

My Life Through Motorcycles

Written By

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Based upon my Forty-Five Years of Motorcycling

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Me

I'm Alive

Temporal Treats

The Motorcycle Memoirs

My Life **T**hrough Motorcycles

My Guardian **A**ngel Wants Overtime

In God I Trust.

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INTRODUCTION TO SECTION ONE: 1970-1979

*"I knew I shoulda' made that left toin' in Albakoikie."
- Bugs Bunny*

Who would think that you could trace where you've ended up in life directly back to the actions you took in fifth grade? I can, and that's where I went wrong. Much like Bugs Bunny, I took a wrong "toin'," mine was in fifth grade.

Since then I've had many interesting experiences and learned countless lessons, many of these lessons and experiences were learned and took place while astride a motorcycle. There's enough stories to fill a book - so I did.

This book can best be described as a collection of coming of age and aging stories. They trace my life through the motorcycles I've owned. The stories follow me from being an eleven year old boy in 1970, to a fifty-five year old man in 2014.

For nearly fifty years I've ridden motorcycles. Miraculously, I've sustained injuries no more serious than arthritis, bad knees, and a back that should belong to an eighty year old. I don't need the Weather Channel to tell me when the weather's going to change, my back let's me know, more reliably I might add.

I've lived life like I rode motorcycles, wide open and dangerously. My foresight is about as far reaching as the tip of my nose. I've always lived for now. I was told many times that I was "sacrificing the future on the alter of today."

I was aware there would be consequences. I know fun ain't free. I knew one day the piper would come-a-call'n. But I've had more fun than ten people should have. If I were lying on my death bed I would be smiling from ear to ear, much as I was after my heart attack, an event that encourages reflection upon your life.

I've also found time spent aboard a motorcycle lends itself to self-reflection on where you've been and where you're going, both in life and on the motorcycle.

That said, let me share my first conscious memory of my feelings toward motorcycles.

When I was nine, my Collie dog, and best friend, King, was killed by a motorcycle. I swore to hate motorcycles forever. Obviously something must have happened, motorcycles have been my passion for over forty-five years. I've owned over forty motorcycles, yet, I've never owned another dog.

In 1969, I was ten years old. I was a nerd. I wore glasses. I liked astronomy. I was a straight "A" student and read voraciously. My only bad habits were smoking cigarettes and cursing - but only I knew that.

I grew up in an area known as Bucktown. Bucktown was a small fishing community on the shore of Lake Pontchartrain. Bucktown was it's own world within a suburb of New Orleans, which in itself is its own world.

Bucktown kids were notoriously tough. By nine or ten, most were already helping their families by performing the duties of a professional fishermen. Equally, I did a man's job working for my father's company.

I was a Baptist in a predominantly Catholic neighborhood. That was odd. I attended private school. That was odd. My father drove a Cadillac and was in the Pest Control business. That was doubly odd. In essence, I was an oddity.

Kids in the neighborhood knew of me, but I never really associated with them. In fifth grade I attended my first public school, East End Elementary, in Bucktown.

My first week at public school threw me in the middle of the Bucktown kids. I couldn't have stood out any more unless there had been a flashing light on my head. By day two I had attracted the attention of most the girls in the fifth grade - because I was new *and* odd. A showdown with the boys was eminent, that day came early one September morning in 1969.

As I stood around the playground kicking pebbles, the leader of the boys, Ruben, AKA, "Boog," sauntered up with his gang.

"What's da madder wi-choo, ya too good for us? Whad-ya some kinda fruit? And if ya ain't, don't even think about steal'n our chicks," Ruben decreed.

"Yeah," chorused his cohorts.

I realized the next words out of my mouth would determine which way the year was headed. I took off my glasses and balled up my fists. I knew how to fight, and I knew how to fight dirty if I had to.

"Fuck you dick-head," I said, unblinkingly.

A hush fell over the playground. I braced myself and raised my fists. Ruben looked around, everyone was watching for his reaction. He extended his hand.

"Ya seem cool. I'm Ruben. What's ya name?"

"Edwin," I relievingly replied.

We shook hands. That was the defining moment that led to a long, adventure filled friendship with Ruben, until he went to prison. All you need to know is that Ruben is responsible for my becoming involved with motorcycles.

I got my first motorcycle a few weeks before my eleventh birthday. I got my second motorcycle a few weeks after my eleventh birthday, thus instilling the philosophy that one should own more than one motorcycle whenever possible.

When I was twelve I earned my first badge of honor, at least for the group of kids I hung with. I went to jail, handcuffs, fingerprinted, and locked up, the whole nine yards. I was bad with a capital "B."

My passion for motorcycles was extreme, by seventh grade my family had given me the nickname, "The Fiend," because of my obsession. By the sound alone I could identify what type of motorcycle it was.

By my early teens I was a full-blooded Bucktonian, and most Bucktonian's lived on the edge of the law, if not just outside of it. Bucktown has always had it's own standards. Both fortunately and unfortunately, those standards followed me through life.

From twelve to fifteen I bounced back and forth from public schools to the private Baptist school I had first attended. It was a desperate attempt by my parents to stop the downhill slide that public schools and my friends had led me on. In truth, I never gave in to peer pressure - I was peer pressure.

In ninth grade I began racing moto-cross. My brother-in-law, Terry, was given a Suzuki dealership for his college graduation. For me, life was a teenage motorcycle fanatic's dream.

By the end of 9th grade I was asked *not* to attend the public schools any longer. I returned to the Baptist school where, for the most part, I was given a high school diploma as a favor to my father. I did have to do my part to pass, I had to score a 124 on my History/Bible final exam. I did.

Growing up steeped in New Orleans's culture, and being in high school in the 1970s - well, I figured there was a reason why it's called "high school."

My high school extra curricular activities were expensive, let's just say Bernie Madoff would have been a role model. By eighteen I had a license to sell stocks.

After high school I tried college, taking the "Renaissance man" approach to education, studying everything from horticulture to interior design. I finally majored in self-destruction.

College didn't teach me what I wanted to know - how to make more money. I was bored. I was off track. I realized it was time to buckle down and focus on why I had gone to college in the first place. I decided to give it my all. I decided to party.

I soon found attending 8 a.m. classes very incompatible with going to bed at 4 a.m. most mornings. I didn't like college. Eventually, I developed ulcers and quit.

After leaving college I sold Honda automobiles, came out of an Ativan fog, got married, and went into the Pest Control business.

Through the years I've found owning a motorcycle is like having aspirin and nitroglycerine in the medicine cabinet. You may not always need them, but when you do, they're good to have on hand, for they're all medicinal.

Nearly a half century has past since I began riding motorcycles; I remember my motorcycling experiences as though they happened yesterday. Many experiences are etched into my memory.

Some memories may have faded slightly around the edges, like an old photograph, where the silver fades, leaving a clear, yet ghostly image, etched in time.

So, let me take you for a ride down Memory Lane and share some of the experiences and lessons I gained during my formative years astride motorcycles. Bring your helmet - I crash a lot.

MOTORCYCLE: HONDA P50

April 1970: My friend, Ruben, had a Sears moped, he exposed me to motorcycling. Ruben let me ride his moped several times, I was hooked immediately. I had to have one. I started a campaign to convince my father. I begged. I pleaded. I prayed. My prayers were answered unexpectedly one afternoon.

Shortly before my eleventh birthday, I came home from school to find a brand new, shiny, red and white Honda P50 parked on the back porch. My dad had bought it for me, but not for my birthday.

My father gave presents when it was a good time to enjoy them, not just because it was your birthday or Christmas. It makes sense to give when you want to, not when you have to; I've carried that lesson with me through life. Either way, I finally had a motorcycle! My first motorcycle, a Honda P50.

The Honda P50 was the pedal start model. It was affectionately known in the neighborhood as "the girls bike." Of course those comments led to many fights, usually fueled by the "four eyes" jokes they threw in for good measure. I wore glasses from two years old until I was thirteen - that's important later.

I was still nerdy, and young enough, to sit in my pajamas, wearing my red metalflake half-helmet, watching *Then Came Bronson*. I dreamed of traveling the country on a motorcycle one day, and of course, meeting "cool chicks" along the way.

From the get-go, riding the P50 taught me lessons, starting with how to fight better. I learned several very effective, if not fair, defense techniques from fighting with the Bucktown Boys. Most importantly, the P50 taught me to ride with all of my heart and soul.

My initial feeling of powering through the air with only a twist of the right hand was heaven, plain and simple. In that moment the world made sense. My mind has always been going fifty directions at once; suddenly, I had an acute focus unlike anything I had ever experienced. My mind and body had found a home.

Motorcycles were like two wheeled Adderall. Keep in mind, at that time there were no ADD diagnosis, kids like me were diagnosed as BAD, and a switch or a piece of cowhide was the most common cure. Riding has always given me focus, so ride I did.

Ruben and I began riding the levees of Lake Pontchartrain every afternoon, and as long as we could on weekends. Ruben on his Sears moped, me on my P50. We thought we were as tough as any Hells Angels member's, and in no time at all we had

the police chasing us as well.

The levee was originally horse riding domain; however, this was the era in which motorcycling had exploded, and naturally the motorcyclists clashed with the equestrian crowd. The cops normally cruised the levee's as part of their beat and to hang out, seldom was there a problem, but problems arose.

Increasingly, the Levee Board Police had to intervene in the growing spats between the two cultures, a "turf war" if you will. Inevitably the police sided with the horse riders, after all, horseback riding is clean and *quiet*, something we weren't. It didn't help our cause that most of the horseback riders were cute, smiley, teenage girls.

As tension grew the underfunded Levee Board Police began to get help from the Parish Sheriff's Department to help the growing feud on the levee. Most parish policemen found it an inconvenience; however, some loved the new challenge.

One over zealous parish policeman was known as, "Freddie the Cop." Freddie had made it his mission to rid the levee of "motorcycle vermin." Soon chases ensued between Freddie and the motorcyclist. To elude him we created hidden dugouts in the brush about every quarter-mile.

My time on the P50 taught me the thrill of playing real-life cops and robbers games. Usually, if you gave up the chase early, Freddie would let you go, or make you push the bike home, sometimes several miles. If you put up an elusive chase, Freddie's short temper would emerge.

As our bikes got bigger and faster the chases got wilder, and Freddie got in more of a "hot pursuit" mode. He would write tickets like crazy; I got my first ticket when I was eleven. He brought me to jail at twelve. He would impound bikes, drive you home, threaten you. Freddie was on a mission.

We all used to say that running from Freddie is where we developed the skills and nerve to race - sort of like the bootleggers and NASCAR connection.

Riding the levee is also where I honed the ability to do wheelies on the little Honda, yes, I could do wheelies on a P50. I would get the P50 up to speed, start bouncing and pulling on the front end, and before you knew it I was doing a wheelie; of course *I* was the power source that lofted the front wheel.

I had to get the front wheel high enough to defeat gravity from pulling it back down. The P50 gave me my first lesson on finding the sweet spot of a wheelie on a motorcycle. But I will concede, the P50 was not bike designed to do wheelies.

Shortly after my eleventh birthday my dad brought home a Honda Cub 50. My sisters didn't ride. My mom didn't ride. The Cub was too small for my dad to ride. So without rhyme or reason I now had two motorcycles. This instilled an important philosophy in me, that you don't need a logical reason to own more than one motorcycle - impressionable young minds.

I struggled in Math, my dad bringing the Cub 50 home was a great lesson in multiplication. I finally understood the principal of $(M) \times 2$. Owning two bikes was twice as nice as owning one. This multiplication lesson continued throughout my life. By thirty three years old I had worked my way up the multiplication tables to $(M) \times 15 = A$ lot of fun.

Beyond the initial rush of the P50 being my first motorcycle, one day, one incident connected to this bike stands out in my mind to this day.

Mother's Day, May 10th, 1970. My cousin and I had taken a ride along the levee. I was riding the Cub, my cousin was on the P50.

Every few miles the levee is interrupted by pumping stations that pump the overflow of rain waters from the neighborhoods of New Orleans into the lake. Most of the pumping stations had small boat launches. The stations and launches were surrounded by a flood barrier wall made of four foot high, one inch thick, steel panels.

