

**My Life
Through
Motorcycles
The Next Thirty Years**

Edwin Thompson

My Life Through Motorcycles
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Dedication

Thank you, Russ, for all of your help, time, effort, money, garage space, and love in helping my motorcycling dreams become a reality. This book would have been a lot shorter without your help. Thank you, God, for your countless blessings and mercies—your mercy for not giving me what I deserve, and your blessing for giving me what I don't deserve, both in this life and especially in the life to come.

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INTRODUCTION TO SECTION FOUR: 2000-2009

As I have arranged this book by decades, this section moves a lot—much like I did during this time. I had some really great bikes while living at Tantela Ranch, however; I was becoming very restless at Tantela. This turned out to be a very tumultuous decade.

By 2004, I was bored to death. I was so anal about my lawn I was cutting my grass twice a week—it was a big yard. The pest control business had taken a big hit after September 11—something I've never been able to explain. I wanted to try something new.

I decided to get a real estate license and take advantage of the signature loans that mortgage companies were offering; they were the type of loans that would become the demise of the economy. I began flipping houses. Easy money.

By 2004, most of my friends had moved to other states—both metaphorically and literally. I left Tantela as well, using the profit to acquire another property. I bought a condo in the Lakeview area of New Orleans. I sold the condo within nine months for a handsome profit, and purchased another home.

During my time back in New Orleans, I became friends with my high school principal, Mrs. Driscoll—she's in the GT380 story.

We laughed at the irony: I was her worst student in her sixty years of education, and now, I was helping her put her forty years of handwritten "Bible Class" notes into a manuscript for her new book.

Recall that nearly three decades earlier I had to make a score of 124 on my final exam in her Bible class in order to pass high school.

We went to lunch together often. We also rode out some tough times in her life; I was honored to be there to support her in any way I could. And I am ashamed for her lifelong friends who sold her out like Judas did Jesus.

The day of her funeral was one of the coldest days in New Orleans I can remember. Mrs. Driscoll is another person in the circle of life that I miss now.

The only motorcycle I had for a while was the RL 250, and it was stored at Jimmy's. For almost two years, I didn't own another motorcycle. Part of that had to do with living in New Orleans, which isn't conducive to riding. When I felt the need, I rented a bike for a day trip.

I did some art during this time—music and painting. But for the most part, I had stepped into a very secluded world. Most of my friends had moved away. I wasn't playing drums. I walked the shores of Lake Pontchartrain a lot. I was bored—really bored.

During a trip to Birmingham, Alabama, in April 2005, while I was walking in the woods, it became very clear to me, in prayer, to go home and sell my house.

"But I like that house." I told God.

It was a cottage on Lake Pontchartrain, in Old Mandeville. I was also told that I should get ready to close the business. I received a very clear understanding that I should hold on—life was about to change. I listened to what I had heard and felt.

When I returned home, I dreadfully began to hammer the "For Sale" sign into the ground. I had hit it exactly once when a car pulled up. The man asked me if I was selling the property. I looked at the sign, and then at him.

"How much do you want?" he asked.

"Two hundred and twenty-five dollars a square foot," I told him.

"Does it have running water and electricity?" he chuckled.

"Barely," I dryly replied.

"I'll take it," he stated imperatively.

I raised an eyebrow at him. He stuck out his hand. I shook it.

"I need you out in two weeks," he added.

"Okay," I replied.

I thought about what I had "heard" in Alabama a month earlier.

"Well, I still haven't closed the pest control business. What could kill that cash cow?" I told myself.

Meanwhile, I moved back to Jimmy's, into "my room" at the edge of the woods—a sloping, cracked-concrete-floored shed. There was no running water except for the wellhead outside. The nearest bathroom was two hundred feet away. I loved it. It was primitive.

I now like primitive camping—as long as it has air conditioning and heat.

My conscience told me not to, but I made an offer on another house—one right on the water. Somehow, my credit got tangled up with another person, and the loan got denied. It took weeks to fix it. Finally, we got ready to close on the property. The closing got delayed—a storm had moved into the Gulf of Mexico, and no one writes flood insurance during that time.

That storm was Hurricane Katrina, which hit New Orleans days later. There were no houses to buy; most were gone or so badly damaged they had to be torn down. The pest control business that had been in my family for over fifty years was gone overnight. Eighty-five percent of my customers had been

wiped off the map. There were no houses left to have contracts on.

In October in 2005, I moved in with Myrna and Russ in Birmingham, Alabama. I did a lot of walking on the same trail where, months earlier, I was led to sell the house and close the business. I thought about what I was going to do with my life. I had never had a traditional job, and it seemed as though everyone wanted a college degree just to apply for a decent job.

My grandmother was living with us as well, as Biloxi had been wiped away as well. We spent a lot of time together for several months-soothing the pain with afternoon toddies. She liked an Old Fashioned; I liked my whiskey in a glass of water.

I taught her the joys of playing drunk-dialing. She caught up with all kinds of people, enjoying much lively conversation with relatives and old friends. It was the right thing to do.

I've always loved to watch a full moon rise, and so did my granny. I would bring a chair for her, and we would sit in the open front doorway having cocktails, talking, and watching the full October harvest moon rise. The neighbors were becoming nervous about the refugees living at my sister's-me and Granny.

It was during one of these conversations with Granny that I told her I felt like going back to college.

"Do it, honey," she replied.

"But Grandma, I'd be fifty years old by the time I graduate," I stated, trying to add perspective and a good excuse not to go back.

She sipped her Old Fashioned and patted me on the knee.

"Well, honey, how old are you going to be if you don't?" she asked frankly.

We stayed in Birmingham until December. Granny returned to Biloxi to live with my aunt; I returned to Jimmy's shed and started college in January 2006.

For the next three and a half years, I went to school full-time—eighteen hours per semester, summer school as well. I made the President's List with a 3.6 to 4.0 grade point average. Higher education was all I did until I graduated in May 2009.

You could call it a case of over-focus—nothing could stand in my way of graduating. I was so intent on finishing by that deadline. I hated college when I was young; I loved it in my old age.

However, I became stressed out from the intensity of my school commitments. That grinding pace, combined with nearly forty years of gluttony—food, drugs, alcohol, and a wild lifestyle—finally caught up with me. Someone must have told the piper where I could be found, and he wanted to be paid for the party.

I had a heart attack on September 12, 2008—three clogged arteries. Three stints later and I was back at school. I only missed two days of class, finished my two English papers on time, and lost thirty percent of my heart. But I finished school.

In May 2009, I received my BA in Secondary English Education. I'm just sorry that my granny didn't live to see me finish, for she was my inspiration. An education degree was by happenstance, but I found that I liked teaching—or at least being on stage—so a teacher I would be.

So said, so decreed.

The Education Department didn't think it was a good idea; they suggested I pursue

"sales or something." Eighteen months later, I finally found a job.

From 2009, I have lived in Ponchatoula, Louisiana; Folsom, Louisiana; Birmingham, Alabama; Jackson, Alabama; back to Birmingham; to Baton Rouge; then back to Birmingham; and Valley, Alabama. I can now identify with the Tuareg people—they're nomadic; they move a lot too.

Through all the changes and the turmoil, motorcycles were there to soothe my pain. I had some great bikes and wonderful rides from 2000 to 2009. So let me share some of these adventures with you.

2000 BUELL M2 CYCLONE WITH RACE KIT

Thursday, June 1, 2000: I had been riding my 883 Sportster that I had purchased before the turn of the new millennium for several months; it was time, or rather past time, for the five-thousand-mile check-up. I brought the bike to Harley-Davidson of Baton Rouge, since they had done such a great job on rebuilding and wiring my chopper nearly a decade before.

The dealership was also selling Buell motorcycles. I had read about Buells, but I had never actually seen one. As I waited around the shop guzzling free Community Coffee and popcorn, I decided to check out the bikes.

I looked at the Buells somewhat bewildered. I had a choice to make: either put down the popcorn or the coffee so I could scratch my head in bewilderment, or just keep the dumbfounded look on my face. I threw the popcorn away and scratched my head.

"What do you think of that?" a voice asked.

"I really don't know what to think of it," I replied to the salesman. "It looks like an angry robot wasp."

"And it'll sting nearly any sport bike out there too," he boasted.

I raised my eyebrows at him and asked, "Have you ridden a Ducati?"

"Nearly any sport bike out there," he said, adding an addendum to his statement.

"Humph, funny place for rear suspension--right there in the middle, under the bike," I said, egging him on for more of an explanation.

He tried to set the hook. "You seem to like Sportster engines. That chopper you had

years ago and the 883 in the back—you should ride this and see what a Sportster engine can really do."

"Not really into crotch rockets," I threw out dodgingly.

"You seem to like speed. What's that, your fourth cup of coffee?" We both laughed. "A fresh pot's brewing, be ready by the time you get back from taking the Buell for a ride."

"No point in riding, I ain't buying," I argued.

He smiled and lifted the Buell into an upright position. "This is a twelve-hundred cubic centimeters engine, with the race kit. If this thing doesn't make you smile after a ride, then you need to start shopping for a grave plot-'cause you must be half dead."

"Ah, um," I said, slowly drawling incoherent consonants.

I was weakening. He knew he had a test ride on tap. Without another word, he started wheeling the Buell to the door. I grabbed my helmet and followed.

When the Buell roared to life, the hair on my neck stood on end. The bike growled. As he revved the engine, leaves and dust within fifteen feet blew clear.

He smiled and yelled over the roar, "You can blow your sidewalk too."

He dismounted and stretched his arm toward the bike. I mounted the bike.

He offered one caveat: "Don't punch into it until third gear, or you're going over backwards."

I took off.

I headed slowly up the interstate service road toward the freeway on-ramp. I tested the brakes and knew this thing would go over forward if I grabbed too much front brake.

As I got on the freeway, I smoothly dialed the throttle on. I immediately felt torque unlike any motorcycle I had ever ridden.

Not only could you blow your sidewalks, but you could pull stumps too, I thought.

There was little traffic, so I began to accelerate. I hit second gear and punched it. The front end started climbing. I backed off and rolled the power on a little slower. Before I knew what was happening, I was rocketing down the freeway at 105 mph, quickly approaching the next exit—it hadn't been two minutes.

This is like skydiving, I thought, ninety seconds and the ride's over.

I continued to the next exit. As I took the sweeping turn of the exit, the bike felt like it was glued to the ground. It was tight, smooth, precise, and it sounded great when you blipped the throttle. I was grinning.

I made the return run to the dealership and pulled into the parking lot. Everyone was looking at the Buell. I parked. As I removed my helmet, the salesman approached with a fresh cup of coffee stretched out toward me.

"Well, I guess you don't need to go shopping for a grave. By the smile on your face, you seem very much alive."

"Yeah! Very much alive!" My words went straight to the part of my brain that releases inhibition and strangles sensible thoughts.

I thought about how this seemed to be happening every time I walked into a Harley dealership lately. I wondered if there's something in their coffee. I also realized that everyone had been wrong about the banks

crashing at 2000, and remembered that I still had some money.

The salesman's voice interrupted my thoughts. "Your Sportster's ready to go, they're fixing to bring it out."

Dazed, I replied, "Tell 'em to leave it in the shop. I'm taking the Buell home."

I could hear me saying it. The salesman heard me, because he asked me, "You want me to get you a trade-in price?"

"No, I'm keeping it too."

"That Buell's a demo, I don't know if that one's for sale--"

"That Buell's mine," I firmly stated. "It's going home with me as fast as the paperwork's done."

In less than an hour, I was riding the Buell home.

When I got home, it dawned on me that I had made the same error in judgment I had made when I bought the Sportster last fall, when I had left my truck in New Orleans. I wondered how I was going to get the Sportster home from Baton Rouge--still don't recall how it got home.

I enjoyed the Buell for a few weeks. I decided that the last Friday of the month I would take the Buell to the Covington block party, where I had been accused of riding my wife's bike a month before by the pig on the Hog.

Thankfully, I never saw him again. People were awed by the Buell, but that didn't last. It was about that time Confederate motorcycles, which were made nearby at the time, started bringing their bikes out in public, and they were fine.

I was really enjoying the Buell. Riding it was akin to what I imagine flying a World War II Spitfire fighter plane must be like. The roar of the V-twin, the way the bike

would just bank over—it was so powerful, so American.

Once the power became a hindrance. I tried to take my friend, Pam—yep that Pam—for a ride, but I couldn't. Over the years she had become a stout girl. Every time I even slightly dialed on the power, the front wheel would head skyward. We didn't make a block before giving up.

When we returned to my house we both laughed. I told Pam, "At least I've given you a ride on a motorcycle before."

She looked at me with remembrance in her eyes.

It turns out that she too remembered the ride on the Honda Cub 50—the ride we had taken in sixth grade. The time she had told me, "I'll always remember this moment." She did. Ain't life sweet?

I rode the Buell on my country road loop for a few months before "the letter" arrived. I figured it must be another computer-generated "Thank you, welcome to the Buell family" letter. I was wrong. It wasn't a thank-you letter, but it was a "fine how-do-you-do."

The letter warned me not to ride the Buell; it warned of impending doom. It told of a "potential problem" with the Buell. It warned that the rear shock mount may fail, allowing the rear shock—the one under the bike—to drop forward, or something along that order.

In essence, the possible result could be me being catapulted forward as the bike came to an abrupt stop. Or as they said, it "could result in death."

"That's pretty straightforward and clear," I said aloud.

Once again I stood scratching my head, staring at the Buell—only this time it was

in my house and in my name. I was paying for a bike I couldn't ride. I was not happy.

I called the dealer. They explained that only one or two bikes had experienced this problem and that it was unlikely to happen, but the potential was there. For legal reasons they advised me not to ride it.

I didn't ride the bike for a month. I waited for the call that would let me know they had the parts to stop the "potential" calamity. The call never came.

I called the dealer again. I wanted to know when they would remedy the issue.

"Can't say, Buell is a separate entity. They do things at a different speed," explained the shop manager.

I began calling the Buell company and asking for my paycheck. The staff remained puzzled until they finally put me through to an executive.

I explained to him that I felt I deserved a paycheck like any other test rider. After all, I had risked my life riding their motorcycle while they were seemingly still in the developmental stage. He was never amused and finally quit taking my calls.

After several months of staring at the bike, reason disappeared—as though I had actually possessed reason. Idiocy prevailed again.

One warm night I rode the Buell to my cousin's birthday party. Her dad's house was out in the country, just a half-mile off of I-12. There was good food, copious amounts of alcohol, a live band, and a lot of young women. It was like any south Louisiana party. It had all of the things I like. However, these things combined can become a toxic mix of trouble—and they did.

By midnight the party had a new attraction—rides on the Buell. You had to be

a female to qualify for a ride. I didn't have an extra helmet, so being a southern gentleman I had offered the ladies the safety of my half-helmet and I rode helmetless. The show must go on!

Once on I-12, we would blast down I-12 to the next exit—exactly one mile away. ETA, about thirty-six seconds. This went on and on.

Finally, as another contestant and I blasted off toward the next exit, a set of blue lights flashed behind us. I killed the lights and nailed the throttle. The police lights went off.

I reasoned two things: the officer figured he couldn't catch me, or that he would just send for a mop—to mop up the mess when my stupidity prevailed. We stopped playing that game.

My trip home that night was much like the trip home from the disco in Biloxi in June of 1976. I made it home safely, thanks to God's mercy on fools and my guardian angel working overtime—again.

The next morning over a cup of strong coffee I stared at the Buell. I felt shame and remorse for my foolish actions the night before. I really did.

I called the dealership again. I wanted to know if they would put the bike on consignment. Before I could say anything, the shop manager told me to hold on. The owner of the shop, an old family friend, told me he would like to refund my money and take the Buell back.

I was stunned. I said, "Thank you."

When I hung up I realized that I had said "thank you" to God more than to the owner of the shop. The next day the Buell was gone. As well, somehow overnight an ounce of sense

settled somewhere in my brain. I have never ridden a motorcycle intoxicated again.

I learned not to be impulsive—no I didn't, I'm still impulsive.

My time with the Buell was like the Buell itself—fast and dangerous. I had a blast on the Buell. My experiences on the Buell were stupid and idiotically fun. They're found on my resume—the one I'm going to use when I apply for the position of village idiot one day.

But the Buell offered fun, speed, and danger—all of the spices of life I like.



PREFACE TO THE 1974 SUZUKI TM 400 SIGNED DECOSTER REPLICA

Roger DeCoster was my teenage hero from the time I was eleven years old. I have always thought that the factory Suzukis from the early 1970s were beautiful. They possess a sleek, crisp, timeless design; and they have world-championship-winning provenance.

I've always wanted one. I couldn't find a reasonably priced RH, so I decided a replica would have to do. I figured the place to start was "Vintage Iron." I called them.

They told me about a DeCoster replica they had just built. When Mr. Rick agreed to get Mr. DeCoster to sign the tank, I bought the bike.

I purchased it over the phone on Thursday, August 31, 2000. It was delivered to my door within a week.

The Suzuki sat in several choice locations of my living room at Tantela--depending on the angle at which I chose to admire it from.

In the ensuing years I owned it, I never started it. I would pull the spark plug, hand crank the starter, and shoot WD-40 into the cylinder.

Not riding the bike didn't take away from the pleasure of owning the bike. It was great to gawk at and a pleasure to polish. If you had seen the bike, you would understand.

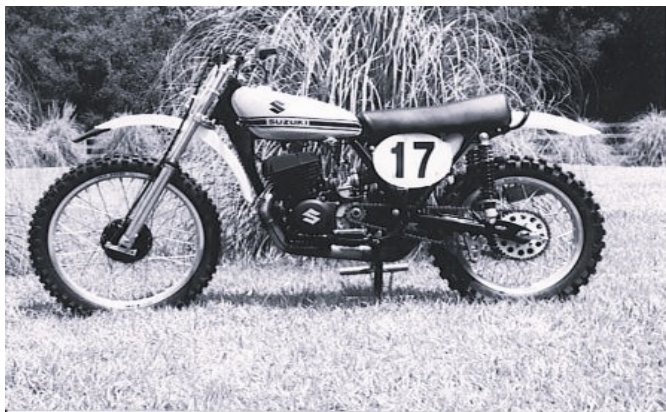
I sold it sometime after September 11, 2001--after the 9-11 attack. I had started panicking about money again--or the impending lack thereof. The DeCoster replica is a motorcycle that I wish I still owned.

The following story was published in VMX magazine, Number 15, 2002, as a letter from a reader. The story of the DeCoster replica

is what planted the seed in my imagination to write about my memories and experiences about the motorcycles I have owned. It's taken many years for the books of those stories to reach fruition, but that's better than the idea having died on the vine.

But that DeCoster replica made me realize that I was growing old. I had reached an age that I would pay thousands of dollars for a nugget of nostalgia. I had matured to the point of appreciating motorcycles as art.

And as always, the reoccurring lesson that was reinforced to me was that it sure feels good to get what you want-especially if it's on two wheels.



The Cost of Individuality

First, let me say that this isn't a story about a mid-life crisis or things I would do different "if." No, my life has always been interesting and exciting—often overly so. Mid-life crisis? Got that out of the way at eighteen.

I'm forty-one and have owned and ridden motorcycles for over thirty years. Like many, I raced motocross competitively during my youth in the early seventies. In summary, I have but four weaknesses: motorcycles, younger women, motorcycles, and music.

My problem? After my third wife left I began to feel as though something were missing—besides half of my assets and property. Just that "something" was missing in my life.

Suddenly bells went off in my head; I answered my phone, and it was Willis, a lifelong friend of like nature.

"Man, there's a real motocross track twenty minutes from your house! A real motocross track! Outside!" His excitement sounded as though he found an untapped gold mine nearby. "A real motocross track," he continued.

I hadn't been to a motocross race in twenty-two years, I thought.

"Outside man... in real dirt... young women." He reintegrated.

He sold me.

So off to the races I go, looking for an epiphany of sorts. Stopping at the track gate, two effervescent teenage girls took my money—and my heart. So far everything looks good.

What can change? I thought. Mud, motorcycles, and women—the true foundations

of life as I see it, and probably millions of WWF fans as well.

As I assured myself and turned in to park, I was cut off by a teenage kid doing a one-handed, rodeo-style stoppie!

My first real problem arose while I was walking around the pit area. I couldn't seem to distinguish one motorcycle brand from another; they all looked so generically blurred. Admittedly, at forty-one, reading has its challenges at times.

I walked closer to a motorcycle. As I stood there, staring into the glaring graphics, I still couldn't tell what it was. I began to focus on one spot, hoping that like one of those pictures it would come into focus.

"Yes, yes... 1... 2... 5... 125! A 125!" I shouted.

I'm five-foot-six and I don't remember a 125 seat being chest-high. Was I going blind and shrinking too? Thank goodness, it wasn't calcium deficiency or failing eyesight, or worse warned things from teenage life. It was technology and rap music graphics—neither of which I like.

A 125 looked like a 400, a Yamaha looked like a CZ—wait! There aren't any CZs; I didn't see any Maicos either.

No, no, no, this isn't working for me! Give me a screaming yellow Suzuki, an orange Maico, a jock-strapped YZ, a red CZ. Give me individuality! I silently screamed.

I went track-side to watch practice. After watching wide-eyed teenagers fueled by speedball mixtures of testosterone and adrenaline pulling flying W's and clap-claps on the double jumps—with nothing more to lose than a week of school and six weeks of physical education participation—I had

serious misgivings about ever sharing the track with them, not even practice.

I expressed my feeling to the older man standing nearby. As it turns out, he was the farmer that owns the land and the track.

He told me, "Come out and ride anytime, long as it's after five-thirty a.m., so my wife can sleep in some. Four dollars, all day." He added, "You might have to share the track with two, three, maybe four people."

The races? Who cares.

From up on a hill, way in the back of the track, I watched each class race once. As I blurred out the modern details around me, it started to come into focus. The new bikes are faster and fly higher, but I don't see the point—not for \$6,000 plus.

Six thousand dollars—what kind of bike would that have been back in '72 or '73? Humph... that's it.

The epiphany? Oh, to be young again. No thank you. Forty-one, healthy, semi-retired, isn't so bad. I know I can never be young again and compete with such levels of energy and daring, but I can recapture fragments of my youth through vintage toys.

So, this old dog learned a new trick. Using the technology of the internet, I found my dream makers at Vintage Iron. By email alone I purchased a beautifully restored, customized, and signed replica of Roger DeCoster's world championship Suzuki from the early seventies, to be delivered to my door. Maybe technology isn't so bad after all.

They tell me the motorcycle is too perfect to ride—we'll see about that when it arrives.

Meanwhile, in south Louisiana, where any excuse is a good excuse for a party, the anticipated arrival party for the DeCoster

replica has swollen into a two-day, two-band affair—"Laissez les bons temps rouler!"

Just in case the bike is too perfect to ride, we're planning a 250 Joel Robert replica, one to ride-just in case. And the DeCoster replica party? Now that could be another story.

1975 BMW R90S IN DAYTONA ORANGE

My first encounter with a BMW R90S was when I was sixteen years old. During the summer of 1976, I was working at the local Suzuki/BMW/Moto Guzzi dealer. I used to polish the two R90S models on the showroom floor every day; there was the Smoke Silver and a Daytona Orange model. I fell in love with the Daytona Orange R90S—I fell hard.

I nearly polished the paint and chrome off of that bike, lost in a vision of me owning an R90S one day. My daydreams were regularly interrupted by the owner reminding me there were forty others bikes to wipe down.

Forty other bikes? I hadn't noticed. I would quietly tell the Daytona Orange R90S, "I only have eyes for you," before I would move on.

The opportunity to own a R90S in Daytona Orange came nearly thirty years later, when I bought an incredibly beautiful specimen on eBay. When I say this motorcycle was original and nearly pristine, let me add weight by saying it was a contender for the Guggenheim motorcycle show, and it's prettier than the one on display at the Barber Motorcycle Museum.

Of course, Mr. Barber doesn't have to sell his motorcycles when he wishes to purchase another one that catches his eye.

At the time, I was on an autographed motorcycle kick. I contacted Mr. Reg Pridmore, who had won the first Superbike championship in 1976 on a BMW R90S. I asked Mr. Pridmore if he would sign my gas tank; he agreed. I shipped the tank to him. He was gracious enough to sign it and UPS it back to me. His signature added immeasurable

value to the R90S for me, and it looked great next to the signed DeCoster replica.

I was living at Tantela at the time, where I could begin riding a sixty-mile loop of scenic, twisty, country roads from my front door. Several days a week, I would ride for hours on the R90S.

The R90S was one of the most positive handling, balanced, and comfortable motorcycles I have ever owned, modern or vintage. I've always enjoyed viewing my motorcycles from every angle possible while I'm riding; the handling of the R90S allowed for that. In motion, the R90S was beautiful from every angle.

On straight, flat, rural Louisiana roads, I would tighten the steering lock, stand up, arms outstretched, and lean slightly forward. My only view was flying through the air above the road. The R90S was the perfect bike for doing that—it would track as straight as an arrow for miles.

A recent set of skydiving adventures at that time had made me realize motorcycling is very much like horizontal skydiving. The upside is, motorcycling doesn't cost hundreds of dollars for a ninety-second thrill. Another nice feature about motorcycling opposed to skydiving is, in the event that you have to make contact with the ground under emergency circumstances, the ground impact is generally a horizontal impact; skydiving is a vertical impact—or in other words, a sudden stop.

But back to earth—so to speak.

Morning rides have always been my favorite rides. Just wheeling the R90S into the sun was a pleasure. The warm glow of the morning sun enhanced the beautiful orange paint job of the R90S. Once underway, the R90S engine purred through the backroads,

making it a complete joy, both aesthetically and emotionally, to ride; it was pure pleasure, parked or in motion.

I especially enjoyed the first two miles of my early morning rides, for I was riding counter-flow to the country commuter traffic. I reveled in the fact that I was going to play, and they were going to work. That always put a smile on my face—it still does.

Riding against commuter traffic reminds me of the fall morning in 1975 when I passed up, skipped school, and rode the GT380 up to the Manchac Swamp. My ride that fall morning was very formidable on my outlook and values toward work, the future, and the here and now.

Spending time on a motorcycle and living for the here and now, opposed to chasing a career, is something I still struggle with.

I must admit, the older I get, the less I struggle with such decisions; it's too late to worry about my retirement, so I may as well go riding. Riding the R90S was a fair trade of pleasure over work—or a worthwhile waste of time—however you choose to see it.

The BMW R90S was a motorcycle I enjoyed owning. It combined beauty, timeless design, performance, handling, and most of all, the joy of owning a motorcycle that I had wanted for decades. The R90S was one of the most fulfilling motorcycles to finally own.

The like-new condition of the bike after thirty years of existence only enhanced my ownership experience; it was as though the bike had been put away and stored, just waiting for me since I was seventeen years old.

The BMW provided encouragement every time I rode it. It let me know that I was making

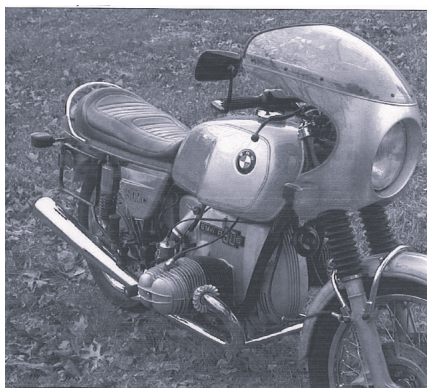
the wise choice, the right decision, to enjoy my time and money while I could.

I may not have the BMW anymore, but I still have the memories. I find reliving the morning rides in my mind and wishing I had the R90S back is better than wishing I had owned one—I owned one, and I enjoyed it.

One of the reasons I'm writing this book is so when I've forgotten such memories, I'll still be able to read about them. Hopefully, I'll still understand they were mine—especially the memories of the R90S.

Of course, as I've said before, if scientists would set their priorities in order, and perfect time travel, we wouldn't need memories. I could just go back in time and enjoy the R90S. Maybe I could even go back in time and pick her up in Germany from her birthplace and tour Europe for three months.

I suppose if I thought logically, I would time travel back and discover Elvis Presley, The Beatles, and become friends with Bill Gates—then I would have been able to keep all of my bikes!



1973 HONDA CL350

The Honda CL350—was this the forerunner of one of my favorite types of motorcycle, the BMW GS series? No. The CL was a street bike with shiny, chrome, upswept mufflers—good looking upswept mufflers, I might add. But the CL350 can in no way be compared to a BMW GS.

I was living at Tantela, fulfilling all of my belated motorcycle ownership fantasies by purchasing the BMW R90S, the DeCoster replica, the Maico, the Harley, the Buell, and of course the RL trials. Somewhere in between the cracks, the Honda CL350 fell into my life.

I don't recall how, or exactly when it captured my desire to own one—forty years after I actually wanted one—nor can I recall when it took up residence in my barn.

I'll make the assumption of how, when, and why it came into my life from a combination of adult beverages and browsing eBay—a known toxic combination to my finances. I've learned over time, and I am still learning, to triple-check my bids. My most recent lesson came after I placed a maximum bid of one hundred and eight thousand, one hundred and eight dollars and ten cents on a Road Glide. I seldom enter extreme bid amounts by mistake, but I have and did.

Half of the problem is my bidding habit of entering weird dollar figures, the other half is whiskey, the other half is stupidity. I think the CL came about in a like manner.

To my credit, Pinky—the bulletproof Honda CB350 that I had thrashed within an inch of its life—left me with the impression that all 1970s model Hondas would run perfect

after decades of storage. That impression was a misconception.

The CL had some minor issues with the carburetors, timing, and electrical system. Minor issues on a forty-year-old bike are to be expected, right?

I expected to press "start" and ride. Don't get me wrong, it was rideable, but it had an annoying habit of switching into some type of "power-saving mode" by running on one cylinder. It usually chose to do this miles from home and minutes before sunset.

The look of the CL was handsome. The CL didn't have curvy, sexy lines. I've never used female pronouns such as "she" or "her" to describe it. The bike had tight, muscular lines. If I had to use personifications, I would say the CL looked more like a surfer-dude. A bike you'd see in an ad with surfers, at the beach, with surfer girls—of course, nothing can ever top the "Norton Girl" ads from the seventies. To say, the CL had no sexy, swoopy lines.

I had wanted a CL since 1971. The Honda ad at the time showed a guy blasting down a country road, just like the ones I was riding on near Tantela. A perfect fit, I thought.

So thought, so bought.

The bike was in great cosmetic shape, all original. The red and white paint was still bright and glossy. The chrome wasn't pitted. The rubber was soft and pliable, except "inside the carburetor," said Billy Orazio, the owner of a Northshore motorcycle shop that specialized in old Hondas.

Let's pause here for a moment at Billy. You know the circle of life theme that runs through the stories; the CL is no exception. The CL led me straight to Billy, whom I hadn't seen in over thirty years.

As a teenager, I never really liked Billy. I didn't dislike him—I, yeah, okay, I didn't like him. Billy was one of the riders that took my spot riding Suzukis for Terry in 1975, after I had lost my nerve for motocross. That I didn't like.

Billy was a steady, good customer of Terry's. He was arrogant—or confident—and I understand that fine line. Billy's mom used to dump wads of cash into his racing endeavors, and at times he acted entitled. That I didn't like.

Billy and I tied up a few times on the race track. He used to race every Sunday. That I didn't like. When we raced against each other, a few times he beat me—that I really didn't like.

So, thanks to the CL, Billy and I crossed paths as adults. As usual, old impressions are usually wrong, as was mine of Billy; he's a good guy.

I had forgotten, until my sister reminded me as I talked about the first drafts of these stories, that Billy's dad was supposed to buy Terry's Suzuki dealership; the paperwork was all in order. His dad had a heart attack—or some health issue—and died in surgery. I had forgotten that tragic part of Billy's life.

Billy's dad knew old Hondas. Billy knows old Hondas. His shop sold Chinese knock-offs of the old Honda Mini-Trails. Read "knock-off" as an exact replica; the only difference is the badging. He also bought and sold used bikes and had a good parts and accessory line. It was a nice shop.

I brought him the CL to work on. Billy got the CL running pretty good; it still wasn't quite right though. I can't remember the details of what we did, or what we didn't do, and should have done, like

replace the carburetors. I do remember not wanting to spend money on it and being disappointed in the bike's performance since it arrived. He kept mentioning something about a diaphragm thing-a-ma-jig inside the carburetors.

Details, details, details. I just want to get on a bike and go.

I rode the CL a while. I brought it to Billy a while. Never quite right.

During one visit, Billy somehow talked me into letting him take my signed Suzuki DeCoster replica to use in his display at the upcoming World of Wheels Show at the New Orleans Superdome.

I'm not sure how I got talked into that, but I remember thinking it would be nice if others could enjoy its beauty, besides the people who had been in my living room.

I won't swear to it, but I believe the DeCoster replica won a trophy at the auto show, and Billy has that trophy—yet another one he has taken from me over the last forty years. I would probably swear that didn't happen and that my subconscious mind is still holding some teenage grudge against Billy.

In any case, the CL had issues—go figure. I was not happy. My dislike for uncooperative motorcycles arose and I became disgruntled. I sold the CL to Jimmy. His patience was shorter than mine. He sold it to Billy.

The circle of life. How many degrees were those encounters?

Lesson learned? Some motorcycles are best owned when they're new, when they were setting the style curve, not past it. Many were best owned when they were mass-produced. The CL was mass-produced. CLs are still plentiful and relatively inexpensive.

This one wasn't worth the effort—at least not to me.

