novelist and academic who works, albeit happily, as a tree surgeon. Deciding after visiting an annual motorcycle rally to invest in a vintage American-made Indian Chief motorcycle, he finds himself friends with bikers and other assorted characters whom he would normally avoid. In the end, he finds that he has much in common with these folks, even as he has managed to sell his first novel and, by books end, is back on the academic trail chasing down university jobs. Because of the setting (Montana) and motif (motorcycles), Haefele's book is doomed to comparisons with Robert Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. These similarities notwithstanding, Haefele is able to guard himself well from any influence anxiety, though in one particular scene where he uses beer can slivers as a maintenance tool, the similarity is a little too close. Haefele's style is more relaxed and he isn't, for the most part, prone to the didacticism that mires down Pirsig's work. Unfortunately, the bottom begins to fall out when, for instance, the ``naming ceremony'' for his newborn daughter, Phoebe, is juxtaposed against the episode in which he names his motorcycle the ``Millennium Flyer.'' By the end, Haefele has dubbed his biker friend and tree-surgeon assistant Chaz the ``mythical trickster'' who has kept him going on his quest to rebuild his bike, and even more clumsily, he draws open comparisons between the clothes bought for his daughter and the parts bought to help build his cycle when most readers would catch the similarity on their own. These slips are not enough to ruin *Rebuilding the Indian*, though, which leaves one curious to see his forthcoming novel. -- Copyright ©1998, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

This is a weird book because I picked it up hoping to read about how to restore an Indian. What I ended up reading was a book in which Fred basically pays other people to do things for him. This is

of course normal and proper, but he doesn't spend much effort discussing the things he does on his own either. *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, if we compare the ok to the great, actually taught you something about traveling and fixing you machine and remains the better book to read. **HOWEVER**, having said all that, Fred is brave in letting you into his life (divorce, father problems, people who are not exactly on the straight and narrow) in that sense I DID enjoy the book because it is a heartfelt, and very honest, book which doesn't try to BS you. However, even then Fred doesn't really take you all the way in. So in conclusion, I don't regret buying it - But I'll probably pass it on to someone else who likes motorcycles.

Started reading this the other night, and I can already say it's a pretty good read, combining not only the story and some pics of this guys "barn find" and the start to finish time line on resurrecting it, but quite a good perspective on his life and all those who were in orbit around the nucleus of this project. Some new perspectives (for me) of northern winters and life in general, Sturgis and the crap people go through behind what we actually see. Haefele can really bring small things into focus with his writing, whether it be a friend and mentors' shaky marriage, a professional bike builders' arrogance or the joy of a small child to watch her dad do something that everyone basically told him he was incapable of doing if he didn't "have ten grand" to invest in it. Not done yet, but if the rest is like the first 40 pages, I'll for damn sure give it 5 stars. Way to go, Fred! Makes me proud to get on my '03 Chief Roadmaster and tell my friends "I told you I'd have a Chief...one of these days!" Atta' boy.

O.k. - I agree with some of the negative reviews about this book. Nope, it contains absolutely zero details about the rebuilding of an Indian. Nope, Mr. Haefele doesn't fit the classic image of a biker. Yes, Fred reveals that he is in fact human - with regrets and mistakes; omissions and commissions. Yep, he's human. And that's what the book is about. It's about trying to find oneself after 50 years of life. For some people, that means going on a world tour. For others, it means a midlife crisis with dalliances and a Corvette convertible in the driveway. For others like Mr. Haefele, and this is the story we're talking about here, is how a gear head comes to terms with his past and his future. It's about piecing together something that others might view as a basket case (be it an Indian motorcycle or an academic career gone astray) and put it together and make sense of it. The book outlines the give-and-takes of the sacrifices it takes to go through the process- the favors we call in and the debts (both monetary and personal) we incur in the process. In the end, we're pretty happy with what we've created! Any of the critics that claim Mr. Haefele simply seems to 'outsource' the

rebuilding process of the Indian - and consequently conclude the rebuilding/review of his life (it is after all a memoir) has been outsourced - have NEVER been involved in the building or rebuilding process of a car or motorcycle. I've rebuilt a few cars and motorcycles in the past 20 years - I have yet to meet a 'builder' that does 100% of the actual work. Engines are outsourced to machine shops and other experts; upholstery goes to another expert; etc. And so it goes in this book whether we're talking about the parts needed to finish the bike, or the 'parts' needed to complete our lives. The process of managing the rebuild with our friends and partners- be it the bike or one's life - is where the 'proof' of the pudding is. And Fred shines in that department both in the rebuilding of the bike and the bridging of relationships he describes in the book. Rebuilding the Indian was a great read. I hope someday to run into Mr. Haefele while I'm out riding my 2003 Indian. Unfortunately, contrary to his afterward, it turns out the New Indian out of Gilroy are perhaps only marginally more reliable to the old iron he rides. In the mean time, I've got a 1973 Yamaha waiting for the engine to be reinstalled.

The book is like a less attractive cousin to Robert M Pirsig's "Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance" with more information about the characters compromises and scams associated with restoring old bikes - in this case, the iconic Indian. More bike, less philosophy - which might not be a bad thing. I do object to the author referring to Australians as some kind of pestilence ravishing the barns of America for Harley Davidson and Indian parts - as if Americans have some god-given superior right to own antique American iron. I prefer to think of our tribe as hard core enthusiasts prepared to travel thousands of miles and put up with hayseeds, yokels, outright liars and cheats, rip-off merchants and red-neck half-wits - so we can restore vintage motorcycles - that Americans were happy to export down under in the first place. So, as a piece of sociology, I guess it can be seen as being informative at least. Disappointing quality black and white photographs, few in number.

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