As we approached the first station I began making a left turn, or more like a smooth arch, following the road that ran parallel to the steel wall. My cousin continued on a straight course, directly toward the steel wall.

As I watched and wondered, I audibly asked, "What are you doing? Turn! Turn - you fucking idiot!"

I can still see the wide-eyed panic in his eyes as he looked at me just prior to slamming into the wall at nearly fifteen miles per hour. I still wonder if he thought I could do something, like turn the handlebars for him.

I hit the brakes. As I came to stop and looked back, I saw my cousin sail over the steel wall. The little Honda's front end caved and the motorcycle flipped over the wall, right behind my cousin. Both my cousin and my motorcycle disappeared from sight. In truth, I was more concerned about what had happened to my motorcycle.

I rushed to the steel wall and peered over. Inside of a small aluminum flat-boat was my cousin and the P50. Both had landed inside a small skiff on a trailer, attached to a truck about to pull off.

I jumped over the wall. The man driving the truck got out and stared in bewilderment at his catch. My cousin seemed to have only suffered a broken arm. The man figured while he had them both in the boat he would drive them back to my house, about a mile away.

The man's actions have been a lesson that has become more clear through the passing years. The man had brought my cousin and bike home, doing what was simple and fast. The world was still a place where your every move, good or bad, didn't become a litigious liability. In time, I've learned it was a better time to live. The world was a more kind and simpler place.

My time on the P50 taught me several important lessons that have served me well in motorcycling and life. The lessons? Don't let anyone ride your motorcycle, especially someone that has never ridden a two wheeled vehicle with it's own power source. It's clear to me that those who shouldn't ride motorcycles becomes evident as soon as they try.

Another important thing I learned was: if you're afraid, either conquer your fear or walk away from the challenge, otherwise, fear will win, especially on a motorcycle. There's truth in the ancient adage that says the strong survive and the weak die.

The most important thing I learned on the P50 is that motorcycles are one of man's greatest inventions. I was hooked the first time I rode one.

The little Honda was the "bug" that bit me. It infected me with what has been a forty-five year long infection, addiction, and joy for motorcycling.

I suppose it's true, there's nothing as memorable as the first time, no matter what it is, and the P50 was my first love in motorcycling.

MOTORCYCLE: 1969 HONDA CUB 50

*"One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see."
(John 9:25)*

There's no way I can tell you about the impact the Cub 50 had on my life without starting nearly a year after I got the bike. The lesson, impact, and miracle? The lesson was, the Lord does work in mysterious ways. The impact, my head and body against concrete boulders. The miracle, sight.

Here's how it all fits together.

The levee system along Lake Pontchartrain is basically a huge hill built to protect New Orleans from flooding. New Orleans is a city built nine to twenty feet below sea level and surrounded by water. We saw how well that worked out in 2005. Between the top of the levee and the lake are large concrete boulders that act as a breakwater barrier.

One afternoon I was coming up the levee with the assumption that I was on course to jump the levee and land on the wide trail that ran between the levee and the lake. I assumed wrong, very wrong.

As I flew over the levee I noticed I was off course of the trail; however, I was in perfect alignment and on course, calculating speed and distance, to land on the boulders in four... three... - Bam! Damn! Sooner than I expected. It also hurt worse than I had expected.

I landed backside-down on the boulders. My helmet split in half. The toxic cocktail of youth and adrenalin kicked in. I felt no pain. My friends formed a circle of upside down faces, frozen in shock as they starred at proof of the invincibility of youth - me, alive.

"Man, really brah, I thought you was dead dude," they said in unison.

I jumped up, confused, dazed, and as always, amazed to have survived, again. I went home. I felt great. I slept good.

Since I was two years old I had worn glasses. My morning ritual was: wake up, put drops in my eyes, ignore the fact that the drops felt like gasoline, put on my coke bottle thick glasses, and *then* get out of bed. I was told that would be my ritual for life.

The morning after having landed on the rocks, I woke up to my morning ritual. Drops in my eyes, rub them, put on glasses. I couldn't see a thing. I took off my glasses and I could see perfectly. Put the glasses on, I couldn't see a thing. I left my room in surprise and shock.

"Mom!" I called out as I went running to the kitchen.

I told her I could see, without my glasses. She gave me something to read. I read it. Mom was confused. She called the eye doctor, they said to come in immediately. We did.

Now the old eye doctor, Dr. Gaines, who I had been seeing since I was two years old, was as baffled as could be. He asked my mom to leave the room. I became nervous.

Dr. Gaines slid his chair up close to me and looked at the door. He looked at me, real secret like, then he asked, "Have you had any head trauma's, you know, hard knocks to the head lately?"

I looked at the door, then at Dr. Gaines.

"Just between you and me, I'm not telling anyone else." he assured me.

"Well...", I hesitated, "you promise not to tell my mom?"

"Promise," he said.

"I crashed my bike on the breakwater rocks yesterday," I mumbled.

"And you hit your head?" he asked inquisitively.

"Yes sir, I split my helmet in half," I replied.

"I knew it!" he exclaimed. "A blow to the head must have knocked something into - ah heck son, it's a miracle either way," he proclaimed.

He called my mom into the office. Dr. Gaines explained to her that the best he could reason was, "It's a miracle, just a miracle."

Of course he couldn't give any guarantees as to how long said miracle may last; however, I never wore glasses again until I was nearly fifty years old and returned to college and I needed glasses to read. The said miracle is still working.

I suppose I learned and experienced more things about life and motorcycling on that Honda Cub through sheer numbers. The hours I spent on that motorcycle on the levee are countless, as are the experiences. Most of the important lessons about riding I gained at the "shell piles."

Several miles down the levee, at the second pumping station, was what was simply called the shell piles. The shell piles were a half square block, sixty foot high mountain of shells

that had been dredged from the lake and had been abandoned years ago. The pile was packed tight and had trails running around its base and up the steep sides.

At the shell piles I learned how to power slide around corners and ride with the throttle wide open - constantly. Riding on shells also taught me how bad, and how long, a case of "shell rash" burned. For a week your skin feels like it's on fire. It taught one how not to crash.

One afternoon as we were all resting and shooting the bull, a trike came roaring into the boat launch. He was hauling, and headed straight for the shell pile. As we sat in awe he flew up the shell mountain. The bike reached the top and shot towards the sky, continuing at least ten feet beyond the top of the shell pile. The trike reached maximum altitude, ran out of velocity, arched, and headed towards the ground, or rather, the water.

He had flown so high and far he was over the canal that fed into the lake. We watched spellbound. All we could say was, "Whoooooa," as our heads followed his launch, decent, and splash-down.

The man on the trike never let go of the handlebars. Later, when they pulled him and the trike out of the water, we found out he was actually tied onto the trike. He was dead as well.

The whole incident unfolded within a minute, but it has been frozen in my mind as clearly as when it was happening nearly forty-five years ago. It was one of those moments in life that happens so fast that it seems like it's in slow motion as it etches itself into your mind. I've concluded that when things go into slow motion they will be memorable, and generally end up bad.

It turned out the guy was on acid. He was a Vietnam veteran that was unable to live with the things he had seen and done in Vietnam. We called them "nuts" or "crazy" then; today we understand it to be post traumatic stress. It doesn't matter what you call it, it was sad then, and it's sad now.

A small track also ran around the outer perimeter of the shell pile, it contained several jumps and whoop-de-do's. A corner taken too fast or wide around the rear would land you in the lake. The whole track was tight and slick.

I soon found that my little step-through Honda offered a unique opportunity to have the lowest center of gravity of any bike racing around the shells. Around corners I would crouch into the dip of the bike's leg guards, the rear wheel sliding outward as though it were setting up a perfect pass of its own front end.

I could take corners like I was on rails. My 2.75" Yokohama knobby tire on the rear would spew up just enough of a shell filled rooster-tail to have people backing off. Meanwhile, I was running wide open, sliding, jumping, and passing Yamaha DT250's like they were stalled. The tricks I learned about racing at the shell pile would serve me well when I began racing motocross.

Soon I figured I needed to boost the performance, if not the pretense of having performance, of the little Cub. I thought the solution was a megaphone exhaust. Lucky me, one of the boys in the neighborhood had one that fit, sort of, and he only wanted \$5.00; plus he offered buy now pay later terms. I said I would take it... a life-long lesson was in the making.

Out came my hacksaw and hammer. I sawed off the Cub's muffler, banged the megaphone on, and secured it with a hose clamp. Nothing could have prepared me for the racket I heard when I started the Cub. It was loud, real loud.

I took it up the street and headed for the levee, heads were turning in anticipation of a motorcycle gang coming into town. People were shuffling their daughters inside, shades were being pulled down. People grimaced as I passed. You could hear the little Cub a mile away, literally.

I didn't notice the promised performance I was told to expect for my \$5.00. I did notice a quantum increase in my ability to draw attention, but not in a good way. It didn't take an hour before I had to ditch the bike into one of the hidey-holes we had made to hide from the police.

I decided the mega-phone was not worth \$5.00. I let the older boy I had bought it from, Fritcher, know. He reassured me that the megaphone was mine and that I that owed him the money. I simply started avoiding him.

Playing cat and mouse went on for about a week. One afternoon there was a knock on my front door. My dad answered and was greeted by a gang of boys. Fritcher told my dad the story of the megaphone, and said he was here to collect, either cash or a piece of my hide.

My dad called me to the door, my heart dropped when I saw the gang of boys. I stood halfway behind my father, he gently pulled me out in front of him, pushing me out of the doorway, front and center to the gang of boys. My dad asked if I had told him that I would buy the pipe.

I said, "Yes, but--"

"There's no buts," he told me.

My dad told the boys to go home. They began mumbling threats against me. My father reassured Fritcher that I would be down to his house shortly to settle the matter. The boys left.

My dad had a quick life-lesson-talk with me about giving your word, debt, and butt-kickn's. He told me to get the pipe off the bike, bring five one dollars bills, and to get in the truck. Off to Fritcher's house we went.

My dad parked a few houses away from the Fritcher's house, he didn't want the boys to think my daddy was taking care of my business. I felt more like he was throwing me to the wolves. I was scared to death. My father told me to go and settle the matter.

As I walked up the sidewalk I had no idea what to say or what to expect. I rang the doorbell. Mr. Fritcher answered, confused. I explained how his son had come to my house with the boys and that I was here to settle the issue. Mr. Fritcher, somewhat shocked, went to get his son.

I'll never forget the look of fear on Fritcher's face as his father brought him to the door. He didn't seem so big and bad with his father standing behind him instead of his gang of buddies. He looked at the megaphone in my hand. He obviously didn't know what to expect either.

I delivered my appeal about having been mislead about the performance I would get from the megaphone. I stated that I was not going to pay him the \$5.00. I set the megaphone down and reminded him that he had said it would be cash or a piece of my hide.

"That's where we stand, pick up your pipe or put up your dukes," I said, taking a stance, ready to fight.

Mr. Fritcher stood there with his arms crossed and a smirk across his face. He seemed to be utterly fascinated by my pitch and stance. I'm sure he was also aware of the obvious difference in my size and the stature of his son, who was also a boxer.

Like a Bantam Rooster, I was ready to fight. Fritcher said he didn't want to fight. I picked up the megaphone and thrust it out toward him.

"Then I guess this is yours," I said.

He looked at the megaphone, which I had altered slightly. I had beaten a large dent into it so that the kick-starter could get past the huge cone. He frowned.

"But you ruined it, I'm not taking this back," Fritcher bemoaned.

I reached into my pocket, pulled out a dollar bill, and stretched out my arm, trying to give it to him.

"I ain't taking no dollar!" he shouted, stepping back as though it were a snake I had thrust toward him.

"Then I guess we best get to it," I said, slipping the dollar back into my pocket.

Fritcher looked at his dad, his dad shrugged his shoulders and said, "He's given you three choices son, pick one."

That minute felt like an eternity. Was I about to have to fight? Was I about to have to pay? I was ready for either one. I felt empowered.

"Aw, give me the dollar and the pipe back," he said defeatedly.

I gave him the dollar.

His dad told him, "Put the dollar in your pocket and that pipe in the trash."

Mr. Fritcher shook my hand and thanked me for coming over. He told his son to shake my hand and seal the deal. We shook hands. I went back to the truck and got in, smiling. I told my dad the story. He told me that I had more courage than anyone he'd ever met, and that he was proud of me. I liked that.