I learned fulfilling a dream, desire, or wish to own a particular motorcycle is without a time limit. It's always fun to get what you want. If not, we wouldn't have invented Santa Claus or the lottery. I believe there's more documented cases of people meeting Santa Claus than having won the lottery. But again, I digress.

My time with the CL350, particularly on those early fall morning rides, was another belated dream come true. It was fun to fulfill it—ang ood to move on.

One consistent theme has surfaced while putting these stories together. I'm seeing that dreams fulfilled belated are better than unfulfilled dreams. Lesson enough for me.



1974 MAICO 250 MOTO-CROSS: MAICO BREAK-O

I have always admired the raw, carved beauty of a coffin-tanked Maico, with its long, low-slung expansion chamber, front fork gaiters, and thick seat. I always wanted one. I finally got one—mind you, it was thirty years after the fact.

I had free time, a little money to spend, and a motocross track twenty minutes away from my house. This Maico had been fully restored in 2002. Theoretically, the Maico should have been better than new.

So much for theory.

It took three laps for me to become intimately familiar with the old nickname given to these motorcycles: "Maico-Breako." It took one hundred dollars to fix it. I fixed it so I could sell it.

It had taken less than one lap to know this motorcycle was not designed for the new era of motocross tracks—tracks with hilltop jumps and whoop-de-dos higher than my head. I'm not quite sure if it was the bike that couldn't handle the design of the new track, or if it was me.

I'm not sure which of the two is more antiquated.

The Maico was useless to me. I sold it. I calculated my losses: it had cost me one hundred and seventy-five dollars per lap.

When it comes to financial stupidity and bang-for-the-buck fun, the Maico made the four hundred dollars I had spent on a thirteen-thousand-foot-ninety-second skydiving adventure seem like a wow-wheel moment bargain.



**1976 BMW R100/7:
TIME TRAVEL**

Written November, 2005. Birmingham, Alabama.

They say time travel isn't possible. That statement was impressively disproved to me recently; however, that story requires a lead in.

I'm from New Orleans, a town that for centuries has seemingly ignored the ongoing onslaught of change and homogenization of cities across America—until recently. Thanks to Hurricane Katrina, the town is now in tatters, and hundreds of thousands of its residents now find themselves living in other parts of the country, adjusting to new cultures, and most strange to a native New Orleanian—change.

In early September 2005, after the wrath of Katrina, much like Dorothy from the Wizard of Oz, I was lifted from my home by wind and water. I landed in a strange, but beautiful, place: Birmingham, Alabama. I had fled Louisiana with my Gibson guitar and a 1974 BMW R65 airhead.

Being unemployed—or rather, having nothing better to do—I took off exploring this new land. Through the mountain roads I rode, through deep green, pine-scented forests. The change of seasons was beginning to unfold in the colorful foliage of the trees, with a backdrop of a crystal blue sky. It was a perfect, unseasonably warm day. It was a gorgeous day. I realized BMWs were designed for roads just like the ones I had found.

During one early morning ride as I sliced through the pine forests on a serpentine mountain road, a road so smooth—something unknown in south Louisiana—I crested a hill

and saw a sign that simply stated, "Barber Motor Sports Park."

My mind started whirring. Hmm, a motor-sports park? Oh yeah? I thought. I hit the brakes-hard!

As I motored along the road leading into the park I asked myself aloud, "Well, just what could this Barber Motor Sports Park be?" and, "Who is this Barber?"

I also found myself unable to observe the posted thirty-five miles per hour speed limit, as the road itself seemed to have a track-like layout and feel to it, encouraging me to go a little faster-well, okay, a lot faster.

As I rounded a sweeping uphill corner, a huge, gleaming, stainless steel and glass building shone brightly before me. Again, not unlike Dorothy as she entered the Emerald City, I was taken aback by its surreal beauty.

The building turned out to be the Barber Museum, a modern structure that houses hundreds of motorcycles-motorcycles that over the past thirty-six years of my two-wheeled addiction I've only seen in magazines. Countless hours of my life have been spent admiring their mechanical beauty, or rather, as I describe motorcycles, "beautiful, usable sculpture."

Now, here before me, were those very motorcycles. They were real, touchable-alright, the signs said not to, but keep in mind I was also thrown out of the Kennedy Space Center for attempting to sit inside of the *Friendship One* space capsule. Just a few more minutes and two small screws and I would have done it. I am now secretly plotting how I can sit on the Captain America bike on display at the Barber Museum-but I digress.

I spent seven hours that day examining every detail of those fantastic works of art. One of the museum curators asked me inquisitively, very inquisitively, several times, "How can you spend so much time looking at those motorcycles?" I think my excitement made him nervous.

I explained to him that I wasn't looking, I was appreciating every detail, every nuance of the lines and curves, much like one would if they were given time with a beautiful woman, or as one does when they see paintings by the masters—and yes, when given the chance I have to touch and run my fingers along those artworks as well. The curator suspiciously raised one eyebrow; I got the feeling my answer didn't help solidify my sanity.

As I was escorted out of the building, a half hour after they had locked the doors for the day, my usher told me of a vintage motorcycle race that was to be held there in a few weeks.

"A race track? This place has a race track too?" I exclaimed.

I left thinking that this Mr. Barber sure knows how to appreciate the value of money and the things it can buy; he had become a true inspiration to the entrepreneurial spirit within me. Make money. Buy motorcycles. Make a lot of money. Buy a lot of motorcycles.

I went home and put those three upcoming days on my empty work/social calendar, and sold my airhead for financial reasons.

Now let me tell you about time travel.

Race day. As I sat on a hill at the rear of the track I began taking in the pastoral beauty of the setting. A ribbon of race track, winding, twisting, undulating through the perfectly manicured green hills.

Sculptures were placed amongst the hedge rows about the grounds, as though this were the gardens of Versailles.

A flock of Canada Geese honked landing instructions to one another as they made their final descent onto the lake behind me. Children were having rolling races down the hills, their infectious laughter made me smile.

A nice warm, balmy breeze was blowing across the meadows, and then I heard it coming... a deep bellowing roar as an old BMW came flying into sight in the chicane, pursued by an equally antique BSA, followed seconds later by the sound of a mad-as-a-hornet two-stroke Yamaha in hot pursuit. The BMW and BSA's harmonic cadence turned into a cacophony as the four-strokers tried to outrun the sting of the two-stroke.

Immediately following this visual time warp was the smell: an intoxicating mixture of racing fuel, four-stroke exhausts, and Castrol bean oil. Ancient conjurors, modern psychologists, and New-Age aroma therapists know that smells can conjure up long-forgotten memories—good memories.

Within three laps of Friday's practice, the sights, sounds, and smells had transported me back in time several decades. This hypnotic mixture would only intensify over the next two days, to a point where I was far removed from the reality and catastrophes of the past two months.

You can read the race results elsewhere; I've never been a person who likes to watch others do. After an hour of watching practice I meandered into the swap meet/show area located in the meadow just on the other side of the hill from the racetrack. There I spent the best part of the next two days.

Only one word can fully describe this area-plethora. Mr. Webster defines plethora as: "excessive fullness; too much; superabundance." He has obviously been to this event before.

Because you don't have the three days it would take to relive the experience through words, I'll break my observations down into rambling categories, shortened to the highlights.

Sights: A pickup truck from Ohio pulls in with two ancient Harley-Davidsons, a 1906 and a 1911, both hog-tied in the truck bed-uncovered, unpampered, both excellent original pieces.

Minutes after parking, the couple unloaded these treasures, donned the proper period riding regalia and launched into a most interesting starting ritual, much like that of my first motorcycle, a pedal-start Honda P50.

The bikes started effortlessly and the couple rode off. The whole package of motorcycles and the couple's period riding gear was a mental time warp.

The 1906 Harley was scheduled to have an exhibition race on Saturday against the 1910 Indian that pulled in an hour later, roped and tied in the back of an old pickup truck in the same manner as the Harleys had arrived.

The Art Deco lines of an old Steib sidecar complete with a chromed lady mascot, a flared wheel well, and a trumpet horn nearly three feet long, gleamed in the sunshine.

A tired '68 Harley whispering memories of its two glory years at Daytona to the nearby 1950s Harley cruiser, with its swan-like handlebars. More Honda 50 Cubs than you'd see on the streets of Saigon.

A groovy motorcycle carcass, the only discernible way to date it was its faded plastic flower stickers from the Flower Power era of the sixties, glued securely through time on its maroon and purple gas tank.

Old-school knucklehead, hardtail, choppers. Hondas, Yamahas, Husqvarnas, BMWs, Matchless road racers, Bultacos, Ducatis, Sunbeams, BSAs, nothing newer than the mid-seventies—the archaic, the extinct. Name the marque, and it was there.

The motorcycles' conditions ran the gamut true to their ages: ratty, mint original, beautifully used, perfectly restored—all being ridden, many being raced.

And like any event that combines beauty and speed, you have the celebrity sightings. There in the hills of Birmingham, in full representation, was the British royal family. In their full splendor sat generations of the British aristocracy: the Vincents, the Nortons, the Triumphs, even the inbred Tritons.

The Vincents. Ah, the Vincents. After thirty-six years I finally understand. Mechanical complexity disguised in symphonic simplicity.

Having spent much time over the weekend staring down the profile of a café-styled Vincent, looking up its long slender tank, with a drilled aluminum tank strap, and a huge Big Ben of a tachometer staring back at me; I could see myself reflected in the tachometer's glass.

Yes, I can see myself on this motorcycle—and not just metaphorically speaking.

In the fall sunshine, the Vincent's gleaming chrome, polished aluminum, and nickel plating became a glittering galaxy, one full of stars that you could wish upon,

dreaming to have any one of these motorcycles parked in your garage. Beautiful. Absolutely beautiful. I now know why libraries of books have been written about the Vincents.

The pit area: gorgeous women, Dick Mann, old men in shorts and flip-flop shoes wearing Jimmy Buffett-type hats and shirts, pattering around the pits. Young'ns full of body piercings and tattoos, flying around the pits. A 1920s-era Indian with duct tape and number plates, waiting its turn to scalp some Harley hide in an upcoming race.

Motorcycles that could have been housed inside the museum, mothballed and protected. These bikes were not only being ridden, they were being raced!

Proof that motorcyclists are inventive, practical people, as I walked past the trackside desk I noticed a trophy from the Daytona motorcycle races. A first-place trophy from the 350 GP race, dated March 8, 2005, was being used as a paperweight, holding down the riders' entry forms. You have to love it.

Conversations overheard: Someone asking the owner of the 1906 Harley-Davidson, "What's it like to own and ride a piece of history?"

His one-word answer: "Incredible."

A sad-faced man in his sixties: "I sold an Indian like that for six hundred dollars. Dumbest thing I ever did."

A very shocked man, after hearing the current value of one of the Vincents: "I sold a Vincent like that for \$1100!" Dumbest thing he ever did.

A man in his mid-seventies: "Yep, went on two honeymoons on my Harley just like this one. I got rid of both the wives, still have the bike, best thing I ever did."

As the sound of an ambulance siren wailed from over the hill on the race track, one older man exclaimed empathetically, "Damn! I hate that sound, reminds me that the things that make me feel the most alive are the same things just wait'n for me to go a hair over my limit so they can take me down! Yep, fast motorcycles, fast women, and good whiskey, just wait'n to kill me," he said, as he stomped out his Marlboro Red.

Perhaps he's right. Danger and disaster are lurking around every corner, waiting to pounce on the unsuspecting, the unprepared--or as Katrina has proven, those who live below sea level. Yes, disaster is waiting to pounce on everyone equally.

I decided that despite the hell and high water Katrina had brought into my life, damn her, I will go on living.

I walked to a display that had kept luring me back over the past two days. I had been admiring a vintage Yamaha café racer, one that kept enticing me all weekend, painting a picture of me riding it through this beautiful landscape, living life, indulging myself in my lifelong passion of motorcycling.

I bought it.

I went back to my spot on the hill and watched the last race.

When I got home I had some good whiskey and began anticipating where my new iron steed would lead me. What new adventures and experiences await me around life's next corner? Like the machine that had transported me to Barber Motor Sports Park in the first place, which led to a weekend spent traveling back in time, meandering through a century's worth of motorcycles and stories.

Wandering from 1906 to the 1960s in the time it takes to turn around. Time travel is possible.

I sat back, slowly sipping my whiskey. I became lost in thoughts of what triumphs and tragedies those motorcycles had seen. I imagined the people who experienced and lived their lives, traveling through time astride them.

A century of time has passed, and those motorcycles are still standing, defiantly unchanged. I realized through it all, life is good, real good. We must live life while we can.



1976 XS YAMAHA 650 CAFE RACER

I walked to a display that had kept luring me back over the past two days. I had been admiring a vintage Yamaha café racer, one that kept enticing me all weekend; painting a picture of me riding it through this beautiful landscape, living life, indulging myself in my lifelong passion—motorcycling. I bought it."

That's how I came about owning the Yamaha XS 650 Café bike in October 2005. Oddly, the roads that the XS led me down were the same ones I had traveled in 1977, the same roads that led to Southeastern Louisiana University in Hammond, Louisiana. By November 2005, I had moved back to Louisiana and was headed back to college, a journey that would take the next three and a half years of my life to complete.

The XS was a cool little commuter bike, and a blast to ride on the back roads that I had ridden for decades. It was a tight little bike, very precise, eye-catching, and a kick to ride. Like most things that are beautiful, fast, and fun, it was as ornery as a one-eyed cat. It started when it felt like it, because much like a cat, my desires were of no consideration to the XS.

I had long since learned some temper constraints. I've come to a place in life and motorcycling where I believe when a motorcycle won't start, especially for no apparent reason, that God is watching over me. I just put it away until later. I have come to accept that perhaps I'm not supposed to be on a bike at that moment.

I must have also picked up some alien language along that journey toward inner peace, for I have developed the habit of walking away from an uncooperative

motorcycle, without the slightest temper tantrum, but mumbling in some indiscernible language—one I can feel is laced with angry profanity, albeit without any noticeable rampages as in the past.

Perhaps I've been around musicians too long, because I can put up with anything that's a pain in the butt as long as it can sing or create magical moments. And the café Yamaha could sing. It could bellow out a harmonious baritone through its twin megaphones, baffled, of course.

On my first trip to school, I realized that luggage on the XS meant a backpack. Somehow that never failed to make me feel like a teenager again, when all you need is in a backpack. It was a cool bike, and I had no worries other than school, and what I might do with my life post-Katrina.

Most times when I parked by the other motorcycles at school, usually modern crotch rockets, the younger people riding them would look at the XS and ask questions. I gave many a young'un a quick history lesson to the connection of their modern superbikes to the DNA of vintage café racers. I had many offers from the younger riders to buy the XS.

Despite the temperamental disposition of the XS, and sometimes weeks on end until the bike would want to start again, I was able to get in some good rides. Memorable rides.

A favorite route I had mapped out was a road that ran from Ponchatoula, Louisiana, where I lived, to St. Amant, Louisiana, a little town on the bayou. The road between the two towns followed the meandering, twisty path of the bayou, passing large rivers and many great waterfront watering holes and restaurants. It was also near French Settlement, the town where the

engineer for NASA lived, the man I had bought the "Cop Bike" BMW from.

It became a ride that offered several hours' break from studying. I could blast through the twisty swamp road, always on the lookout for the occasional alligator sunning itself on the warm blacktop, stop at a little bayou dive, have a couple of beers, listen to live music, as always in south Louisiana, and have a quick bite to eat.

The XS garnered the nickname "Bayou Blaster," not to be confused with the old "Bayou Blaster" from the late 1970s—either way, both got me high.

My time with the XS really wasn't filled with the usual frolicking away of idle time, nor did it offer any big life lessons. The main lesson the XS taught me was to act upon the epiphany I had at Barber Motorsports when I bought the bike: Live today. Tomorrow's not guaranteed. Enjoy your passions today. Don't let the lack of money and opportunity be a stumbling block, nor an excuse, for not owning a motorcycle.

I also enjoyed the circle of life that the XS and the V-Star provided. I would go to tutoring three times a week, because the only thing I know about math are the ten digits that have worked for thirty years to solve all of my mathematical problems: my accountant's phone number.

Tutoring was held in an office in Southeastern Hall, which in 1977-78 was my dorm. My tutoring was held in the same room that once was my dorm room, where I had hid the Yamaha MX100. What an irony. What a big circle of life. What a head trip that was! And I swear, I could still smell pot in the room.

There was really only one unfortunate drawback to the XS: it had a solo seat that

did not allow for passengers, which was a shame, for twice, fellow female co-eds wanted a ride.

I solved that problem when my brother-in-law, Russ, in Birmingham, Alabama wanted to sell me his Yamaha V-Star. Together, the XS and the V-Star made a great combination of motorcycles while I attended university again. They were truly the anchor that glued my life together-again. And once again, owning two motorcycles at once was twice as nice.

Katrina had erased my life of twenty-plus years overnight. I had returned to school after a nearly thirty-year hiatus. To say that I was lost and confused is an understatement.

To say that motorcycles helped keep my head clear and offered a cohesiveness and soothing balm between the past and the future during this time is a greater understatement.

Besides the lesson to live, despite circumstances, the little XS taught me that there is no better therapy than motorcycling. Bar none, but God.



2005 YAMAHA 1100 V-STAR

"Ain't nothing like the real thing, baby."
— Marvin Gaye & Tammi Terrell

Well, that statement's true, especially when it comes to big cruisers with a V-twin engine. However, this isn't a story about Harley-Davidsons; this is a story about a 2005 Yamaha V-Star 1100.

A V-Star decked to the max: Corbin seat, bags galore, performance pipes. It rode like a Cadillac; to quote Al Pacino from the movie *Donnie Brasco*, "It's like driving a fucking water bed."

The bike was plush—too plush for my taste. It was soft. Russ had bought the bike and had accessorized it out the wa-zoo. It had more luggage space than many newer Cadillacs, and a really comfortable Corbin seat.

The factory styling statement of the V-Star that stands out in my mind are the fenders. In my opinion, the V-Star has the fugliest fenders to be found. The rear fender is the epitome of—well, the best I can come up with is crap. Butt-ugly crap. Get my point?

I wasn't particularly looking for another bike at the time; I had my sporadically sparking XS and was attending college full-time, not to mention I was living on savings. Russ sold me the bike at an attractive price. Since lesson one in motorcycling, that I learned from the Honda P50 and Cub 50, I knew that it's always good to own more than one motorcycle.

Since owning the BMW R100 "Cop Bike" I had thought about owning a modern cruiser. Like many, I felt that the price of a new Harley was ridiculous. Robbery without a

gun. I thought about Russ' offer, for about three minutes, and said, "Sure, why not."

I was living back in Louisiana so I had my niece, Jessica, drive with me to Birmingham, Alabama to pick it up. We visited a day with family and headed back to Louisiana.

Jessica followed behind me in my car for about two hours, until she couldn't stand the noise from the bike anymore. At the first rest stop, I had to admit that the bike was loud, really loud. My hands were already tingling from the vibration coming through the handgrips.

We continued toward Louisiana. After about four hours, I realized that the comfort of the seat and wind protection were nice. I also began to notice that my ears were starting to ring more than usual. My hands were not tingling anymore; they had gone completely numb.

Not good, I loudly thought, in order to hear myself above the ringing in my ears.

As we entered Louisiana, the strangest things began to happen: the roads became lumpy, bumpy, and it started raining. I pulled over to try out my cheap rain suit. We continued down Interstate 55 in an ever-increasing thunderstorm.

It didn't take but a few miles to realize one of the benefits of a properly set up cruiser. The first thing I noticed was I didn't feel like I had ridden into a colony of wasps; for once, the rain didn't make me feel like a dartboard at a dart tournament, and the bike was secure on the road. It was nice.

Within twenty minutes, I also realized I had gotten my money's worth for what I had paid for the cheap rainsuit. I was half wet.

We made it to my house. I was tired from the seven-hour ride. I went to bed, my hands numb and my ears ringing. I knew then I wouldn't be taking that bike riding across the country; besides, something about the motorcycle's performance was lacking, and the bike seemed as though it were a foreigner on American Interstate highways. Something was not quite right.

I began taking the V-Star to school the next day. I couldn't park by the back door in the motorcycle area where I parked the XS; I had to park in the automobile spaces. The V-Star was so big that it was impossible to slide into a slot between the wasp-waisted sport bikes and scooters. My XS650 didn't have that problem.

After school and on weekends, I began taking my usual fifty to sixty-mile loops. I enjoyed riding parallel to the railroad tracks that sliced through the farmlands of Louisiana, becoming lost in time. I noticed how all of the little towns were eight to ten miles apart, all built along the tracks—evidence of how modern transportation has reduced what was once considered far away to minutes away.

One loop that became a favorite of mine was alternately riding the elevated Interstate 55 and the Old Hammond Highway that runs parallel, and ground level, between Ponchatoula and Manchac, Louisiana.

The difference between riding the elevated Interstate 55, versus the old ground-level highway, is like the difference between flying above one of America's most infamous primeval cypress swamps and riding through it.

The old highway is nothing more than a clearing that the myriad of creatures that call the Manchac Swamp home have to cross.

You may have seen the television show *Swamp People* and have an inkling of the creatures of which I speak.

During the cooler months, many of the creatures find the old highway a good place to stop, relax, and warm up from the heat emitting from the ancient concrete.

One crisp, fall afternoon, I made a trek to a favorite watering hole, "The Gator's Den," in Manchac. As I was riding on the traffic-free old road, weaving slowly from side to side—a dance I like to do on motorcycles on straight, empty roads—suddenly I noticed what appeared to be a large cypress log blocking the road ahead.

As I approached, I could see there was space for me to get around on the left side. I slowed down. I was downshifting and blipping the throttle, enjoying the rumble of the pipes; when I was about fifteen feet away, I noticed the "log" slithered and switched as it moved a few feet.

I stopped. My log was an alligator. A big alligator. This monster was three-quarters the length of a two-lane road, easily pushing ten feet long. I sat at an idle watching, waiting. He slowly turned towards me and opened his mouth slightly as he whipped his tail.

I began making preparations to retreat.

As I began turning the behemoth V-Star around on the shoulderless road, the gator started moving slowly in my direction.

It's amazing the quickness in which thoughts can move through one's mind. I began thinking about the fact that alligators can live up to fifty years, and after they are about five feet long they have no predators, they move to the top of the food chain—the exception of course being man and his weapons.

I had no weapon at hand, at least not one I would try to use on him. As I paddled with my feet, trying to turn around, I thought how this gator had witnessed man rape and ruin his home, the Manchac Swamp. I sensed he saw a chance for revenge.

I increased my effort to turn around. He increased his gait towards me.

Just as I got turned around, I looked back to see the gator about six feet away; I revved the bike. The huge gator opened his mouth wide in a defensive stance. I sped away as he whipped his tail. I stopped far enough up the road, out of his reach, and looked back.

The gator was sauntering toward the swamp. I watched him slither into the murky water and sink down to where he appeared to be a semi-submerged log. I turned around and headed towards the Gator's Den for that beer—"maybe two," I reasoned.

A side note, and an add to the circle of life theme, the Old Hammond Highway which I was riding on is the same Old Hammond Highway that I rode endless hours and countless miles on as a kid, it ran along the shore of Lake Pontchartrain behind the levee in Bucktown.

It became a broken, historic road between New Orleans and Hammond long before they build the engineering marvel of the Lake Pontchartrain Causeway—it's sort of like the carved up and broken Route 66.

I made many trips up to the little village of Manchac. Many times I would bring a few cold drinks and sit at the boat launch, watch the sunset, and listen to the swamp come alive as twilight encroached. Manchac is a magical and mysterious place.

Often, as I sat at the boat launch, I would think about how cool it was that I was

sitting in the same spot I had been thirty years earlier, when I had sat at the same spot on the Suzuki GT 380 that crisp fall morning I had skipped school and had taken my first small highway trip on the newly opened Interstate 55. I would sit and enjoy the sunset, the swamp, and my beverages, lost in time.

Round and round I go on that circle of life-it's just more than coincidence.

I have always enjoyed having a beverage and polishing my motorcycles; it's a great way to get to know every piece of your bike. In a few months' time, I began to get to know every part of the Yamaha.

As I would polish and rub, several things became apparent, particularly when I would mentally compare the V-Star to the Harley Ultra Classic that Russ had bought after selling me the Yamaha.

I began to notice little details, like the fact that many of the engine parts were nothing more than chrome-plated plastic coverings, and that the rear fender on the V-Star is one of the ugliest components on a motorcycle this side of an MZ. The plethora of cheap, thin, not-made-to-last components on the Yamaha started to make me understand how Japan could produce such a bike at such a low cost.

The spongy ride was becoming annoying as well. It was becoming clear that the Yamaha was nothing more than the equivalent of a fake Rolex.

As well, there was the whole "Harley mystique" that the world had, and the Yamaha didn't. That became painfully and annoyingly evident one day at school.

Belinda, a beautiful, nineteen-year-old, very exotic Brazilian classmate that shared several back-to-back classes across campus

with me, was walking with me to class. Our walk took us past the parked V-Star; it was gleaming in the sunshine.

Belinda perked up with enthusiasm. She ran and sat on the bike. "Take me for a ride after school," she excitedly stated.

"You bet," I said, smiling.

As Belinda looked at the bike and petted the tank, she suddenly looked at me with her big brown Brazilian eyes--eyes that were welling with disappointment. My smile faded. She tilted her head, and in her wonderful accent asked me, "Why didn't you buy a Harley?"

My insides dropped. The only thing I could say was, "Because my brother-in-law wasn't selling a Harley for seven thousand dollars."

As she got off and put her backpack back on, she shrugged at me and said, "Too bad." She started her perky walk toward our next class. I followed.

I thought this was a good time to inject a lie into the conversation. "You'll be surprised how little difference there is between my bike and a Har--"

"No I won't," she interrupted. "I'm not riding on that. I didn't come to America to ride on a Japanese motorcycle. I want to ride on a Harley," she snapped.

She wasn't being snobby, just honest.

Belinda's words had proven what I had begun to suspect, and what Russ had realized after riding a few months with his Harley buddies before he sold the V-Star: "ain't nothing like the real thing baby."

As always, there were a few things that I learned from my time with the V-Star, namely: don't buy an imitation of anything. I can now see that the old saying, "Imitation is the sincerest form of

flattery" is a lie. It's an imposter of the original, nothing more. Go for the original, whatever the item is, or do without. Save your integrity, not your money.

I became more appreciative of the position of the modern Harley-Davidson in the business world and the hearts and minds of the world. If you study it, you can learn much about the power of advertising and brand labeling. The Japanese can copy almost anything—quite well I might add. However, with plastic chrome and a tin-can V-twin sound, the mystique of a Harley-Davidson cannot be duplicated.

Overall, both Yamaha street bikes, the V-Star and the XS650, were a letdown in style, performance, and handling. One copied an American classic, while the other copied the classic British Triumph; both nice bikes, both fakes. But who wouldn't become a little biased after owning several BMWs and Ducatis through the years?

Another lesson I learned came after I got the results of a hearing test I had to take for the Education Department, which said I was too deaf to teach. Mysteriously, two days later they dropped the thirty-year-old hearing test as a prerequisite to teaching.

My deafness combined with the constant ringing in my ears, aggravated every time I rode the V-Star, made me realize if I could go back in time I would wear hearing protection while riding motorcycles, playing live music, and shooting guns.

I realized just now that last statement is a lie. If I could go back in time I wouldn't do anything different, except live life closer to the edge. Oh well, it was a thought.

After many miles on the V-Star, I realized I wanted a modern Harley-Davidson—a

big-bore cruiser. I decided I would have one after I graduated and landed a teaching job. However, a few more BMWs and a Ducati would come before that day.

Most importantly, I learned that my most consistent and biggest problem throughout life has been that I care too much about what young, beautiful women think and want.

After Belinda wouldn't ride with me, I went home and put the V-Star up for sale on eBay. It sold fast.

As the V-Star pulled away, I said what they would say in its homeland, Japan: "Sayonara, anata nise Jo!" which translates to, "Goodbye, you phony Joe!"



2005 BMW R1150R: NAN'S BIKE ANOTHER GIRLS BIKE

February 2009: I was months away from graduating college after thirty years—or at least after another three and a half year run—finally I'll have gotten a college degree. I deserved a reward.

I thought about it. Let's see, sold the Yamaha V-Star, sold the Yamaha XS 650. That's it! I deserve another motorcycle, another BMW would be nice. To eBay I went. eBay is the best, or worst, thing to ever happen to an impulsive motorcycle buyer.

After a few minutes of searching, I found a beautiful BMW R1150R, and even better, it was in New Orleans. I emailed the seller. A little while later, he called me back. We talked for quite a while about the bike, bikes, and general chit-chat about our lives, and "how's ya mamma an dem" stuff, as New Orleanians do.

I set up an appointment to see the bike the next day. I arrived at the house mid-morning; it was a beautiful home in uptown New Orleans. I rang the doorbell.

The door opened and an attractive woman said, "Hello, Edwin Thompson."

It was an old friend, Nannette, whom I had not seen in over a decade. Nan had once dated Ruben, my friend from childhood—the friend that I grew up riding and racing motorcycles with. The friend that introduced me to motorcycling. The friend that had lent me his Yamaha Seca Turbo. The friend that was now in prison.

Nan and I were very close friends during the time she dated Ruben. She told me she realized who was coming to look at the BMW after her husband had described the

conversation he and I had had the previous day.

"What a small world," Nan proclaimed.

I won't take off down the "circle of life" theme that runs throughout most of my stories, but this encounter—too deep with details to describe—is proof that the circle of life is small, or as a more recent theory states, we're all just "six degrees" apart.

I went inside. We visited for a while. I got to re-appreciate several art pieces I had sold to Nan after the demise of my first marriage; to boot, my first wife was also Nan's hairdresser. We caught up on small talk and tried to find sense in how Ruben had ended up in prison. As I said, too many details to fathom.

We went to the garage and looked at the BMW. It turned out that it was Nan's bike. A "girl's bike." It was a real clean, well-maintained bike. I bought it and made arrangements to pick it up the next day. I said goodbye to Nan.

One of the things I learned from this motorcycle, which wasn't even in my possession yet, was a simple and warm lesson. Friends come and go over time, especially if you're as nomadic and unsettled as I am.

Even after long periods of time have passed, when you see old friends it's as though time had stood still—as though only the world had kept moving. It's very warming to unexpectedly cross paths with people you were close to, people who truly know you.

I took the bike home to Tantela Ranch, where once again I was staying in Jimmy's shed—or "my room" as it has become to be known. I had sold my house in Ponchatoula in anticipation of graduating and moving back to Birmingham in pursuit of a teaching job,

a job which took sixteen months to find and required me to move again. Nomadic.

The BMW was a great bike. It was a typical BMW: smooth, reliable, comfortable, and designed by people who assume everyone is six-foot-three. I've always had to balance BMWs on tip-toes—if not on one tip-toed foot.

The R1150R looked like a porpoise: bottle-nosed with sleek, rolling, flowing lines. It had some design elements that puzzled me. There was a shock in front of the engine, and a muffler in the rear, about where you would expect, or feel safer with a swingarm holding the rear wheel on, not just a lone nut on one side.

Remember, I've had bad experiences with rear wheels coming off, and those experiences are engraved in my memory forever.

The beak-shaped front fender started to grow on me; it was that "initiation of acceptance" which began leading to a growing fondness towards the unique attractiveness of the BMW GS models. However, I never did figure out how the front suspension worked, but it worked well.

A recurring problem I have with BMWs is the position of the right foot pegs. It's not in harmony with the rear brake pedal, or the design of my right foot—one of the two. Unless I'm on a wide-open road I always keep my right leg and foot poised to strike the brake pedal; it has saved me from many crashes through the decades.

But starting with this BMW, I would quickly develop a pain in my right leg; it was as if my leg had to twist a bit to stay in a poised position. At this writing my current BMW, a 2005 GS650F, does the same thing.

I began taking the bike to school, or rather, the hell-hole I was student teaching at--the hell-hole I asked to be placed in, thinking I wanted to teach in inner-city schools; a thought that passed quickly.

I enjoyed my twenty-five mile, early morning rides to school and some great afternoon rides around the countryside. I find all BMWs ideal for twisty backroads.

I turned fifty while I owned this motorcycle--an age I thought I would never see. To celebrate, I rode the bike all day; it was a Monday, that made it better.

Later that afternoon, I rode to the Tap Room in Covington and bought myself a birthday dinner. Yeah, I celebrated alone; remember, after celebrating my forty-third birthday with Jasmine I don't try to upstage a perfect party. The Tap Room is one of my favorite pub-restaurants on the Northshore of New Orleans.

It was there I began noticing I was being shunned by Harley riders at events where motorcycles gathered; it was the same place I met the pig on the Hog with my Sportster. I've always laughed at the piety of many Harley riders; for that matter, the whole branding together of motorcycle riders is absurd.

For several months, I rode the heck out of that BMW. May came and I finally graduated from college and moved back to Birmingham; the red 1150 moved with me.

Once again, I found myself astride a BMW riding the backroads of Alabama. Alabama has some beautiful, exciting roads, ranging from beachfront to mountain roads. At times it reminds me of a mini-California. I can make that absurd analogy because I've lived in both states. Either way, Alabama offered some good trips.

I made several trips up to Mentone and rode the DeSoto State Park area, where I had lost Tabitha in a snowbank decades earlier. Over time, I think I have ridden nearly every backroad in central and northern Alabama.

On my rides astride the 1150, my mind would begin to think about that lone nut holding the rear wheel on. I began to ask myself, "Is it just me, or do others have thoughts of their rear wheel malfunctioning?"