I'm not sure if Fritcher learned anything from that experience, but to this day I can tell you what I learned, and how I've used those lessons throughout my life.

I learned to never buy something because of guarantees made by the seller. I learned to pay for what you buy, or said you would buy. I learned that a step-through Honda Cub 50 does not need a megaphone - ever, for any reason.

Most importantly, I learned to face my fears and problems head on and without fear. I learned about the power that comes from facing your fear, and how powerless fear becomes in the face of courage.

Many lessons in my life have been costly, very costly in a myriad of ways. But the lessons I learned from a five dollar megaphone transaction, and the dollar I had to pay, has been the best return on an investment I've ever made. I had to have a refresher course on the lesson of paying your debts years later when I owned a mint condition Husqvarna.

Oddly enough, Fritcher and I would tie up one more time soon after the megaphone incident. He was on the levee flying a kite. I was riding with my friend, Kevin.

As Kevin and I rode down the levee, Fritcher's kite crashed right behind us. The kite's tail got caught on my bike, I didn't realize I was dragging the box kite, or pieces of it, behind me until Kevin heard the screaming. The kite was in pieces. I figured there was no reason to stop, so I didn't.

Once again Fritcher showed up at my door demanding money. This time he was out of luck. I told him I wasn't giving him a dime. For emphasis I added, "Why don't you go fly a kite!"

He retorted with incriminating evidence, "I wish I would've hit you when I was swooping down to try." Realizing what he said, he left.

My friend Kevin, along with Ruben, bring to mind one quick lesson - mamma's always right. My mom told me when I was in sixth grade to "stop hanging out with them two, they're trouble." Premonition? Both Kevin and Ruben are in prison. Speaking of being stuck somewhere...

Another fond memory of my little Cub 50 was riding the sand bars in Lake Pontchartrain. At certain times of the year sand bars would appear about thirty to fifty feet offshore. Some of the sandbars were a half mile long, separated in spots by a few inches, and up to a foot of water.

There were several options available for getting onto the sand bars. My favorite was to ride out onto one of the piers jutting over the lake and jump onto the sandbar. This approach was risky.

Depending on the softness of the sand, the bike might get stuck a foot deep in the sand, that came with an immediate and abrupt stop of the bike, of course your body adhered to the laws of physics which demands that "a body in motion stay in motion until acted upon by an outside force," like the ground or the lake.

The smoothest way to get onto the sandbars was to wheelie the bike straight up and walk behind it through the knee deep water. The rear fender on the Cub had a permanent duck-tail curve from such antics.

One must remember, though I often forgot, sandbars are created by a low tide, and tides come back in. I was supposed to do the same before the tide - come back in.

On one occasion I was having so much fun riding up and down the sandbars that I didn't notice their diminishing size. The only way to return to shore was to wheelie through the water.

Well, that's all fine and good, but the water between the sandbar and the shore had become nearly waist deep. I stood the little Cub straight up and started wheelieing towards shore. The water was lapping over the rear of the seat. Bubbles rose between my legs from the submerged muffler. If the wheelie failed, the bike's vitals would become submerged.

This is where you have to admire the ingenious design of the Honda Cub. The wheelie had the engine above water, and the location of the air filter, high on the mainframe below the handlebars, allowed the bike to breath, and me to make it back to shore.

We stopped riding the sandbars after we finally realized the pulling power of soft, wet sand. We understood after several friends had their bikes disappear into the sand, the bikes were simply sucked under and gone. Several others motorcycles became so stuck that they were impossible to remove. I'm just thankful that I was never one of those boys who had to go home and explain that to my father.

"Hey dad, you know that motorcycle you bought me? Well I lost it. Where? In Lake Pontchartrain it got sucked into the sandbar."

Well, another place that wasn't good to be stuck was in the middle of the ever escalating feud between the bikers and horseback riders. Granted, the equestrians were there first, and my sister was one of them, but hey, times change, we were riding horses too, just a different breed.

Unfortunately, the obnoxious noise from out unsilenced bikes did scare the horses, many a rider was taken on a "runaway horse ride." If you've ever had that experience, and I have, then you know it's not fun, it's frightening.

Jumping the levee always had the possibility of a horse and rider passing by. One path ran up the levee and had a blind jump at the levee's crest, then a flat dirt road. One unfortunate incident that occurred was when an airborne motorcyclist collided with a horse that had reared up in fright.

The motorcycle smacked the prancing horse, knocking the riders off both the horse and the bike. Unbelievably, no one was hurt, not even the horse. They sold the horse, he suffered from post traumatic stress syndrome the rest of his life, or as we said back then, "He was freaked forever dude."

The one thing that kept the motorcycle and horse battle from becoming a war was hormones. The motorcyclist were all teenage boys, ranging from eleven to seventeen. The equestrian group was the same age group, but they were girls.

Many teenage romances developed between the clashing cultures. I still like women who ride horses.

My riding experiences on the Cub were not limited to off road riding, I also got my first taste of riding on paved roads aboard the bike. Our family often went camping. We had a Super-Cab Ford truck pulling a 32' Layton camping trailer, which forever ruined my ability to ever enjoy primitive camping.

One of my favorite campgrounds is Flint Creek Park in Wiggins, Mississippi. The campground and park have miles of beautiful paved roads. The property is owned by the state, the laws of driving applied there too. Thankfully I grew up in a different world than the one today, they allowed unlicensed kids to ride their motorcycles on the roads.

I would ride for hours pretending to be Peter Fonda on the open road, riding through the beautiful countryside on my imaginary chopper.

The roads were smooth, uncrowded, and full of roller coaster hills, all of which we don't have in Louisiana. I developed an equal fondness of riding on paved roads as I had for dirt riding that Honda Cub.

On camping trips, our family dog, a small mutt named Angel, who could reproduce faster than mice, liked to ride as well. She would sit in my lap as we rode. On one ride she saw a squirrel and jumped off after it, I was doing twenty miles per hour - she didn't ride with me anymore.

On the roads of Flint Creek I learned that one of the best preparations for road riding is the ability to bring your off-road riding skills to the road. Once, a large dog ran out in front of me. I employed my dirt riding skills by jumping a curb instead hitting the dog.

Not only did I learn to appreciate road riding in Wiggins, but several years later I experienced another "first" there. I was turned on by a bunch of country girls from Mississippi. I find an irony in that. I had the only portable music, a cassette player with a tape of Traffic's *The Low Spark of High Heeled Boys*, all twelve minutes of it. They had pot. Enough said.

After two years in public school I returned to Mid-City Baptist School in seventh grade. Every morning one of the school limousines - not busses - limousines, would pick me up. It was embarrassing, now that I was a bad-ass Bucktonian. It was also quite a juxtaposition to riding the big, smelly, yellow bus to public schools.

My mom used to pick me up in the afternoons. I waited for my mom with another student, Frank, who liked motorcycles as well. We got to know each other. We both rode motorcycles. He was my age but a year behind me, so we really never became friends.

Frank got picked up every afternoon in the "Doc's Yamaha" pick-up. Somewhere deep inside I was jealous. Oddly enough three years later Frank and I had become close friends. We shared car rides or rode our motorcycles to school together, for we had both returned to the Baptist high school the same year.

The "circle of life" thing was beginning. In high school Frank and I ended up going on a motorcycle trip and experiencing one of those memorable summers that old people, like I am now, look back on with fondness and smiles that hide secrets. You can read about that trip in the Suzuki GT380 story.

Somewhere hidden in the Cub 50 there must be a child rearing lesson. Example: My dad, by giving me two motorcycles, taught me that two motorcycles are better than one. In essence, I learned more is better. That turned into a break-the-bank habit through the years.

I would be truly amiss not to share the greatest things about life that I learned on that Cub 50. I learned that freedom as we see it in America, at least back then, always included the open road and blond haired girls, which are just as enticing as freedom.

By eleven years old I had learned that one of the greatest feelings in life - blowing effortlessly through the air on a motorcycle - can be greatly enhanced when a beautiful girl is on the back, like the neighborhood hottie, Pam, who was tall, blond, and on the back of *my* motorcycle one summer day. Her arms were wrapped tightly around my waist, her head resting on my shoulder, telling me, "how great this feels," and that she, "would always remember this moment."

"Yeah, me too," I thought.

I'm not sure if she still remembers that moment in the summer of 1970, but I do. I realized that day that the cup of life is closest to being full when you have a motorcycle *and* a pretty girl. Some things never change.

MOTORCYCLE: 1972 KAWASAKI G-5 100

"Okay Houston, we've had a problem here."

- Jack Swigert, Command Module Pilot, Apollo 13

The Kawasaki G-5 100 will be remembered as my first real motorcycle, not a scooter or moped, no sir, a no excuses bonafide motorcycle. One with a tank between my legs, which I soon learned was not always a good thing. The G-5 gave me one hundred reasons why my back hurt then, why it hurts now, and why it will probably hurt forever.

The G-5 is a good looking motorcycle. It's bright yellow paint, black accents, and fiberglass body panels and fenders are extremely stylish. I saw a mint condition G-5 at the Barber Motorsports Vintage races in October, 2009, the G-5 has proven to be timelessly stylish.

But back to 1972. I was thirteen years old and had been riding the Honda Cub for two years, it was time for a *real* motorcycle. When I saw the G-5 on the showroom floor of Cycle Stop, the local New Orleans Kawasaki dealer, I fell hard, I had to have it. The salesman, Joey, convinced me that the rotary valve engine was a screamer. He wasn't lying.

That little Kawasaki was quick. The real thrill was the G-5's acceleration, and being able to go above forty mph. That quickly became an addiction. My fetish for speed developed on the G-5. Did I mention how good looking the G-5 was?

The first time I took the Kawasaki down the levee I just kept glancing down at the gas tank between my legs. I couldn't believe I had a real motorcycle. I developed the habit of petting the tank as I rode, something I have done ever since on my motorcycles as I rode them. I squeezed the tank with my legs that first week until I almost dented it.

But beauty is fading. It didn't take long, perhaps two wheelies gone awry, before I had a Preston Petty plastic fender on the front. I discovered the delicate nature of fiberglass, and both it's positive, and negative features, which are: it's either perfect, or cracked.

After several months of riding, the G-5 developed the annoying habit of loosing power until it slowly died. I brought the bike back to Cycle Stop. Two days later it was running perfect again.

I never really figured out what mojo the mechanic put on the bike, and never really got a clear explanation of what the problem was, but it was running again, and that's all that mattered to me.

By this time I had returned to public schools again, I missed my seventh grade friends from the Baptist school. I decided I should ride over to my old school and show off - I mean show them my bike.

The school was in the mid-city section of New Orleans, miles from my house. I following the maze of levee's, which intersects most neighborhoods of the city, and was able to avoid all but a couple of miles of actual street riding, and at thirteen, with two tickets, and one ride to jail for driving without a license, that was a good thing.

Across the street from the three story school building was a three acre lot where a high rise building was to be build. It was to house a school, a college, offices and condominiums. The complex was to be built by Mid-City Baptist Church. Unfortunately, the project was financed by bonds that were stolen. It became an international scandal, but that too is a book in and of its self.

The vacant lot offered me a great place to show off to my friends, which were glued to the third floor classroom windows watching me do wheelies and jumps. I was always a showman.

A week before, I had torn the right footpeg off of the G-5; it's two little 10mm bolts were no match for the sky-high landings I made on the bike. I had to ride with my right foot on the engine case that juttet out and housed the carburetor. The lack of a footpeg didn't slow me down, but I finally had to have the peg welded on.

My friends still remember the show I put on that day, especially the part where two New Orleans police cars showed up. I left with the police in pursuit. I was able to eluded them, after all I had years of practice on the levee.

That day solidified my reputation all the way through high school as a bad ass on a motorcycle. I did have to add additional chapters throughout the years to keep that reputation polished, shiny, and up to date.

By the time I got back to "my" levee the G-5 did it again. It began losing power and stopped running. That was a dilemma, I had skipped school and my plan had been to put the bike back before my parents returned home. I pushed the G-5 over a mile, at double time, to make the deadline. I was furious at the bike, and very annoyed with its growing unreliability.