Not like a Super Bowl "malfunction," no--one where all of a sudden you don't have a rear wheel, at least one attached to the bike. If the bike is chain-driven, I worry about shedding a chain and the ensuing lock-up that occurs, or at least it has to me. No one else thinks about these things? No? Just me? Figures. Paranoia sucks.

These rides were generally shared with Russ and his other friends that rode Harleys. The branding thing started to appear, along with the BMW becoming the punchline for endless jokes, many funny.

My favorite was in response to the sound of the running BMW, which they likened to a sewing machine. They would ask each other if anyone needed any tailoring done, or patches sewed on their jackets while Ed had the sewing machine running.

They didn't understand a BMW. They didn't get it. Wasn't it the Harley crowd that coined the term, "If I have to explain, you wouldn't understand?" I feel the same way about BMW motorcycles--if I have to explain, you wouldn't understand.

Many have babbled on about the look of a BMW since the 1920s. Bottom line: you either like the look of a BMW, or you don't. I do.

The summer of '09 passed. It was late August and I had not found a job. As always, I panicked. I put the BMW up for sale on eBay.

By mid-September, I had sold it to a very interesting man, Mr. Coursy. I forget the details, but he had owned, or still owned, a BMW dealership somewhere. He was staying in Alabama for the fall.

We brought the bike to him and listened to many interesting stories about his life and world travels centered around motorcycles. He should be writing a book, not me.

Mr. Coursy had been specifically looking for a red, pre-anti-lock brake R1150R. Whatever. He wanted one, I had one for sale. I've never been that specific in a search for a motorcycle; I buy out of impulse. I believe Mr. Coursy owns a hundred bikes and cars; I suppose he can be specific in his searches.

Several years after I had sold him the motorcycle, he ended up calling Russ. Mr. Coursy needed me to sign the title, which I had overlooked doing somehow in the course of conversation. He had been riding and enjoying the bike for years, all the while riding it unregistered using a dealer plate.

That's a nice benefit, I thought.

Meanwhile, after selling the BMW, I was bikeless and unemployed. Sacrifices and suffering, tightening up my belt times were in order. No more foolish spending.

A beautiful fall began unfolding in Alabama. I began needing a motorcycle. I decided I would sacrifice and suffer later. I started looking at BMW GS models on eBay.

The next Saturday we were on our way to Asheville, North Carolina to pick up my

R1150GS. It was October. I had been bikeless a month, perhaps.

When you're an addict, you start "jonesing" quickly. I needed a fix.

I learned when times get tough, desperate, and no hope is in sight, it's most important to keep your mind and thoughts focused, and to relax. That only happens for me on a motorcycle. Motorcycles are my best therapy, and I had a new therapist: a BMW R1150GS.

I began therapy as soon as I got it home. And like any addict, once I had a new drug, I didn't think once about the highs the R1150R had given me—but the R1150R was a nice bike that brought nice people into, and back into, my life.



2002 BMW R1150 GS: A Bike for the Apocalypse

Saturday, October 17, 2009.

Road trip! We're headed to Asheville, North Carolina. Me, my sister, and Russ were going to pick up my 2004 BMW R1150 GS. The weather was cold, and there was a good chance of snow.

I had sold the BMW R1150R a month or so earlier out of panic from unemployment. Things were better now so I bought the GS. I was still unemployed, which opened the door of opportunity to go back to North Carolina in a few weeks to ride The Tail of the Dragon.

See, things always work out, I reassured myself.

Late that afternoon we arrived at the man's house who was selling the GS. The weather was spoiling fast. The man showed us around back. The GS was stuffed on a small porch, semi-exposed to the elements. The man left us alone for a few minutes to go answer his phone.

We all seemed to have the same unexplainable feeling about the bike. It seemed fine-needed polishing up—but some gut reaction was telling us different. But we had driven so far, and the price was fair. As it started to snow, we loaded the GS onto the trailer and left.

Driving in snow, we returned home to Birmingham. The GS polished up nicely. I sat back to look at the GS. Cool. Very cool. GS model BMW's possess a very unique design.

The style of the GS is—well, it's just bad-ass. The GS looks like a pissed-off wasp, one from the hymenoptera family, not New York. More specifically, the GS has an "apocalyptic" aesthetic and attractiveness

to it. If I had to choose one bike to survive the apocalypse with, it would be a GS. I'd also try and find some lifter boots as well.

I have always marveled at the height of my BMW's; the GS brought what I thought to be a tall seat height to a new level--no pun intended. The GS was tall! On the center-stand the handlebars were chest-high on me. I was truly riding "high/tall in the saddle"--no double puns intended.

This was a one-toed BMW; I could touch the ground with one foot, tip-toed. Being from Louisiana, where the roads are flat, stopping on the sloped roads in mountainous regions threw me for a loop at first. I learned real fast to find the high side of the slope and plant my foot there when stopping.

After riding the GS on several sixty-mile jaunts, I felt the GS was solid. I decided it was good to go to North Carolina. The following Friday we left for Maggie Valley.

When we arrived in Maggie Valley the weather was cold, damp, slushy, and there were snow flurries; but after all, it was late October--perfect fall, mountain weather. Tomorrow we would ride.

We got up early Saturday, hit the local breakfast buffet, and headed up the Blue Ridge Parkway. It was my first time being on the Parkway. It was a breathtaking show of fall color. We rode about one hundred miles before having to turn back because of a road closure due to snow.

We returned to Maggie Valley, walked main street, checked out the motorcycle museum Wheels Through Time, and had dinner at Snappy's, a good Italian restaurant. We finished off the night up with a cocktail on

the hotel gazebo and went to bed. We had a good ride planned for tomorrow.

Sunday the weather had cleared. It was warm and sunny. We decided to ride the Blue Ridge Parkway again and bring a picnic lunch. As we rode the Parkway, we blasted through walls of low clouds into sunlight-drenched views of the fall foliage that dappled the mountains with brilliant colors.

We stopped at an area with picnic tables and enjoyed a wonderful picnic lunch at a table perched on the edge of the mountain, thousands of feet in elevation. It was great. A memorable moment.

I like picnics. I used to put on picnics for pay-remember the sub-story in the "G5" story- and the spot we found was a great picnic spot. Of course my favorite spot for a picnic is still on a hillside in Mount Tamalpais State Park in Mill Valley, above San Francisco, but its exact location is my secret.

Anyway, there I was: fifty, heart attack survivor, unemployed, broke, and having one of the most fulfilling days of riding in forty years. One of those "life is great" moments. It was all good, and about to get better.

Monday, October 26, 2009: My equilibrium is fine

We arrived at Deals Gap early; it had a carnival atmosphere about it. We looked around, had some iced tea, saw the Tree of Shame, and decided it was time to ride the rides. It was time to conquer the Dragon. It was time to ride The Tail of the Dragon.

I'm sure many of you have ridden the Dragon or heard about it. If not, or as a reminder, it has three hundred and eighteen curves in eleven miles. To call it a twisty

mountain road is like saying a whale is just another fish.

The Tail of the Dragon—been there, got the T-shirt and the sticker-or stickers. I think I may have enjoyed it more if it wasn't a motorcycle tourist trap. It was crowded. Sport bikes would either blast past or suddenly appear crowded up next to you as they ducked in from the left lane. Very annoying and rude.

Remember this was late October. I heard that the day we rode the Dragon a motorcyclist died when his bike flew off the damp, leaf-infested road into the mountainside. He lay unnoticed for some time. I think it was a sport bike rider—I'm shocked.

I don't understand how one of the many photographers littering the roadsides didn't get a picture of it happening. I wish I would have thought of that gig first; hanging out in a pretty place, taking pictures of bikers, and making money.

Riding the Dragon was a great experience. It showed me what a really twisty mountain road is about; thank goodness, for I was about to need the experience.

Later that afternoon, by accident, we ended up on Highway 209; the weather was spoiling and dark was approaching. By the time we rode Highway 209 and made it back to Maggie Valley, the Dragon seemed like a kiddie-ride at the motorcycle amusement park. The one word that best describes Highway 209 is the word *intense*.

Let me explain how we ended up on Highway 209, AKA, The Rattler.

Earlier that day we had ridden the Dragon twice, and ridden the Cherohalla Freeway. We had a great pork-chop and mashed potatoes lunch at the Smoky Junction. After a late

lunch it was time to head back to Maggie Valley. We put our rain suits over our leathers and headed towards tumultuous-looking skies.

It was getting late and the weather was spoiling. It was cold. It was going to snow. Russ decided to, "Take a short cut back to Maggie Valley." That was the last I heard before we ended up on Highway 209.

The road is serpentine in every sense of the word. It snakes back and forth through the mountains and valleys. That day it was also wet and slimy, like a snake. The road, like a snake, was just waiting to bite you—it was a blast. It was one of the most intense road rides I've ever ridden.

The road rose and dropped, always turning. It cut through rock mountains, their sides inches away from you. I have never seen so many off-camber turns. The road passed through valleys, offering a flat, fast, railroad-like ride through pastoral settings. The small towns felt European. There was a purple, bruised-looking sky as a background. Snow was just waiting to happen.

The sights and smells along Highway 209 were like a trip back in time. The area we had found was unspoiled by traffic. It was rural; passing through on a motorcycle felt like being transported back to the late 1800s.

The local farmhouses and barns were jewels of a bygone architectural vernacular. They were beautiful. The road ran along a rapid-filled river. The visual stimulus was one of timelessness. The sky continued to look like it wanted to unload some snow.

The turns on 209 were either blind, dropping, climbing, banked, or off-cambered; it just depended on the topography. The

turns always seemed to have little surprises from nature waiting. Surprises like rocks of various sizes, branches, standing water, and puddles begging to crust over with ice. There was always a challenge awaiting our arrival into a turn.

Interestingly enough we found ourselves in a race. We were racing against darkness. We rode faster, which only added to the intensity of the road and situations.

After an hour, and what seemed like more turns than the Dragon, we found the main road that dropped us back into Maggie Valley. When we got back to the motel, I immediately took a hot shower and we went to eat. My head and vision were still in the endless turns we had made that day. Russ asked me if I was alright.

Yeah, my equilibrium's fine, I lied.

Later, Russ and I both admitted we were getting nervous on Highway 209 about the encroaching darkness. We had both begun scouting out lodging possibilities, including the farmhouses we passed. But we all agreed that Highway 209 was the highlight ride of the trip. The Dragon now played second fiddle to Highway 209.

The GS performed well on this trip. We returned home to Birmingham and I rode nearly everyday—since time allowed.

The first feeling I had about the GS was to pass on buying it. I still had a feeling of some impending, expensive doom. I had a dealer check the GS for any developing situations. He said things seem fine.

He mentioned that I would probably have to do some rear bearing and shaft seal work in the future, "But there are plenty of miles left," he assured me. By now you know I can be paranoid. I put the bike up for sale on eBay. Besides, the GS was too tall

for my five-foot-six frame. It didn't sell right away so I continued to enjoy many scenic, sixty-mile loops during the weekdays. The GS never gave me any problems. It finally sold, after the ad had been expired for weeks.

A man up north bought it. I arranged shipping, and just like that, the GS was gone, after only six months—not unusual for me. Unfortunately, the GS reinforced the more unpleasant sides of selling a used motorcycle. Fine today, broken tomorrow. The lesson? Always cover yourself with an "as is" clause, and state that there is no warranty.

The man bought the BMW in the heart of the winter. He lived in Minneapolis, or on some other iceberg. He let the GS sit until spring. He called me all irate the next spring, months after purchasing the bike.

The battery is dead, he scolded.

Duh. I told you it was low before you put it in the deep freezer, I reasoned.

He hung up in frustration. I was confused. I've bought and sold a few motorcycles before. I cannot fathom calling someone I had bought a bike from and complaining about a dead battery, especially after months in a deep freezer. He had also wanted me to pay for a new one. I told him he was crazy. I guess it's just me.

Several weeks went by and he called again. This time some seal had gone out—an expensive rear seal of some type. He wanted me to refund him \$1,500.

Yeah, right. Read the bill of sale, I told him. End of conversation.

Unpleasant all the same. It somehow reminded me of my former wife asking me, twenty years after our divorce, if I was going to pay the five hundred dollars the

jeweler wanted to service her Rolex watch. I told her, "No, I'm not. Remember our property settlement? It's your watch, not mine. Read the divorce contract."

I felt the same way about the BMW. Here's a lesson for everyone: if you want a warranty, buy a new bike. Even the best used bike may have some disaster lurking within. I've had my share of new and used bikes that were housing hidden demons deep within. Motorcycles are like humans—healthy today, dead tomorrow.

As with many motorcycles I've owned, and what has become a reoccurring theme—ride. No matter what life throws at you, good or bad—ride. When I ride, the world makes sense, and life's problems always work themselves out.

At this writing I have a BMW GS 650. I had been wanting to try one. So far, so good. The GS BMWs are bikes that give off an attitude. Sort of a, "screw you, I'll go so far and deep, you'll never find me," attitude. Harley riders can emanate a bad-ass look, but the GS alone gives off a Mad Max survivalist vibe. I like the look, maybe because it's not a look that everyone likes.

I had to explain to many people exactly what the bike was for. It was sort of like when I owned trials bikes. The closest anyone came to understanding was a teacher I work with, who is my age; she said, "So it's like an enduro bike?"

"Exactly," I agreed.

If you want to see a GS in its element, check out the series *Long Way Round* and *Long Way Down*; it's a good series.

The GS, for me, was a great bike. It was perfect for the Blue Ridge ride. In a fantasy, I see myself shelling out over twenty thousand dollars for a new GS one day

—one with the lowering kit. Remember I said "in a fantasy." For now, I'm happy with the memory of the big GS in my mind, and twenty thousand dollars in my pocket.



Saddlebags are Zen

There are several movements of late where people choose three to ten pieces of clothing that they'll use for an entire year. The movement is trying to show people how we have too much, too many choices, and that simpler is better. Well, not to blow their movement out of the water, but I've known that since my first motorcycle trip at sixteen.

Being able to travel with two saddlebags' worth of supplies brings life to a near Zen level. There's a certain pleasant austerity about having the necessities of life arranged and packed artistically and proficiently within a saddlebag. Perhaps I should start a movement where people live out of saddlebags. For the most part, I've been doing that since Hurricane Katrina.

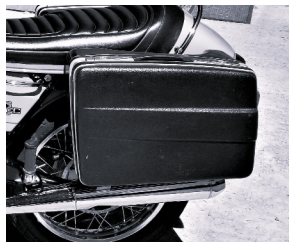
These days, no matter my mode of transportation, my luggage is simply saddlebags. Over time I have amassed a collection of soft luggage that went inside my hard luggage. I have a set of pretty cloth blue-and-white, vintage BMW bags. Some sleek, black Harley-Davidson bags. And more recently I've gained a great set of Velcro-topped Trax bags.

It's amazing what you can fit inside of these bags—especially a combination of the bags. Rolling your clothes and storing things in every little nook is a great way to go. It seems as though whatever trends of simplicity have come and gone, I've been ahead of the curve.

Since Hurricane Katrina I've become particularly proficient at living near the poverty level, eating as though I'm in a war camp, and traveling light. Now if the world would just listen to me about simplifying

their lives by getting rid of television, smartphones, GPS, and tablets, they'd see that life is a lot slower without all of those things.

Wait, are you listening? Hello. Where did everyone go?



INTRODUCTION TO SECTION FIVE: 2010-2019

Finally! After thirty-three years I finished college. It was 2009; I was fifty. In my naivete I believed I would have a job within two months. By 2010 I had applied for over six hundred teaching positions from Louisiana to Alabama. I had applied for positions that required English Language Arts certification—which I have—they just weren't accepted in Alabama, at least not until I taught there for two years.

Can you say Catch-22? How convenient.

Haven't I had issues in Alabama before, I wondered.

Later I was told, off the record, that jobs in Alabama are first filled by people from, and who went to school in, Alabama; then they might consider a foreigner for the position. It also helps if your alma mater has the terms "Roll Tide" or "War Eagle" connected to it.

It turns out Louisiana does the same thing. Everyone takes care of their own. I accept that it's fair. It was my first wake-up call to the real world and working for others—a rude wake-up call, I might add.

It seems my having gone to school in Louisiana and moving to Alabama made me akin to a man without a country. I now know how my great-great-great-grandmother felt. She was born in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, on a ship carrying her parents from Ireland to America. At that time in America, she was considered an outsider by those who had also come to America from other lands. Figure that prejudice out, then explain it to me.

She married my great-great-great-grandfather, a full-blooded Chiricahua Apache Indian—an outsider to "Americans" as

well, even though he was the only true native to North America in the bunch. Hum, on a side thought, Irish and Apache blood flowing through my veins? And I wonder why I get a little crazy when I drink alcohol.

But back to looking for a job with my new college degree. In my search for employment, I even reverted back to the pest control industry. After an exhaustive search I was told, also off the record, that I was too old, and that with my health and age I would mess up the company's insurance policy. I couldn't even get a job in pest control on straight commission and no health benefits.

Discouraged? You bet. I now sympathize with the young people who are graduating into today's job market. I can only imagine how discouraging it is for them. It took me nearly eighteen months to find a job. I finally found a teaching position in L.A.—lower Alabama.

That began what has seemingly become my teaching niche. I get called for interviews in order to meet a legal quota, or get offers after school has started and they need an emergency hire, when the only required credentials are a pulse and teaching certificate. I usually get about two days to move.

Since 2009 I have lived in Folsom, Louisiana; Birmingham, Alabama; Jackson, Alabama; back to Birmingham; to Baton Rouge; back to Birmingham; Valley, Alabama; Smith Station, Alabama; and back to Birmingham.

At this moment in my life, I can't imagine doing anything except teaching. Okay, I can imagine being rich and retired, but when I registered for college I was told they didn't offer a degree in that.

The desire to teach is why I've been willing to move to unknown places within a

day's notice. Disappointingly, teaching seems to be the only thing in life that I've wanted that I can't seem to conquer, thus far.

Teaching is a tough gig. They say it's a calling; I'm starting to wonder if I was hearing voices instead. If and when teaching fizzles out, my next career move will be to either Wal-Mart's garden center or Publix Super Market, stocking shelves on the graveyard shift--and I'm not kidding.

During this time I had three great motorcycle trips and a "May-September" romance (which oddly ran from September to May) with a beautiful, intelligent coworker. Otherwise, life has just not offered me the spontaneous fun that I once enjoyed. Poor me.

I do have a regular job, which I find a dreadfully boring existence, even with the time off that teachers get. I find routines stifle creativity, spontaneity, and fun--not to mention they really interfere with my morning rituals and my morning coffee time.

I liked self-employment better. Too bad. Those days seem to be gone. The problem is, I move too much. I just don't feel settled or part of the communities I've lived in. It's made me unwilling to commit to anything, such as friendships or relationships. I still haven't fully unpacked my belongings since Hurricane Katrina.

I've never been able to picture my future, and I have a pretty intense imagination. But remember, my foresight extends to the tip of my nose. In truth, I always believed I would be dead by thirty. Either way, I'm not disappointed. My life is proof that when you take off on a journey

with no destination, plan, or map, then you can't ask, "How did I get here?"

I've also begun to watch what I say, for the older I get, the more I see the words I speak seem to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. On the other hand, I have fulfilled what I used to say when I was younger and living wide-open. I used to say, "If I live to be fifty I'll live a normal life," and with a great pause would add, "and work the rest of my life." It seemed only fair that I have to work now, since I played for the past forty years, when I was young, strong, healthy, and had an appetite for life—it was a fair trade.

Over the past four decades many things have come and gone. Hurricane Katrina and a heart attack erased any sense of permanency I may have had. These days, the only thing that seems permanent is eternity, and there's much "good news" to be said about that.

I moved to Valley, Alabama, where I was teaching middle school English at a school I despised. That was followed by yet another "not renewing your contract" pink slip. During my stay in Valley, I started writing this book.

During the editing of this book I also stopped drinking alcohol. While editing this book I realized every stupid, dangerous thing I have done since I was fourteen years old has been fueled by alcohol. I stopped cursing. I stopped other forty-plus-year-old habits—albeit only for two years—guess I can't run from a second love either; but none of these changes were by my own wanting to or trying to, just more miracles and changes of heart by God.

Most surprisingly—I stopped riding; and for nearly five years I did not once desire a motorcycle!

But life continued—once again, I got an emergency hire teaching job and moved to Smith Station, Alabama; that too did not work out. The position at Smith Station High School was ideal; it was a school that was huge and perfect—literally one like you see in the movies.

My demise at that job was the fact that I could not hide my disdain for Shakespeare. The other twelfth-grade teachers lived and died for Shakespeare. I did not fit in. I never do.

I moved back in with mom and dad that May, 2016. My father became bedridden and his health started declining, but not his mind. I could not find a job to save my life—I finally realized that I was right where I was supposed to be, taking care of dad. He passed away in March of 2017.

That year with dad was very rewarding, and one of the first times in my life that "me" was not the my goal. After dad passed away, I realized my mom was aging and not in the best position to live alone, something she has never done in her eighty-nine years. I had also promised my dad I would take care of mom.

In that last year with my dad, he taught me one of my most important life lessons—how to die with dignity and that Christians do not die in fear, but rather in joyous hope of the new life to come.

After I stopped riding, the question was, how does one fill the void of nearly fifty years of motorcycling?

Sports cars.

I tried a Nissan 370Z—a soulless, yet fun car to drive. Then, a 1996 Porsche Boxster,

with the legendary flat-six engine—a car that for three years warded off any desire to ride motorcycles.

And of course Covid-19 appeared on the world scene. I'll touch on that in the Section Six introduction-briefly

But this book is about motorcycles, so let me share the stories of the motorcycles, adventures, and lessons I learned during this decade. And is there any better place to start than with a Ducati?

2005 DUCATI ST4: 2WHL SX

Vanity plates—most of them I can't figure out. It was a game in Los Angeles to find the closest ones to being obscene. In Alabama, I can't understand any vanity plate, perhaps because the shortened phrases use an Alabama accent.

The first thing I wanted to do when I bought the Ducati ST4 was to get a vanity plate that read 2WHL SX, because the ST4 was the sexiest motorcycle I've ever owned. That wasn't just my opinion; everyone who saw the Ducati drooled or commented on how fine she was.

Being a high school teacher in a small Alabama town, I didn't get the plate. Being a responsible adult and role model for teenagers has its sacrifices. But the Ducati was sex on two wheels—the epitome of Italian style and performance.

I have always talked to my motorcycles; for the Ducati, I even learned a few Italian phrases, just to make her feel loved and willing to perform for me.

"Ah, la mia Ducati, lei è così bella. Ti amo," I used to croon to her. I'll let you translate.

Let me back up and tell you how I came to have an affair with the ST4. I didn't have a bike, having sold the BMW R1150 GS. I was on eBay looking for something interesting. I was actually looking for a Ducati Monster, and then I saw her.

The bike's curvaceous lines were absolutely fluid. The deep gloss black paint reflected various parts of the bike as they flowed into another beautifully crafted piece. The lines, the gloss, the reflections—all liquid smooth. To use an overused term,

the bike looked like it was doing one hundred miles per hour standing still.

I showed it to Russ.

"Did you buy it?" he asked.

"Not yet," I replied.

"What are you waiting for?" Russ inquired.

I clicked "Buy It Now."

I had to return to Jackson, Alabama the next day. I handled the transaction by computer. Russ and Myrna said they would drive to Asheville, North Carolina and pick it up for me. It was also a good chance for a road trip in their new SUV.

While backing up to load the Ducati, the trailer jackknifed and put a big dent in their new SUV. Things went downhill from there. Myrna didn't like the bike when she saw it. The Ducati gave her a bad feeling. She often said it was evil.

They got back home and unloaded the bike. Russ pushed it into the garage. He turned the key on. The Ducati started and shot off like a rocket—straight into the gas hot water heater!

Somehow the starter button had gotten stuck. When Russ had turned on the key, the Ducati roared to life and took off. Thankfully, the hot water heater and pipes weren't ruptured. The Ducati's eight hundred dollar headlight didn't survive unscathed. The stylish cover that protects the actual light did its job; while doing so it was broken, but the headlight was safe.

"The thing's evil," Myrna repeated.

I showed up the next day expecting the worst. The damage wasn't anything but an unnoticeable scratch and the broken lens cover—which, not being there, you didn't miss. The Ducati was beautiful. The only

stock piece on the bike seemed to have been the frame.

The bike was covered in tastefully placed carbon fiber. The bodywork and tank had been sheathed in deep black paint. A thick clear coat covered the paint and the custom decals. The paint was so deep it looked like you could put your hand into it. It had custom everything-period.

My sister continued to act as though she had been raised Catholic. She talked of having an exorcism performed on the Ducati. I started having doubts as well. I wanted to sell the Ducati and give up riding.

I actually said, "I want to give up riding."

Thankfully Russ was possessed with practical sense, and he shared some with me. I kept the bike. I calmed down and continued to fall deeply in love with the Ducati. When I started it, the mellow sound from the V-twin and carbon pipes, combined with the rattle of the exposed dry clutch, was mechanical harmony.

Damn, she's fine, I repeatedly mumbled.

Russ delivered the Ducati to me in Jackson later that week. It stopped my landlord and neighbor, Dr. C, in his tracks as he drove up the long drive. He stopped to look at the beauty. Dr. C shared his motorcycle stories with me and mentioned how he, "toyed with the idea of getting a bike, but, you know, with the two young girls--"

No, I don't, I thankfully thought.

The next day the kids at school swarmed the Ducati as I pulled up. I purposely blipped the throttle as I slowly rode through the parking lot past the crowd. The sound of the V-twin echoed in the courtyard between buildings; a powerful rumble

surrounded the school. The Ducati gave me instant "cool teacher" status.

I began to notice everyone who has never heard of a Ducati knows what one is: beautiful, Italian, fast, and fine. I couldn't take the Ducati anywhere that it wouldn't draw people like it was giving away money. And of course, they always had to touch the tank and fairing, leaving fingerprints on the black paint.

Arrrrg! Fingerprints! My pet peeve since I've owned chrome.

My ride to work each morning was seven miles of smooth, rolling, four-lane highway that undulated through the countryside, and I had to ride it on a Ducati. What a way to have to start the day. As I've said before, life is tough—always has been.

Once, while making my commute, for a millisecond, I thought about the sixty-mile commute I once had in Los Angeles. Six lanes wide, crawling along, shrouded in smog, eyes burning—an hour-and-a-half ride. I endured that so I could go sell all day, nonstop. Then I got to drive home. Damn. I sure missed that. Not really; never have, not once.

A more serious problem facing me on my commute to and from work was that the bike didn't become comfortable until I was above eighty miles per hour. At those speeds the wind alleviated the pressure of the riding position on my wrists and back.

The problem? Once comfortable, the low rumbling sound of the pipes became hypnotic. In no time, without any sense of speed, I would be doing one hundred and ten miles per hour, completely comfortable. Thank God Bambi was never out for a stroll.

I was never able to get my coworker and friend, Brandy, to ride on the Ducati. She

said, "It scares me. I'll ride with you when you have a Harley." When I did, she didn't. But she was accepted into the NASA astronaut training program, and with a ride like she might get one day, who needs to ride on a Ducati.

I mainly rode the Ducati around Jackson. I had a thirty-mile loop on a beautiful, rural, twisting, rising and falling road. The riding could be dangerous because of deer. Jackson had deer and rattlesnakes. I thought Texas had deer and rattlesnakes! Jackson was literally slithering with snakes.

The area around Jackson is known as the Rattlesnake Capital of the Southeast; it's also in what is known as The Black Belt region for its tremendous deer population. My thirty-mile loop took me past at least three dead deer, two places that buy rattlesnakes, a rattlesnake milking farm, and one snake-handling church.

One afternoon while sitting on my porch, I looked up to see two rattlesnakes curled up in the porch eaves—right above my head! But enough about snakes.

Every few weekends I would ride the three hours of backroads—the only roads—to Birmingham to visit family. The bike was a joy to ride. Stretches of Hwy. 5 run through wide-open fields with undulating hills, no cross streets, and little to no traffic; yes, I found out the Ducati was fast—really fast.

Owning that Ducati was like owning a beautiful piece of jewelry. It was exquisitely crafted from the finest materials. It shimmered like precious stones. Each piece of the bike could hold your eye with its balanced beauty and exotic design.

I kept the Ducati for over a year. Many times while riding I would begin thinking about the upcoming maintenance the Ducati might need. I had heard horror stories of valve adjustment costs, not to mention the costs of tires, chains, and what-not.

As usual, I began to find my time with the motorcycle coming to an end. I get bored easily, hate maintenance costs, and downtime.

I made plans to sell it. I felt like I was leaving the perfect woman.

I sold the Ducati to the first person who saw it; a customer of Russ' bought it as soon as Russ emailed pictures to him. My Ducati was now with another man—one with deeper pockets than mine. One who could afford to maintain such a lovely thing.

My tastes were beginning to turn towards a big cruiser—a real cruiser, a Harley-Davidson.

As for my maintenance fears of the Ducati, the man who purchased it rode it over ten thousand miles during the year and a half he owned it. He didn't do anything except replace the tires, chain, and made minor adjustments. He never did a valve adjustment.

The only trouble the man "ran into" was when he hit a Canada goose at about eighty-five mph. He had to replace a body panel and the windshield, but the eight hundred dollar headlight survived unscathed.

I almost bought the Ducati back in September 2013. I had sold the Harley I had been riding, was living in Valley, Alabama, and needed a bike. I really wanted to try a BMW F650GS, but owning the Ducati again was so tempting.

I told Russ to call him the next day; I wanted her back. I was too late. He had sold

it the night before to the first person who saw it.

Somehow I felt relieved.

I thought about the things I learned when I had owned the Ducati. I re-learned that there is no substitute for quality; and if you can't feel, sense, and see the quality of an item, then you shouldn't own it—a pearls to swine kind of thing. I also re-learned that Ducatis just want to go fast. That's that. They go fast; they go fast very well.

Back in 1998 my neighbor, Al, who every time he saw me sell something I was bored with would share this gem of wisdom with me: "Edmond, don't sell anything. Keep everything; you'll wish you had."

Great advice, I agreed.

It's especially true if you're Al and have over one hundred thousand square feet of storage space. Yep, I sure do wish I could've kept every motorcycle I've owned. Yep, if I was rich, I would have. I'd even go buy them all back if I could.

Al is from Mobile, Alabama. Al owns a large portion of the original Tantela Ranch, which was the playground of the Hamiltons of Piccadilly fame. Al makes piles of money at whatever he does. Al has the Midas touch. Al is a hoarder.

Al was on the television show *American Pickers*. Al parlayed that into more sales and more money. Did I mention Al's never home? He works a lot.

So I guess, as always, the thing I realize the most through motorcycling is this: the best thing in life is taking time to live and enjoy life, and for me, that means taking and making time to ride not just making more money. But if I did see

things Al's way, I'd be in my garage
polishing my Ducatis right now.



2005 Harley-Davidson Wide Glide: The Thousand-Dollar Ride

I've always been a spendthrift. I'm the type who is opposite of the old Southernism that says, "He wouldn't spend a nickel to watch a piss-ant eat a bale of hay." Nope, I'd pay a dollar! I have spent hundreds of dollars on ninety-second skydiving thrills. I've lost money on nearly every bike I've owned. In short, I'm really stupid with money-or smart?

A case in point: my time on a 2005 Harley-Davidson Wide Glide—one ride, one thousand dollars. Stupid. Or perhaps another sign that Dr. McCord's suspicions of bipolarity are correct. Call it what you want, but it is what it is. Or to quote Popeye, "I am what I yam."

No help is my proclivity to give in to my "I want what, and I want it now" attitude.

Several months had passed since I had sold the Ducati ST4. Russ was talking about the trip up to Canada that he and a friend were going to make in June. I had been pondering buying a bike that I would keep forever—as though that could happen. I decided I needed a Harley—a new-generation, reliable Harley. I also threw my name in the hat to go on the trip to Canada.

I was still living three hours away from civilization in Jackson, Alabama, so Russ took up the quest to see who might be selling a used Harley. He asked his biker friends. Sure enough, within hours Russ called me back. He had found what might be a good bike at a fair price. Russ' friend, Snake, had a friend, Choo-Choo, who was selling a Wide Glide—at least that's what Chopper told Russ.

At this point you're probably wondering one of two things: why did I buy the bike after that introduction, or why do bikers always have these bad-ass nicknames?

I still don't quite like the connotation of my biker nickname, Special Ed. My proper biker name is the one given to me in my childhood, The Fiend.

It's one thing when, after I have been witty or interesting in some way, a woman tells me, "You're special, Ed." It's a completely different connotation when biker acquaintances, such as Snake, Chopper, and Choo-Choo, call you Special Ed. To make it worse, the one who tagged me with that name is the wife of one of the bikers; she's also a college professor. It ain't right. It just ain't right.

But back to the Wide Glide. That afternoon I drove to Birmingham. Russ, my sister and I went to look at the bike. When we pulled up I had my first bad omen: the bike lived outside. I've always found that makes for an ornery bike. I think dogs should live outside and bikes should be kept inside. Bikes kept inside are much more gracious than those motorcycles left out in the elements.

We lifted the tarp off; the bike looked good, started right up, had mildly high bars, and way-forward forward controls. The price was right and we knew it had been well maintained. I pondered buying the bike for a minute—literally—then we loaded it onto the trailer.

We brought it back to Russ' house and gave it the once-over. I rode it up the street once and realized I had to do something about reaching the rear brake pedal. I had to—well, Russ had to—make an

extension pad for the rear brake pedal so I could reach it without sitting on the tank.