I made it home with five minutes to spare. I killed time on the levee smoking cigarettes until the school bus dropped off the other kids, then returned home as though I had been to school. As I walked past the G-5 I kicked it, spit on it, and mumbled curse words at it.

That was the beginning of my contempt and temper tantrums towards ill running machinery. It was also the beginning of anger management problems that have plagued me throughout my life.

At dinner that evening my dad asked me, "What did you learn at school today?"

My heart dropped. Dad never asked that question. He frequently asked what kind of trouble I had gotten into at school, but not what I had learned. He asked questions like that when he knew something. He liked to catch you in two lies and double the punishment.

I thought fast. "Honesty is the best policy," I thought, "tell the truth."

"Nothing," I said truthfully and boldly. I waited for his verbal move.

One of the two phones on the kitchen wall rang, which it always did during dinner. Dad answered and began a long conversation. Perhaps it was only minutes in reality, but in my mind, which still didn't know what he did or didn't know, time stopped as I waited. He hung up the phone.

"You didn't learn anything today?" he asked, picking up the conversation that I hoped had ended.

"Second chance to fess up," my mind screamed, "tell the truth!" I reasoned within my conscience.

Have you ever noticed that "conscience" can be broken into two words? "Con" and "science," or as I see it, the science of conning.

"I did learn that Kawasaki's are not as reliable as I thought. I learned that the levee's don't all connect in New Orleans, they're broken up."

"There, I told the truth - again," I thought.

My dad went on to explain the history of the Corps of Engineers, who had built the levee system, which reminded him to get some men on tractors the next day to cut some levees that his company had a contact with the Corps to cut. He picked up the phone and called one of his men.

I finished eating in mental tranquility. I felt better having listened to my conscience and having told the truth to all of my dad's questions.

"Whew!" I said aloud.

My dad had one of his men bring the G-5 to the shop the next day. Once again it was ready in two days. No real explanation, but the bike was running again. I felt better having the shop's assurance that they thought "the problem is solved."

The next day I took off toward the boat launch. Our gang was already there, jumping the new dirt and shell mounds from the dredging and construction. I flew over the levee and sped straight toward the hill I had mastered days before the G-5 had stop running.

My friends were waving and shouting. I nodded as I passed them and raced toward the hill. One good thing about my mind on a motorcycle is the absolute focus I have. One bad thing about my mind on a motorcycle is the absolute focus I have. That day it would have behooved me to have had less focus on the hill and more focus on my friends frantic gesticulations.

I flew up the hill, which was about fifteen or twenty feet high. It had a large flat top, much like a mesa - at least it did the last time I had crested it. Today, there was no top, no mesa, only a sheer cliff on the other side. Add the fifteen to twenty feet of the missing hill to the four feet of altitude my jump added, and there I was, about twenty feet high and climbing.

I remember looking back and seeing the ground below getting farther away. I saw the familiar look of shock and awe on my friends faces. The bike ran out of momentum. I can still see, feel, and tingle, as I did in the millisecond when the bike stopped it's ascent towards the sky and began it's decent towards the ground. Things went into slow motion.

That was in the age of man landing on the moon. As I started my downward decent, the immortal words of Apollo 13 astronaut Jack Swigert kept running through my head, "Okay Houston, we've had a problem here."

My friends scattered. Somewhere around ten feet from impact I separated from the motorcycle like a spent Saturn 5 rocket, pushing it away from me. It seems as though the physics of a falling feather and rock are true. The motorcycle and I made ground contact about the same time.

In slow motion I watched as the new fiberglass rear section, seat, side panels, and various other parts of the motorcycle exploded into an airborne collage of color and chrome.

I landed on my tailbone, which is connected to the spine, which is connected to nerves, which generate pain swiftly and concisely, and seemingly for life.

How I walked away, let alone how I walk today, is a mystery to me. I learned a couple of valuable lessons that day. Never assume things remain the same, change is inevitable. I learned to pay attention to the flailing arms and the "stop" motions that people make toward you.

I understand now that they're not necessarily encouragement to ride balls to the wall, but at times are more akin to the robot from the *Lost in Space* television show, when it flails its arms around and cries, "Danger! Danger Will Robinson!"

I also think I shrunk an inch that day when I compressed my body and spine. I picked up my parts and pride and headed home. Guess what happened on the very slow ride home, the G-5 began losing power and stopped running - again.

I went ballistic. I threw the bike down the levee, picked it up and kicked it repeatedly, then repeated the process several times. One upward kick sent the gas tank sailing through the air. I'm not proud of my temper tantrums, but I felt better.

Back to Cycle Stop it went. It dawned on me how aptly named the dealership was. Both my dad and I let the dealer know that this was becoming a habit that was nearing the point of needing the attention and help of a factory rep. They said they would take care of it - again.

As usual, the bike was up and running in two days. In three days I was off in search of a new jump, which I found within the ever changing landscape of the boat launch. New piles of dirt were everywhere. I looked for a new challenge.

I found one particular mound that launched you over a canyon and onto another mound about ten feet higher. In essence you could jump from the lower jump over the canyon and land much higher with the impact of about a two foot jump. This was good in theory, if everything stayed together and your power source didn't fail.

After countless jumps I decided to push the envelope. I was flying through the air. As I revved the engine while mid-air, I heard a terrible grinding and rattling sound, followed by a nose diving front end.

I looked back just in time to see my rear wheel hit the ground below and bounce away. No bailing out on this one, impact was in 4... 3... bam! Once again, sooner than I had calculated. I learned I wasn't good at mathematical calculations.

I gathered up the pieces, put the wheel on, without the axel nut, and limped home. Guess what? It began losing power.

I had to push it the remaining mile and a half home. Yes, I beat the crap out of the G-5 again.

I've never understood how the little G-5 still retained its good looks, and how unscathed the paint was. I've always been obsessive compulsive about cleanliness. I would wash or wipe down my bikes after every ride. My childhood friends knew never to touch the chrome on my Schwinn Apple Crate or put fingerprints on my motorcycles. How this bike still retained any semblance of beauty has always escaped me.

There was a dent at the rear center of the gas tank, where the tank and seat met. The dent was left by my crotch crashing into the tank after I landed from a jump on both wheels at the same time. The landing compressed both the front and rear suspension, leaving only my crotch and spine to absorb the shock.

For days my voice was as high as it was three years earlier, before puberty. The local Catholic priest wanted me to try out for the boys choir, but I was a Baptist.

The G-5 came home as usual in the miraculous two day time period. It ran like a clock. Once again, no exact problem nor cure was given. My dad let the dealership know that the next time we bring it back we would be going home with cash. The manager snickered. I snickered as well. The manager didn't understand that Marines *always* win the war. My dad is a Marine.

With the bike running good, back to the levee's I went. Ruben and I went to visit one of our riding buddies, Robby, who lived across the canal, which was somewhat like the proverbial "across the tracks." Robby lived in the wealthy section of Metairie. He also lived across the street from the reputed mob boss, Carlos Marcelo, and our classmate, Tommy.

When we would go visit Robby we would usually get a glimpse of the going's on around the Marcelo house. Once his daughter (I think) drove the Cadillac into the swimming pool after her dog ran out of the garage as the garage doors opened. We didn't dare laugh - until we had made it inside. We always speculated about how many bodies were in the trunks of the Cadillac's and Lincoln's that came and went to the Marcello's house.

But more fun than the Marcelo's was going to Tommy's house and ringing the doorbell in hopes that his mother would answer. It wasn't because she was good looking, it wasn't a Tommy's "mom has got it going on," thing; it was because we liked to hear her announce our presence to Tommy.

Whenever Mrs. Garver would answer the door and see us, she would roll her eyes, turn slightly, and call out to Tommy with a note, or symphony full, of disdain in her voice, "Tommy, the motorcycle gang is here."

Ruben and I would always do our best Eddie Haskell impressions of innocence and good manners. Mrs. Garver didn't buy it any more than June Cleaver did. We would imitate her endlessly. I still make fun of that statement and use it when biker friends come around.

Anyway, that day we had gone to see if Robby wanted to take his new bike, a new Suzuki TM 125 (arrrrgh, I hated him) with us on an adventure. Since the G-5 was running great, Ruben and I had decided we needed to try a motocross track, of course there were none even close; however, there was the golf course at New Orleans City Park, as a matter of fact there were two of them.

Robby opted not to come along, it being Saturday, the sabbath. Even the Jewish faith, like the Catholic's, could go race on Sunday and not be sinning, but no, not the Baptist's, but that issue comes up later in the AT-3 MX story.

I never cared for golf. I tried it once. I wasn't good at it, so you know I quit. However, I was looking forward to playing on the greens that day. We snuck along the levees and up Harrison Avenue, which cuts right through the two golf courses in City Park.

It had rained earlier that day so there weren't many golfers out. "Perfect," I thought. We went off the road and onto the greens. Four!

Talk about smooth and fast riding, the fairways made for wonderful wide open straightaway's. The soil offered perfect traction for doing donuts and slides. We were tearing it up - literally.

I was especially fond of the smoothness of the putting greens, and jumping from there into the sand traps. Ruben and I played a few rounds, never quite making it to the eighteenth hole, as that was too close to the club house.

It turned out that we were too close to the club house anyway, a brigade of golf carts approached us at high speed, say perhaps ten mph.

We dug up the turf and started making circles around the carts like Indians circling the white men's wagons. And just like a scene from such a movie, the calvary showed up to save the day, with fast horses and guns, i.e. read: police cars.

We took off. We tore out through the fairways with the cops slipping and sliding along right behind us. We veered into the putting green and jumped over the sand trap. One police car followed our path, at least as far as the sand trap. It was just like in the movies. Ruben and I were laughing so hard we had blurred vision from our tears.

We sped toward the wooded area of the park with the police in hot pursuit. We ducked into the woods, the police couldn't follow. We meandered through the woods for several blocks and found a place where we could hide. We waited until it was safe to get on the street.

We stayed under the thick canopy of the Live Oak trees for quite a while. Ruben and I were already familiar with two things: police helicopters, and the fact that "you can't outrun Motorola."

We escaped once again and made it home. We laughed until we cried, our stomachs hurt from so much laughter in one day. I know now it's not funny, or I've at least learned to say that with a straight face as though I mean it. Oddly enough I would have justice served to me for tearing up City Park, nearly forty years later. Let me explain.

Flashback to 1984: I needed pictures of my Bentley for hotel's to promote the "Picnic's in the Park" service I was promoting at that time, basically another way to make \$75.00 an hour while hanging out, partying, and calling it work. I figured City Park was a pretty place to take pictures.

I found a lush, green spot under the ancient Live Oaks and parked the Bentley where the sun shone through the trees and onto the Bentley's grill, its long radiator slats glimmered like swords in the sun. I set up a picnic, complete with an antique croquet set, and took the pictures I needed.

As always, it went fine, my parking the Bentley wherever I wanted and doing whatever I wanted. But as it does a lot in New Orleans, it had rained the night before. As I was leaving, the two ton car started spinning it's wheels. The rear wheel dug a trench toward the street.

It got stuck about twenty feet from the road. I jammed small tree limbs below the rear tire for traction. The Bentley dug another trench to the road. Once I got to the road, I got out to check the car. Just as I stepped out of the car a City Park Police car pulled up behind me, with its lights on.

After reading me the riot act about being a snotty, spoiled twenty-something year old brat - which I must say surprised me, as we had only met minutes ago. His keen sense of character must have come from the intensive training at the City Park Police Academy.

He asked me if I thought I was special because I had a Bentley.

I hesitated, chin in hand, a look of deep contemplation on my face.

"No," - (long pause) - "I just think I'm special," I replied.

He didn't have a sense of humor, nor an inkling that I wasn't kidding. He did have a fresh pad of tickets and an ink pen. He gave me a ticket and a court date.

"Yeah whatever," was my wise reply. I wadded up the ticket and tossed it away.

Flash forward to 2010: I was applying for a teaching position at a New Orleans public juvenile detention center, they also call them "schools." Teachers are required to go through an FBI background check, but Orleans Parish also runs a record scan for Orleans parish as well.

I knew something was awry when I was asked mid-interview to follow the building's security man. I also knew that I would be the twenty-second teacher for that class that year, and it was only October. It was an emergency hire, I wasn't too concerned that I wouldn't land the job. I had what they needed, a teaching certificate and a pulse.