Remember, I'm five-foot-six and have short legs; but hey, they reach the ground—unless I'm on a BMW.

We planned a ride for the next morning. A group of us were going to ride to Mentone, Alabama—a nice ride through small towns and into the beginnings of the Appalachian Mountains. It was an easy, pleasurable ride we had made several times.

We took off to Mentone the next morning. The sky was Alabama blue, the temperature warm—a great day for a ride.

I have to admit, once we got onto the open backroads I fell straight into an Easy Rider daydream. The Wide Glide had a feel that reminded me of my chopper—namely, it felt like my feet were falling off the forward pegs and the front end felt about as squirrely—but it had rear shocks.

My fantasy kept getting interrupted every time I had to move forward, constantly fighting to keep my feet planted on the front pegs. Even with the brake pedal extension, it was still an effort to use the rear brake.

In the bright sun I began to notice that some of the bolts, screws, and chrome visible from the saddle had mild rust and pitting. Because I like to admire my motorcycles in motion, those would have to be replaced.

We made the ride, had lunch, and headed home. It had been an uneventful ride, and I wasn't really happy with the bike.

We stopped for gas and a cold drink in Odenville, Alabama. As we sat in the parking lot next to the town park, which had an old church across the arched walking bridge spanning a little creek, we noticed what

seemed to be an outdoor wedding about to commence. I say "seemed like a wedding" because it was hard to tell what the group was about to do, based solely on their attire.

Upon closer inspection, it was a wedding party. Being from New Orleans, I'm used to the unusual. The flip side of the coin is that my mom was in the bridal gown business and I've done hundreds of weddings with the Bentley; but, "I'ze ain't never seen such get'n hitched clothes as theez folks was-a-wear'n. No sir-ree."

The bride wore a traditional wedding gown—sort of. In one hand she had flowers; in the other, a little dog. She walked across the bridge to meet the father of the bride, who was decked out in full camouflage. The bridesmaids were wearing short, somewhat matching little black dresses, cowboy boots, and had a bright yellow something in their hair. Two carried flowers; one carried another dog. One of the groomsmen wore shorts and a tux top—or maybe it was the groom. Either way, I've never seen a wedding that utilized those fashions. Never.

The father of the bride chain-smoked throughout the entire ordeal and ceremony. The one dog had to poop during the vows. The definition of spectacle is: "a visually striking performance or display." That wedding clearly qualified as a spectacle.

We drank our Cokes under the trees while we watched the ceremony. Oh yeah, you know it: I took pictures of the blessed event. The show was easily worth a hundred dollars—and remind me later that I said that.

Wedding's over. Back on the road. We returned to Birmingham.

When we got home I told Russ I wouldn't be able to ride the Wide Glide to Canada. I

also didn't like the used feeling about the bike. It was just an uncomfortable bike for me to ride. In summary: I didn't like the bike.

That night, as I sat pondering the bike and the fact that any type of education costs money, I decided I needed a brand-new Harley. Something that fit me. Something more classic.

Russ suggested the Softail Heritage Classic. We looked at the Harley website. I liked what I saw, so the next day we all went to the Harley dealer so I could try one on. The Heritage Softail Classic fit me well. It looked great in black. We left. It was Saturday. Russ said he would check around Monday and see what he could kick up.

Having to work Monday, I returned to Jackson. By mid-afternoon Monday I had a message from Russ. When I called him after school, he told me he had gone to the Harley dealer he had bought his Ultra Classic from; they had two beautiful black Heritages on the floor. He wanted to know if I wanted him to bring the Wide Glide in for a trade-in quote. Of course I did.

Russ called back a few hours later and told me the numbers. The trade-in value was a thousand dollars less than what I had paid for the bike just days ago.

I understand the consequences of paying retail and selling wholesale—you lose money. Years ago when I held a securities license I learned the concept of buy low, sell high. However, in my personal dealings with stocks, I bought high and sold low. Are you getting the picture of my financial acumen?

Most of the motorcycles I've owned I've lost money on when I sold them. The same was true with the Wide Glide: I lost money. The

only other option was to sell it myself—you know, be patient.

You also know I don't possess patience; besides, June was approaching fast—"Hellooo, Canada calling."

I traded in the Wide Glide and bought the 2010 Heritage Softail Classic.

I took a sick day the next day and drove to Birmingham. I didn't lie; I was sick from the thousand-dollar loss. We went to the dealer to pick up the Softail.

As I was removing the Wide Glide's license plate, I put the first skull bolt in my pocket to use on the Softail. Just then I heard the shop manager tell me, "Those stay with the bike."

I continued to unscrew the other nut. I looked at him, then at the I-paid-retail Softail, and said, "You kiddn, right?"

He walked away. At that moment I decided I would never give that dealership another dime. I haven't, and never will.

I got on the Softail and left. As I rode home I thought about the Wide Glide ride. One ride, one thousand dollars. "Humph," I said aloud.

I reviewed the three lessons I learned from the Wide Glide. First: Getting what you want, when you want it costs money. Second: It feels good to get what you want, when you want it. Third: My next wedding will be a "no smoking and no dogs allowed" affair.

As I rode home I looked down at the gleaming chrome dancing across the curved lines of the Softail's headlight and chrome driving lights; I planted my feet comfortably on the floorboards and smiled. I thought of the old adage that declares that ignorance is bliss.

I laughed aloud, ran my left hand down the lines of the gas tank, and said, "Maybe so, maybe so."

I dialed on the throttle and enjoyed the music of my brand-new big V-twin, with my feet planted comfortably on the floorboards. I've never missed the Wide Glide—not once.



**2010 HARLEY-DAVIDSON SOFTAIL
HERITAGE CLASSIC:
Got Pot?**

We walked into the dealership and Russ brought me to the Softail Heritage Classics; one was to be my new bike. I had two black ones to choose from. Funny how two exact motorcycles can seemingly have completely different personalities—or perhaps I just anthropomorphize motorcycles way too much. Either way, it was like choosing a puppy.

One bike looked dull, asleep; the other shimmered in the showroom lights, alive and spirited. She was chrome and black—always a beautiful combination. Classic lines mixed with technology, and as much innovation as an air-cooled engine will allow. It was ready to ride. That puppy was mine.

The trip to Canada had been pushed back to early July, giving me a month to put one thousand break-in miles on the Softail. It was a hot summer; the temperatures were hovering in the high nineties. I had to take short trips to get the miles in. On one trip I felt so overwhelmed by the persistent feeling that I was about to pass out that I cut the ride short and went home—a first for me. Heart medications and really hot temperatures don't mix.

Riding during the cool of the mountain mornings, I was able to ride my thousand miles and get a feel for the bike. The bike was ready to go and so was I. My first planned, high-mileage motorcycle trip was here, after only forty years of waiting. Perhaps I do possess patience. I was excited. I had a new Harley that fit me well. We were ready to go.

Russ and I headed to meet his friend, Terry, in Chicago. Terry was riding a one-

hundredth-anniversary edition Softail Classic to Canada with us. We met Terry at his house outside of Chicago. My front brake had been feeling spongy and weak, so I headed to the local Harley dealership to have it checked.

When they brought it around they had found the problem and corrected it. They also wanted two hundred and twenty-five dollars.

You know what I said: "You're kiddn, right?"

He wasn't kidding, and I wasn't paying. He got the manager. It turned out the problem was covered under the warranty. Imagine that. They fixed it for free. I was happy.

I continued on without any more incidents. However, I was not pleased with the mercenary corporate attitude that seemed prevalent in Harley dealers. As a matter of fact, I still have a bad taste in my mouth about it. And yes, I understand that the corporate mind-set and philosophy is what pulled Harley from the hand of failure years ago, but as we say in N'Awlins, "Dat ain't right."

You know what else ain't right? How many people, me included, refer to a Harley-Davidson as a Harley. The same is true with Rolls-Royces; they are commonly called a Rolls. How would you like to be Arthur Davidson or Frederick Royce? No one acknowledges your contribution to greatness. "Dat ain't right." Enough griping about the irrelevant-onward to Canada.

We left Terry's house the next morning and rode through cornfields that seemed endless. It was hot. I was pouring water on myself trying to cool down. Thank goodness I had the chrome handlebar-mounted beverage

holder on my bike—the same one I had made fun of when Russ had mounted it on his bike, now I was the one who liked it.

As we rode through the sweltering heat I thought about when I was growing up; all I ever heard was that summers up north are nothing like summers in the south, they're a lot cooler. Really? This one was just like the summer in the south I had left days earlier.

After hours of riding through an endless sea of lush green cornfields, we arrived at a neighborhood, complete with a golf course, built in the middle of cornfields. Terry's mom had an accommodating house for drop-ins—good thing, for we would be staying the night.

As I lay in bed that night I thought about what a joy the bike had been to ride that day. A dream turned into reality. Me on a new Harley, riding through the heartland of its origin. It was so comfortable I could ride until I needed gas—a first for any bike I had owned. I was happy. I fell asleep while visions of sugar plums danced in my head. Christmas had come in July.

The next morning we headed toward The Inn on Gitche Gumee, a beautiful little inn on the shore of Lake Superior. That was our day's destination and where we would stay the night.

One road we had taken followed the Mississippi River; I was amazed at how different the river is up north, looking nothing like it does in New Orleans. We stopped at a small cafe wedged between the road and the Mississippi River.

Between the river and the cafe was a railroad track that was perhaps ten feet away from the restaurant windows. Every so often a freight train would pass—at high

speed, I might add. It was surreal to be eating while the rear windows became a blur of the passing train. The noise and vibration would halt conversation.

Weird. Memorable.

We talked about heading into wooded terrain and the possibilities of a moose or deer wandering across the road. Of course, many people have horrific, "I hit a deer" stories, which they always tell in an anecdotal way, and they always end with what they believe to be the best way to hit a deer.

The stories all seem to end unanimously with the advice to dial on the throttle and go through it. I shared my misgivings about how well that would work with a really large animal-like, say, a moose.

We hadn't ridden three hours on roads that sliced through the forest—Terry was up front, followed by Russ, and I was bringing up the rear—when, poof! A large doe made two leaps between Terry and Russ. Russ' brake lights didn't even light up. From my angle it looked like Russ had to have hit the rear flank.

In reality, Russ missed the deer by millimeters. It had happened so quickly Russ didn't even have time to apply his brakes. Mysteriously, there was a strand of deer hair caught in Russ' clutch lever!

Later in the trip we stopped at a roadside souvenir shop. Right in front of where we parked the motorcycles stood a life-sized statue of a moose. Big—it was big. It was really big! It dwarfed the big Harleys, all three of them.

As Russ sat on his bike taking off his helmet, he looked at the statue and said, "I'm glad that didn't jump in front of me."

As I took off my helmet and leathers, I wondered if a moose jumps about the forest and roads, or whether it meanders. I can't see the need for something that size to be in a hurry. I wondered where a moose fits into the Canadian food chain. I wondered why I wonder so much about such things. Simple mind, simple pleasures.

Several hours after the near-deer hit, we arrived at the Inn on Gitchie Gumee around six p.m. We sat on the porch and had some whiskey as we looked out at Lake Superior. I was raised on the shores of Lake Pontchartrain in New Orleans; it's a big lake, twenty-six miles across, but I must concede, Lake Superior is--well, superior. I've never seen ocean-going ships in Lake Pontchartrain.

Later we went up the road a couple miles and had a great dinner at a restaurant that was nearly empty and offered beautiful views of Lake Superior. After dinner, as we walked towards the bikes, a car full of people in their thirties or so parked next to the bikes.

As we began to suit up, they started up a conversation with us. I was okay with that, especially since half of them were pretty women.

As we talked it became evident that they seemed a little tipsy, buzzing, or nearly drunk. They had, by their own admission, been out on a wine-drinking spree. One woman in the group decided it was okay to sit on my bike. It was.

As I talked to her, she just outright asked me, "Do you have any weed?"

Nope, I lied--I mean, replied.

"Why would you assume I might?" I inquired.

"You're riding a Harley-Davidson, you're American, and you look like an old hippie," she replied matter-of-factly.

"Oh, sorry," I said.

This began what would become a common question put forth to me over the course of the trip. I found it mildly amusing, especially it being 2010—which in retrospect is why I suppose it was okay for people to ask.

Granted, I had let my hair grow to a small ponytail's worth over the last school year, but it amazes me how the Harley, American, and hippie mystiques—or stereotypes—never die. Whatever, it helped fuel the *Easy Rider* trip and fantasy I was on.

That night I decided it may be a good idea to get rid of that which I was holding and that others sought before a border crossing; so I burned up a week's worth on the shore of Lake Superior. I slept very well that night.

The following morning we began following the roads around Lake Superior and into Canada. As we rode along Lake Superior, Gordon Lightfoot's song, "The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald," began playing an endless loop in my head; it lasted two days. We had breakfast along the way and entered Canada.

I find crossing a border exciting. Once you cross a line on a map you're in another country, with another language, another currency, another culture—all bordering, or literally touching each other, but so far apart culturally.

As we drove further north the weather began to change. In nearly every direction I could see rain falling from the clouds on the horizon. We kept missing the rain, but I had put on my rain suit and a sweatshirt

under my leather coat. It had turned cold-like patches of sleeting rain cold. Being from south Louisiana, and with the heat wave we were having in Alabama, I found the cold weather a blessing in July.

I thought perhaps when I was told the summers up north were cooler, they meant way up north. Once again, I was thinking too much.

The first cultural shock in Canada that I received was when we stopped to fuel up. We waited in a line of motorcycles ten deep. I was shocked at the twenty-five dollars it took to fill up my bike. Worse, I didn't even know how many gallons I had bought, since they sold it in liters.

After we filled up and got back on the road, I thought about how in 1970 my fifth-grade math teacher tried to teach us the metric system. She had warned us that by 1980 the whole world would be using the metric system, and if we didn't know it, we wouldn't be able to get a job.

I guess the world underestimated either the strength or stubbornness of America's people and economy. Forget about not having learned the metric system, but I do wish I would have learned Spanish. Now you can get a job if you speak Spanish fluently. Who'd-a-thunk-it.

I soon realized everything in Canada was expensive—at least along the route we were riding—which I suppose is how they paid for the million-dollar views that the roads offered. Canada's beautiful. The sheer mountains, with evergreens clinging to cliff sides on one side, Lake Superior and its islands on the other.

Rising and falling roads, twisting through the Canadian wilderness—all are just beautiful. Climbing each mountain created an

anticipation of what glorious view would explode in front of me when I reached the crest.

That evening we found a quaint old motel, with a restaurant, to stay the night. We had a good dinner and went back and sat outside the rooms looking at the bikes and enjoying some adult beverages and conversation. Terry and Russ had to go to bed. I wasn't tired--besides, it was still daylight.

An older couple sitting nearby told me, "It's going to stay daylight until eleven o'clock or so." They suggested I come sit with them and share their Canadian whiskey. They said they had some "mighty tasty Forty Creek."

I stayed outside talking to the couple for several hours. We talked about our backgrounds, New Orleans, Katrina, Canada, retirement--theirs, not mine. Their daughter is also a teacher who earns nearly twice what I earn, but as they explained, it's all relative, because as I had realized, Canada is expensive. They added that Canadian health care sucked as well.

I've never complained about what I get paid for working what is essentially a part-time job, but talking to them about health care made me real happy about the fifteen dollars a month I pay for a Blue Cross health insurance policy as a teacher in Alabama, especially with my health conditions.

I didn't want to--the conversation and Forty Creek were both good--but I finally had to go to bed. It was after eleven p.m. and had finally gotten dark.

Bright and early the next morning we were ready to go--or at least Terry and Russ were. It also took me most of the day before the paranoia of hitting something subsided. I

was beginning to wish we would take more time to stop at scenic overlooks. At times the trip began to feel like a drive-a-thon, which, unless you're among the idle rich, long motorcycle trips are.

We did stop at several beaches. I was amazed at how each beach was different. One beach was made of pure white sand. Another beach was gray, near black, smooth stones, and still others were a mix of smooth rock and sand of various hues.

Naturally we did stop at the Thunder Bay Harley shop so Russ and Terry could buy T-shirts. I'm cheap; I drink the free coffee and ogle the motorcycles. I get my Harley T-shirts for free when Russ cleans out his collection; mine come with a cool, worn patina—something you just can't get when you buy them new.

I think the Discovery Channel should do a show on Harley-Davidson shops, if they haven't already. I wouldn't know, I don't watch television.

But I find Harley dealerships to be a modern marvel of marketing. Anyway, as I sat outside in the crowded parking lot, soaking up the sun, an older couple parked next to me began chatting with me as they put on their riding gear. Yep, you guessed it, they asked me, "You got pot?"

"Nope, no dope," I said. That became my standard reply for the rest of the trip.

We made the thousand-mile-plus drive around Lake Superior and headed to the U.S. border. Terry and Russ breezed through in seconds. The border guard seemed to have more questions for me.

"So where do you live?" he inquired.

"Jackson, Alabama," I said.

"Never heard of it," he said, as he furrowed his brow.

"Me neither till I moved there," I answered, raising my eyebrows high and sporting a fake, wide grin.

"What do you do in Jackson?"

"I'm an English teacher."

"Why do you want to teach?"

By now the interrogation was wearing thin. If this conversation was to continue I would have to shut the bike off; my right thigh was beginning to cook.

"Because all of the cool border crossing jobs were taken," I said with a smile.

"Have a great trip," he added, as he handed my passport back.

"Will do," I said. I put the bike in gear and pulled away.

Russ and Terry were laughing when I pulled over to them. Terry smiled and said, "Did he ask if you had any pot?"

"The only thing he didn't," I replied.

We rode that day and stopped early in Houghton, Michigan to spend the night. We found a weird, multi-level motel that was built along the topography of the mountainside. They had just kept adding on as it grew over the years. We were right across the street from the old *The Daily Mining Gazette* offices—a newspaper name that says volumes about the history of this town's prosperous past.

We walked around town and found a great restaurant and bar, The Ambassador. It has a really warm, pub-type interior and a history to it. Best of all, it had a large rear deck overlooking the Portage River and cute waitresses. A full moon was rising, the dinner crowd was thinning, and the party crowd was moving in.

We went back to the hotel. Russ and Terry went to bed.

It was a full moon; I went back to the bar around sunset, say about ten-thirty p.m. Did I mention it was a full moon?

I found a seat at the bar, which since time immemorial has been a good place to meet the locals, for everyone gathers at the watering hole. I ordered a beverage and looked around. It was a mellow, sedate pub. I set my drink down and turned towards the bar. I looked to my side. I was face-to-face with a very attractive woman, Peggy, who had sat next to me.

Peggy started up a conversation as though we had known each other since fifth grade and she had ridden on my Cub 50, whispering in my ear how she would remember this moment forever as she wrapped her arms around me—

Sorry, wrong story. Strong memory. Pam did that.

Peggy and I talked and flirted for a half hour. I'm ashamed to say that the woman, whose beauty she accredited to her half-Chippewa and French genes, had worn a blouse that accentuated and framed her cleavage like—well, let's just say that I couldn't help but look at, okay, stare at, her cleavage. In my defense, I offer the following evidence: even the young women in the bar looked at her cleavage as they passed.

Peggy suggested we go outside. We did. The moon shone bright on her cleav—I mean the river. As she smoked a cigarette, she nonchalantly told me, "My breasts are real, people just assume they're fake 'cause they're so perfect, especially for my age."

Uh-huh, I agreed. Assuming that was an approval for me to start staring again. I did.

"You want to touch 'em?" she asked. "Go ahead, squeeze them," she casually invited.

"Yes, I do," I replied from some primal space within my being. I marveled that not only was she gorgeous, but she was a mind reader as well, for I had been thinking that I wanted to do that since we had met.

Her asking me if I wanted to touch her breasts was like Eve telling Adam about apples: "They're nice, huh? Here, try one, they're sweet and firm. You'll like them." And much like Adam, I fell for the forbidden fruit that was offered by a beautiful woman. Her claim seemed to be true; they were as described.

As the conversation sadly moved away from her breasts and towards her life, she told me, "My husband was going—"

Stop. Hold on, I interrupted. "Your husband? Here? You're married?" I interrogated.

We hung out a while longer and enjoyed the moon. Peggy gave me her number. She told me that she was looking to get out of this town. She told me to call her in a month.

As we were saying goodbye, she asked me, "Any chance you got some pot?"

Nope. No dope, I replied.

"Call me," she cried out as I walked away.

"I will," I promised. I did.

As I walked back to the hotel I thought about how much I love full moon nights. I don't care what experts and statistics may argue; having grown up in New Orleans, being a lunatic myself, and having spent countless hours enjoying full moon nights makes me sort of an expert. Weird things happen when there's a full moon—at least to me.

I called her a few months later. It turns out the only attraction between us emanated from the forces of alcohol, a full moon, and the happenstance of two lunatics being in

the same place at the same time. But of the millions of moments that have passed in my life, I remember that one.

The next morning it was time to put the finishing miles on our trip. We had some extra time; Terry talked us into riding forty-five minutes, one way, out of the way, to see the old mines—more specifically, the outside of old, abandoned mines. My town history lesson was now complete. I had gotten the town's history and the importance the mines had played in it the night before from Peggy.

After the mining tour we headed back to Terry's house. We had arrived early enough that afternoon that Russ and I loaded up the bikes and started back to Alabama.

The trip to Canada will always be a memorable trip. It was my first real road trip. It was my first trip on a Harley. It was a pleasure. That trip taught me that a Harley-Davidson is a great no-hurry, no-worry cruiser. Being somewhat reclusive, the trip to Canada taught me that the world does possess interesting and friendly people.

Terry is one of the most easy-going, amicable people I've met. He is filled with interesting stories of his world travels. Terry travels to so many places in the world that he had to have pages added to his passport. He too, like the man who bought my BMW R1150R, should be writing a book.

Riding that trip filled a hole in my motorcycling soul that had been hollow for nearly forty years—to make a long road trip on a big-bore Harley.

I did make one other trip in 2010. Russ, my sister, and I decided to ride down to Panama City Beach for the Thunder Beach Rally. We were going to meet some of Russ's

riding buddies there. I was already down in Jackson, so I met Russ and Myrna at I-85.

It had poured down rain on Myrna and Russ on their way down from Birmingham to meet me. From I-85 and into Florida, it rained. At times it rained torrentially, like the Malbis rain Frank and I had experienced on our journey through Alabama in 1975. Myrna and Russ remained warm and dry in their Harley rain gear. I was soaking wet and freezing in my cheap rainsuit. I still hadn't learned.

We had to stop and wait one storm out. We stopped at a closed gas station. There was an old farmhouse across the street. The couple who owned the house came over, in the rain, to talk to us. They were just as friendly as could be. As they stood in the pouring rain, they kept trying to talk us into coming over to their house, waiting out the storm, and having a drink.

Bottom line: these two were a bunch of kinky freaks looking for new friends. No thanks. We left.

When we got to Thunder Beach I was highly disappointed. The lack of motorcycle diversity was a letdown. It was ninety-nine percent Harley, with the attire to boot—no pun intended. To all but three of the five senses, it was boring. Yeah, yeah, I know; I was on a Harley.

Worse than the lack of motorcycle diversity were the riders. Never in my life had I seen so many people, ranging in age from their early twenties to their late seventies, who were obese, tattooed, drunk, and unable to hold their liquor—and I'm from New Orleans, we have Mardi Gras!

Tattoos. I know you don't care about my opinion on the subject, but it's my book. I see tattoos as dermal graffiti. If God

wanted us to draw on ourselves he would have given us a canvas outer layer, not skin. Enough said.

The people at Thunder Beach were rude and obnoxious. The traffic was, as expected, plentiful and slow-moving—if at all. We did enjoy a nice ride up to Apalachicola, Florida. We found a cool little restaurant on the bay where we enjoyed a long, late lunch—or an early happy hour, it just depends on how you look at it.

For having been such a motorcycle Fiend—my true, given, biker name—for most of my life, I've never had the desire to attend motorcycle rallies. I would like to see Daytona Bike Week once, but I have no real interest in rallies. Thunder Beach had confirmed my feelings that biker rallies, for the most part, are just excuses for people to get drunk and act foolish. I have never had to have an excuse to do that.

With the exception of going to Daytona before I die—which is not on my bucket list, because I don't have one—I won't be attending any more motorcycle rallies. Perhaps being from New Orleans and having been to Mardi Gras countless times, combined with bad experiences at rock concerts in the 1970s, I just don't like, nor trust, crowds, particularly when alcohol is in the mix.

The bottom line for me and motorcycles is this: I got into, and like, motorcycling because it's a singular activity. You don't need a team to play. You don't need help riding the bike. You don't need to talk to people, listen to music, or talk on the phone while on a motorcycle. Me, the bike, the elements, and my thoughts—those are the only ingredients I need in order to have a wonderful motorcycling experience. A few

less thoughts now and then might even make it better.

After Thunder Beach I returned to my house in Jackson; school was starting in August. I had become so attached to my Harley the past two months that I brought it to Jackson as my sole transportation. It was August in the South. Rain or shine--and then some more rain--I rode the Harley. It was the wettest season in a decade, and I enjoyed every bit of it.

Only because of how cooperative the weather was when I needed to ride. It would rain like the monsoon season in Vietnam all night and early into the morning. I would suit up to leave--no rain. I would ride the seven miles to work--no rain. I would get inside school and it would rain until I was ready to leave in the afternoon; then it would stop raining until I got inside my house.

That rain pattern continued for nearly two weeks. Just another example of the saying, "God takes care of children and fools." I was fifty-one, so I don't fit into the children part of that protection.

Another example of protection is a return trip back to Jackson from Birmingham. As I rode up the desolate Highway 5, I could smell rain. I decided to stop and put on my cheap, leaky rain gear. It took several miles to find a spot to pull over on the shoulderless road, but in the middle of nowhere was a lone road intersecting the highway; I pulled off the road.

I was about halfway through putting on my rainsuit when out of nowhere, literally, a carload of atypical, movie-type, huge, redneck Alabamians pulled up.

"You okay, boy? You broke down or something?" the biggest one asked.

Their stopping also proved the atypical nature of an Alabama redneck—they stopped to help, because most Alabamians I've met are helpful and polite. Anyway, I looked at the carload of people and smiled.

"Yeah, I'm just get'n ready for the rain," I replied.

Small talk ensued for a few minutes, then they began to drive away; as they did, a chorus of "Roll Tide!" erupted from the car. I just nodded.

The car stopped and began to back up. I felt something brewing—something not good for me.

The biggest one in the passenger seat, right by me, said, "I said Roll Tide, boy. What's wrong, you not an Alabama fan?"

Thoughts started running through my head at 100 mph. My first impulse was to say I was from Louisiana, so I like LSU. Thankfully, the part of my mind with sense stopped that thought from reaching my lips.

I began to get a little nervous. I realized I didn't have my pistol; I also realized that my hollow-point .380 bullets would probably do nothing more than piss off these huge Bubbas. In the event of that type of showdown, I would have needed an elephant gun and five rounds—two of them were so large it would have taken two shots each.

Suddenly, a light went on in my head.

"I'm a little hard of hearing. I didn't hear what you said," I explained.

"Roll Tide!" Big Bubba screamed.

I stuck my head near the car window and yelled—and I mean yelled—"Roll fucking Tide!"

"Woo! That's what I'm talking about!" Big Bubba yelled. He gave me a high five and they drove off.

As they drove away I thought about how weird the encounter was—until I realized that I was in Alabama, and all things weird seem to happen to me on a motorcycle in Alabama.

Meanwhile, back at school in Jackson, where the Ducati was a magnet for people, I found it interesting how invisible the Harley was. The Ducati caused a swarm wherever it was parked; no one made mention of the Harley—okay, once.

One student asked me, "Why did you sell the Ducati and get an old man's bike?"

"Cause I'm an old man, and I wanted to make an eighteen-hundred-mile road trip and not be crippled afterward," I said defensively.

"Huh?" was his only reply.

Somewhere in the past forty years, Harley went from being a bad-boy bike to a fossil-ride. Probably because a new Harley costs as much as some new cars. For the most part, the only people who can afford either one are older people with expendable income. I got mine because Russ knows the bank manager and my credit score was still passable.

Over the following year I realized that Harley-Davidson is an incredible motorcycle. Harley-Davidson has spent over 110 years perfecting a bike designed to ride the roads of America. And it really does do it better than any other brand—at least, that's my opinion.

By January 2011, Russ started planning next summer's road trip. He put together a ride that included the Blue Ridge Parkway, the Cherohala Skyway, and The Tail of the Dragon. For accommodations we would have a home base that was a plush, five-bedroom, five-bike-garage chalet in Maggie Valley.

The remainder of the school year in Jackson came and went; so did I. They decided not to renew my contract the following year. I moved out the day after school ended and went back to Birmingham. Russ, Myrna, and I have perfected moving me into, or out of, a town within a day.

A week later Russ, Snake, Terry, Bill, and I left for our trip. We arrived that afternoon in Maggie Valley.

We crossed a wooden bridge over a small river, which led us into the neighborhood where our chalet was located. It was a quaint, quiet neighborhood with many older, retired residents, and it was built on a mountainside.

When we turned the corner, we stopped. The road was steep. It was nearly vertical. We decided to walk up and find the chalet before going up on the bikes. After several pauses to catch our breath, we found it.

Navigating the bikes to the front drive would require a three-block ride up a mountainside incline that should have had a chain-driven trolley to get you up. Then we would have to make a ninety-degree left turn, possibly at a dead-stop, to turn onto the street in front of the chalet. Essentially, one would have to come to a stop, balance a six-hundred-pound motorcycle on a very steep incline, and then turn left. We were all a bit apprehensive.

Thankfully, Bill went first. As he made the slow, sharp left turn, the bike began coming over, slope-side down. Bill bailed. He and the bike slid a few feet downhill; pieces of shattered fairing followed.

As we ran up the hill to help Bill, we noticed a level, smooth driveway pad that led directly into the garage of our chalet.

How none of us noticed this before on our pre-ride walk is still a mystery.

We lifted Bill's bike up from a puddle of its vital fluids, checked the oil, and started it. A cloud of oil-blue smoke flowed down the mountain and across the neighbors' properties—not exactly the reason why they like to call it the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Many of the neighbors had already come outside or were standing on their second-floor decks to see what all the commotion was about. You could read their thoughts through their facial expressions.

They weren't happy to have a motorcycle gang renting the chalet near them. Keep in mind, everyone's motorcycle—except mine, because I'm cheap—had aftermarket performance pipes; IE read: loud pipes. And we wonder why stereotypes still exist. Of course I don't—at least not since fifth grade when I rode a Honda Cub 50 with a megaphone.

We finally got the bikes into the garage, unpacked, and settled into our rooms. Later we cooked a great dinner and went to bed early. A big day of riding lay ahead of us.

We took off the next day and rode the Tail of the Dragon. It was worse than before. The sport bikes would pass in droves and dive in next to you, inches away at times. It was so bad I started riding so far to the center that they couldn't squeeze in next to me. Later that afternoon we made a short ride on the Blue Ridge Parkway and then returned to the chalet.

It was great to have a big kitchen and several people who liked to cook. I sat on the rear deck and thought about the primitive camping trip Tabitha and I had made years earlier on the BSA and BMW.

I liked these accommodations much better. I thought about how much Tab would have enjoyed a trip like this. I thought about how much I still miss my wives. I thought about how much money having been married three times had cost me.

At that point, I thought I should stop thinking and start drinking, so I did.

The next day we rode the Cherohala Skyway. On the return ride we finally stopped at a crowded overlook. Riding was a ride-a-thon, again, out of time-constraining schedules. Each stop had most of our crew checking emails and dealing with pressing business needs. One of our group was always on the phone with his multiple-women problems. He left the next day to go deal with his women issues.

I was free from the shackles of a job and a relationship, so I just enjoyed the scenery and wondered if I would find a job next year, or if I'll ever fall in love again. Later that night I was relieved to hear on the news that the upcoming job market was the worst ever.

Regardless, I reassured myself that I would land a job; after all, I have a college diploma. A diploma that I've always said is suitable for framing, yet it remains still unframed, in its original mailing package, inside of my briefcase.

The Blue Ridge trip was nice; we had plush accommodations and rushed riding. I enjoyed it. I also realized a trip with fewer people equals a trip with less drama, more time to ride, and you don't have to reach a seventy-five percent committee vote on where and when to ride.

The more trips I have taken with multiple riders, the more it has solidified the reason why motorcycling has always been

attractive to me: because it's an individual thing, and you don't need others to make it happen—but I concede that having a few of the right people does make it better.

Good trip. Good ride. Good people. Good food.

We returned home safely, which always makes for a happy ending. That trip added to my faith in the human race that Terry had given me the previous summer. The group on that trip were all easy-going, amicable, generous, interesting, and intelligent. A great group, and had it not been because of the Harley-Davidson connection, we would not have ever met. Naturally, Russ being the exception; it's my sister's fault he has had to deal with me for the past thirty years.

Fall came again, school started, and we took a lot of day trips through the backroads of Alabama. I believe I have seen nearly every small town in Alabama. It becomes apparent very quickly that most of rural Alabamians adhere to the old slogan stated by the confederate soldier holding a rebel flag: "Hell no, I ain't forget'n."

During our rural rides my sister would play a game of "count the rebel flags." For those who are good at higher levels of math, you can also play "count the BBQ joints." It's safe to make the statement that Alabama has a plethora of rebel flags and BBQ joints. The irony I find in that is that the two distinctly different cultures are feeding off of one another. Think about it, but not too hard.