He brought me to a small office that was affiliated with the New Orleans Police Department. A very stern woman began interrogating me about my past record with the New Orleans Police. I honestly couldn't remember anything that would be on my record forty years later.

"Are you talking about what happened in 1975?" I asked.

She dropped her file and looked over her glasses at me, "No, why? What happened in 1975?" she asked. "How old were you then?"

"Sixteen," I replied.

"Did you kill somebody?" she flatly inquired.

"No," I said

"Then that ain't it."

Much like President Nixon, I could not recall that which I [could not] remember. She said I would have to go to the parish courthouse and get a court stamped clearance for the incident in question, the incident that I still had no recollection of.

As I got up to leave she said, "Honey, you might want to let someone know where you're going."

"Why?" I asked confused, and a little nervously.

"Because there's a real old outstanding warrant for your arrest connected to this little problem."

Long story short. The "little problem" and warrant were connected to my golf course debacle with the Bentley. The charges included, but were not limited to: destruction of public property, threatening an officer, and failure to appear in court. We were able to settle the issue since it was so old and post Katrina.

"I thought all the records got destroyed in Katrina," I mentioned to the clerk.

"Not the one's on hard drive," she smirked.

We agreed that if I donated several pieces of art to the city, art pieces that had the portraits of Benjamin Franklin and Ulysses S. Grant printed in pretty green ink, they could give me clearance.

As we were wrapping up the trade the clerk looked at me and motioned for me to lean closer. I did.

In a lower tone she told me, "You some kind of lucky, you missed having the grand theft of property valued at over \$100,000.00 by two months. If you-da been seventeen at that time, you'd be explaining that one too."

"I thought juvenile records were destroyed aft--"

"Sha, yeah right. You forgot where-ya-at? This is Na Awlin's baby."

I leaned in to peak at the computer screen, "Can I see that--"

"There ain't no record of dat, you's a juvenile then."

"But you just said--"

"There ain't no record of dat either."

She pursed her lips and raised her eyebrows.

"Well I didn't steal nothing, they found the ring in the dryer, and--"

She rolled her eyes at me and told me, "Get outta here and go teach them chilen's someth'n, like not ta be a dumb ass after sixteen, like you was."

She was still laughing as I headed to the door. As I reached the door I heard her tell the clerk next to her, "Girl, listen to what that man done."

And that is yet another example of the circle of life.

Back to the G-5 and more adventure in riding. This time I was bringing the Kawasaki to Uvalde, Texas, where my dad had leased a ten thousand acre hunting tract in the Texas Hill country. I loved hunting, and this would be my first time to bring a motorcycle. I couldn't wait!

Before we go to Texas hunting, let me share with you my earliest memory of hunting. When I was seven I got my first gun, my dad's 410 shotgun that his dad, my grandfather, had given to him as a child. Several times a year we would go visit my grandparents in Lake Charles, Louisiana.

The surrounding countryside was mostly rice fields that were filled with geese; the skies were filled with clouds of blackbirds. These flocks of birds were miles long, literally. They actually darkened the sun when they flew past. My dad would bring me out to the rice fields to hunt birds.

Dad would slowly drive past the rice fields and stop at an area thick with birds. I would press the button and lower the rear window of the Fleetwood Cadillac, raise my gun out of the window, and shoot birds. Sometimes the dog would retrieve them, sometimes I had to actually get out of the car and go get them myself.

Like I've said, "Life is tough, always has been." And people wonder why I grew up with a distorted view of what's normal.

Enough of Lake Charles, let's go to Texas.

When you drive into the city of Uvalde a sign proclaims, "This is God's country, please don't drive through it like hell," - tells you something about the place. The area was God's country, I loved the wide open isolation of the lease, and I couldn't wait to explore it on my bike.

When we drove up to the ranch, the owner, an old man who was the epitome of cowboy, was rolling a cigarette. I used to stare in wonder at how, one handed, he would roll a smoke, lick it, and light it up, of course he always struck the match up the leg of his blue jeans. He was something you only saw on TV in New Orleans.

My father never had any problem taking me or my sisters out of school for a week or two if we were traveling. He felt that traveling and seeing other cultures was more educational than sitting in a classroom. He was right.

In the late sixties and early seventies, before the total homogenization of society, you really could travel hundreds of miles and be exposed to a totally different world, especially if you were from New Orleans, just going fifteen miles out of New Orleans is a different world.

When my father and I would go hunting in Texas, often twice a year, it gave us the opportunity to visit the border towns of Mexico - talk about a different world. It was a time before the towns had become what they are today. Whenever we went to Piedad Negras my father would go see his friend, Jesus, for leather goods.

I would disappear with Jesus' son, traversing the back alley's of the town to secure my contraband. Since I was a child I had always shown entrepreneurial talents. In Mexico, I found a way to pay for half of a new motorcycle in one trip, by smuggling switchblades. I could also get you a stiletto by prepaid special order.

I would buy up to twenty switchblades each trip. Crossing the border I would have so many switchblades stashed in my boots, pants, and pockets that had we hit a bump I would have been a soprano singing paraplegic.

To reduce the chances of a search I would always "declare" that I had bought a switchblade for my one armed neighbor's dad, and yes, he existed. At the time, handicapped people were allowed to possess a switchblade. It always amazed me that half the time they let me keep the declared item.

The profit was amazing. I used to buy the blades for \$2.50 each in Mexico and sell them at school for \$20.00 apiece. I made about \$300.00 to \$400.00, which was a handsome profit, particularly in the days when a new moto-cross bike cost \$600.00 to \$800.00.

I liked Mexico as a young teenager. It was exotic, fun, and fast paced. We could eat a five course meal in the best restaurant in town, dressed in our blood stained hunting clothes. As long as you had the cash you were welcomed.

I've always found Mexican women very attractive as well. The people were warm and friendly, proving that money can buy you friends. As part of my education my father would bring me into the slum areas and to the poverty ridden outlying areas of the city, where people lived in stick houses with no water or electricity. He exposed me to true third world conditions.

I understand the immigration issue has been a problem since Europeans showed up on Native American lands, but having seen and met people that longed for a better life for themselves, children, and family put a soft spot in my mind toward those who would cross into the country illegally.

I had to admire people that would risk jail, and even death, just for a *chance* to have a better life; who's only opportunity was across a small river. This was a time when illegal's were not welcomed with open arms and given the benefits provided to working Americans. They were jailed and deported, if not shot.

At one time, in the part of Texas where we were hunting, there was a bounty on Mexican border crossers. The ranch we were leasing was a main thoroughfare for illegal's. The owner made as much money on bounty as he did leasing to hunters.

Enough on immigration; the old joke that tells of the Indian chief who, in a meeting with a U.S. President, told the President that he "should watch his immigration policy closely, because we didn't," pretty much sums it up.

Back to riding the G-5 in Texas. Without question, one of my most memorable motorcycles rides occurred on a full moon night in the middle of Southeast Texas. I had hunted all day and had stayed for a sunset hunt. The moon was full and the landscape would be well lit for my ride home.

Earlier that day I was so bored I was shooting buzzards out of the sky with my Savage 30-30, then suddenly, I saw a red fox darting around the scrub brush. "Oh yeah," I thought, "you'll be a pretty mount."

I put him in my crosshairs and pulled the trigger. He dropped.

I went and picked up the fox and put him on the windmill water tank ledge where nothing could steal or eat my prize. That was about noon. The fox lay dead on the tank rim until I was ready to return to camp. The full moon was rising; being an aficionado of moonrises and sunrises, I stayed to watch.

Besides a half dozen buzzards and a couple of rattlesnakes, I had only taken the fox that day. I picked him up and gently placed him across the rear section of my gas tank where he could rest in my lap and I could hold on to it. Fine, off we go, headed back to camp.

The Texas landscape had an eerie glow in the full moon light. The headlight bouncing across the rocky path looked like pictures sent back from the moon. It was a very foreign landscape to a swamp-rat from south Louisiana.

After several miles of negotiating the trail by moonlight and a bouncing headlight I felt something rubbing my leg. I brushed my leg, the rubbing continued, and increased. I looked down and saw the fox pawing and scratching its way up my gas tank - it was alive!

I started freaking out. I had learned early on that while riding a motorcycle not to freak out all at once, I knew to stop, then freak out. I kept calm and stopped. The fox was on my tank, scratching away, recall that somehow the G-5 tank was unscathed through all of the abuse it had taken. All I could think about was that the fox was scratching my bike.

I kicked him off. He squirmed on the ground with one eye rolling around looking at me. To say, in the middle of the desert, on a full moon night, the scene was getting scary. I shot him again. He died, again.

To this day I have not been able to conjure up a story that makes sense of how a fox, shot with a 30-30, could lay "dead" for six hours, and then come back to life as a full moon was rising. An example that truth is stranger than fiction.

About the best explanation that I've settled on, which goes back to my Baptist upbringing and belief in the bible, is this: as is evident throughout the bible, spirits can possess animals. If for no other reason, because there is no reason, I believe the resurrected fox qualifies as a biblical example of an evil, tank scratching demon possessing an animal. So there.

When I returned back to camp my father's first response was that the fox was possibly rabid. He suggested I throw him away.

"Throw him away? He's getting mounted!" I retorted.
"Especially after he scratched up my tank!" I reintegrated.

We returned to New Orleans. I didn't have rabies, but I showed off those scratches on the tank from the fox as though they were a metal of honor, "battle scars" is what I called them.

I had the taxidermist mount the fox with an evil growl, baring his teeth. I still have the fox, and other mounted critters, stored in my sister's attic. I did throw all of my moto-cross trophies away nearly twenty years ago, but I still have that fox.

Once home I returned to thrashing the life out of the G-5, and my joints, on the levee. Within no time, the G-5 did it's stop running routine one last time, and I gave it one last beating. I was about to light the bike on fire, but Ruben talked me out of doing it. I've never figured why, Ruben liked a good fire as much as I did, actually more.

The dealer had the bike less than a day before they called. This time it wasn't fixed. The dealer informed me that the problem seemed to be "a defective rotary valve."

"Fine, fix it," I told him.

"Well, ah, the bike is out of warranty," he stammered.

"Uh-huh," was my only reply.

My dad I left the Kawasaki dealership without the G-5. We did have a full cash refund in hand. I told you, Marines *always* win. The dealer offered to give me any bike at cost. I decided they could keep their bikes and I would keep the cash and my business. I never went to Cycle Stop again.

With cash in hand, and the profit from my last trip to Mexico, it was time to go shopping, time to move up to a real moto-cross bike. I swore I would never own another Kawasaki, the experiences with the G-5 and the Kawasaki dealer left me with a bitter taste toward Kawasaki's to this day.

Remember I mentioned at the beginning of this story that I saw a mint condition G-5 at the Barber Vintage Motorcycle Festival a few years back?

Sitting on the bike brought back a flood of memories. I wanted it for the sole purpose of recapturing a very pivotal point in my youth, even if it was three times the original retail price. I had a long conversation with the owner about my G-5 experiences. He just knew he had a sale on the hook.

I was tempted to pay \$1500.00 for a lost piece of my youth. I generally stick to what I say, be it a promise or a threat. I swore in 1973 I would never buy another Kawasaki, and I'm sticking to my promise. Sometimes grudges are best forgotten, but not this time.

As I looked at the G-5 something in my heart and memory surfaced, out of my mouth flew the words, "Screw you, you piece of crap," and I walked away.

The owner had a look of total confusion on his face as I walked away from the G-5. I had a smile on my face and satisfaction in my heart, for I stood by my word nearly forty years later. I will never own another Kawasaki.

The lessons I learned on the screaming yellow G-5 were numerous and lifelong. Many of the lessons didn't sink in until decades later. I will share my lessons and epiphany's in no order of importance.

Many of the lessons I learned on the G-5 were very scientifically and mathematically related. I learned about the physics of gravity, the geometry of trajectory, and all about arch and angle.

Starting with gravity, also called gravitation in mechanics. Gravitation is defined as "the universal force of attraction acting between all matter."

This attraction is particularly true between an airborne Kawasaki G-5, it's rider, and the ground. They attract each other quickly, and with a force that helps you understand the Big Bang theory, Einstein's, not CBS's.