For every rebel flag you see in rural Alabama, there's a flip side. There's an equal amount of signs that proclaim that Dr. King marched through the area as there are "signs" of rebelliousness towards civil rights. I can't decide if anyone ever really

won. It also seems as though Dr. King marched through as many small Alabama towns as I have ridden through.

On another summer ride we stopped in Ashville, Alabama for what my family used to call an AWR stop--Air, Water, Restroom. As we drank our cold drinks, an old home across the street caught Myrna's eye. It was a magnificent old Greek Revival mansion--which you don't see as often in Alabama as Myrna and I are used to in New Orleans. Myrna and I walked over.

As we turned from peeping in windows, we were nearly shocked to death. Before us stood a man who looked like a ghost, or at least a caricature of a Confederate soldier from the Civil War. The man was the caretaker. The old home turned out to be the John W. Inzer House, an 1852 Greek Revival antebellum home now serving as a museum. He showed us around the main salons downstairs.

As he shared the history of the home, he showed us the bullets still lodged in the front door frame, put there by passing Union troops during the Civil War. After our private tour, we thanked the gentleman and mounted up for the ride back home. As we rode home I thought about how nearly every time we have made an AWR stop on rides through Alabama, something interesting and unusual finds us.

I had a few more rides around Alabama before getting a call for an interview in Baton Rouge. I went to the interview. I landed a job in Baton Rouge teaching at a thug-infested middle school. I had two days to move. I moved. Again.

I left the Softail in Birmingham for two reasons: I don't like riding or driving in Baton Rouge, and I wasn't sure I would stay at that job. That was an accurate

premonition, for I kept the teaching position in Baton Rouge four months. I quit and returned to Birmingham in January 2012.

There wasn't much riding; Birmingham was having one of the coldest, snowiest winters in its history. Once again I found myself burdened with free time. Once again I was unemployed.

I decided this was an opportune time to write one of the screenplays that had been floating around in my head for years. I also did some substitute baby-sitt—I mean, teaching. It turned out I had enough time on my hands to write two of the screenplays I had been thinking about and rewrite my children's audio story in a screenplay format.

I did some riding that spring around Birmingham. I spent a lot of time staring at the Heritage and becoming nervous about finances. I was becoming bored with the look of the bike. The styling began to look like something the Village People collaborated on.

With all of the black leather and studs, I kept hearing the song "Y.M.C.A." in my head. I found the leather saddlebags were high maintenance; they were beginning to bother me. I thought I had found a keeper in the Heritage, but my feelings and desires were waning. I was leaning and lusting towards a Road Glide. Then one day an event happened that made me sure that I wanted a Road Glide.

One afternoon, while on my way to my parents' house, I had a gut feeling that I should slow down. I wasn't speeding, but I felt that I had better go below the speed limit. I've learned to follow those feelings. As I crested the mountain and came into Chelsea—a small town on Hwy. 280 with a

ton of cross streets and a fifty-five-mile-per-hour speed limit—I slowed to about forty-five mph.

Thank God I did.

As I came through town, looking everywhere at once, I saw it coming. An old woman looked at me and pulled out right in front of me. I hit the brakes. The rear brake locked up and the bike started going sideways. I was able to get it straight and avoided hitting the woman. Had I maintained my speed, I would have hit her broadside.

I decided right then that I would rather have twin disc brakes up front rather than the stylishly nostalgic chrome faux brake hub that takes up the right side of the front wheel of the Heritage Classic. Nostalgia's nice, but brakes are better.

By July 2013 job prospects looked bad—rather dismal to be exact. I worried about having a note on the Harley. I was also bored with the bike. I sold it. When I sold the Harley I only lost four thousand dollars. So much for the salesman's pitch of, "You can ride this thing a few years and get what you paid for it."

The truth was, I could hardly give the Heritage away. There was, and probably still is, a glut of Heritages on eBay. People are asking near what they paid for them, but they're not selling them.

Naturally, a few months later I landed a job teaching in a small, rural Alabama town. I immediately began thinking I should have shunned the fear of unemployment and paying for a motorcycle. My mind went on a continuous loop telling me, I should have kept the Harley.

I finally silenced my mental choir with the truth. I emphatically told them, I was bored with it.

By September I was looking for a motorcycle. New Road Glides were delayed a while and were expensive. It seems used ones sure held their value better than a Heritage did. I had been looking at another BMW—in particular, a black BMW F650GS with aluminum panniers.

I own several Zero Halliburton attache cases, as well as a mix of aluminum cases. I seem to have some fetish for aluminum cases of all types. The BMW with panniers is a natural addition. Of course, one appeared on eBay, but that's another story.

As I always do, I reflected on what I had learned during my time with the Harley. While I owned the Softail I learned quite a few things: namely, I realized it would be great to once again own several different motorcycles simultaneously.

Most importantly, I found out there really ain't nothing like the real thing. A Harley-Davidson is a Harley-Davidson; therefore, nothing can take to the open highways of America as well as a Harley-Davidson can—it's home turf, Harley gets the advantage.

While I had the Heritage, I found out leather bags were great—in the 1950s, before fiberglass. They sag, they're high maintenance, and they don't hold much. I also decided that dual front disc brakes and rear ABS brakes will never again be a compromise that I make on a large motorcycle that I own.

One thing I learned owning a new-generation Harley and traveling on it was what a pain in the butt the Harley Wave is. I got tired of it. Having ridden all types of motorcycles, it was painfully obvious how Harley it is. I get a fifth of the waves while on another brand. And really? Waving

in turns and at eighty mph across the freeway? Is that necessary?

Sometimes, for the fun of it, I would return the cool hand wave of a passing Harley rider with a slap-happy-stupid grin and an over-exaggerated hand wave.

The main thing I learned on the Heritage was that even though the cost of a new Harley is more than many new cars, I want a Road Glide as soon as I can afford one.

Besides, I need another Harley-Davidson; for I miss having total strangers ask me, Got pot?



2005 BMW F650GS

August 2013. Birmingham, Alabama:

No job. No job prospects on the horizon.
My phone rang. I answered it.

"Hello."

"May I speak with Mr. Thompson?"

"Speaking," I said.

"Mr. Thompson, this is John Doe, the principal at Nowhere You've Heard Of Middle School. Are you still interested in the teaching position?" he asked.

"You bet."

"Can you come in Friday for an interview?"

"I'll be there," I assured him.

I drove one hundred miles to the interview, spent fifteen minutes talking to the principal, and drove back to Birmingham. As I walked inside, my phone rang. It was the principal. He offered me the job. He wanted to know if I could start Monday, as the other teachers had already started a week before.

"Sure, no problem," I said.

I packed my clothes and guitar and moved into a hotel until I could find an apartment—which took nearly a month. For the eleventh time in less than ten years, I was moving again. These days I can deploy faster than the Marines. I have become like the Tuareg people of the Sahara region: nomadic.

Even though I had landed a job and went straight to the Harley dealer, I didn't get a Road Glide. Seems as though they weren't making them at this time, the salesman explained.

"Really? Well, at this time I want a Road Glide," I said, as I walked out the door.

September 2013, Valley, Alabama: I had been looking at BMW F650GSs on eBay. I

thought a smaller bike might be fun. I had no serious road trips planned, and I wasn't paying what they were asking for used Road Glides. I began shopping for a BMW F650GS.

Of course I found one on eBay; of course I began bidding. The one I was bidding on had everything I wanted: it was black, it had aluminum panniers, it had driving lights, it had an aftermarket windshield-heck, it even had LED flashing brake lights. However, the reserve hadn't been met... yet.

I'll wait. I'll go exercise and sleep on it. I won't be impulsive, I told myself.

I went to exercise. As I entered the gym at my complex, my phone rang. I answered it.

"Hello."

"Hey, Edwin, this is Jack at the Royal Motors Dealership in Texas. I see you're bidding on the BMW GS—"

"How did you get my number?" I interrupted.

"Russ-your-brother-in-law-gave-it-to-me-he-said-if-it's-about-motorcycles-it-would-be-okay-to-call-you," he speedily spoke.

"Uh-huh," I said, as I continued to decipher his one long word, or one short sales pitch.

"Tell me again, where did you get Russ' number?"

"Your buyer profile. Look, let's make a deal on the BMW 650GS."

"I don't know if now is a good time to talk," I suggested.

Yeah right, as if now has never been a good time to talk about bikes, my conscience laughed.

He ignored my noncommittal pitch. We talked. I bought the bike.

Two days later, at ten p.m., the BMW showed up stuffed sideways on a rack between cars on a carrier truck. It was safe and

secure. The driver was on his way to deliver the cars, got the bid via eBay, made a twenty-mile detour the next day, picked up the BMW, and delivered it to me the next. Done.

The truck was so large it couldn't fit into Russ' gated community. The driver had to pull aside outside of the gates. We met him at the gatehouse. It took all of two people to lift the bike through the trailer framework and carry the bike off of the trailer.

The bike was just what I expected; I had no disappointments, plus it was delivered to my door. As I learned with the DeCoster replica, technology is good.

I didn't have any way to get the bike and my car to Valley, and the weather was starting to turn cold already, so I left it in Birmingham. I finally rode the bike home at the end of October. I had it in Valley a week, until I returned to Birmingham the next weekend. By Sunday it was cold and rainy. I took the car home. I still didn't own proper rain gear.

I had a few weekend rides through fall and winter around my mountain loop in Birmingham. The winter of 2013 and into 2014 was cold! And it was rainy. We had four snow days at school—in central Alabama! I let the BMW stay warm and dry in Russ' garage.

As is nature's way, after the extreme winter weather, spring 2014 burst into a beautiful display of color and perfect temperatures. My fifty-fifth birthday was on April 20th; I decided to ride the GS back to Valley after Sunday lunch in Birmingham.

As I rode home I felt afraid. I've always had these weird thoughts about dying on my birthday. I began to have motorcycle therapy with myself on the way home. It would be

like a double therapy session, as I had a two-hour ride home.

The route home is a four-lane, sixty-five-miles-per-hour, smooth, rolling highway through the mountains of central Alabama. I fell into the groove and began my therapy session.

I thought about when I had given up on motocross—how I kept flipping in the same spot, drawing a larger crowd with each lap I made. I had lost my nerve. I was in love. I could no longer boldly charge into a first turn. I quit riding motocross out of fear.

There I was on my birthday, on a fun bike, on a beautiful spring day, and I'm obsessed with dying in a motorcycle crash. My recent paranoias are mainly because several doctors and pharmacists have advised that I stop riding, because I take Plavix, which basically makes you a free bleeder and doomed in a crash—any crash. The doctors and pharmacists agree that means a car crash as well. I rode on in fear.

After forty-four years of riding, I was afraid now? The thought became so crazy and obsessive that I told myself aloud, and in a serious tone, If you're really afraid to ride a motorcycle, don't.

Thankfully, several hours and a hundred miles later, I remembered that we're all going to die physically—it's a promise from God. I realized the one place the world makes sense to me is on a motorcycle. I was in that focused, trance state where all of my senses were on high alert, yet relaxed and clear-headed. Finally!

The best thing about my two-hour therapy session was that it didn't cost one hundred and fifty dollars an hour; it cost me five dollars and forty-five cents in gas.

Over the next month I decided to ease my paranoias by shopping on eBay. I decided I needed reflective stickers. I found some really cool stickers of the Tuareg Man. My disdain of technology only seems to be soothed by shopping on eBay; I call eBay The World's Shopping Mall.

Later I noticed a bright orange safety vest in Russ' garage. I decided that would be a great idea to wear when riding. Why the obsessive desire to have reflective items? Having been rear-ended in a car several weeks earlier by an eighteen-year-old who was texting and didn't notice I was stopped, combined with the amount of people I notice texting, talking on the phone, screaming at their kids, watching DVD players—well, I don't want to say I'm getting paranoid, because I already am. Let's just say that I've become more cautious-oriented.

I've been riding since 1970. The only distractions drivers had then were beating the kids, picking up something you dropped, or lighting a cigarette from the car lighter. If you were talking on the phone, you were probably rich and being chauffeured. I've been riding so long that I can see how technology advancements have quantumly advanced the chances of being hit by a car while on a motorcycle. To say the least, I want to be seen.

A scarier thought is that maybe riding BMWs makes you want that kind of safety riding gear. Perhaps after all these years I am falling into the brand attire trap. Spooky.

However, I did enjoy my daily commute through the countryside to work—albeit with flashes of mental pictures of me hitting a deer, which are more plentiful where I live

now than they were in Jackson, Alabama, if that's possible.

I was also becoming shrouded in fear by the thoughts of being hit head-on by the endless parade of logging trucks that passed me on the roads I had to ride. It began spoiling my rides.

Once again, I found myself afraid. I made it to work all week without incident—without dying. I even made it back to Birmingham the next weekend unscathed.

The end of May came. A fresh oil change and some general maintenance for the summer riding season was on the to-do list. It turns out performing that general maintenance was an engineering nightmare. Do engineers ever drive, ride, or repair the vehicles they design? I think not.

As I checked the blogs and YouTube for suggestions, a general consensus amongst BMW 650GS owners is obvious concerning the oil sump nut: unless yours is new—and if it is, let the dealer do the first oil change—if you try, you will strip it. If your bike is used, it's already either partially stripped, if not totally stripped.

Really? I thought. A bike supposedly designed to be worked on in the brush and they use easy-strip bolts?

I checked mine—it's a used bike—it was stripped. I was so disgusted that I put the bike back together and decided that I would ride the thousand miles left before an oil change was actually necessary, and in the back of my mind assuming the bike would probably be sold by then.

After working on fairinged GS model BMWs and Ducatis, I appreciate bikes that do not have body panels, or what are now known as naked bikes. Harley: three screws, one bolt, presto—oil change.

I've found that Germans over-engineer everything. Russ' mother's new German dishwasher was a nightmare for the installer. The Porsche I once owned--well, I didn't even attempt to do maintenance on that car. Can't quality be simplistic, just once?

I delayed maintenance for the pleasures of now and went riding. I have to admit that the 650 is a fun bike. Because of my physical stature impairment, I'm most comfortable--size-to-weight ratio--on the bikes labeled as girl bikes: the Sportster, Honda Cubs, and the F650GS.

For a girl's bike, the little BMW has handled everything I've thrown at it so far: highway speeds of eighty to eighty-five miles per hour, dirt trails, city traffic--you name it, it'll do it.

On a return trip to Birmingham I had a seventy-mile ride in pouring rain; it was miserable, cold, and it hurt. I finally bought a quality rain suit--a Harley-Davidson high-visibility suit. It hasn't rained since I bought it, but I'm sure it will work well and look great on the BMW, and there's reasoning behind my fashion and brand faux pas.

As you know, I don't really care what I look like while riding; I just want to be comfortable. However, on a purely subconscious level, I bought the Harley rain gear because I already know my next bike will be a Road Glide.

Since I've owned the BMW, not a week has passed that I haven't bid on a Road Glide. It feels like cheating on your wife--looking for a replacement mate while in a relationship--but hey, it's okay to look, right?

The summer of 2014 I stayed with my mom to help her with my dad. After spending two months helping take care of my eighty-eight-year-old, blind, and weak father, I thought about the fact that if you live long enough, you won't be able to do the things that you did when you were young and able-bodied-like ride a motorcycle.

To see my dad in the position he is in now makes my riding time one of thankfulness—thankful that I can still ride.

As I rode back to Valley, I thought about how blessed I've been. I never had to work every day at a normal job; teaching is about as close as it has come thus far. I could not imagine having only a week or two off in a year.

While riding home I realized that somehow having been off the previous five weeks, and off the next five weeks to come, had me still winning at getting out of the working-every-day grind.

On my ride home I found myself singing Sly and the Family Stone's song, "Hot Fun in the Summertime." The track played over and over in my head, the lyrics about out-of-school summer freedom perfectly matching the rhythm of the highway.

As I sang and rode, a funeral procession passed me; headlights kept coming over the hills.

A funeral. Now there's something to be thankful for, I thought. I'm not riding in the front car. Just had to be happy about that.

As I stretched my leg back onto the footpeg from the front engine guard at sixty-five miles per hour my leg grabbed the air; as my leg landed back on the footpeg, the bike wobbled, because the bike is so light. At that millisecond, three thoughts

simultaneously ran through my mind. One, the high-speed wobble the chopper had gotten into on its maiden voyage. Two, a Road Glide would have never done that. And three, I need a Road Glide.

I felt like the characters in the movie *Dumb and Dumber* wobbling down the freeway on a mini-bike. Of course, that led my thoughts to my former neighbor who got to travel the world, all on the success of his band Dead Eye Dick and their top-forty hit song, "New Age Girl," which was featured in the movie *Dumb and Dumber*.

Billy, his mother, and sisters were great neighbors. They put up with my crazy and tolerated my obnoxious band practice and parties without calling the cops.

The one thing that made the Landry clan great neighbors is that they tolerated loud motorcycles in the middle of the night.

Loud motorcycles, I thought, as the sound of wind rushing by lulled me away.

I suddenly realized—motorcycles! I'm on one! I'm on the BMW! No wonder there's only the hypnotic sound of the wind. I snapped out from my mental side trip.

"Motorcycles. Motorcycles. Motorcycles," I said aloud, as I clicked my heels against the BMW engine cases—back to 2014, back to reality.

The first thing that hit me as I returned to reality was that I need a Road Glide. I began remembering how a fixed-fairing motorcycle is superior for road travel. I thought about how I could roll down the road at sixty-five mph on the BMW R100, with its fixed Windjammer fairing, and smoke a cigarette. I thought about how thankful I am that I don't want to smoke a cigarette behind a fairing, nor anywhere else anymore.

And then I thought, You know, Ed, you think too much. Shut up and enjoy the ride. So I did.

I made it back to Valley. Since I had a few days at home, I took the GS for a loop up to Callaway Gardens; I didn't deem it necessary to pay eighteen dollars to tour the gardens, but I enjoyed the scenic byroads of Georgia. The ride took me through the town of West Point. I rode out to West Point Lake, which has a nice road that runs atop the levees and dam. The GS did great on the ride.

June 28, 2014: I took another ride along West Point Lake and meandered into Georgia. I still like to wander aimlessly when I ride. I'll stop at a crossroad and turn in the direction I feel led. I finally reached a point that I had to either turn around or start making plans for the night.

I ended up on I-85. As I passed the KIA plant in West Point, Georgia, I was startled at how big, windowless, and soulless the plant looks. I can't imagine working on a production line in a windowless factory, especially in America, especially for the Koreans' ultimate benefit. I admire those who can.

July 5, 2014: I decided to do the oil change on the BMW. After an oil change to synthetic oil and a Saddlemen gel pad, vibration was minimal.

I put on some new brake pads, bought some winter and rain riding gloves, and a new HJC helmet with a shield—my first new helmet since I had bought the Sportster in 1999. I decided to properly prepare to enjoy the bike during the upcoming fall months.

The more I rode the GS, the more I believed it is a good dual-purpose bike. It does everything quite well. However, I

believe Russ best summed up my attraction to the GS when he said, "Well, Ed, you finally did it. You finally found an aluminum briefcase on wheels."

Yep. That 'bout sums it up.

The remainder of the summer was so hot I couldn't tolerate riding. My medications make me light-headed in the heat. The GS sat for weeks. School started again. Work consumed my days; at night, I began editing this book.

During editing, the circle of life thing happened again. If you remember, in the Buell story I told of how my lifelong friend, Pam, had gotten a job working with a friend of my family's since early childhood: Lee-Ann. Lee-Ann had married a man, Tom.

Tom was a fire chief who, in the 1980s, also worked part-time with my family's company. Tom and I became close during that time. I was going through my first divorce and Tom offered Godly wisdom. Tom was a man of strong faith.

All to say, the circle of life with those three people worked its way into my life during my time with the GS. Pam called, right at the usual orbital cycle of about ten years. She called to let me know that Tom had committed suicide.

It's sad when the faithful lose faith. It wasn't the happy circle-of-life reunion that I'm used to with Pam. It was sad.

Meanwhile, the late August afternoons began to give some relief to the stifling heat. In the cool of the evening, I began taking the GS for short rides on the surrounding country roads.

I found myself fearful of crashing. I feared being hit. I was fearful of falling. I was fearful of a bump on the head. I couldn't believe I had reached a point in

life where I take more drugs to stay alive than I used to when I partied. However, doctors seem to agree that I need my medications in order to live.

You want to live? Then ride, I told myself.

On my rides I was constantly afraid of hitting a deer, and then a strange thing happened.

As I rode home one afternoon at sunset, I saw a deer walk out of the woods. I slowed down to nearly a walking pace. The deer stopped at the edge of the road and watched me pass.

The world went into that slow-motion thing; but this time, it went into real slow motion. As I passed the deer, our eyes seemed to lock; I could see details of its face, and it seemed like I could see my own reflection in its dark eyes. It was truly surreal.

Then the world went back into real time. I looked in my rear-view mirror and saw the deer bound across the road. The moment freaked me out. I went home.

Because of my fears and paranoia, I parked the BMW and finished editing this book.

As I've read these stories, I've realized a lot of things about myself. While writing this book, I've had to mentally relive forty-five years of my life through motorcycling, and the stories within the stories. It has become clear to me that I've been miraculously protected throughout the years. It's also evident I'm impulsive and spontaneous. I believe if life were fair, I'd be dead from my own stupidity.

Over the past four decades: wives, friends, money, music, and health have come and gone. These stories have reminded me

that I've had a great time, and that motorcycles remained the one constant in my life, providing fun, laughter, excitement, and sanity—alright, maybe not sanity. No, definitely not sanity.

In retrospect, the parallel between how I lived life and rode motorcycles is quite similar. Both were done wide open, and usually ended with spectacular crashes. I'm sure my guardian angels deserve overtime for their work.

On September 1, 2014, I awoke in the middle of the night with the strong feeling that I should sell the GS—now! Through the years, I've learned to follow those feelings. I put the GS on eBay the next day.

September 9, 2014: I sold the GS.

September 10, 2014: Money transferred into my bank account.

September 11, 2014: Uri, an independent trucker originally from Ukraine, picked up the BMW for delivery to its new home in New Jersey.

Uri and I talked for over an hour about America, 9-11, the state of the world, his life, and mine. We loaded the BMW into his carrier. He closed the rear door. As Uri pulled away, the BMW left without a whimper. There was really no attachment between us. It was just another motorcycle.

Now it's gone.

Now I'm bikeless, and for the first time in forty-five years, I don't feel the need nor desire to own a motorcycle. Oddly enough, in the long circle of life, I've taken my own advice from the lesson I learned on my first motorcycle at eleven years old: the Honda P50. In that story I said, "If you're afraid, either conquer your fear or walk away from the challenge;

otherwise, fear will win, especially on a motorcycle."

I've had over four decades of incredible, fearless journeys through life astride motorcycles. I grew up, and have grown old, on motorcycles. I'm happy with that.

It's been a great ride.

THE END



INTRODUCTION TO SECTION SIX: 2020-2026

"The End"-I guess not. Next time I'll wait to declare it's over until after the fat lady sings.

From 2014 until April 2020, there was a vacancy in my garage, and somewhere in a deep recess of my mind, during the absence of motorcycles, I didn't desire one, but I never felt it was over either. It was like a latent gene within me.

I often wondered when the dormant desire for motorcycling would return, as it had been a defining part of my life since childhood.

By early 2020, the world had gone nuts. Most likely because of people's newfound sense of mortality—something I have been keenly aware of all my life. Nonetheless, I stayed away from everything and everyone. I felt that after having survived myself for fifty years, I'd be damned if some invisible germ would be my demise.

I spent a lot of time online, doing what everyone was doing: shopping! I decided to use Uncle Sam's free money giveaways—which they wanted half of back later—as venture capital. I made more money sitting in my living room chair buying and selling vintage Rolex watches and Schwinn Krate bicycles than I would have if I had been working.

Slowly, the world seemed to be returning to normal, or at least to the "new norm." For several years, life had been moving at a snail's pace. I had not been around people, had no house of my own, no social circle, no adventure, no adrenaline rushes—I really didn't feel "alive" the way I always had.

During the pandemic, I thought about what I would miss if I were dying—you know, the deathbed scenario—the one I've touted about

how I wouldn't have any regrets because I had lived a full, self-indulgent life! As I pondered that question, it took exactly one second to answer: motorcycling.

For an added punch, I realized that for five years, right outside my door lay several seventy-mile loops that offered some of the most desirable motorcycling roads in Alabama. Opportunity had been knocking at my door, and I had not been answering.

These routes include twisty mountain pavement rising to breathtaking scenic overlooks, pastoral country blacktop, and highway cruises on undulating, four-lane tarmac—all of it as smooth as glass.

"I need a motorcycle," I said aloud in self-awareness.

So, I clicked my mind and my money into gear. And at a staccato pace, I began catching up on my love of experiencing different motorcycles. The list reads like a smorgasbord of fun: a BMW R90S, a Harley-Davidson Road King, a BMW R1200R, a BMW K75, a Honda C125 Super Cub, a Honda C125 Hunter Cub, and yet another BMW R90S.

By 2026, I had also fulfilled my prophetic words spoken in the Covey of Cubs story: "If I live to be really old, a Honda Cub will probably be my last bike." We'll see how that "last bike" part pans out.

But I'm back in the saddle again, cycling through motorcycles just like I always have—Happy Days Are Here Again. And I feel alive!

So, let's pick up my life through the motorcycles I've owned in the twenty-first century, starting with the legendary BMW R90S.

As always, bring your helmet. But these days, the ride is at a much slower, far more civilized pace. I've slowed down to appreciate the scenery and the machinery. I

have matured enough to adhere to the old adage, "stop and smell the roses"—which I actually do sometimes.

1976 BMW R90S

"It's the end of the world as we know it and I feel fine."

— R.E.M.

In my past I have returned to a lost love; and it turned out the second time around proved that memories, much like altered photographs, can put a soft focused patina on the truth.

It doesn't take long to remember why that love didn't last the first time. Much of the same is true in having returned to the motorcycle I loved the most, a BMW R90S-in Daytona Orange, of course.

The story of this R90S is more in the wanting, obtaining, and circumstances leading to ownership more than the actual owning and riding of the motorcycle. It's also an example of the truth that a man with limited financial means must face his dreams when put in juxtaposition to reality.

It all started on April 2, 2020.

But first a bit of backstory of my love and lust for the R90S-in Daytona Orange.

In 1976 I was seventeen years old and worked at Clearview Suzuki, which also sold BMW and Moto Guzzi motorcycles. My job was to assist the mechanics, help assemble new bikes, and polish the motorcycles on the showroom floor.

That summer a pair of BMW R90S' arrived, assembled, and put on the showroom floor-front and center. We had one of each, the Smoke Silver and one in Daytona Orange. These were the epitome of motorcycling sport bikes, the true first super-bikes. They were also very expensive.

You know from my stories that I fall in love at first sight, and I fell in love with

that R90S in that gorgeous Daytona Orange immediate.

The R90S was the most elegant, beautiful motorcycle I had ever laid eyes on. I had seen pictures in the magazines, but their beauty when seen in person is stunning. Much like being in the presence of the super-models I had the opportunity be around in the early 1980s.

I longingly, and lustfully, polished that R90s every morning-something I wish I could've done for the super-models as well. I was smitten. It was unlike any other motorcycle available.

"One day I will own one of these." I would say aloud as I ran the polishing cloth across its sensuous bodywork.

That "one day" arrived in 2000, when I was forty-one, good things take a long time they say. I rode it nearly everyday, and kept it on display in my house-that "on display" part is a key element in this story.

After the 2001 9-11 fiasco, I panicked and unloaded unnecessary toys in fear of the future. The first thing to go was the R90S. Throughout the ensuing years I never stopped wanting another one.

Flash forward many years and many motorcycles to 2020. After a five-year hiatus from motorcycling, and a month into the Corona virus crisis, I found decided to read my manuscript for "My Life Through Motorcycles," The R90S story became very visual and reignited powerful memories.

I found myself spending hours watching YouTube videos of R90S', and began pouring over classified ads looking and lusting at BMW R90S'-just to pass the time.

Looking at the videos and bikes for sale made me realize the R90S is the only bike I

truly missed throughout the years. I felt that if I had to pick one bike to own again, hands down it would be an R90S.

During my hiatus from riding I often said I would own an R90S again, if only to "have and to hold." Sort of an investment in art I reasoned. I also realized that since my last R90S ownership they had become highly collectible, more than doubling in price since I had owned one.

The pandemic offered way too much time to contemplate life in the here and now and to remember that the future is as uncertain as the bible has told us it is. I remembered God has already predetermined the moment in time of my earthly departure.

It was then that I had an epiphany. It was time to put aside my fear that had led me to stop riding and sell the GS650. It was time to trust God, and ride again.

Very strange that it took a pandemic and the fear of death to rid me of the fear of death there is a deep irony hiding in those words somewhere.

The final catalyst to owning another R90S clicked as I was browsing through old photographs and found a picture taken of me at the Barber Motorsports Vintage Bike Festival in 2009 sitting on an Daytona Orange R90S that a vendor had for sale.

In the photo I am grinning from ear to ear. The man took the picture after I had lamented for an hour about missing my R90S; he figured a picture of me on the bike was a good way to get rid of me. It worked.

After staring at the picture, and my ear to ear grin, I set the picture of me astride the R90S as my computer backdrop. Call it subliminal suggestion, but seeing that picture of me on that bike every time I booted up the computer lit the "I want"

rocket boosters. I moved from merely desiring another R90S to beginning a sincere quest to own another one.

One evening, as I perused "Cycle Trader" I made the mistake of telling my mom, "I am going to get another BMW R9—"

"You're not buying a motorcycle!" She interrupted in a tone as though I were ten years old.

Somehow the tone in her voice and hearing the words, "not buying a motorcycle," made me fire back, "I am not ten years old, nor asking for permission."

I reminded her that I never said I would not ride motorcycles again. Most telling of my decision was when I threw out the oldest line from my defense playbook for riding; one I used throughout the years whenever my parents would bemoan having given me a motorcycle.

"If I do die on a bike, know that I died happy." I would boldly state.

Strong words in the past, even stronger when I heard them roll off of my tongue at sixty years old.

That night as I slept a paradigm shift within my soul took place. When I woke up the next morning I began my quest in earnest to find the perfect Daytona Orange BMW R90S. It was April 2, 2020, fifty years since I had gotten my first—and second—bike.

I started a flurry of conversation when I posted the following on the Facebook BMW R90S Owners Club page. It was six-fifteen p.m.

Hello everyone—thanks for the add.
Starting to get a feel for values,
last R90S I had was twenty years ago.
I am curious as to what those of you
that are up to date think something

like this one on eBay may be worth, though I prefer Daytona Orange. Any opinions would be helpful to bring me up to date. I have seen several on BAT run up to 11K plus-not being disrespectful, but most of the paint jobs are beautiful, but wrong. Thanks everyone for any input.

Within minutes the comments opened like a flood gate, filled with people affirming the prices were reasonable. They went on with a litany of comments about other R90S', both restored and original. The most common comments were about the amount of paint jobs that were well done, but wrong in their execution.

The bottom line was clear, when it comes to an R90S, paint is paramount. A nice original factory paint job trumps a re-spray—even a good re-spray that will set you back six thousand dollars. One near exception being the paint work done by a Quail winning restorer in California, whose paint jobs cost more than most R90S' are selling for.

I determined I needed a nice, unrestored, original R90S.

While the flurry of comments were flying, a man from Canada, known as "The Barber," kept telling me to check my message box. I finally found his message, that he had purposely kept off the forum discussion.

He told me he "had a friend in California"—of course that made my eyes roll—his friend had an original Daytona Orange R90S he was thinking about selling.

When he gave me the friend's Instagram name my feelings went from doubt to extreme excitement. His "friend" is one of the few people that I had begun following on Instagram; he is the premier restorer of

concourse level R90S'—with the Quail ribbons to prove it. The man whose paint jobs, as mentioned above, are the only exception to a non factory paint job, for they are factory perfect.

He told me his friend, Mark, had said this particular R90S was too perfect of an original condition R90S to do any restoration on. "The Barber" told me that he had seen the bike and it was the finest original, unmolested Daytona Orange R90S in the United States, if not North America.

"You will not be disappointed." He added.

Big words.

My heart began to sink, thinking that given what I had been seeing all week of time worn, heavy patina originals fetching thirteen thousand to seventeen thousand dollars, none of which pushed my must have button, I could only imagine what this one in the possession of an R90S connoisseur might cost.

"Around fifteen thousand dollars." The Barber told me.

He said the bike would be in his garage if not for the current monetary exchange rates. The Barber also owns one of Mark's restored R90S'—one of which recently sold for sixty thousand dollars on *Bring A Trailer*, yes, they are that well done.

He gave me Mark's e-mail. I emailed Mark immediately.

An hour later I received a reply. He did indeed have the bike, it was stuck at his home in northern California awaiting a lift on the COVID-19 quarantine so he could list it for sale on eBay.

He gave me details, telling me, "It is what I would call the most desirable pedigree R90S. This is the most complete and unmolested R90S I have ever come across."

Mark mentioned he had pictures posted on Instagram. I had been to his sight earlier that day, I didn't recall such a bike, they all looked like his perfectly restored bikes.

I went back to Instagram. After realizing the pictures of this bike were the ones Mark had taken during a ride through the Redwoods and along the Pacific Coast, ones that I thought were of a restored bike—one that the paint job caught my eye a week ago as "a little different" from the rest—which it turns out it was different, because it was original.

I emailed back for a price. Not being proud, I asked him to remember to factor in the "unemployed educator" discount.

His price, fourteen thousand five hundred dollars. He added that the bike came with all original tools, shop rag—a rarity in itself, and the hard luggage. I told him that I would buy it. I sent a deposit via PayPal within minutes. It was nine twenty-two p.m.—three hours and seven minutes from posting to buying.

I went to bed knowing that fate, not foolishness, had intervened that evening. I'm not sure how things had moved so quickly from looking at disappointing R90S' for sale earlier that day, to posting my question—which I almost didn't—on Facebook, to a rapid discussion and affirmation of values, to "The Barber" messaging me privately, to my contacting Mark, to Mark having the best original Daytona Orange bike lurking in limbo, to the bike being priced right in the middle of bikes that did nothing for me, to being the bike that I knew I would regret letting slip away if I did not buy it, to it being my new BMW R90S.

It was a perfect storm. The light speed unfolding of events, with the players involved, were not mere chance. Once again—Divine intervention.

The pandemic, and the remembrance that life is a vapor, had raised my capricious attitude from the dead.

The desire to live again in the midst of tragedy, a reoccurring theme in my books, like the XS650 I wrote about after Hurricane Katrina, and the this R90S, they share the same theme, live now, while you're alive. For most of my life, motorcycles, have been the catalyst to my feeling alive.

I was full of anticipation, but with the world shut down delivery of the bike could takes months, but that was okay. I felt a sense of satisfaction knowing that I owned another motorcycle, and not just "another motorcycle", but the best, original R90S in America, and that I was returning to the oldest and most enjoyable passion I have had since I was eleven years old. I felt good.

So that is "the quest" portion of the story, now for "the arrival."

Sooner than expected, the bike arrived, on April 20th, my sixty-first birthday, exactly fifty years to the day from when I had gotten my first motorcycle—tell me it was not fate, not meant to be. When the delivery driver called that morning to say he was an hour out, I said aloud, "Happy birthday to me!"

As the R90S was being lowered down from the "top shelf" of the delivery truck.

I audibly exclaimed, "Gorgeous! A timeless design. No wonder it's a classic. Perfect proportions."

When the sun hit the Daytona Orange paint—well, let's just say I was elated.

The driver hooked up the battery, pulled the choke lever, and pushed the starter button. It fired to life.

I had forgotten how the torque of a BMW opposed twin rocks the motorcycle sideways, and the unique sound of a BMW motorcycle.

And now for the "lost love reunited" part—sort of.

After a severe case of writers block and many attempts to restart this book the past two years, I realized I could once again wax poetic for pages about the R90S, but I have already done that in the first R90S story from 2000.

Instead, I have decided that this R90S story should come to an end as fast as my tenure with this bike did. It was bought, sold, and gone by October 2020—five months.

Say what? You wonder.

Riding an R90S is always a wonderful and unique experience. This R90S provided that experience in spades. The smoothness, the power delivery, and the ability to ride standing up—one of my favorite things about a BMW—is nearly unequalled.

It's beauty and performance is legendary, and time has only enhanced it. The paint and patina on this R90S was flawless. A true time capsule.

Of course I did have to locate Mr. Pridmore again and have him sign this R90S as well. Mr. Pridmore is the first superbike champion who rode a BMW R90S to that title, and was gracious enough to sign my first R90S as well.

There is something about riding an original, vintage classic that is magical; it transports you back in time; and this time it brought me back to the years 1976 and 2000—I've said it before, motorcycles are time capsules.

Having lightning strike twice through the years by owning the nicest R90S available is amazing. There is great satisfaction in owning something so special, and twice as nice to have it happen twice.

However, it only took a few weeks for the truth of Mark's words, that the bike was too pristine to ride regularly, started to make sense. Sadly this bike, like so many rare cars and motorcycles had reached a point of historical and monetary value that forces you to keep it in a preserved state. And this one was a very special specimen deserving such treatment.

Sadly, I found myself delegated to short rides every two weeks, just enough to keep the old classic healthy. I had to find non-ethanol gas to preserve seals and gaskets related to the fuel system. I had to worry about chips—heaven forbid the tank, with it's original paint, becoming damaged. The adage, "It's only original once," settled in, deeply.

After owning the bike a few months, and taking it out of its dark, secluded, a-mile-away from my house, climate controlled storage unit every other Sunday for a fifty-mile ride, made me realized how ridiculous this type of ownership is, at least for a man of moderate means.

It's one thing to have a rarely ridden collectible, it's a completely different issue to have one that you can't even see and polish anytime you want to.

My last R90S lived in my house, I saw it all the time, day and night—and that was half of the joy of owning it.

This R90S did reignited my passion for riding, I now wanted a bike to ride whenever I wanted to.

I wanted a bike that did not have to be a pampered garage queen, living in the dark.

I wanted a bike that I did not have to fear marring in any way.

I wanted to be rich so that I could have them all.

It was about this time I began watching videos of Harley Road King's; once again I was becoming hypnotized by the rumbling sound of a Harley. I was beginning to think fifty-mile jaunts every few weeks was not "riding" a motorcycle, but rather mental motorcycling masturbation.

I was beginning to recall the wonderful trips to Canada and the Blue Ridge Mountains aboard my Harley Softail ten years earlier. I was beginning to think I needed a bike I could take to Louisiana and Texas to visit friends and family. I became convinced I needed a Road King. I bought a Road King.

In four months I had put about five hundred miles on the R90S; in less than three months I put over three thousand miles on the Road King. Best of all, if only for a few months, I once again enjoyed the pleasure of owning two bikes at once—just like I had learned fifty years ago when I started riding motorcycles. But at this time of my life I could not keep them both.

I sold the R90S to a BMW dealer in Atlanta, where it is on display and gets ridden enough to preserve it. It went to a good home.

Did I feel bad about selling the R90S? No. Did I lose money? Yes. Did I learn anything? Yes. All of my stories have a "lessons learned" ending.

So let me share the lessons learned with this R90S. I learned to trust God and not to fear riding, which had caused the five-year hiatus from motorcycling. Trust God and

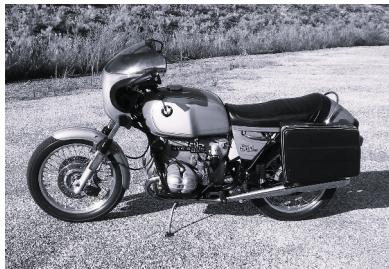
enjoy the ride—it's a good philosophy for every aspect of life.

I realized that not being on a motorcycle for several years dulls your second nature riding skills to a dangerous level, and that time and practice, with my butt in the saddle, is the only way to regain those skills.

And of course I remembered that getting what you want, when you want it, is good medicine, especially in the face of a global pandemic and possible death from something as dumb as a virus.

I understood that my true love is not specifically a BMW R90S, but it is motorcycling. But the Daytona Orange R90S is my "dream girl."

Most importantly I learned that returning to a past love, or lost love-motorcycling—is a ray of hope for living. And it feels good to be living and feeling alive again.



**2008 Harley-Davidson
Road King:
Good Medicine**

By late August, 2020 the motorcycle addiction had regressed to level of fiendishness not seen since the 1970s. When I was eleven, one of the first lessons I learned about motorcycles is that having two is twice as nice as having one. However, as mentioned, the BMW R90S had to go, so I was back down to only one motorcycle.

Dealing with these types of "first world" problems can be mentally exhausting.

I am unsure of what runs the functions of my brain and actions; perhaps I am:

- A) hypnotized by the sights and sounds of YouTube videos.
- B) perhaps I am a shrewd, careful, and thoughtful planner.
- C) or maybe I am impulsive and easily influenced.

They say when taking a test and you do not know the correct answer always guess "C".

There were two influential things responsible for my buying a Road King: my copies of Peter Egan's books and the YouTube channel Bikes and Beards—a motorcycle dealer that is infatuated with the Harley-Davidson Road King, who has hours of videos of him aboard various Road Kings that he has for sale.

The sights and sounds, combined with a quiet, steady input of Peter Egan stories equaled trouble—or action, however you want to see it.

The videos of the Road King are filled with sounds of big bore Harleys at a loping idle and effortlessly thumping down the highway.

The loping idle of a Harley has always blurred my vision at a stop, unless I release my grip on the handlebars. The Harley-Davidson sound is hypnotic. It speaks to my inner self, which speaks to my outer-self, which speaks to my hand, which tells me to get out my wallet and buy a Road King.

I have found it's always best to listen to your inner voice(s).

The biggest obstacle to acquiring a Road King was finding the right one. There is no shortage of Road Kings for sale, at every level of specifications, from stone stock to over the top. Being a well-centered man, I chose one somewhere in the middle.

After shopping around I found one in Kansas that had only been ridden seven thousand miles in its lifetime—twelve years, seven thousand miles—I don't understand that type of ownership experience. A Road King is not collectible, it's not uniquely special, it is a Road King, made to be ridden.

We agreed on a fair price and once again I bought another sight-unseen motorcycle. I have never had any problems buying vehicles sight unseen, but this time I forgot to ask for the date codes on the tires. The front tire was from 2008! The rear was six years old. Again, what type of ownership is that?

New tires moved to the top of the "must do" list. Tire failure on a motorcycle is a completely different experience than tire failure on a car. I rode the bike a few days to flush out any hidden issues; none were found so I decided to let the Harley dealer lighten my wallet and do a ten thousand mile service and put some new shoes on those pretty spoked rims.

Then I started riding. And ride I did.

Wow! What a smooth riding bike! What a sound! What a cruiser! What an overweight,

sits-too-high pig! At least when viewed from my five-foot-six, one hundred and forty pound frame.

Within a week I had the most unusual experience with the Road King—I dropped it! If that were not personally insulting enough, I dropped it again! I dropped it twice in two months.

I have only dropped a street bike once in fifty years, and I had an excuse for that; it was the huge BMW "Cop Bike," and a car instigated my drop by pulling out in front of me as I made a slow U-turn and I hit the front brake.

I dropped the Road King twice just trying to get out of my driveway—oh sorry, I couldn't maneuver the Road King out of the sloping driveway due to its weight and a sharp drop at the curb; no, I had to cross an eight-foot section of sloping lawn, with tree roots, and then make a ninety-degree turn. Each time I dropped it I had pulled in the clutch midway through this mini obstacle course, which stopped the powered momentum... yes, I know better.

I quickly re-learned, or refreshed myself, with staying in the friction zone using the clutch, throttle, and rear brake. Thanks to YouTube, I was able to re-learn how to ride a Harley cruiser at slow, bad-angled speeds all over again. Thankfully only my pride was damaged.

To my defense, however weak it may be, I have never owned an eight hundred pound motorcycle. I had also not ridden in five years; however, I learned real fast that Alabama sloping lands, slow turns, and slow movements on a Road King require constant power to the rear wheel, or gravity will just pull you down faster than you can say, Oh s*#t!

As a motorcyclist there is nothing more embarrassing than having to ask someone to help you pick up your motorcycle when you have dropped it. Thankfully a couple happened to be walking past and the young man helped me pick up the pig and eat a slice of humble pie.

And yes, I know the techniques where a petite, five foot woman can lift an eight-hundred pound bike; but that woman probably does not have three bulging discs, bad knees, and arthritic shoulders.

Another problem, combined with the weight, was that the bike was too high, or created a too-wide stance for my thirty-inch inseam. A set of one-inch lower rear shocks and a lower, less wide, solo seat, combined with thick-soled riding boots helped the issue—if not my back on rough spots—it is amazing what one inch of suspension provides in shock absorbency.

However, I was so disgusted with having dropped this bike and trying to maneuver it out of a sloping driveway that I almost sold it within three weeks. Then it dawned on me.

In fifty years there has not been one motorcycle that has beaten me. So I practiced, and overcame.

Once I had the bike fine-tuned to fit me, that mysterious addiction that a Harley injects you with hit me—customizing. I started adding more chrome, a lot more chrome, and spending more money, a lot more money. With the exception of the Harley chopper, I have avoided this on every other Harley I have owned.

By the time I stopped three months later I must have added another twenty-five pounds of chrome, literally. The bike looked good, blindingly good in the sunshine. It also

seemed to attract women—in a weird way, but more on that later.

Being unable to take any extended trips these days, as I help with my mom, I soon developed a series of seventy to one hundred mile loops from my house that took me on some of the most fulfilling roads and rides. The loops covered open highways, undulating country roads, twisty mountain roads, and a great combination of both.

Before I knew it I was averaging a thousand miles per month from a few two hour long rides each week. I was completely satisfied with the variety of roads and scenery offered in central Alabama, always have been; there are some really great roads in central Alabama.

I have to admit, the Road King was so comfortable, and the backrest was a life saver for an old man with a bad back. I could ride non-stop for hours. Interesting that I only have backaches and need back support when I ride a Harley cruiser; something about the riding position in relation to my sciatic nerve does not gel unless there is a backrest.

One of the things that I quickly became addicted to while riding the Road King was the sound of the exhausts; it had a set of Rineharts with "eagle beak" tips—that could, and did, shred flesh just as fast as an eagle beak; and since they stuck out past the rear fender I quickly learned to walk wide around the rear end of the King.

The only people that did not seem to appreciate the intoxicating rumble of the pipes were my neighbors. I like to ride early in the mornings, around five-thirty a.m.; I often heard the comment, "You went riding this morning," said in the form of a statement, not a question.

I could not ride over a bridge or under an overpass without revving the engine--this was my first Harley, besides the chopper, that had great sounding pipes; Luciano Pavarotti Cavaliere di Gran Croce OMRI would have been proud, and yes, I had to look up the spelling and use his entire name after seeing it.

On a different note--pun intended--while riding I would occasionally stop to admire the scenery and the bike; I have noticed throughout the years that if you stop for any reason in Alabama someone will stop to see if you need any help. Unless it's 1975 and you have long hair--see the "Suzuki GT380" story for more details.

If you're older you may remember the old Honda ads with the slogan, "You meet the nicest people on a Honda"? It seems a Harley attracts them as well. An example of this happened on one ride.

I was riding along looking for a particular road and I missed my turn; as I was turning around a woman pulls up, and frantically begins motioning for me to stop. I couldn't hear her so I walked over to her car. She began telling me she really liked my bike, so we start talking--for about thirty minutes.

She was an older woman, around my age, petite frame, with the largest, nicest, most stand-at-attention breasts--sorry, usually don't mention that type of details, but they were that impressive--and she did not have a wrinkle, nor a crinkle on her face; a really gorgeous woman, all natural as well. Thank goodness I had my sunglasses on so I could stare at the cleavage being shared by her low-cut, half-unbuttoned blouse.

We had a great conversation--we talked about all kinds of things, including the

fact that her husband—yes, again! Much like the full moon night in Michigan on the Canada trip story, "Got Pot?"—but I will not retell old stories—anyway, her husband had had a vertigo spell the night before and she was trying to find what hospital he was in.

Yep, that seemed a bit odd to me as well. Especially after thirty minutes of conversation about everything except her husband and the fact that we were in the middle of nowhere.

I must admit that the feeling and chemistry I was having with her only comes along about every ten years, the last time being with Brandy, but no old stories. It turns out this woman lives in Chelsea, where I live, and about fifty miles from where we were. She is a nurse and owns an RN sitters business.

She asked if I wanted her phone number—dumb question—hell yes I wanted her phone number!

For some reason this encounter left my head so twisted that I had to make myself stop thinking about her until I got home. This encounter just proves once again that you never know what is right around the corner.

I did not call her. I never mess with a married woman. Never.

Because most of my rides were short adventures there were no monumental trip events. On the other hand, I did have many small, inspirational, beautiful, meditative, and medicative journeys.

Thankfully, I had started keeping a riding journal, mainly to help break a many-years-long writer's block; also, as my memory has reached a point that I will not be writing stories of my motorcycling

adventures from memory fifty years later, as how most of this book was written.

More scary is that in fifty years I will have long since expired—read: dead. Or, I'll be one hundred and thirteen years old. Let's go with dead.

So, for the sake of brevity I will share the highlights from my riding journeys, woven together into the continuous landscape of thoughts.

Let's ride!

It started on a cool, sunny, and absolutely gorgeous morning. The experience felt less like a standard cruise and more like riding through Beethoven's "A Day in the Country" from his 6th symphony. Pastoral best describes the entire run.

The country sights, sounds, and smells were truly incredible; all the surrounding fields had hay either actively being cut, already down, awaiting baling, or stacked in bales waiting for pickup. It created an endless, near-intoxicating scent of fresh-cut grass.

Seeing cows, pigs, goats, and horses sharing the same fields was entirely peaceful—completely unlike what would happen if you crammed that many human beings into a field together, which would just result in immediate chaos and strife. Okay, with the unique exception of Max Yasgur's farm at Woodstock 1969.

After that run I felt a renewed sense of peace within myself, a feeling that kept reliving itself in my mind as I finally drifted off to sleep that night.

Other days started differently. On one particular afternoon I woke up pissy, agitated, and borderline angry; I desperately needed to go for a ride. Doing absolutely nothing for over a year during

the pandemic was starting to get irritating, so I treated the excursion as pure therapy.

Since it was seventy-seven degrees with low humidity under a gorgeous blue sky with fluffy clouds, I decided I needed to just blow in the wind. Off came the windshield.

Looking out over the front end of that massive, chrome, extended light bezel of the Road King without the glass added a distinct coolness to the scenery—a very vintage feeling.

It turned into a great, meandering journey: go here, stop, turn this way, go there, stop, turn, and eventually end up exactly where I already was—which was nowhere in particular.

The scenery was wonderful, and the sky looked so painted that I had to constantly stare into the distance as I rolled along. I rode in a variety of experimental positions: standing up on the floorboards, driving with my foot, completely relaxed—whatever worked. It just felt great to be aboard the King.

Once again the thought hit me.

And I want to sell this bike why?

Money in the bank could not have cured my attitude that day, no way. Only a motorcycle ride could, and did. Just a cold fact.

Several times during the run I thought about how completely useless money is when it is just stored as numbers. Money is merely a medium of exchange, and I was incredibly happy that I had exchanged some of mine for a Road King this specific afternoon.

As I cruised along I started thinking about how I have always worn watches, even as a child.

What the hell, the COVID virus may kill us all soon and I want to experience owning a Rolex before time does not exist.

I decided right then that I must experience the finely crafted horological machinery of a Rolex before I die.

When I got home I went online and purchased one. I am actually on my third one at this writing—funny how the word "logical" is buried right there in horological.

The quality and craftsmanship of a Rolex is much like that of a Bentley: subtle, sublime, and tactile. It is another piece of fine machinery that whispers excellence the moment it is seen and felt—but back to motorcycles—though this though pattern does explain a lot...

A ride down scenic Route 148 was wonderful—I mean truly great. It was the kind of ride that had me realizing that selling the Harley just to keep fourteen thousand dollars in the bank with no bike was a completely inane idea; I never would have experienced the incredible ride I enjoyed that morning. It was old-time therapeutic medicine that only a motorcycle can provide for me.

I just pattered along at forty-five miles per hour and rode completely hands-free. With my right foot resting casually on the crash-bar, I guided the heavy bike with the slightest physical hold on the right wind sword—because you cannot ride most Road Kings hands-free due to their notorious tendency to drift to the left for a variety of non-proven reasons.

Nonetheless, I had my arms stretched out wide like Superman and giggling like a little girl from the sheer simplistic pleasure of truly flying through the air. Every car that passed—all two of them—waved and smiled at my childlike antics. I suppose they really were childlike in the sense that I had zero fear of the danger; I only felt

the absolute joy of the moment. It was magical.

I eventually decided to push past my usual turnaround at the Highway 7 crossing, which eventually became the absolute highlight of the trip. As I came over a sharp crest that opened up a view of an expansive, massive meadow, with the distant horizon mountains semi-shrouded in thick fog.

It was a sudden moment of beauty that made me tell God aloud, "Thank you for sharing this view and letting me see it."

As I meandered a bit further, out of the corner of my eye I spotted a man bent deeply over the open hood of a 1950s Chevy truck. Another man, also dressed in plaid and overalls with a cap on his head, sat nearby in a lawn chair just watching. I had to take a quick second glance; something about the layout seemed completely surreal, too good, too cool, too perfect. I had an immediate feeling it was staged somehow.

In a moment the scene was behind me, lost in the past, but it kept swirling around in my mind. I turned the bike around to go see the men and the truck a second time. As I came back upon the spot, they were still in the exact same frozen positions—it was unreal, literally.

I pulled over to the side of the highway, threw on the flashers, grabbed my camera, and walked over to inspect this art.

It turned out this art piece was set up in a cleared section right in front of the property gate, out in the middle of absolute nowhere.

Upon closer inspection I saw how beautifully made the figures were, built with a heavy scarecrow sort of construction. The whole piece was exceptionally well done,

and a copious amount of creativity, and a massive amount of physical labor had clearly gone into the presentation.

Out in the middle of nowhere, early in that magical morning light, I got to enjoy some great art, fly like Superman, ride a motorcycle, view gorgeous mountains, cross flower-filled meadows, and laugh like a little kid. It was a Monday morning. Perfect. Just perfect.

On another early morning ride, a misty fog hung directly above the low-lying fields. The sun shone through at a low angle atop the yellow flowers blooming about two feet high; the blooms sat right at the fog line, creating an eerie yellow glow within the mist. I was traveling south on the west side of the flowers looking east—what an unbelievable sight.

Riding a vintage-looking, big Harley with the DNA of Duo-Glides and beyond, along with that classic sitting-at-the-dining-room-table seating position, completely tricks your mind into believing you are operating an actual old, vintage Harley.

The rough backroads only added to the reality—or the dream—that I was riding a machine circa the late 1930s or 1940s, back when the public roads genuinely matched the ones I was traversing.

The surrounding fields were in full bloom, the weather was flawless, and the Road King was purring perfectly.

"Life is good—thank you, God." I said.

It was amazing, once again, my life was exactly the fulfillment of everything I ever wanted as a young child: a Harley-Davidson, a winding mountain road, zero bills, a little money tucked away in the bank, and free time to enjoy it all. All that was missing from the equation was that gorgeous

blonde companion who used to populate those childhood dreams. I wonder if she ever found her husband.

Eventually I took the windshield off again, and man, what an unbelievable difference it made. At slower cruising speeds I could lift my helmet visor completely, and the sensation of the wind blowing through reminded me of how desperately I always wanted to be Superman when I was a kid.

The introduction to the old television show always featured the sound of the wind whistling as Superman flew through the open air—which was exactly what I heard today. So, operating as Superman, I flew down the road.

As a child I actually did fly like Superman once. I had donned my Superman costume, got on the roof of the house, stretched out my arms, and jumped.

I was flying! I was actually flying! Albeit for approximately two seconds. I decided to not work out the details of landing any more.

But back to the ride. The absolute best part of this specific run was on a little access road I often take that curves directly through local cow fields. One house along the stretch has a huge white Samoyed dog that loves to race me the entire length of his property line.

He heard the deep rumble coming and was literally waiting for me right in the middle of the road, directly in front of my path, jumping up and down with pure joy.

I slowed the machine to almost a complete stop.

Come on boy, let's go!

He took off like a shot along the grassy roadside, racing with me side by side. That

dog can pull a steady twenty-five mph-speedometer error not factored in-for two full blocks. It made me smile—a really massive, genuine smile.

It's funny how he is completely used to my routine, he can hear my engine note coming from a distance, and knows exactly when I am arriving. His raw joy is contagious and instantly brings a smile across my face.

I purposefully let him win today. It is funny how something as simple as a dog waiting to race with my motorcycle makes me smile so much. What a wonderful, pure joyous, moment that you could not possibly experience anywhere except from the seat of a motorcycle.

I really liked my Harley-Davidson; they are rare machines, in that they possess a distinct soul and a heart entirely of their own. It is a specific feeling they transmit, and a Harley always carries a unique mechanical signature.

Many high-end motorcycles and automobiles have an individualistic signature or soul—the Porsche, the Bentley, and a Ducati being fine examples of this class. How incredibly blessed I am to have owned them all in my lifetime.

Another memorable ride made me realize that in Alabama you simply never know what wonderful vista awaits your eyes at the crest of the next hill or directly around the next sweeping bend.

On this particular ride, as I began a steep uphill climb, off to my left sat a massive, open field which seemed to have a light blue and purple haze hanging directly over the soil. As the road rose in elevation, I dropped my speed down to nearly

twenty miles per hour and just looked in absolute awe.

Viewed from an elevated perspective, the entire space was a field of low-growing blue flowers; small ones that pop up overnight with green leaves at the very base. The whole field looked completely unreal, far more vivid and captivating than a Monet painting—precisely because it was real. It was yet another wonderful view created by God, not Monet.

Like most of my rides, there is no final destination. The ride reminded me that ever since the day I first threw a leg over a motorcycle at eleven years old, a motorcycle is the only single place where the world actually makes sense. I have zero anxiety about life while aboard a motorcycle. My mind naturally slows down and locks its focus entirely on the right-now moment of living.

I ended up getting turned around in a town called Munford; this is where the very last battle of the Civil War was fought east of the Mississippi River. It is also the exact location where the final Confederate soldier was killed in action. Interesting... I suppose.

It immediately made me think about all of the lives throughout human history that were willingly given to defend a cause that has long since been completely abandoned, or entirely overtaken by the winning opposition. All of that bloodshed and historic sorrow was ultimately to no avail.

Another ride through the wildlife preserve surrounding the Bull's Gap Trailhead, hitting the Pinhoti Trail off of Highway 148—also known as the Bill Nichols Scenic Highway—which spans sixteen miles of absolute natural beauty.

The road was so serene that I just putted along at thirty-five miles per hour before stopping on an open driveway pad to enjoy the pure, unadulterated quiet of being in the absolute middle of nowhere.

The only sounds remaining were those of nature. I had to step back a few paces just to admire the Harley. Looking at the machine from unique angles that I never get to enjoy when it is parked up in Mom's driveway, I had to say aloud, "Damn, that's a monster of a motorcycle."

I started contemplating my current situation, which seems to be cyclical—I am not working, I have unspent money in the bank, a great motorcycle beneath me, a perfect road ahead, a beautiful spring day, and my health—what more can a man desire?

It is all I ever really wanted out of this life: to avoid having a mundane existence and a boring job, to not be in financial need, and to ride a cool motorcycle on great roads while everyone else is stuck working—I win.

Do I have a terrible work ethic, or rather, none at all? Or do I simply see right beyond the classic work ethic illusion? Am I just lazy, or do I know better than to waste my limited time pursuing a career—which at sixty-three years old is a completely moot point now. Am I lucky, or am I just blessed? I fully believe I am blessed, and I believe that only God knows exactly why He has handed me my life's scenario.

After enjoying this contemplation for a while, I saddled up and rode off. I eventually turned onto an unkempt, two-lane road, marked by a weathered wooden signpost.

This has to be a great road, I thought.

The tarmac led me straight into yet another small, forgotten town. I passed what looked like a small pool of some kind-right on the side of the road. I was intrigued. I spun the bike around to investigate.

It turned out to be an old Sulphur Springs cement pool, no longer operable; it sits now as a quiet memento of prosperous days gone by for this community.

This small town I had wandered into was Talladega Springs. It was deeply historic in the sense that the original sulphur springs were first located by a soldier serving under Andrew Jackson.

By the mid-to-late 1800s, the town had grown into one of the largest resort destinations in the South, hosting nearly five hundred visitors a day who arrived strictly by train. Luxury hotel resorts flourished.

All of the fun and laughter died out completely when the nearby Lay Dam was constructed. People feared malaria was lurking in the backed-up, mosquito-infested, stagnant waters created by damming up the Coosa River.

Ironically, Talladega Springs was originally founded and successful because of water, but it was also water that led to its sudden, permanent demise.

And that concludes the abbreviated rides on the Road King sequence of this story.

I rode a massive amount of miles on the Road King, especially during the dead of winter. I have always liked riding in cold weather—it makes me feel alive—though combined with the blood thinners I am currently taking, it also makes me feel cold. Very cold.

One of the best things owning the Road King did for me was that it finally forced

me to invest in proper, high-quality cold weather gear. I bought a pair of heated socks and heated gloves. Those, along with heavy thermals, leather chaps, and my Nanook of the North coat, made it highly comfortable, if not entirely enjoyable, to cruise in weather with temperatures dropping into the upper thirties and forties. I just cannot figure out why it took me fifty years to finally do this.

I also found doing general maintenance on the Road King to be quite simple, and I enjoyed spending hours bolting on custom chrome components.

However, I did not like trying to keep those wire-spoke rims clean; scrubbing those beauties constantly bruised and cut my hands to ribbons—the blood thinners at work again.

The bike had more chrome than the chopper had; it also had to sleep outside under a cover through rain, shine, sleet, and snow.

I eventually found the perfect over-your-cover cover: a queen-sized mattress bag over a quality motorcycle cover. I could honestly sell these on eBay, as they really work remarkably well.

However, with high southern humidity, moisture always finds its way through layers of plastic to the bike, and it accumulates. I started constantly worrying about fighting the rust demon. I finally reached a point with the Road King where I could not add or do anything more to make it harder to clean and care for—which soon led directly to boredom.

After about nine months—the average lifespan of a motorcycle for me—I was getting weary with the inability to maneuver the beast. I could not pull over in loose gravel, which there is a plenty of in Alabama. I could not add any more chrome. I

could not even back the bike up on level ground.

The oppressive summer heat was coming soon. The rust was finding its way into water-holding nooks and crannies, and those chrome, wire wheels were showing spots of corrosion in near impossible to clean, but very visible, places. The writing was on the wall, or at least in the classifieds.

By now you know exactly what part of the story we're at. I sold the Road King. It only cost me several thousand dollars in financial losses—once again—but it is a fair price to pay for a million dollars' worth of pure enjoyment that the Road King had provided.

On Sunday, May 30, 2023, the the Road King was gone, after having ridden it over seven thousand miles.

The lessons learned from the Road King were numerous, many of which were re-learned lessons from my past. Without a doubt, the greatest lesson was to trust God and enjoy the ride. I had successfully put my fears behind me and returned to my deepest, love-motorcycling. My mind felt as though it had finally come home.

I began keeping a structured riding journal. I wrote down the day, time, temperature, the route ridden, and the highlights of the rides. The riding journal is starting to become quite large; it will be great to read in the future, along with this book, when my memory has faded and these wonderful adventures began to blur and fade.

At this point in my life, writing in decades-long sections is becoming smaller and shorter steps toward the coming day of either not being able to physically ride, or simply not being here to ride at all.

As for epiphanies on particular motorcycles, I realized a huge cruiser is built for cruising in a far more serious manner than my local rides, which would be categorized strictly as jaunts, not long-distance cruises.

A perfect bike for me is several hundred pounds lighter, with solid highway capabilities, and practical, comfortable accessories rather than chromed ones—read: a functional fairing, a proper windshield, and luggage that actually can hold things. Also, a bit more sporty and stable handling in fast turns is always nice, especially when you live in the mountains.

Basically, I realized once again that the perfect-for-me type of bike is usually a BMW Sport Tourer.

The demise of the Road King most likely started when I began looking at BMW R1200Rs for sale—and watching YouTube videos of said BMWs. You already know exactly what that means. I soon bought a 2007 BMW R1200R.

As soon as I sell the R1200R—which we all know I will— I will write a new story about my time and adventures on it. So, hang on, more to come.

But for this Harley-Davidson motorcycle, I must take a bow to the Road King, for it is aptly named—for truly it is the king of the road.



Honda PC50: The Quest For Unicorn Tears

While waiting for the BMW R90S to arrive I decided once again to locate a Honda PC50, one exactly like the first motorcycle I ever owned fifty years ago this month as of this writing. This quest was set into motion because of the free time offered by COVID.

I was perusing pictures of my motorcycles. One particular picture that captured my attention was one of me sitting on a red and white Honda PC50 at some dealership in Mississippi, taken just a few years ago. It stirred my feelings. Talk about a hard-to-find motorcycle—somewhat akin to finding unicorn tears for a magic potion. But it was COVID, there was plenty of time to shop. And persistence pays.

I eventually found a Honda PC50. A problem arose when I insisted on a bill of sale and the seller started dancing around my direct questions. After many decades of buying and selling everything imaginable, I smelled a scam of some sort—or information that they preferred not to share in the vein of full disclosure.

The Little Honda PC50 owner finally produced an "original bill of sale" on a three-by-five-inch sized receipt pad from a Honda dealership in her town, dated some time in 1969.

Yeah right, I thought.

I decided to call the dealership myself—thanks to the internet that is an incredibly easy task these days. I explained exactly what was going on with the Little Honda. The manager, who happened to be the daughter of the original founder of the dealership, asked me the exact date printed on the receipt once again.

"May 12, 1969," I said.

She told me flat out there was no way in the world that they sold the bike, nor wrote any paperwork on anything, because her dad did not open the shop until 1971.

Armed with this fresh mechanical time-travel discrepancy, I immediately called the seller back to have a very blunt conversation. I dryly explained the textbook fraud she had committed, which constitutes a felony in her state and most other jurisdictions.

I told her that while the Little Honda would look great in my garage—which I do not have—a bright orange jumpsuit would look vastly superior on her when the state troopers finally caught up with her forgery.

I asked if she wanted to test the acoustics in the cell of her local county lockup over a Honda. Apparently, she lacked the stomach for prison food. She wisely decided to cancel the eBay transaction on the spot.

Of course, her surrender to defeat was only after my endless threats to contact every single regulatory authority in her state—much as I had done years ago when a local vendor foolishly screwed me out of exactly four dollars.

Most men would let four dollars go; I, however, decided to spend days making phone calls to systematically ask for the help of every single politician and attorney general on the state roster.