I also learned geography, horticulture, and some more entomology. I found out fast that *everything* in Texas seems to sting you, stick you, or bite you. I never saw so many rattlesnakes in my life, until 2010 when I moved the "Rattlesnake Capital of the Southeast," Jackson Alabama.

Part of the entomology lesson was, the bugs that inhabit Kawasaki's can not be stopped by stomping the life out of the Kawasaki, and that they're best left alone.

They say that people communicate as much, if not more, with body language as they do with words. I found that to be true also. I learned to not assume that people who are gesticulating wildly are not necessarily glad to see you, they may be warning you of impending doom; like my friends were doing the time I launched myself into the sky like a Saturn 5 rocket.

I found out that mysterious mechanical problems are *always* solved the day after your warranty expires, be it a motorcycle, washing machine, or whatever. However, I still don't purchase extended warranties, only gap insurance.

I believe the G-5, which incidentally does sound so NASA-like, is responsible for my having taken up skydiving later in life. I had already experienced the worst possible scenario of skydiving on the G-5, falling from the sky without a parachute and hitting the ground.

Every religion, philosophy, and belief, even rock and roll, has some saying, proverb, theory, or lyrics that teach us the lesson of reaping what you sow. As Wet Willie so clearly put it, "Everything that 'cha do, will come back to you." It's true.

The G-5 taught me that lesson in spades! Crash hard and it's going to hurt, and you're going to hurt for life. Tear up a golf course, later than sooner, you'll pay for it. Treat your equipment bad, and it'll treat you the same. Act like an idiot, and people will treat you like an idiot.

Being raised in the south during the sixties and seventies, I learned about, as did most people within my circles, to embrace blind prejudice.

Somehow, connected to the G-5 , I learned to let some of my prejudice's go. I learned that poverty and cruelty are colorblind.

For all the lessons I learned with the G-5, what I *did not* learn, then or now, is how in the world that fox came back to life. It stills puzzles me to this day.

Perhaps the lesson from the fox is simply the lesson that tells us that many things in life can't be explained, like love, the scope of the universe, and most mysterious of all - why I still wish I would have bought that pretty little G-5 at Barber Motorsports.

MOTORCYCLE: 1973 YAMAHA AT-3 MX

Having gotten a full refund on the Kawasaki G-5 lemon - no wonder it only came in yellow - and flush with my contraband profits, it was time to move up 25cc's and step into the realm of a real moto-cross bike.

With cash in hand, I went shopping for a new motorcycle. European bikes were out of mine, and most peoples, budget. The TM Suzuki's had a long waiting list and I had a short patience. The YZ Yamaha's weren't available yet, so I got the best thing available; I bought a Yamaha AT3-MX.

The local Yamaha dealer, Mohoff Yamaha, made me a good deal and gave me a standing invitation to come riding with them. The AT3 was a real moto-cross bike, not an enduro, but an honest to goodness "out of the box race bike," or so the ads claimed.

As soon as I got the bike home I was headed for the levee. I can still feel the rush that I felt the first time the engine came "on the pipe." I was immediately addicted to acceleration and craved more.

As I blazed along the six inch wide trail atop the levee, the first thing I noticed was the difference in handling that a 21" front wheel made. It didn't take me ten minutes to figure out that with a 21" front wheel, the front end of the bike was already poised three inches higher than the G-5 to do a wheelie.

After I had gotten used to the bike I went riding in Enon with the group from the dealership. Enon was endless miles of trails and logging roads that ran through dairy farms, raped over pine forests, power lines, and Tung tree orchards. We rode the hilly power line trails and through the woods and orchards almost all day.

Only one of those trips stands out with any significance in my memory, really just a moment in time. One of the hot-shot show off's (not me) was blazing by everyone on the downhill's, riding dangerously flat out, and I'm not just the pot calling the kettle black. He blew past Ruben and I, flipped us off, and disappeared into the dust, briefly visible as he would jump above the dust clouds.

As we came down the hill, in the clearing dust cloud, we saw the idiot going end over end. He was thrown through the air and landed in the high grass. We went to see if he was okay, even though he had flipped us off. Remember, Ruben and I were good samaritans and responsible citizens, so we stopped to check, not help.

When we turned the bikes off we could hear him screaming as he came out of the grass. He began vomiting violently. As we approached him, we nearly wretched from the smell and sight of him.

He was covered in, well, we couldn't quite tell what he was covered in, but it had movement to it. He had been tossed into the air and had landed on top of a dead cow, one that had swollen to the point that a pin prick would have popped it, and darned if a prick didn't pop the cow.

Smart aleck had hit the cow full on and face down. The cow blew up. He was inside the maggot filled carcass. Once we saw that he was okay, and realized he was not in our group, nor did we know him, we started our bikes, flipped him off, and laughed so hard we nearly peed on ourselves.

Over the next few months I rode that Yamaha like a mad man, wringing every ounce of power out of the bike. Once I had found the end of the power range I decided that it needed modifications. Out came the tools: a hacksaw, drill, and a dremel tool.

"Reeeee, reeeee," screamed the little dremel grinder as I prepared for surgery, smiling like a mad scientist.

The first thing I did was replace the reed valves with a set of reed valves from a 360 Yamaha, which took a lot of "reeeee-reeeeeing" on the intake port. I rejettted the carburetor and decided the bike needed more air.

I removed the small, heavy, metal air filter housing and made a still air box by fastening vinyl around the frame members below the seat. I ran the plastic carburetor boot to a huge sock filter inside, below the seat.

I ensured it was properly sealed with three roles of duck tape inside the air box. When I first started the bike and revved the engine, it had an actual growl, you could hear air being sucked in.

After much trial, tribulation, and error, I found the correct jetting of the carb. The bike screamed, but it was slow off the line. That was a simple fix with a twelve tooth countershaft sprocket. The AT3 came off the line like a rocket. I lost some top end, but that was a fair trade for what I gained in low and mid-range performance.

I began taking off every unnecessary part and bracket. I had already replaced the fenders from misjudged wheelies. The bike looked radical and it was a hole-shot screamer. The AT-3 would power out of turns with such strength I would have to be over the handlebars to keep the front wheel down.

I thought about gaining a few pounds and bringing my weight up to 123 pounds to help, but no matter how much pizza and junk food I ate I couldn't gain a pound. I still suffer with that problem - one heart attack later.

With all the modifications I had the AT3 so perfectly balanced and light it would actually stand up by itself, once you found the perfect balanced spot. I began practicing balancing at a standstill with me on the non running bike.

Here I have to brag. After months of endless tries I was able to walk all over the bike at a standstill. Without exaggeration, I practiced my balancing act nearly a hundred hours. I nailed it!

I could stand on the left side, walk around the front forks to the right side, down the right side, onto the seat, and back to where I started. It usually drew a crowd wherever I performed this trick, which I usually did wherever there was already a crowd.

As amazing as the balancing act was nothing could, and still can't, compare to the wheelies I could pull off on the AT-3. Not little slow wheelies, no, these were fifth gear, fifty plus miles per hour, near vertical wheelies. The longest one that was witnessed was over a mile, only because I was bored.

I would get the bike to speed and bounce the front end up, find the sweet spot, which was near vertical. Then I would lean into the handlebars and use the front brake to stop and start the front wheel turning. Later through physics I learned the turning wheel acted as a gyroscopic balancing wheel, realizing that did nothing to boost my interest in science or school.

I became known for my wheelie abilities. The girls loved them, and I loved to show off for them. Many of the girls lived down the levee where the neighborhood became more respectable and upscale; association with boys like me was discouraged by their parents. To say the least, our little "motorcycle gang" was very disliked, mainly because of the echoing noise of our unsilenced two-strokes. Many times our gang had up to twelve unsilenced two-strokes roaming the levee.

There was a section of the levee that allowed me to show off to all of the rich kids at once. The levee ran past a country club that was at the base of the levee. A chain link fence separated the levee from the pool and tennis courts. It was center stage for a show-off like me.

We all know the saying "pride comes before a fall," well my day came, and it was spectacular. People remember it to this day. My pride, and back, are still bruised.

I came blazing loudly down the levee, made a few runs by the country club, like Evel Knievel did at his ramp. I was ready. I went back a block and began the wheelie. I was in full form and perfection as I wheelied past the country club. I was stoked, once was not enough. So I did again... and again. Back and forth. I should have taken my winning hand and left, but no, that's not my style.

As I wheelied toward the country club my back wheel hopped over a small hand sized rock embedded in the ground, one I often used to help launch the front wheel. This time it helped launch the rear wheel off the ground. When the rear wheel returned to terra firma the front of the bike had repositioned itself a hair past the sweet spot, it started coming over backwards.

I tried to get the front end down. I squeezed the front brake hoping to use physics to bring down the front end. It worked! The front end came down fast, so fast that the bike shot out from under me. At this point the world went into slow motion.

I was standing on my boots, surfing down the levee in an upright position at over fifty miles per hour. The motorcycle continued ahead of me. The front end had come down so perfectly straight that the motorcycle continued it's path, without a rider, without me!

There I was, skating upright behind the bike that was continuing forward at a greater speed than I was. This game of chase lasted until we were right in front of the country club. Suddenly the smooth symphony of motion became a cacophony of the crash to come.

At the same time, in perfect harmony, the handlebars started violently going left to right, as I began my bodily decent to the ground. The next step of the dance was also in perfect time. The bike began tumbling end over end, pieces were flying off with every impact. Meanwhile, I joined in the tumbling game. I began flipping around like a rag-doll thrown through the air, or as my fishermen buddies who watched the spectacle unfold later said, "Ya looked like ya was a trout outta water brah!"

Both the bike and I finally ended our aerobatic display and began our high speed decent down the grassy levee, straight toward the fence, straight toward the swimming pool, and nearly seventy-five spectators.

We both came to a stop, followed by a cloud of churned up grass and dust. I ended up in an upright sitting position with my legs spread eagle inches from the fence. I was looking straight at my audience.

The crowd was a mixture of gasps and laughs. The crowd gave me a sarcastically laced, standing ovation. Too dazed to be embarrassed I stood up and took a bow. I walked over to my motorcycle and picked up the twisted mess. The handlebars were bent. The front forks were tweaked. The front wheel was not quite round anymore, but was still able to roll, albeit with a rising and falling motion.

I pushed the bike toward the street alongside of the country club. As I passed the front fence it was lined with the jeering crowd.

The girls screaming out, "Do it again, Edwin!"

I was served not a piece of humble pie, but the whole darned thing in one sitting.

Many years later my doctor asked me, "Exactly what did you do to be twenty-five years old and have the spine and discs of a seventy year old?"

I told him, "I could do fifty mile per hour wheelies for miles."

With a questioning look he inquired, "And how did that do this?" he asked, pointing to the X-Ray.

"You know how many times I crashed at fifty miles per hour to perfect that trick?" I rhetorically asked.

He grinned, and with a note of sarcasm asked, "Did you have fun?"

Smiling from ear to ear I replied, "Yes. Yes I did. I had a blast."

My foolish antics were also inspired by another childhood hero, Evel Knievel. Yep, you know it, I tried jumping cars as well. That was a very short lived endeavor, mainly due to my lack of carpentry and geometry skills.

I had lured one of the neighborhood boys, Daniel, into helping me build a ramp. I had sworn him to secrecy. I figured I would perfect the trick and then show it to everyone.

This leads to the question, "Do you know how many people can keep a secret? Two, if one is dead."

Unbeknownst to me, within two days, Daniel had told everyone. It seems as though those he had told were better at keeping secrets than Daniel.

With Daniel's help I built a ramp out of 2X4's and quarter inch plywood - yeah, *quarter inch* plywood. The next day we put the ramp in the back of his dad's truck and headed for my *secret* location to practice my jump. Daniel drove, since neither of us had a drivers license and it was his dad's truck.

We went to a dead end street were an old man in the neighborhood had several old cars parked side by side. I say old cars, I realize now that "old" translates to "collectable."

The old man that owned the cars was out of town. He also owned the vacant lots on most of the dead end street, so we were safe from adult interference. No need to have "responsible" thrown into the mix. We set up the ramp.

Like roaches coming out of the woodwork, the neighborhood kids started appearing. I was beginning to have misgivings about the motorcycle feat I was about to attempt, and for me to have doubts should have been warning enough, but it wasn't. Pride is empowering.

Without so much as a trial jump I was going to attempt to jump two cars. I calculated speed and angle, as best as my D-in Math allowed. I figured I needed to launch the bike at about thirty miles per hour, or somewhere in the range that felt like thirty miles per hour.

To make yet another miraculous, saving grace of God story short; I hit the ramp, it immediately began splitting from bottom to top. It was a race as to who would make it to the top of the ramp first, me or the split. The "paneling" held up long enough for me to become airborne, and then it split into two. Immediately afterward the 2x4 frame collapsed.

Split ramp and all, I was airborne.

"Hell and be damned!" I shouted.

Prophetic words indeed.

I was airborne at a way too straight up angle. I leaned forward to bring the front end down, the back wheel landed at the end of the first car's roof, creating a large dent.

I made it onto the roof of the second car, pushed the roof in so far it caused both the front and back windows to blow out. My front wheel went over the car's roof edge at a downward angle; meanwhile, the rear wheel went upward and over, moving into first place ahead of the front wheel.

I was catapulted off as though I had been riding a bull. The bike was only slightly damaged.

I had a nice case of road rash on my hands and forearms. Once again, most of the damage was to my pride. Once again, I got applause and vocal approval from the crowd. I never attempted jumping cars nor carpentry again.

Speaking of jumps brings to mind one memorable day on the levee with my friends. We would have contests to see who could jump the levee the highest and land the furthest down the levee.

We would get a running start on the trail between the lake and the levee, crest the levee and catch a lot of air. With the sloping levee you came down parallel to the slope; however, at the point of launch you would be nearly ten feet in the air above the flat road on the levee - the one the police cruised, looking for hoodlums like us.

On busy days you would have police, horse-back riders, and assorted people picnicking on the levy, we would have a lookout to tell when it was clear to jump. Several times these watch-dogs would play practical jokes, like the time I had been cleared for take-off, only to jump over the top of some people having a picnic lunch.

The worst, or best, practical joke was when we cleared our friend, Donald, to jump. Donald had just gotten a new TM 250 Suzuki, he was snobby about his new toy, we decided he needed payback. We cleared him to launch. He headed towards the levee, hitting the crest with a great speed, and then, he was airborne.

Unbeknownst to Donald, we had timed him to jump right in front of Freddie the cop's approaching police car. As usual our math calculations were wrong, very wrong. Freddie was driving faster than we thought. Donald landed on top of the police car, caving in the car roof, and continued a perfect landing onto the levee, and fled into the streets.

Freddie stopped, got out of the car waving his gun around, cursing us as we scattered for our motorcycles. We took off in three directions, some down the old highway along the lake, many of us ducked into our hidey holes in the brush, while others took to the streets. None of us got caught. Just another reason why Freddie continued his years long crusade to rid the levee of "biker vermin."

By this time I decided to focus on getting my dad to let me race. I'd been racing the Levee Gang for nearly a year. I was fourteen. I was growing old. It was time to go real racing. My sister's boyfriend, and future husband, Terry, helped convince my dad that moto-cross was safe; after all, I had years of riding experience. My dad finally gave in. Off to the races we went, the whole family came along - once.

We went to a moto-cross track in Slidell, Louisiana. It was the next and nearest race. The track was known for two things: if it had rained lately, it was mud-soup; if it hadn't rained lately, it was dry, dusty, and slick. Slidell was known for the pile-ups from riding in a Sahara-like, zero visibility, dust storm. It hadn't rained in a while.

My mom was worried. She said, "I don't know how your going to see in that dust."

My reply was simple and honest, "I plan to get the hole shot and stay in first place." - Wishful thinking.

The beginning of the first moto I shot out of the hole, and promptly missed third gear, twice. I was still ahead of a few, but behind many. I raced toward the first turn, totally blinded by the cloud of dust created from over forty bikes.

I only remember hitting something, then going over something else. Finally something hit me, followed by something(s) going over me. When the dust cleared, I was left with a bike that had a remarkable similarity to the way it looked after the wheelie fiasco in front of the country club.

"No worries, back to the pits, straighten things out, get ready for the next moto, try again," encouraged Terry.

"I can't win a trophy if I only win one moto," I proclaimed, "I'm going home with a trophy!"

Terry started straightening out the bike. I went to register for the 175 class. It was full. I tried to register for the 250 class. It was full.

"Then put me in the open class!" I demanded.

"You can't ride a 125 in the open class! You crazy?" asked the man at the sign-up desk.

"Then why is it called the open class?" I questioned.

"Guess you got a point," he realized.

He shrugged his shoulders and handed me the paperwork, "It's your body and bike kid," he added.

We got the bike ready. They called for the open class to line up.

First Moto: I optimistically looked down the line past all of the older guys shaking their heads, snickering, or just starring slack-jawed at the wide eyed teenager on a 125.

"What? Only twenty or so riders? And most of 'em are over thirty. My odds just went up," I mumbled.

The gate dropped, I shot out and was in third place. If there would have been another ten feet to the first turn I would have been dead last. I was wide open. Most of the other bikes still had another gear or two to go.

The track was tight and didn't have many long straightaways. Within a half lap I realized I could blow the doors off of the big bikes in the turns, easily picking up any positions lost on the fast straights.

The last part of the track before the finish had three tight turns, a switchback, and then a straightaway. The finish line was in the middle of the long straightaway. On the final lap, I exited the last turn in third place, the two bikes I had blown past in the turns were right on my tail.

They passed me before the finish line and I finished fifth. I was psyched. I rode past the trophy table and looked at the trophies. I was determined one of the open class trophies was going home with me.

Second Moto: I finished in third place. One of the riders who had finished ahead of me in the first moto crashed and DNF'ed. Several of the guys started to grumble and protest to the track officials. I think the officials just wanted to see how this was going to turn out. They let me race again.

Third Moto: I finished third again. Somehow the math worked out to an overall fourth place finish, which meant only one thing - I was going home with a trophy!

"Oh yes! Victory is sweet," I thought, no wait, I said that aloud.

By this time several of the guys I had beaten filed a formal protest. All of the riders, from all classes, were around the trophy table. The officials decided that "open class" meant *open class*.

They added insult to injury when they told the men who protested to, "Go home, cry, and lick your wounds. The boy beat you fair and square on a 125."

His laughter while giving his decree only added salt to their wounds.

My mom, dad, and older sister didn't see me get that first trophy. They had left before I raced the first open class moto. The crashes and injuries that day set the scene in their heads of an eventual end that they didn't want to witness. They never attended another race.

I learned important lessons that day. I learned that perseverance pays, quitters never win, and moto-cross tracks were a lot more physically demanding than the levee. I was exhausted.

That night I set the trophy on my dresser where I could stare at it until I fell asleep.

I actually showed some natural talent for racing to go along with youthful invincibility. And so my racing career had begun, with one little hitch, okay, one huge hitch. I could only race once, perhaps twice a month.

You see, I was raised a Southern Baptist, I still am. My father made a huge concession allowing me to race on Sunday's, you just didn't do it as a Baptist; it was sinful, plain and simple.

Most of the racetracks throughout the deep south couldn't start practice until after 12 p.m. so they wouldn't disturb church services with the noise. At that time, there was either a Baptist or a Pentecostal church every mile or less in rural areas. They had it sewn up much like New Orleans has Catholic churches on nearly every corner.

I was always jealous of my friends, they could race every Sunday. They were Catholic's, and the Catholic's got to go to mass on Saturday, hence freeing up Sunday without the yoke of sin. Even my Jewish friends were able to race on Sunday's, as their Sabbath Day was on Saturday.

I argued the point that the sabbath was actually Saturday, and that the Baptist were technically going to church on the wrong day, until I was blue in the face. My argument, no matter how well versed, was to no avail. I never changed my father's mind, nor did I convinced the Southern Baptist Association. Through years of argumentation, I now know the truth as to why Protestant's meet on Sunday's.

I decided I would just have to win every time I raced. For the most part I was always in the top three. I also had a knack for going very fast in the mud and rain. When I raced in the rain, I usually won. I had years of practice on the levee, were I had learned that speed enabled you to float above the mud. I had always figured it didn't matter if you crashed in the mud, the ground was soft, so crashing didn't hurt as much.

No matter what talents I may have possessed for racing, it was a mute point. Not being able to race every Sunday made it impossible to accumulate enough points to place me in regional championships, let alone ever get a sponsor.

It's true that real life is stranger than fiction; I got a sponsor. A year later Terry got a Suzuki dealership for a college graduation present, in order to prepare him to take over his families Ford dealership in the future. I rode the Yamaha until Terry got the Suzuki dealership. Thus proving that the Lord does work in mysterious ways.

I learned many things on the Yamaha; I learned about being a good sportsman - just win. I learned there are no excuses for loosing. I learned that I don't know anything about science, physics, or math. I learned that it didn't matter, because I could do very impressive wheelies.

I also learned a very strange lesson in anatomy from owning the AT-3. Once, while I was making Swiss cheese out of every part on the AT-3 by drilling holes in everything to make it lighter, a sliver of steel became embedded in my eye. The next morning my eye was bloodshot and rusty. Off to the eye doctor we went.

When Dr. Gaines, my eye doctor since I was two, looked at the piece of steel embedded in my eye he said, "It will have to be drilled out." - Yeah, *drilled* out.

They deadened my eye and prepared. Dr. Gaines, who was getting up in age at this point, started towards my eye. My head was in a vise, literally, to keep me from moving. As he moved closer, his hand was shaking, and I began shaking in fear as he drew closer.

Right before impact with my eye he stopped, set the drill down, and said, "I better get a younger doctor to do this."

"Whew!" I thought, very relieved.

A younger doctor completed the drilling operation. I can still remember the feel of the drill sinking into my soft eyeball. I'll spare you the details; but I learned how soft and fleshy the eyeball is, it felt like sticking a toothpick in an olive. From that experience I also learned to wear goggles when operating power tools.

One valuable lesson I *almost* learned from the AT-3, but didn't, was "when to hold 'em, and when to fold 'em." I still push a good thing to the point where it becomes a bad thing, because I'm a show-off.

Oh well, "C'est la vie."

The Yamaha AT-3 MX was a great bike, and it's one that I wish I still owned. But it had to go, Terry had a Suzuki dealership. Roger DeCoster and Joel Robert's had Suzuki's. It seemed only natural that I should have one too.

Within the year I was riding Suzuki's and tearing up the local tracks, as well as sneaking off to tracks in Florida and Alabama when my parents went out of town. Not to mention riding a Suzuki GT380 triple by sixteen. But Suzuki's, those are other stories to be told.

MOTORCYCLE: 1973 YAMAHA RD 250 STREET BIKE

The Yamaha RD 250 was not a bike I owned. My dad had bought the bike. He had gotten caught-up in the motorcycle craze of the 1970's. With gas prices skyrocketing from thirty-eight cents a gallon to nearly fifty-five cents per gallon he figured he could use it to commute. It doesn't sound like much now, but double what you pay for gas now and think about it. Thank goodness we learned then not to be an oil dependent nation in the future, that future being now.

Anyway, one Saturday dad decided that he would bring me and Ruben to Enon to go riding. Enon, as you may remember from the AT3-MX story, was miles of fire-roads and power line right-of-ways. Enon was not street bike friendly. Dad fell on his butt more times that we could count. We would have to wait as he slowly slithered up the sand roads. He finally gave up and we all went home.

I rode the RD around the neighborhood a few times. I was still too young to have a driver's license, and my dad had put the fear of God into me if I took the bike street riding. I can only say this about the bikes performance, it was a little screamer. That bike was quick, really quick.

My dad stopped riding the motorcycle after he witnessed a man on a motorcycle get beheaded after he slammed into a semi-tractor trailer. My dad was so taken aback that he rode home and put the RD in the paper that night. It sold days later.

I suppose I did realize a few things connected to the RD while it was around. I realized I liked the feel of a street bike, an actual street bike. The RD brought my interest in motorcycles beyond dirt bikes.