By the time I was finished turning their legislative phone lines into my personal complaint department, nearly a year later, I reaped a forty-dollar return check from the vendor and had accidentally triggered a cascading, multi-million-dollar class-action

lawsuit that completely dismantled the man's entire operation.

I do not handle financial insults well—unless they are self-inflicted.

I only include this story out of the fact that in my mind I did buy the PC50, though I never took physical possession of the machine. I did hit the Buy It Now button—and in my world, and eBay's clicking that button is owning it. The financial commitment was locked; the digital handshake was complete.

It also keeps perfectly with the core theme that runs throughout this book: lessons learned. There were many hard lessons to be extracted from this phantom Little Honda.

Lesson learned from this bike? Simple. There is always a scammer lurking in the tall grass, looking to screw you over in one creative way or another—and I have spent fifty years learning that specific, unyielding truth the hard way.

I also learned how much I would genuinely like to have another Honda PC50, the Little Honda, and a proper garage to keep it in, or my living room—if I had one.

I have nearly given up on ever owning another Honda PC50—unless one just randomly falls right into my lap. And it absolutely has to be a perfect, original example. And it has to be red.

By the way, have you seen the new Honda 125 Super Cub? Brand new, complete with a title and a factory warranty. Only thirty-two hundred dollars.

I best not give up quite yet on owning another Honda Cub, even if it isn't a PC50, it could easily hold me over until I manage to find my first bike for a second time.

In retrospect, I probably should have just bought the bike, even without a valid

title. But I had been told by an employee of the Alabama DMV that if you ride a bike on the street without a registration, they can legally confiscate the machine; and I definitely would be riding it.

But I have since learned that in Alabama a registration and a title are not even in the same legal universe. A vintage vehicle in this state does not actually need a factory title—just a standard, un-notarized bill of sale. Literally any bill of sale will do.

You could scribble an agreement on a grease-stained napkin, forge the signature of a dead man who went into the ground during the Nixon administration, and off you go—it's all fully registered, entirely legal, and all yours.

Or more to the point, write one on a Honda dealers receipt pad and date it long before the dealership existed.

I had completely forgotten that it was exactly this type of bureaucratic ease that made Alabama a notorious national hot spot for registering stolen motorcycles back in the 1970s.

Damn!

So it turns out I could have had my PC50 after all. I could have avoided hours of wasted time; I could have been reliving the halcyon days of my very first motorcycle—had I not been blinded by a rule-following issue that really didn't matter in the grand scheme of things.

The bigger mystery of this entire incident was, when did I ever follow the rules anyway?

I spent my youth launching dirt bikes over levees, outrunning local police cruisers across manicured city golf courses,

and kicking gas tanks straight through the air in fits of absolute mechanical rage.

Yet here I was, decades later, letting a perfectly good Honda P50 slip right through my fingers because of a sudden, uncharacteristic bout of compliance with the Department of Motor Vehicles.

It wasn't meant to be.

But I will continue the hunt. Somewhere out there lies a vial of unicorn tears—and a perfect PC50.

2008 BMW R1200R Is This Perfection?

I could write a summary of the BMW R1200R that I owned for two years—a remarkably long time for me, and a machine I traveled over seventeen thousand miles on, marking the record number of miles I have ever put on a single motorcycle—in precisely ten words.

The BMW R1200R was the best motorcycle I have ever owned.

And yet, I absolutely hated this bike for the first two months. I mean, I really hated it—until I finally installed a comfortable seat. It's funny how a proper, comfortable seat instantly transforms a motorcycle from an object of pure hate into genuine love.

Did I actually like riding the R1200R? As mentioned, I rode this bike over seventeen thousand miles in two years, and I never once ventured further than seventy miles away from my home. Do the math on that.

The R1200R was unlike any other BMW I have owned. With the sole exception of my old R90S, every single BMW that has passed through my life possessed a certain structural quirk that prevented it from being perfectly comfortable for me.

Either the factory ergonomics were slightly off, or it was too tall like the GS—who am I kidding, like all BMWs—or a little bit off on the footpeg ergonomics like the R1150, or simply too old and quirky. And worse, it was just too precious and rare to ride—like my last R90S.

But this specific R1200R—perfection.

The bike sat just low enough with the factory low seat option, albeit an incredibly uncomfortable seat from the factory. After installing a custom Sargent seat, Zeta barbacks to give me a little bit

of rise and setback to the handlebars, a set of Grip Puppies, and combining all of that with the Parabellum Scout fairing that came on the on the bike, it was comfortable to ride for hours on end.

I could write an entirely separate story about how perfect that Parabellum fairing was. I have never owned a bike with a fairing that offered a quiet zone so completely buffet-free and near-silent, the classic Windjammer on my R100 from the 1990s being the exception. The fairing, in and of itself, was an absolute work of art and perfectly designed.

The performance of the Hexhead Boxer engine was smooth, linear, and stunning. The engine accelerated with more than enough G-forces to pull your face back. It would cruise comfortably from eighty-five to well past one hundred miles per hour without providing even an inkling of the actual speed you were traveling. That is not necessarily a good thing for your license, or in the event of an unexpected mishap of some type.

The Remus Hexacone muffler produced a perfect note that sounded throaty without ever becoming obnoxious. The brakes were incredibly smooth-phenomenal, actually. Modern fuel injection completely eliminated the old BMW carburetor fiddling I was used to on past vintage models. You simply push the start button and ride.

The handling through the twisty mountain roads was right on par with the Ducati; you could dive through corners on the R1200R like the machine was operating on autopilot. It stayed perfectly straight and planted.

Combined with the deep black paint and the throwback white pinstripes, reminiscent

of the very first BMWs, the machine was gorgeous—pure elegance. The complete package made for a stunningly beautiful, spot-on handling, absolutely perfect BMW.

I took the BMW on some beautiful rides to Mount Cheaha, and made several trips down the scenic route running outside of Sylacauga. The bike would track straight as an arrow, completely hands-free, for miles and miles on end. With the Throttle Lock push-button cruise control engaged, it felt exactly like sitting back in a comfortable dining room chair and watching the world go by.

In keeping with the current style of this book, I am including the continuous narrative highlights directly from my riding journal—a log that details every single run on every bike starting with the Road King.

On Saturday, May 14, 2022 I rode ninety miles past *houses, farms, and fields...*

Ever since my trip to Florida in 1975 on the Suzuki GT380, I find myself automatically singing portions of the song "City of New Orleans" whenever I am riding past houses, farms, and fields. It's a soundtrack that's been looping through my head for forty-six years.

This particular morning was a ride where I easily could have turned around and made the entire loop a second time; I was just so completely in the zone that only a motorcycle can bring me to.

I put my boots up on the BMWs jutting jugs, rested my hands casually on the luggage bags, leaned all the way back into the seat rise, and rode for miles exactly like that. The posture is so surreal and comfortable that it creates the vivid illusion that I am just on a virtual ride inside a Lazy Boy—but I'm not. It's real.

The smells hit me first: fresh-turned dirt from hundreds of acres worth of local farmland. Cow poop—a natural, good country smell. Fresh-mowed fields. The heavy scent of the local paper mill. The privet. The trees. These are all sensory inputs that you miss inside a car. The smells are a wonderful part of riding a motorcycle.

Then came the sights: the sun rising as a huge orange orb in the eastern sky. The remaining fog was hanging directly on the ponds; one pond in particular featured a low, light fog sitting on the water. Out of this mist there were literal flames of fog rising above the surface about two or three feet high. The way the wind was swirling the mist stacks made them look just like liquid fire.

The dense darkness of the trees on the shaded backroads made for a mysterious sight. I passed a field of junk cars, all covered in a heavy, rusted patina—art in its own right.

The animals were out too. “Pickin’ with the Chickens” on the side of the road—the entire chicken flock, peep, or brood was out this morning wandering the roadside. The cows and horses were just starting their grazing.

The access road which led to my dog’s house suddenly became a high-stakes roulette table of rabbits and squirrels tempting fate. I had two rabbits dart directly across my path; one I nearly hit as I rode standing straight up on the pegs. Then a squirrel was missed by a literal inch. All of this chaos occurred within a couple of miles of each other.

As I approached the turn that usually sets up the run with my dog, the two local beagles—or whatever yappy mutts they are—

came charging out as well. As I tried to begin our usual race, the two little dogs started circling the bike, getting directly in front of my path, I had to come to a near-complete stop just to avoid running over them.

Most amusing, and highly disappointing, was that the big dog came running around the left side into the road—and you could see his agitation with the situation that the little yuppies were creating.

By the time the yuppies finally cleared out, the big dog and I had only a few feet left of a race. He was visibly upset, but I still had to laugh and smile.

The temperature was perfect. The morning sun was casting long, sweeping silhouette shadows of me across the tarmac. The smells were wonderful. The absolute freedom of flying through the air was great. The bike ran perfect.

And I suddenly realized something...

I take the same routes, over and over. I realized it doesn't matter where I am going—riding is the thing. I thought about being eleven years old and riding the two miles I never got bored.

The mileage doesn't matter, the thrill of motorcycling is the key, and as long as the scenery is not boring and the ride is safe—there is nothing like riding a motorcycle. Nothing, period.

I gave thanks to God for the fact that I have had over fifty years of my childhood dream and goal fulfilled—riding a motorcycle. What a blessing. What a thrill.

The continuous momentum carried directly into Saturday, 8/27/22. I logged one hundred and ten miles as the temperatures held between seventy-two and seventy-four degrees, moving from heavy fog into early

sunshine. The route carved down Route 280, past DeSoto Caverns, sweeping down Highway 21, cutting across Interstate 20 toward Pell City, and pushing through US Route 231 to Highway 25 for the Leeds turns before heading back down County Road 55 home.

"I've been everywhere, man. I've been everywhere. Westover-Sylacauga-Talladega-Lincoln-PellCity-Vandiver-Leeds-Chelsea-I've been everywhere, man..."

Yep, I felt exactly like Johnny Cash this morning. I took out with absolutely no destination and ended up with a great ride filled with a rich variety of roads and scenery. This is always the best type of ride. Left, right, straight-where am I? Who cares-I am riding.

Another early morning ride offered a perfect landscape for a ride: the air was cool and damp, and the fog hung thick at times, creating an eerie, mysterious, and beautifully muted landscape.

Early on, as the sun rose, the air turned a distinct yellow. The sun itself looked like a dim, massive, glowing golden ball suspended right in the middle of the colored mist. It was just amazing.

The precise way the fog shrouded the mountains and danced across the local rivers and lakes was gorgeous. The mist would hang directly above some fields in a small, thin, wavy cloud formation-a truly incredible sight.

Other fun, fleeting sights popped up along the ride. On Interstate 20 I saw the world's largest bicycle-literally, the sign said so-being towed on a huge trailer. The wheels were at least ten feet tall and the bike had to be twenty feet long. It was styled perfectly as a classic cruiser bicycle-zoom, and then it was gone.

Spider webs hung thick in the roadside trees, glistening with heavy dew as the early sun shone directly through them—and zoom, they were gone.

A longhorn steer had his head down eating in an open field; as the BMW bellowed by, the steer raised his heavy head and turned to see what was approaching from behind. All I could see for a brief moment was the tip of his horns about four feet out, rising and turning in the high grass. And zoom, it was gone.

A herd of massive, beige cows were grazing together in a tight group—big cows, though I was entirely unsure of what specific breed. I turned my head to try and read the farm sign, but it was completely shrouded in the dense fog. And then, the scene was gone.

Whenever I would break completely out of the mist, the bright Alabama blue skies would suddenly appear; they were starting to turn that distinct September-blue.

A most magnificent sight was waiting at the Highway 25 mountain crest right at the hairpin turn, which offers a see-tomorrow-coming view of the expansive valley below. It was eighty-five percent shrouded in mist. Looking straight down from atop the mountain, it looked exactly like an open sea of fog below my viewpoint. It was stunning—truly a stunning sight—but only for a single moment.

Massive fields were dotted with large, rolled hay bales sitting quietly in a semi-fog-shrouded haze. The smell of the fresh-cut hay was damp and crisp. The smell of fresh air was unbelievably clean.

The ride offered so many beautiful and interesting sights; but on a motorcycle they are but a single moment in time—a fleeting

moment that somehow seems so much larger and longer inside my brain.

It was nice to ride the open four-lane roads of Talladega County.

It was nice to cruise at eighty to ninety miles per hour on the freeway, just soaking up the scene and blowing down an open road.

It was nice to stand straight up on the pegs on the quiet country lanes.

It was nice to ride completely hands-free.

It was nice to take the mountain twisty turns with a healthy tad of vigor.

It was a nice ride—a very nice ride.

The R1200R was a wonderful motorcycle. It gave me years and thousands of miles of pure pleasure. It was the most comfortable bike, both in ergonomics and overall state of mind, that I have ever owned.

There seems to be something specific about a BMW motorcycle that connects directly with me. Perhaps it's the fact that they are offbeat from the normal, mainstream motorcycle culture.

Perhaps it is because they are so brilliantly engineered. Perhaps it is because they eat miles like simple snacks. Either way, I like them; I have owned more BMWs than any other brand. And this specific BMW was very special.

So one asks,

If it's so special, why did you sell it?

I sold this bike because of that quiet inner voice that always tells me exactly when it's time to move on.

After having logged over seventeen thousand miles on the R1200R—too many of them at exceptionally high speeds—I came to realize that most of my daily riding was on tight backroads, tracking along the same forty-mile loops.

I had owned the BMW R1200R for two years—well beyond the average lifespan of my time with a bike—and I did not see it leaving anytime in the near future. It had officially become the best street motorcycle I have ever owned.

Yet, I began to think a smaller bike was in order, and once again watching too much YouTube led me to believe that I needed a Honda C125 Super Cub. And wouldn't that be a full circle of life!

The lessons learned from this R1200R seem to follow a lifelong pattern. I learned how much raw joy I get from being on a motorcycle. I realized how blessed I am that God has given me decades of safe riding and temporal pleasure garnered while owning so many unique and wonderful motorcycles.

Most importantly, during my time with the R1200R I understood more deeply than ever how completely settled my mind is astride a motorcycle.

For nearly sixty years now, the exact same thing happens the moment I ride a bike: my busy mind becomes laser-focused, and my senses become heightened to the absolute point that I can say, I get high riding a motorcycle.

One last crucial thing that was reinforced during my time with the R1200R was a lesson I first learned as an eleven-year-old kid: owning two bikes at once is twice as nice.

Yep, I had two bikes for a while—again—I don't plan these things, I'm just lucky like that.

I had decided to try out a BMW K75—supposedly the smoothest motorcycle ever engineered. I realized I better not dare sell the R1200R until I had the chance to compare the two machines side by side.

But the fact that you already know I sold the R1200R doesn't necessarily mean the K75 was the superior machine. Nope. That is an entirely separate story, coming up next.

But in summary of the R1200R.

In order to best describe my time with this machine, I have to get anthropomorphic in thought. If a motorcycle could be a human, this BMW R1200R was my soulmate.



1995 BMW K75: The Gentleman's Express

While the BMW K75 and K100 are famously known as 'Flying Bricks,' I think a more fitting name is the 'Gentleman's Express.' That title perfectly captures the smooth, refined personality of my own K75.

When it first arrived, I had ridden it perhaps fifty feet and said aloud, "This is the smoothest motorcycle I have ever ridden!"

And the more I rode the bike, the more I found myself saying the exact same thing. It is: smooth, quiet, refined, civilized.

It felt entirely electric in its power delivery and fluid smoothness. The unique "whee" noise it produced sounded like a vehicle straight out of *The Jetsons*.

For decades I have read about the quirky K-bikes of BMW fame. A total love-or-hate relationship was the general consensus of most people.

Here was an inline triple that virtually eliminated engine vibration, wrapped in a completely unique styling perspective with a center of gravity tucked right down on the ground. I simply had to try one—having tried every other type of BMW model.

So what if I already had a perfect BMW parked outside? Remember what we learned as an eleven-year-old kid: two motorcycles are twice as nice as one. I consoled my conscience—and a wallet that was still flush with cash—with the logic that I would simply test them both and keep the best one.

So, I found a specimen with maintenance records detailing nearly every single fuel fill-up. It was a beautiful factory red, featured an aftermarket windshield that

offered quiet comfort, had comfy ergonomics, and delivered absolutely awful gas mileage.

Other than having to replace a leaking fuel gasket, re-wrap a few sections of the weathered wiring loom, and perform basic general maintenance, it was a pure push-the-starter-and-go machine.

I logged a lot of good rides on the K75, tracking the exact same routes I have ridden for tens of thousands of miles over the past few years. But every bike is a different experience and offers a unique ride entirely of its own--and the K75 was well worth the experience.

It certainly possessed a few bad quirks: the engine ran incredibly hot. It was heavy down low, making it a complete beast to lift onto the center stand--hence BMW installing a helpful, foldable grab handle directly below the seat area. And, of course, the terrible gas mileage.

Its good traits were equally distinct: a completely quirky design and weird whirring sounds whenever you were accelerating. It handled exactly like a true BMW, just with an even lower center of gravity than the others. It was comfortable for hours. And, after all, it is a BMW.

The K75 just wafted along. It is a genuine pleasure to ride slowly. It somehow makes me compare the riding experience to driving the Bentley I once owned; the power is "adequate,"--as the Rolls-Royce and Bentley factory always described their performance--and the ride is silent and smooth, save for the quiet engine purring--or whirring, or wheeing-- along beneath you.

Bumps? Just a smooth, heavily cushioned response. Accelerate? Okay, sure, but not too quickly, it'll get you there before

lunch. Drama? Absolute zero. Uneventful? No, because I am still riding a motorcycle.

As I rode along in the deep calmness of the machine, I officially dubbed it in my mind, 'The Gentleman's Express.' Smooth, unhurried, quiet, refined, low-key.

Off and on my feelings vacillated from the above description to: Slow. Whiny. Too wide of a seat. Too narrow of handlebars. Too much pressure on my wrists. The K needs to go. Guess I'll ride it a few thousand miles before I lose money.

So I began to log on the miles- to reach the acceptable dollars per mile ration I have formulated.

One enjoyable ride offered the Alabama-beautiful-blue skies, zero humidity, and green trees starting to turn a few shades lighter above open green pastures. And, of course, that constant, industrial whirring noise in my ears.

Oh, but the jaw-dropping acceleration more than makes up for the sound-NOT! The K75 is near non-existent of anything that even closely resembles actual acceleration.

And the worst part? I passed a local flock of Guinea hens and revved the engine up with vigor; not a single bird looked up or moved. I know for a fact they didn't hear it, because I couldn't either.

But enough of my whining-the K75 does enough for us both-the machine is so smooth and quiet that it is boring. Literally boring. It brings absolutely no increase to your pulse-none.

The K is just a polarizing bike. Yesterday it was near-dreadful to ride; this morning it was an absolute pleasure to cruise through the early morning with the smooth, silent quietness of the chassis.

I hadn't realized that the "love-hate" relationship the magazines had talked about were dual feelings that wrestled within the individual owners themselves-until now.

I raised the handlebars on the K75, using a few leftover parts from the R1200R. They felt so perfect, and offered such a near-match to the R-bars, that I decided I would take the K75 out for the exact same loop I had taken the day before, just to compare highway comfort, speed, and handling.

Well, shut my mouth! The K was perfectly comfortable. With the sole exception of needing a better seat, everything else was very, very nice.

Where the R1200R was cruising effortlessly at eighty miles per hour, so was the K. I brought the 75 up to ninety miles per hour and held it steady-it just smoothly sailed down the open road without a single inkling of effort.

This particular ride was one of deep contemplation regarding the fact that it is really nice to be irresponsible enough to own two BMWs at the same time, and to be able to experience their completely unique characteristics. It made me realize that it hurts absolutely nothing to keep both machines for a while-unless God has other plans.

Heads up! Back to the scenery.

The open fields were covered lightly with a thin, very purple fog as the sun was just rising, and the morning grass and foliage glistened with dew. It was a beautiful morning, all framed perfectly by the distant mountains.

How wonderful it is to be able to experience God's creation-to see it, and to be able to ride through it all. Riding is such an immense blessing; it really is

something to have been blessed with the health, the time, and the financial means to experience the rides I have enjoyed for over fifty years.

Yes, I say that a lot-because I feel that nearly every time I ride, especially the more the decades add up.

As with many rides I make it a point to go racing with the dogs! Today was great. It was a cool day and they were excited and happy to run. As I came around their familiar corner, the one from the right side came right alongside my leg and started saying hello. Then the one from the left joined in. Finally, the third dog dropped in from the left, and as the other two dropped back, he was actively outrunning me.

So, I sped up to match his speed and he barked with pure joy. I barked right back. We both went flying down the road, barking and smiling. Just how wonderful is that? Really.

The K75 always hit me as being slow as a slug whenever I first got on it. Then that classic *Jetsons* whine hits my ears. After ten miles or so, the quiet, fluid smoothness takes over, and I start to truly appreciate the unique characteristics of the K75.

I found myself singing the theme to *The Jetsons* to myself, albeit with a name change—Meet Ed Jetson-doo-da-da-doo-da-da...

And the wonderful rides between the K75 and the R1200R continued. The K75 was a complete putterer of a motorcycle. The morning rides were gorgeous. The bike just wafted through the morning air quietly, smoothly, and completely unhurriedly. I did find myself genuinely liking the whole funky, retro, K-bike vibe.

Oh my! Was I falling for the K75?

I had vacillated between which BMW to keep long enough, the R1200R or the K75. I decided to let God decide.

Running parallel to this indecision was the strong feeling—and that quiet inner voice, the one I always listen to—was telling me it was time to sell. I had been having a distinct feeling it was time to go down to a smaller bike. So, I put both BMWs up for sale on the market.

In less than a week, and within one day of each other, the R1200R and the K75 were on their way to completely new homes. I felt absolutely zero remorse. I did, however, feel the absolute amazement of how God works.

It was interesting to own the K75 and the R1200R at the same time. One cannot fully appreciate the stark juxtaposition of the two engineering mindsets behind these bikes unless you can ride one and then immediately jump on the other for an extended period. Once again, I was able to have such a unique opportunity.

And the lessons I learned from my time with the K75? The exact same, recurring lesson being:

It feels good to get what you want.

It feels good to try a new motorcycle.

It feels good to ride.

And you know this one—owning two bikes always feels better than owning one!—Gosh, even I'm getting tired of hearing that line!

And as always, I felt the grace of God for giving me safety, pleasure, and motorcycles. He may not have given me financial acumen, but He sure has provided funds for the fun.



2020 HONDA C125 SUPER CUB

Certainly, being back on a red, step-through Honda Cub must be at 359 degrees the "circle of life." This must be where it all ends. And you know, after all the motorcycles I have owned, and after only one hundred miles on the Cub, I realized this is the purest motorcycle experience one can have.

So how did this happen? It came down to listening to the guidance of the Spirit, feeling a bit older, and dealing with heavy, over-sized bikes during the previous years.

I came to the realization that I don't need a big bike for the types of rides I take now. I did need a bike that can't go one hundred miles per hour. Oh yeah—and YouTube videos. There you have it, the same old formula: want, look, get. So, I bought a Super Cub.

Finding a Super Cub was easy. There was a plethora of low, low-mileage machines for sale in the \$3,000 range. "Why?" I wondered. In 2019, Honda re-released the iconic Cub in America, and it instantly sold like crazy to people looking for a bit of fun. There was a massive waiting list for the standard Cub, and an even longer one for the Trail version.

The reason for the sudden glut of low-mileage bikes on the secondary market was simply the flip side of the American story. Buyers here look at the Cub as a toy, like a cute little puppy.

The rest of the world looks at the Cub as a vital, irreplaceable engine of global and personal commerce—the ultimate Asian workhorse that reliably gets well over one hundred and thirty miles per gallon.

Over here, people bought them on a whim, got bored, and walked away. Most of them were also slightly scratched from being dropped.

The Cub has no manual clutch and no traditional friction zone; if you try to take off at a slow, leaning angle, let off the gas for a split second, and BAM-gravity wins. You drop it. Ask me how I know.

But wow! The Super Cub was an absolute kick. As usual, I immediately spent way too much money on accessories, outfitting it as if I were planning a rugged cross-country expedition. Once again, I lost a lot of money in the process.

But did I enjoy it? Was it usable? Did it fulfill my riding needs on my mountain route? Oh yes! I rode the Cub twelve thousand miles in less than eighteen months, and it was never pampered. I pushed it along at fifty to sixty miles per hour and still managed to get an incredible one hundred and twenty-five miles per gallon!

The Super Cub is a wonderful motorcycle—if not a true mechanical wonder. It is a design perfected over sixty years and one hundred million units.

It gave me thousands of miles of pure pleasure. Every time I kicked a leg over it, it brought back that warm, nostalgic feeling of being eleven years old again.

The Honda Cub is where my life in motorcycling started. I learned to ride, really ride, on a Cub. I fell in love with the sensation of horizontal flying on a Cub. I dreamed of life, adventure, and the future on a Cub.

Those feelings were renewed every single time I rode it. I smiled astride the C125 until it practically made me laugh out loud

during many of my rides—but I smiled every time I rode it.

Putting twelve thousand miles on the Cub was like having a torrid romance with your long-lost first girlfriend. It was exciting, near wrong, like tasting forbidden fruit, and deeply satisfying.

Astute readers who have made it through my previous books will likely notice a subtle shifting in the tense of this story, moving from present to past. I'm sure they already realize that the Cub is no longer in my present tense.

So, in the signature style of my twenty-first-century stories detailing the time I have spent with different motorcycles—especially now as the halcyon days of adventures in farther away destinations have shrunk down to a tight fifty-mile radius—let's explore how this brief, torrid romance with the Super Cub ultimately came to its demise.

In early June 2026, the Cub officially entered my life, and I finally returned to my early morning therapy sessions—riding a Honda C125 Super Cub!

I had been contemplating returning to my roots, where I began fifty-four years ago astride a 1969 Honda Cub. After shopping for a month online, I was getting impatient and ready to buy—but the Spirit told me, "Not now. You'll know when the right one comes along."

Okay, I thought. I looked and looked. I tried to buy a couple of Cubs, but the owners either did not answer me back or were completely unwilling to sell to me! They literally wouldn't take my money. It reminded me of the Divine intervention to

stop my purchase of another house right before Hurricane Katrina.

One Asian man, after hearing that I take care of my mom, straight-up said, "You don't need bike. You take care of mom..."

The disconnects blocking a purchase were downright miraculous—three failed attempts in a single day! One bike sold ten minutes after I talked to the salesman. Another one sold just prior to my call.

So, I waited some more.

And damned if the biggest test of, "I want to go back to my roots" didn't come along—the "Best bike I've ever owned," came up for sale, the BMW R1200R.

I thought about it for two days and kept hearing, "No, don't backtrack, this is not the one." So I passed on the purchase—somewhat begrudgingly.

Then on June 5th, the one I had been looking at struck me as the bike to buy. It was in Mississippi, owned by a woman who is a vet and owns one hundred and twenty-five motorcycles! It was a 2020 C125, red, and "no scratches," she assured me. She followed up with a video that showed a couple of tiny nicks in the leg guard paint.

"No problem," I said. "This is the one," I was told. So I bought it.

The next day, her husband brought the Cub to me. It only had two hundred and sixty miles on it. It's amazing how many of them are up for sale with only a few hundred miles on the odometer.

It was the blindingly gorgeous Pearl Nebula Red. As we were unloading the bike I noticed the front fender was scratched, pretty badly—"Oh well," I thought, in the excitement of a new bike

I took it out for a maiden test voyage of about twenty miles, headed back to the house

to change the oil, and dedicated the following day to a thorough washing and polishing.

Now, this is where one person's definition of "no scratches" and mine differ drastically. As I washed and polished the finish, I discovered the chrome on the right mirror was scratched, the front fender was actually cracked right at the fork joint, and the chrome headlight rim was scratched as well.

"Like new," I had been explicitly told.

My first instinct was to call the woman, let her know I never would have bought it under those terms, and demand some of my money back—but the Spirit softly whispered, "No, this is the bike you are to have."

So, I got out the super-glue, a Brillo pad, polishing compound, and various waxes, managing to do a pretty good job of masking the damage. "Not bad," I thought to myself as I stood back to admire the shiny, rejuvenated Cub.

And just like that, I had officially returned to my roots of motorcycling, once again astride a Honda step-through bike. Let the grins and giggles begin!

It sure was a flashback to be on a Cub once again. The first thing I realized is that forty miles per hour felt a lot faster at eleven years old.

After the initial cleanup, oil change, and get-to-know you rides, it was time to take on one of my wonderful routes through the mountains and the countryside.

My first real ride took place on a quintessential summer morning, the air feeling warm and slightly damp with a light fog hanging low over the fields while the sun rose in all its glory.

I had been hesitant to head out this morning. Myrna had informed me that our cousin Mark's thirty-six-year-old son had been killed in a motorcycle accident a week before, and his funeral was today. The details were sparse, but it seemed he crashed after swerving to avoid an animal.

It made me realize, once again, that God has already ordained exactly how and when I'll depart this body. That truth brought a sudden, settling peace, allowing me to gear up, ride, and fully enjoy everything the morning offered.

And enjoy the ride I did, carrying a deeper spiritual appreciation along the route.

The animals were out en masse—cows, horses, donkeys, sheep, goats, geese, and cliff swallows swarming around every bridge.

As I passed one large field with a hug pond, the sheer number of geese in that field was amazing. As I shuffled up the road past the horse fence, they started quacking and complaining loudly about my interruption of their roadside meeting.

There were so many fleeting views of the sun rising above the corn and the mown fields that I had to turn the Cub around three times just to catch the glimpses offered. Every single return was well worth it.

To say this morning's ride was bucolic would be an understatement. All I needed was Ralph Vaughan Williams' classical piece "Bucolic" playing as a soundtrack to my ride.

I also had a wonderful conversation with God as I rode. One can't help but be verbally thankful for the sight, the physical ability, the time, and the

financial freedom to experience a morning like this.

After a year with the Cub I was still riding nearly every day.

On one early summer morning ride, I noticed how incredibly lush the cornfields were, growing so evenly with the tassels forming perfectly mid-stalk. It was a vast sea of verdant growth. The stalks looked like soldiers standing in rigid formation, their tassels perfectly mimicking the epaulets of a military uniform.

The smell of freshly mown hay offered my olfactory senses a pleasingly pungent perfume. This beautiful culmination of sights, sounds, and smells, all wrapped neatly in the warm morning air, brought a deep sense of joy and a deep contentment inside.

I leisurely glided through the countryside; after a year and eight thousand miles on the Cub, I had settling into a groove of enjoying the casual speed and the ability to take in the scenery.

In my down time between these wonderful rides I avoided the internet and pulled out my copy of Peter Egan's book "Leanings" to read for the double-digits time.

On my rides I had found myself thinking about his stories featuring a Honda Cub and a Honda Benly 150.

I could now fully appreciate his view on how enjoyable these small bikes are for their simplicity, their purity, and the true joy of riding through the countryside.

I had been living my own Cub story over the past year. It is a wonderful feeling to live a story firsthand instead of merely experiencing it vicariously through another person's words, though it gave me a much deeper appreciation for his writing since I

could relate completely to an adventure astride a Cub.

I have owned dozens of fast motorcycles over the decades and tens of thousands of miles, but now, in my old age of sixty-six, this little bike combined with these quiet country roads gives me the exact same joy I had when I was eleven years old. The purity of the Cub satisfies my soul.

It's about the ride. It's about the wind. It's about the raw sensation of the horizontal ground flying beneath you. It's about the smells. It's a total sensation that is far larger than the sum of its parts.

This morning, the Cub took me down quiet country lanes, over winding mountain passes, and on a short, reflective journey down memory lane. Combined, it was a perfectly beautiful, wonderful little ride.

I have to say it again-the Honda Cub offers one of the purest motorcycling experiences a person can have!

It had been far too long since my last sunrise ride, so early this morning I simply thought to myself, I'm going.

It was an excellent choice. The morning turned out to be absolutely spectacular, with the sun gently peeping over the horizon, a light summer fog hanging low in the valleys, and the crisp air heavily perfumed by the blooming mimosa trees.

To make the morning complete, my dog was out! He and his little yappy companion greeted me. I nearly stopped and waited until he got to me, and then we raced along slowly.

Just at the end of his run, a whole flock of young ducks came bumbling, tripping, and running across the road. I had to stop

because there were so many, and they were just honking away.

The air brought back a powerful, vivid memory of a specific morning in September 1975—that cool, crisp fall morning when I was riding my Suzuki GT380 to school, and as I passed the school towards the I-10 off ramp I said, “Fuck that! I’m riding”—and skipped school for an hour to ride to Laplace —good decision then, memorable moment many decades down the road. That was a formative moment in time.

As the miles clicked by today, I briefly chuckled thinking about the foolish stunts on my Suzuki GT380—pulling wheelies in front of the school. I thought a lot about the rides I’ve taken through the years. I have been riding motorcycles a very long time, and I have had God’s protection for just as long. It has been an amazing journey.

And so, my pastoral morning rides reaped a continuous bounty of bliss—until, quite suddenly, they didn’t.

After nearly a year and a half of these blissful excursions, just as I was approaching the twelve-thousand-mile mark on the odometer, the Cub started developing a highly annoying, metallic “whoo” noise. It would start at the top of third gear and carry directly into fourth gear, persisting stubbornly until forty-three miles per hour.

To say it was annoying is a massive understatement. It was like an ear-bug; once you heard it, you couldn’t un-hear it. I replaced the tire, the chain, and the sprockets—doing everything the collective wisdom of YouTube suggested—all to no avail.

The problem was a complete oddity for a Super Cub. With one hundred and ten million of them rolling across the globe, nowhere on the internet could I find a single person

reporting a similar issue. Even the local mechanic said he would be surprised if it were a transmission issue, noting he had never seen one fail in his twenty years as a Honda specialist—but it sure sounded like one, he added.

I stubbornly continued riding for almost another thousand miles, but the symptoms started to lean like the Leaning Tower of Pisa toward an internal problem, a catastrophic one that could easily cost well over a thousand dollars to fix.

I was at my wit's end, and by now you know exactly how I feel about an ill-running, uncooperative motorcycle.

But I kept riding while I weighed my options. One morning I set out with a firm resolution to just enjoy the ride and ignore the noise. That's easy to say, but hard to actually do in practice. The moment I rolled to the top of third gear, the "whoo" noise roared to life, as if to make my final decision for me.

To make matters worse, the engine felt tight several times showing a noticeable lack of power. I had reached the point where I could not enjoy my morning rides anymore. The experience had become tragically similar to the hollow dread of being in the company of a lover you just didn't love anymore.

I had crossed the threshold of my tolerance, and I was ready to sell the Cub for a huge loss just to move on. I did the math on the potential repair costs, the miles I had already logged, the dwindling value of a high-mileage Cub with impending internal problems, and contrasted it against the cost of a Honda CT125 Hunter Cub—which I had been watching YouTube video of.

Ultimately, I sold it to the only person who contacted me in over a month. I found

out the hard way that Honda Super Cubs are incredibly easy to buy, but very hard to sell—a stark reminder of that massive plethora of used Cubs sitting on the market with only a few hundred miles on them.

In the end, the machine left me with a total lifetime cost—not a loss—of only \$3,200. On a simple Honda Cub, I think that figure alone speaks volumes, though I'm still not entirely sure about what.

On Saturday, January 3, 2026, the Cub officially went to a new home. It was purchased by a man named Scott—a one-legged man traveling with a one-eyed dog named Chopper. And what an incredibly interesting, genuine pair they turned out to be!

When they arrived at the house, I looked out and saw the front end of what looked like a classic, nineteen-seventies style "Love Van" pulling up the driveway, but it was new. In the passenger seat sat Chopper, sitting upright in his very own custom seat on the passenger side. Scott began climbing out of the driver's side with noticeable effort.

As I walked up to greet Chopper, I realized the little dog had only one eye. Then, as Scott rounded the front of the van, I noticed he had only one leg, navigating with a prosthetic—and sporting a magnificent mullet haircut that would make Joe Dirt jealous!

Sometimes, the characters you sell motorcycles to are every bit as interesting as the adventures you take on the bikes themselves. As we began talking, Scott's incredible life story slowly unfolded.

He had been a dedicated Harley rider for decades. Six years ago, as he was returning from Florida to his home in Decatur, Georgia, he hit a stretch of heavy

construction on the freeway. Just as he was passing an active work area, a massive front-end loader suddenly swung around, putting its heavy bucket directly in front of his path.

The impact was horrific; Scott's right leg was sheared off completely, left dangling only by an iron rod that had been implanted during a previous surgery. The construction firm was massive, well-insured, and totally negligent, resulting in what I assumed to be a massive monetary settlement.

On top of that, Scott discovered he had a dismemberment policy that he had been mindfully paying five dollars a month for decades through his job with the State of Georgia, which paid Scott two hundred thousand dollars.

Scott quietly noted that while the tragedy brought a lot of money on top of a great state retirement pension, he would still give every single dime of it back just to have his leg back.

His plan for the Cub was simple: ride it until it self-destructs or doesn't, and then rebuild the engine with a big-bore kit just as he had done on several of his other mini-moto Honda's.

Scott is a super, nice guy, and he possesses such an amicable, easy-going personality that I could easily hang out with him. The Cub went to a truly wonderful home.

And so, many hours, many miles, many smiles, and many great rides were logged on that little machine. It was a wonderful, reflective journey back to my motorcycling roots that had started fifty-five years ago on a Honda Cub.

The lessons The C125 Super Cub taught me? You can go back! You can recapture fragments

of your childhood. Fun is fun on a motorcycle, no matter the size or power. And as always, it is good, and wise, to live now, ride now, enjoy life here while here.

As always, it is good, and wise, to live now, ride now, and enjoy life while you are here to experience it. I learned that the Cub really does provide the purest experience of motorcycling available.

Once you're underway and the wind is blowing directly through your head, clearing out the negative thoughts of daily life, the world passes by as though you are floating or flying through the scenery. Then, all of a sudden, it hits you—that big, unprompted smile and that deeply happy feeling.

I don't regret the cost for the pleasure the Cub offered. Getting what you want feels good, all the way to the point of being irresponsible. As I see it, dumb is still smart.

The old Honda ads are true—you really do "meet the nicest people on a Honda." And you know who I met? Me. I met "me" again on a Honda.

The thousands of dollars the Cub cost me is still inexpensive therapy when you break down the cost by the hour. It's also a much better fun-to-loss ratio than the thousand-dollar ride on the Wide Glide!

And have I mentioned that I bought a Honda CT125 the next day? It should arrive this Saturday...



2024 Honda CT125 Hunter Cub: Selling Nostalgia

Another summary of a motorcycle in ten words or less: "The most disappointing motorcycle I have ever owned."

Fifty years of accolades and "How Great Thou Art" praises—I was really expecting the perfect little dual-purpose bike to fit my needs—nope, it is nothing more than an homage to the Hunter Cub's glory days!

You know, when it had a dual-zone transmission and could pull stumps in low gear or get to the next serious trail on a back road in high gear.

It does not do off-road well: no clutch, no friction zone, no power. It does not do back roads well. Top speed strains at fifty-five to fifty-seven miles per hour downhill.

It looks really cool! Its target audience is my generation that had the old dual-transmission models and a different time and place to ride a Honda Trail.

Honda was selling nostalgia when it released the Super Cub and Trail Cub in 2019, and my generation bought it to sold out levels. But the "dream" faded fast for most buyers; so many Super Cubs and Trail Cubs are for sale with less than two hundred miles. The dream I had for the CT125 faded after my first ride! It was up for sale three days later—loaded with accessories—again!

But what went wrong so fast for me? Immediately, the lack of power made me say aloud on my first ride, "Damn, this thing makes the Super Cub feel like a superbike!" And it does!

I have never seen a bike run out of steam at fifty; open the throttle at forty-eight or so and you can eat lunch while you wait

until it gets to fifty-three, maybe fifty-five miles per hour, with no "oomph" whatsoever.

My first ride off-road on the huge plot of ground with rolling trails with ruts, small bumps, and some damn deep puddles—oh my gosh—what a worthless "off road" machine!

First few bumps and, "clunk" from the front end. Get into a slow, uneven patch of terrain, and do not let off the throttle, because you will have zero power, no clutch, and no friction zone.

Do not stop on an uphill; you may have to lift your weight off of the seat so it can beg its way up the incline. Get in the mud, deep mud, well, that is like a game of slip-and-slide, even with the off-road tires—which sing on the road louder than the noise the Super Cub was making! That too was my first three miles of riding complaint as well, "This thing makes more noise than the 'something wrong' Super Cub," I said aloud.

On another off-road ride, a smooth dirt road, the CT125 will rattle your brains out. I had to adjust the windshield, phone mount, and damn near every other thing bolted on—oh, and the "clunk" from the forks.

I finally fixed the clunking by adding ten cubic centimeters of oil and three washers to preload the front end. It turns out that Honda purposely underfills the forks for a softer ride—really?

Yet another attempt at off-roading through a cutting in the woods—I made thirty feet and was turning around, with much difficulty in a rutted, uneven, stick-filled area—no power, no friction zone—and the CT sits high. I nearly dropped it three times. I was nervous.

On yet another disastrous ride, I decided to get some pictures of the CT in a

patch of jonquils. Making my way slowly to a spot, I let off on the bumpy, uneven ground and BAM! On the ground I go.

I hurt for three days. I decided I would not be going off-road again-perhaps the smooth dirt road, but nothing else. The bike cannot handle it. It is dangerous. I am too old to fall. It is not worth the return, or lack thereof, of fun.

And the gauges? Want to know how fast you are going-look at your GPS. Want to know your miles ridden from the tripometer-too bad, it doesn't have one! Look at your GPS. Want to know the time-oh, no clock. You cannot read the gauges unless the sun is aligned in the exact position for lighting-nothing!

But many serious CT125 aficionados fix that with a three hundred dollar aftermarket gauge.

And more importantly, when you are coming into a slow, "I need first gear" area, so you downshift to make sure you are in first-well like the Cub, neutral is at the bottom of the gear pattern-many times I ended up in neutral- with no power.

On nearly every ride, I questioned how Honda, an amazing company with an amazing history with this bike, could drop the ball so badly on the gearing, the lack of power, the useless gauges, and the front forks!

I spent way too much time wondering what they were thinking. What was their idea of the "perfect" dual-purpose machine for a double minded environment, what was their design philosophy for this "Trail Snail?"

Finally, on one ride, it dawned on me. An epiphany. They were selling nostalgia, that's all. This bike is not even available in Europe, because they do not wax nostalgic over a utility vehicle.

I did have some pleasant rides on the CT. There were several rides where the CT was in its element, going slow down a beautiful country road—with a larger front sprocket. Some smooth dirt roads were fun.

I enjoyed exploring side roads that I never saw on my usual routes I have ridden hundreds of times, because I was going too fast, too focused on right ahead. I actually learned to appreciate riding at a slower pace. It offers the chance to really see the scenery, to enjoy the ride. I did see a lot more on the familiar roads I had been riding for several years.

The verdict? This bike is useless beyond a slow, mostly smooth road or trail. It does great on errands to the post office and grocery, with my Insta Crate on the rear rack. It looks really cool in Turmeric Yellow with all of the accessories.

Whenever I rode the bike, I did feel like I was riding a bigger adventure bike when I looked down at the racks, bars, and hundreds of dollars worth of accessories I had installed. That vision usually faded as soon as I started an incline and had to open the throttle—to no response, except to lose speed more slowly.

But overall, the CT was the most disappointing motorcycle I have ever owned. And it only cost five hundred dollars to find that out.

But it's gone. Goodbye, good riddance. It was sold to a retired teacher who will be riding it during the summers at state parks out west, where he takes jobs to have access to free lodging and the park—a perfect new home.

The lessons learned from my few months' time? I learned to enjoy a slower riding pace. That was a lesson that I hope to bring

forward, especially as I am aging—slow down, enjoy the ride; that is a good thing, that is a good attitude.

The most fearful lesson I learned from the CT "Trail Snail" is that maybe, just perhaps, owning two motorcycles at once is not twice the fun of owning one! That's a huge tear in the fabric of my universe! The thought alone disrupts universal harmony!

The most important thing I gained from my time on my slow, contemplative rides on the CT was that it sucks for my needs. I also remembered that the most perfect bike I have ever owned was a BMW R90S. Perfect in both form and function.

And just how did I come to realize that sometimes owning two motorcycles at once may not always be better than one? Because I bought another R90S. I decided I would find a good rider condition R90S and keep it forever. I couldn't help myself. The R90S is my dream motorcycle—just look at the cover of this book.

Just as within five miles on the CT125 I disliked it, within three miles on the R90S I was in love. Perhaps you have to experience utter disappointment in order to fully experience motorcycling fulfillment.

So you know, given that epiphany, owning the CT—which led to owning the R90S at the same time—turned out to be a new twist on an old lesson—it is better to have two bikes at one time!

Ah, universal harmony restored.



1976 BMW R90S: I'm Not Worthy

"What a bike!" That's what I kept saying on my maiden voyage through the mountains on Highway 25.

Another feeling also took hold: that unique, deep, visceral sensation of riding a vintage motorcycle. But this wasn't just any vintage bike; it was one with a history and nostalgia buried so deep within my psyche that even fifty years after first laying eyes on one, I am still amazed by the R90S—and utterly amazed to be sitting on my third one.

The handling. The smooth power. The torque. The way you just "point and shoot" when you ride it. I just kept saying to myself, "What a bike. What a bike."

To me, the R90S remains the most beautiful motorcycle ever designed. The Daytona Orange paint, the Teutonic styling of the boxer-twin engine, and the bikini fairing all meld into a gorgeous, flowing, timeless masterpiece.

On my maiden voyage aboard the R90S, I was in no hurry. This wasn't just because it was an unfamiliar bike, but because the CT125 and C125 Hondas had taught me to enjoy riding at forty-five to fifty miles per hour. It was nice to have the power of the big BMW, and equally nice not to use it all.

Once again, I felt zero buyer's remorse. Instead—especially after a recent talk with my sister about growing older, declining health, and our increasing inability to do things—I had simply looked forward to the arrival of the R90S.

I had never experienced the slightest disappointment with the two previous R90Ss I owned—mind you, they were museum-quality

motorcycles. This one, however, was a rider-quality survivor, and its less-than-perfect condition let me down from the start. The first glaring issue hit me the moment it arrived: when the trailer doors opened, I noticed the paint carried far more patina than I expected.

It had clear-coat fade on the rear fender—the first thing I saw—as well as on the gas tank and front fender. There were some scratches on the tank and body, but the paint was entirely original. Nonetheless, I felt a tinge of disappointment—an irrational emotion for me when looking at a Daytona Orange R90S that's mine!

After looking it over, I realized it was a beautiful survivor. The real problem was that I had always owned near-perfect R90S models, and when you get used to the best, well, second best is just that.

I decided to see how she ran and rode. I pulled the choke, hit the starter, and it was an instant start: no smoke, no rough idle—just smooth as silk.

After a twenty-mile ride, I knew once again that I had made the right choice to experience the rare thrill of a classic R90S. On the road, she purred like a kitten in my lap, never missing a beat.

Once I refreshed my muscle memory on how to pilot an R90S—especially through the twisty turns—I was deeply pleased, though highly aware of the need for new tires.

Back home, I evaluated my purchase. I was in at a fair price of ten thousand dollars. It ran great, looked the part of an original survivor, and rode exactly like an R90S is supposed to.

It was the perfect R90S for my desires and needs—one to ride and to pet. I did not want a pristine garage queen, forcing me to

live in fear of the very first scratch. I had gotten exactly what I wished for.

But how did this sudden appearance of another R90S happen? I like to say it was the Honda CT's fault! That little bike was so disappointing that I began to crave a real motorcycle again—one that could cruise effortlessly at fifty miles per hour without dreading a mild incline. And I didn't have the patience to wait until the CT sold—time is always of the essence in my head.

So, I gave in to my old adage that two motorcycles are twice as nice. In all honesty, that statement and blaming it on the CT125 are just fragments of the reasons there is another R90S in my life. The other catalysts for this purchase run a lot deeper and came upon me a lot faster. So, take a deep breath, and let's dive deeper.

In March 2026, I received my first Social Security check—an event I never thought I would see. With it, my mindset about where I am and where I am headed began to undergo a paradigm shift.

I started thinking about the role motorcycling plays in my life, and for how much longer I can sustain it. Having sold or thrown away nearly everything I owned just over a year ago—including my beloved artwork—I scaled my possessions down to about five plastic crates, a piano, two guitars, and a faded twenty-year-old Camry.

This shedding of weight brought a new perspective on exactly what baggage is worth carrying through the rest of my life's journey.

Ever since the onset of COVID, I realized that a motorcycle is one of my most valued possessions—one that "provides" on a multitude of levels.

I have always appreciated art, and recently, I recognized that one of the most beautiful things to me is the pure design aesthetic and engineering of a BMW R90S in Daytona Orange.

It has been exactly fifty years since I first saw, touched, and petted an R90S while working at Clearview Suzuki. Back then, I touched the smoke black and silver, but fell hopelessly in love with the Daytona Orange.

Now, this very R90S is fifty years old. Remarkably, it had also been fifty years to the month that BMW dominated and won the first-ever AMA Superbike race at Daytona. Fifty years... everything just seemed to align for me and this R90S

As well, just a month ago, I succumbed to my sister's advice to park some money in a CD yielding 3.8 percent. It felt odd from the onset—a completely foreign concept to me—and it immediately gave me buyer's remorse.

I quickly decided that investing ten thousand dollars in an R90S made far more sense. Furthermore, driving my mom's old Camry, which has suffered from "clear-coat cancer" for the past few years, has given me a deep appreciation for simplistic, analog, low-maintenance machines. The Camry's faded paint actually cured my old obsession with having to pamper perfect finishes!

Add it all up, and this new R90S acquisition perfectly fits my plan for growing older. Somewhere in my mind, I truly do think—not just believe—that this machine will be a long-time companion.

Even if it eventually becomes nothing more than a tangible reminder of the lifetime of joy motorcycling has provided me, it's still a stunning piece of art to just sit and stare at. And there you go:

those are all the reasons this R90S was always destined to be a "keeper."

There was only one thing I forgot to factor into the equation—myself, and my own shifting mindset. "Keeper" and Edwin are an oxymoron. In less than three months, the R90S was gone, sold on June 5th at a loss of only four hundred dollars—a new low record of loss.

So, what happened this time? Well, the bike actually required a fair amount of work and money to bring it up to a truly reliable, rider-condition state. I spent countless hours rebuilding the front brake calipers and rotors, fighting endless alignment issues with those notoriously over-engineered BMW brakes just to get them back to proper working order.

Countless hours were spent polishing. Countless hours were poured into long-overdue maintenance, accompanied by many, many harsh words concerning German over-engineering.

But far too much time was spent agonizing over the missing VIN plate on the steering neck. It was a true "How did this happen?" moment. I literally lay awake some nights wondering how a VIN plate simply goes missing.

I even began inventing stories in my mind to explain it away—stories I was selling myself, and began to believe, just for my own peace of mind.

The missing VIN plate shot the bike in the foot from ever being perfect—ever. Not even a thirty-thousand-dollar restoration could replace the original VIN plate; you only get one. After hours of labor and over a thousand dollars spent on new tires, tubes, fluids, and endless carburetor

adjustments, she was finally riding, running, stopping, looking, and idling well.

However, in the middle of all this grease and frustration, a revelation hit me: I had never actually owned an R90S that I had to work on. My first one was barely twenty years old with low mileage. The second was simply too pristine to ride. Working on this R90S changed everything.

I realized this is actually an incredibly complex machine. The Germans didn't just settle for the status quo--no sir, they engineered floating front calipers with eccentric adjuster bolts. They utilized "top hat" and "wedding ring" shims in the axle mechanisms to keep things aligned within 0.05 millimeters, alongside master cylinder adjustments down to a single millimeter. Exact science was the order of the day.

It's no wonder they cost over three thousand dollars in 1976--more than twice the price of a Honda CB750. It's no wonder they are rare, and it's no wonder you need a truckload of specialty tools to do anything right. If you ever get bored, read up on how to shim the rear hub tolerances correctly; afterward, you will find quantum physics textbooks a whole lot easier to understand.

I realized I owned a fifty-year-old, seventy-one-thousand-mile machine. I owned a ticking time bomb waiting to go off in my very thin wallet. I realized what a crushing weight owning and maintaining a classic R90S really is. Every single time you ride it, the countdown to the next failure begins.

I started agonizing over the day it would inevitably need a major service: the nearest specialist was all the way in northern Alabama.

A classic bike belongs inside a warm, climate-controlled garage, not trapped under

a plastic greenhouse in the punishing southern humidity. To own one, you have to be ready to drop a thousand dollars at a moment's notice-as a down payment.

I realized that at any time, I might need to pack up and deploy to a brand-new life at a moment's notice.

On my rides—which totaled about eight hundred miles over those two months—the bike began to feel cumbersome, antiquated, and lacking in basic riding comfort. It was heavy and awkward to maneuver when stopped, and it featured those typical BMW ergonomics seemingly designed only for people over six feet tall.

I also found it hard to enjoy the rides due to the severe wind buffeting from the bikini fairing; the constant howling set my tinnitus into high gear. I found the bike comfortable enough to cruise at forty-nine miles per hour, except for that wind.

Soon, I found myself missing the quiet comfort of the Honda Cub—its windshield, its simplicity, its lightness, and its fuel injection. I really missed the Cub every time I put gasoline in the BMW.

The R90S averaged barely forty miles per gallon, while the Cub delivered one hundred twenty-five miles per gallon on those exact same routes. With gas hovering at five dollars a gallon for premium, filling the BMW's massive six-gallon tank became a burden; I simply could not afford the rides.

The ultimate charm of the R90S is its beauty—something you completely lose sight of while in motion. I actually caught myself trying to look down at the bike while riding, desperate to appreciate the legendary machine I was astride. I almost ran off the road three times. Once again, the reality hit me: when you are in motion

on a motorcycle, it doesn't matter what you are riding, because you can't actually see it!

Standing there looking at the BMW, I found myself doing the math.

And as I always do, I had already listed the bike on Facebook Marketplace—just in case the Lord wanted it to go. And—poof! In a heartbeat, it was gone.

A buyer materialized out of nowhere in a sluggish market. Once again, sanity prevailed, and I let another R90S go.

My attraction to the machine is fueled by a nostalgia so powerful it completely overwhelms the reality of ownership. An R90S simply requires more than I have to offer it.

As time marches on, the commitment to preserve it only grows larger, while my own ability to meet the requirements of proper, peaceful ownership continues to diminish.

The lessons learned from owning this R90S were many. The most important was coming to the sane realization that until I have the proper means and housing for an R90S, owning one is simply inane.

This also brought a clearer understanding that the perfect alignment of money and space is shifting exponentially toward the "will not happen" spectrum of my reality.

I learned that as I age, the true pleasure of motorcycling is not found in the machine itself, but in the riding experience. It has become abundantly clear that I garnered far more riding pleasure from that little Honda Cub than this R90S could ever provide—across every single spectrum of ownership.

I learned what a terrifyingly powerful force nostalgia truly is. It can easily hijack your mind and dictate your actions.

Moving forward, I realize that nostalgia is a feeling best left ignored.

The R90S is rapidly losing its crown and glamour in the motorcycle world. Over just the past few months, a plethora of R90S models have hit the market, many of them one-owner bikes. The generation that was once captivated by them is aging out, and the younger generation behind us can see that a BMW R100S—only a few years newer—is actually a better machine for half the cost. Yet, they still aren't interested.

I learned that I am standing at the very cusp of a massive generational shift. There are still a few people from my generation desperately buying up the remaining R90Ss—one last chance to grasp a childhood dream before it is too late—even as nice, original examples become harder and harder to source.

Finally, I learned that time moves far faster than I realize. I first lusted after an R90S fifty years ago. I got my first one twenty-five years ago, until the shock of September 11th prompted a sale. I owned a perfect, all-original example six years ago, but a lack of proper storage prompted its departure. And now, I had obtained a lesser, survivor-condition machine that still deserved far more than I could offer—a reality that, along with six more years of aging on my part, quickly prompted a final sale.

I do believe this Daytona Orange R90S is destined to be the Daytona "Sunset" Orange of my motorcycle ownership experience.

Most importantly, I learned that if I ever find myself with the means and a proper garage, an all-original, pristine R90S will undoubtedly be parked right next to my Bentley S1—ready to fulfill all of my

nostalgic motor vehicle dreams at the turn of a key.

Time may be running out on that dream, but thankfully, I have already experienced three R90S models and a Bentley. I have fulfilled and completely surpassed the dreams of that sixteen-year-old boy who so lustfully wanted an R90S: I have owned three. And that makes me smile. A lot.

Meanwhile, being foolish with funds never grows old.



2021 HONDA C125 SUPER CUB: RIGHT BACK WHERE I STARTED FROM

Three days have passed since I sold the R90S, and I'm already waiting for a shipper to give me a pickup date for my new bike... another Super Cub! Yep, I'm heading back to the beginning-again!

The narrative of my riding life seems to have a permanent theme of "again," as I buy the same model bikes over and over.

After the lessons learned on the R90S and my intense longing for the simplicity of the Cub, well, I found one-in Ohio.

It's another "girl's bike"-say it ain't so! But it is.

This Cub is supposed to be super clean, features a few nice options, and has only twenty-seven hundred miles on the odometer. I picked it up for twenty-three hundred dollars. With shipping, insurance, tax, license, and a few accessories, I'll be all in for thirty-two hundred. Not a bad start.

My maiden voyage on the new Cub launched on June 26, 2026, and truth be told-again-the Honda Cub offers one of the purest motorcycling experiences to be had!

And what a spectacular morning it was. It had been a long time since I took a sunrise ride, and this morning I simply thought, I'm going-good choice.

The sun was peeking over the horizon, a light summer fog hung in the low areas, and the air was heavily perfumed with mimosa trees, which are incredibly thick this year. It carried the pure scent of nature mixed with the smell of cattle-a true sensory delight that brought a flood of smiles.

The Cub just purred, and I cruised along at forty to forty-five miles per hour. What a treat to float through the morning. And my

dog was out! He and his little yappy companion greeted me. I nearly stopped to wait until he reached me, and then we raced slowly along the road.

Just at the end of his run, a whole flock of young ducks came bumbling, tripping, and running across the lane. I had to come to a complete stop because there were so many of them, and they were just honking away.

The corn is so lush and tall, and the summer trees are so thick. The mist was heavy on the fields. I passed cattle, horses, and the very first thing I saw on Highway 55 was a rabbit, with a Hawk trailing close in the sky—I wondered who had breakfast, or who was breakfast.

But it's wonderful to have another Cub! It was pure riding pleasure this morning—so light, so nimble, and so effortless. Pure fun, pure pleasure, and many smiles in a beautiful world. A true blessing.

And here's one for the BMW engineers to scratch their heads and contemplate—the engineering of Japanese genius—the Cub yielded an amazing average of one hundred and forty-four miles per gallon!

Yep, one hundred and forty-four miles per gallon. At an average speed of about forty-three miles per hour, just nice and easy.

And the slow pace is wonderful; this Cub does so much better than the CT125 ever did. Today I went riding and engaged my throttle lock, allowing me to ride hands-free for miles! The Cub tracks incredibly straight and smooth, just purring along.

As a note, there is a normal straight-cut gear whine between thirty-nine and forty-one miles per hour on this Cub at twenty-eight hundred miles on the clock.

That said, I will easily recognize if any noises develop outside of this norm and can

look for causes. Hopefully, this Cub will just ride on and on and on—you know, I bet this bike could be a keeper!

When I returned home, my mom asked how my ride was. "Just like medicine." That's what I told her. And it was. It was just wonderful, and exactly what I needed.

A few days passed and I woke up with a tremendous inner irritation. I went outside, saw the fog, felt the cool air on a summer solstice day, and decided I would rid myself of my pissy attitude—I reached for the medicine cabinet and grabbed the keys to the Cub. It took fifteen minutes of riding for the Cub's magic and medicinal qualities to start working, but by then, I was smiling.

I was enjoying the world. My mind was clear and at peace behind the high windshield and the huge wind deflector I had installed—a concession to old age. It creates a pleasant pocket of quiet air, still enough to think, or I can lift my head to hear the rush of the wind and drown out the incessant ringing in my ears from a lifetime of auditory abuse.

I've said it repeatedly throughout these books, but it's worth repeating again—if only for myself—astride a motorcycle is the only place I am truly content. It's the only place my mind is at peace. It's the only place I'm happy. That was true the first time I rode a Honda Cub fifty-six years ago, and it is still true today.

Lately, at times, I feel I have nothing material or tangible left, and then, like this morning, I realize I have a wonderful life. It's a life not bound by tangible things, but one of freedom-of sorts—a life that offers me the opportunity to do exactly what I did this morning: ride through a

beautiful world, and then go home and have coffee with my mom. Blessed, very blessed.

As the years pass, the days and weeks when Mom is not as bright and energetic are increasing. Sickness lingers longer. Energy wanes. She's going to be ninety-five next month. I admit, during these off-times when she's not feeling well and is sleeping a lot, I get scared for her-and for myself. It makes me contemplate the future, and I let it put a damper on the realization of how good my life truly is.

These are the days that a motorcycle becomes my medicine; and of late, motorcycles have become the biggest bottle in my medicine cabinet.

I had one such morning recently when I needed-not wanted-a ride for therapy, thought, and healing. I woke up at four a.m. in order to get an early start, but Mom was already awake and very confused. She kept repeating that she didn't feel good, over and over again. There were no specific pains or issues; she was just cold and feeling poorly.

We shared some coffee together, and by six o'clock I was able to tuck her back into her bed. I originally wasn't going to head out at all, but honestly, after spending the past week feeling incredibly anxious, afraid, and worried about her, I decided I desperately needed a ride. And so I went.

I headed out into the warm, damp air under an overcast sky painted with heavy shades of gray and brief slits of sunshine-how befitting, I thought. The trees and the passing scenery were a vibrant, verdant green, and the stark contrast of the dark, damp tree trunks against those deep summer greens was beautiful.

Cruising past the cornfields and soybeans, I found myself completely transfixed by the perfect symmetry of the crop rows. They looked flawless and lush. Moving past them at speed made the rows seem like a deck of cards being rapidly peeled, shifting in a beautiful staccato motion.

I have gotten so content to cruise at slower speeds; it's perfect for enjoying the ride and absorbing the beauty of the world. The air felt warm and damp—like a warm hug—heavily perfumed with the rich scent of freshly cut, damp grass and moist soil. The whole world felt refreshing.

Along the way, I had a long, pleading conversation with God about Mom, my inner feelings, and my deep fears. I assuredly heard, "Don't be afraid, God has a plan."

The prayer, the ride, the motion, the sound of the passing wind, and the steady hum of the little Cub working beneath me were indeed medicinal this morning. I came home feeling much better, though I still carry a heavy, yet calm spirit.

The next morning offered an opportunity to go for a ride. With a renewed spirit and a happy heart, I headed out on the Cub.

It felt incredibly special to ride it this morning. Having just re-edited the other Cub story from my manuscript the day before, riding up Old Highway 280 triggered vivid, powerful flashbacks of riding the roads of the Wiggins campground.

It brought a sudden sense of amazement that those memories were built fifty-six years ago. Time moves on. Things change—and things just keep on changing.

Thankfully, motorcycling remains the one true constant throughout all these decades of change—soothing my soul in a way that no medicine ever could.

The entire ride felt like an hour of dream-like floating through a perfect country morning, filled with the fresh air, the light, and the rich smell of hay, grass, and nature.

Combined with the effortless riding requirements of the Cub, it was a pure joy—not a dream, but just so perfect that it certainly felt like one—much like re-reading the stories of my life through the motorcycles I've owned.

Reading this manuscript covering nearly sixty years of my life and bringing it up to date has shown me several things quite clearly.

Over time, the tone of these stories has naturally shifted. The winds of time have carried the narrative from the frivolity of youth to the weight of age.

Yet through it all—across nearly six decades—motorcycles have remained my sole constant: the anchor of my life, my adventures, my remaining sanity, and my hopes for the future.

At the end of the "BMW F650GS" story it ended with the words "The End." Thankfully, it was not the end, but rather a chance to rest and refuel for the journey that lay ahead.

Throughout these pages, I have seen my life through motorcycles. I grew up on—and grew old on—two wheels. Nearly sixty years, nearly sixty bikes, and here I am, right back where I started: on a Honda Cub.

At this point, I plan to keep on riding until they put me out to pasture, and perhaps this little Cub will be the bike that takes me there.

You know, this one just may turn out to be a "keeper."



Epilogue

Damn! That was fun. Can I go again?

For nearly sixty years, I have been riding motorcycles. Thankfully, the worst injuries I have sustained are arthritis in nearly every joint of my body, bad knees, and several discs in my back that should belong to someone in their eighties—but they've been that way for forty years.

I don't need the Weather Channel or a barometer to tell me when the weather is going to change; my back tells me. In fact, I might add that my back is actually more reliable than the local weatherman.

All things considered, I have been incredibly blessed to have never been seriously injured while motorcycling.

Over the years, presidents, countries, and world economies—not to mention friends, wives, money, music, health, and wealth—have come and gone. However, motorcycles have remained the one constant, providing fun, laughter, excitement, and sanity.

Jesus has provided me with eternal salvation, forgiveness, and many earthly pleasures to enjoy, along with a host of guardian angels who have definitely worked overtime.

Looking back, the parallels between how I rode motorcycles and how I lived my life are striking: both were done wide open, and both usually ended in spectacular crashes.

Time aboard a motorcycle lends itself to self-reflection, analysis, and meditation on where you have been and where you are going—both in life and on the road.

Many times, motorcycles have been a conduit to feeling closer to God, allowing me to pray while enjoying His creation from the saddle.

As I re-read these stories, I realized that I could put colored sugar sprinkles on top to make it look sweet, but the reality is that my actions in life have often been a cupcake of stupid. I don't say that with personal condescension, but from a reflection on facts.

But my life couldn't have been any different, for I have been a motorcycle fiend since I was eleven years old. I have always lived for the "now." My foresight is about as far-reaching as the end of this sentence.

However, as I have aged, I have begun to see things less in a temporal light and more through an eternal lens. It's true that motorcycles are nothing more than a temporal treat in a temporal world.

I have had the pleasure of possessing many wonderful things. Today, only a handful of those things still exist. Yet, I still have a motorcycle and I have the memories, which I have shared with you on these pages.

Allow me to reiterate what I have said before: if I were lying on my deathbed, I would be smiling from ear to ear. If I were dying now, from a worldly perspective, I would have to say that I came out ahead.

There's a smile on my face, unspent money in the bank, a motorcycle to ride, and the ability to ride it. However, I would have just one regret—that I didn't buy just one more motorcycle.

To be continued.