I also learned that my dad was making an effort to connect with a rebellious teenage son through a shared interest, motorcycles. I appreciate his effort. Besides, dad had his motorcycling fun with his friend, Ed Buyer, when they were teenagers running from the cops on a 1930-something Indian, after they had blown up a gas station, but I'm writing a screenplay about my dad's adventures.

I should have learned from the beheaded biker that motorcycles and stupidity don't mix, they're a deadly combination. As is evident from stories to come, that was one lesson that I didn't learn until decades later.

MOTORCYCLE: 1975 SUZUKI GT 380

*"Kind of young, kind of now, Charlie.
Kind of free, kind of wow! Charlie."*

- 1970s "Charlie" perfume ad by Revlon

Sixteen years old, young and free, and a Suzuki GT 380 - wow! The GT 380 came about because Terry owned a Suzuki dealership. Ask yourself, how cool was it to be sixteen, totally into motorcycles, and have a brother-in-law with a Suzuki dealership.

My father bought this bike, but he rode it only a couple of times and decided for the second time that motorcycling was too dangerous. Remember, he saw the man beheaded while he was riding his RD250. I'm just thankful he never decided that riding wasn't for me as well.

The Suzuki GT 380 was a two-stroke rocket, that thing pulled G-forces. It was also a perfect match for my fondness of doing wheelies. More importantly, it was my first true, and legal, foray into street riding.

The only flaw I found in the GT was it's dislike of water, it hated being wet more than our family cat. It also acted much like our cat, who would pass out if it got wet. So would the Suzuki. Wash it too hard or ride in a Louisiana rainstorm, it was out cold.

My fondest memory of this bike happened on a crisp, cool, clear September morning. I was headed to school on the GT 380 and had taken I-10. The normal pattern to school was to take the exit past the school and loop back, avoiding a congested intersection. The school was located right along the interstate.

As I passed I saw everyone arriving at school. I thought about how much I disliked school, and what a beautiful morning it was to experience a nice freeway ride.

"Screw school," I said.

I already possessed a propensity for skipping school, or for being really late and blaming it on my old car breaking down. I road past the exit to school. A smile immediately stretched across my face, an experience I later repeated in adult life many times as I rode counter flow past commuters on their way to work while on my way to play.

About five miles past school, the edge of the New Orleans suburbs ends and abruptly becomes a swamp. I-10 becomes a twelve mile long stretch of elevated freeway, in essence, a bridge.

This stretch of I-10 runs through the wetlands between the Mississippi River and Lake Pontchartrain, cutting right through the Bonnet Carre Spillway and runs along the edge of Lake Pontchartrain.

About twenty miles up I took the exit to the newly opened I-55, which forked off to the north, cutting directly through the then magnificent, primeval Manchac Swamp.

I will never forget the feeling of freedom I felt that morning. Saying no to that which I disliked, and yes to my passion. I can still mentally relive that experience of blowing down the highway on a motorcycle, a dream I'd had since fifth grade, since seeing *Easy Rider*.

That morning was the fulfillment of a long-time dream, wrapped up in a crystal blue September morning. A moment in time I would relive over and over again - if scientists would hurry up and perfect time travel, and quit wasting time trying to save the planet. Don't scientist know how to prioritize?

When I returned to school, hours late, I felt so relaxed, so free, so empowered that I told the principal, Mrs. Driscoll, the truth of what I had done. I offered no excuses and had no fear of consequences.

Mrs. Driscoll had known me all of my life, I believe she could see the glowing happiness of a dream fulfilled. She simply looked at me, cracked a wry grin, and told me to go to class. She also gave me an excused tardy.

When school was over that day I treated everyone to a smoking tire burnout, followed by the longest wheelie I ever performed on that bike. Ah, the feeling of invincibility provided by youth.

That ride on a beautiful September morning cemented a feeling and attitude within me that I've carried throughout life. It also traces my habit of placing pleasure before work right down to its roots.

In a sense, I suppose that ride is responsible for my lack of retirement funds today. The memory of that morning is still more important to me than money. All the money in the world can't make missed opportunities return - unless scientist would get their priorities together!

The GT 380 is also responsible for my fondness of riding in cold weather. South Louisiana cold is a different type of cold. It can come with north winds off of Lake Pontchartrain, mixed with 100% humidity. It's a cold that seeps into your bones, almost to the marrow. I like riding in that type of cold, it makes you feel alive, or at least as though you are so near frozen that you won't age.

In the winter I would take my girlfriend riding on Sunday afternoons. We would go cruising Lakeshore Drive, a popular, eight mile long cruising spot since it was built. Every time we would come to a stop, the scent of Charlie perfume would waif forward, filling my senses, a scent that for many years would be synonymous with young women and fun.

Lisa would beg to go home, she was so cold. Several times she caught a ride back with friends in their warm cars. I would just ride with a smile that was literally frozen on my face.

During tenth grade, I started sharing car rides to school with Frank. On nice days we would ride our motorcycles. Frank usually rode a Yamaha DT-250 enduro, a demo bike. Frank's dad, known as "Doc," owned a Harley-Davidson and Yamaha dealership. Between the two of us we basically had free bikes, free service, and free parts. Life is tough, always has been.

Spring came. The weather warmed up. Frank and I decided that when school ended we would ride our bikes to Pensacola, Florida. Surprisingly, our parents agreed. The end of May rolled around and we decided that the second week of June we would begin our excursion.

Lisa's mom and dad were flabbergast that my parents would let me go on such a trip. Lisa's mom told me, "You're lucky I'm not your mother, because I wouldn't even let you have a motorcycle."

I have always considered Lisa's mom my second mother. I still call her on Mother's Day, but she's right, I am lucky that she wasn't my mother, because I wouldn't have a book full of motorcycling experiences.

Doc, Frank's dad, was a wise road warrior, his advice to us was to wear sunscreen, long sleeved shirts, and to avoid riding into June thunderstorms along the Gulf Coast. Frank and I snickered at the thought of long sleeved shirts during the summer. Sunscreen? I wasn't really sure what that was.

Doc just grinned and said, "Okay, but when you can't sleep because you feel like bugs are crawling all over you, remember, I told you."

We laughed again. Doc retorted with the scary statement, "I'm warning you, it'll feel like your on a heroin withdrawal, like things are crawl'n on ya."

In the infinite wisdom of our youthful knowledge we just shrugged off his advice. Adults, what do they know?

We left out early the next morning. Things were going great. We made it out of Louisiana and rode up the Mississippi Gulf Coast, through Pass Christian and Biloxi. We noted the amount of new disco clubs along the coast and decided on our way home we would stay a night or so in Biloxi and "disco down."

At that time the drinking age was eighteen, and we looked all of that. Besides, in the south, no one checked ID's if you looked like you were at least fourteen. And that's not a joke.

After a great seafood lunch we jumped back on I-10 and headed to Alabama. Here's were you need to keep in mind a couple of things: it was 1975, we had semi-long hair, and we were on motorcycles.

By then I had seen *Easy Rider* at least fifteen times. I thought the tales told in the movie of the dislike for our kind had certainly passed - or so I thought. Besides, we were on the interstate, not headed to backwoods roads or small redneck infested towns. Certainly we wouldn't run into prejudice.

I've spent time in small towns throughout the South in my youth, visiting relatives and on hunting trips with my dad, I knew what to expect. Chalk one up for naivete'.

Frank and I rode through Mobile, through the tunnel, and along Mobile Bay. As we cruised along the bay I pointed to a sign that heralded the battleship USS Alabama. Frank shook his head in agreement, silently we made plans to visit.

Right about that time we passed an old lady who was stretching up to see over the steering wheel of her land yacht, which most cars of that era were. I nodded to her as we passed. We moved back into the right lane.

Perhaps I didn't notice, or rather, did not fully understand what I did notice. The little old lady had squinted her eyes and tightened her mouth when I had nodded to her. Now she pulled into the passing lane.

As she pulled along side of us she glared at us, and began moving into the right lane. Frank was closest to her. He started moving closer to me. I started moving closer to what little shoulder of the road there was.

Frank stretched a leg out and kicked her door, which sent him into a wobble and her into a rage. I was hugging the shoulder's edge trying not to run into the grass which offered about a five foot buffer between Mobile Bay and myself. Frank continued to joust with the insane woman. Which begs the question, was it Frank or the old lady that was insane?

I slowed to a near stop. The woman jerked the car wheel towards Frank, he locked up his brakes just as her car entered the right lane. We stopped. She drove on.

I asked Frank, "Did that just happen?"

He nodded and shook his head.

We had a smoke break and contemplated the situation, and our sunburn.

We survived Mobile and had gotten past Spanish Fort when very large, dark, bruised looking clouds began looming on the horizon. As we got closer they grew even larger and more menacing.

One of the things I like about motorcycling is that you smell the earth around you, good and bad. You can also smell rain. I smelled rain, a lot of rain. I also began to think about, Margie, our family cat, and the Suzuki's perfect imitation of her when it got wet.

A few miles outside of Malbis, Alabama the heavens opened up. To say it began raining is an understatement. To say it was a torrential downpour is an understatement. Had it rained like that during Noah's forty day boat ride it would have only needed twenty days of Malbis-rain to get the same amount of water. Within five miles, Margie, I mean the Suzuki, passed out.

During our five minute planning phase Frank and I didn't think about a breakdown, or bringing a tow rope. They say necessity is the mother of invention; we hooked our belts together and looped them to my handlebars and his rear luggage rack. We had about a foot between the two bikes as Frank began towing me. We rode slowly, very slowly, on the shoulder of the road toward Malbis.

The stinging rain did little to sooth our sunburn. The rain felt like a swarm of bees stinging us on the neck and arms. The pain from the rain moved more into the realm of what I imagine being attacked by a gang of acupuncturist must feel like.

As we continued, cars and trucks would pass, many would slow down. "Perhaps," I thought, "a truck will stop and offer us a lift."

Yeah, all we got were people honking their horns and offering us encouragement with their middle finger. We made it to the Malbis exit.

My spirits were uplifted when I saw a large gas station, the kind so common back then, with a huge roof covering the pump area. It had garage bays full of tools, which we would need, because we didn't think about bringing tools either.

We pulled under the covered area near the office. A weathered older man came out, wiping his hands with a red shop rag. He looked at us and turned to me.

"You broke down?"

I wanted to say something smart aleck, but decided "Yes sir," was the correct answer.

"Do you mind if we work on the bike and wait out the rain storm?" I asked.

He looked at us, nodded his head, and said, "Sure, do what you need to do, just do it somewhere else."

I looked at him with surprise, disbelief, and anger. Frank looked at him questioningly.

"Really?" I asked, hoping he was joking.

The old man nodded his head, and without any emotion said, "Yeah, really. You boys get them motorsickles off my property. Why don't you go down the road and wait out the rain in the barber shop chair."

Two things crossed my mind: one, he really did say, "motorsickles." Two: this was really happening.

As we started to put our helmet's back on, two old ladies who had just filled up their huge 1960s Cadillac, the kind with winged rear fenders, called out to us.

"You boys don't pay that grumpy old bastard no mind, follow us to our house. You can use my husband's tools and garage."

The old man at the gas station just shook his head, hissed, and walked off. We hooked the belt tow back together and followed the women through town.

They pulled under the porte-cochere to what had to be the largest house in town.

The house was a treasure of the Antebellum architectural style. At this point, episodes of *The Walton's* were playing in my head, the one's that had the two sisters that were rich and sold moonshine.

We pushed the bikes, okay, I pushed my bike into the garage, Frank rode his. The women were so kind and nice, both were in their late seventies or early eighties.

It turned out that they were sisters, both widowed, and lived in the grand old mansion by themselves. They were pillar's of Malbis society. They let us use their tools, dried our clothes, all of them, because Frank and I hadn't thought about waterproof packing. They fed us, told us about their lives, and asked where we were headed.

The one who owned the house told us how she always wanted to ride on a motorcycle. Her sister slightly pushed her shoulder and said, "Oh sister, you were always the wild child of our family."

Frank and I grinned at each other.

The rain finally stopped and the Suzuki finally started. As we began to get our gear together I looked at the lady who owned the house and asked, "So, you always wanted to ride on a motorcycle huh?"

She smiled and nodded. I patted the seat of my bike and told her, "Opportunity knocks, sometimes only once." I stretched my helmet out toward her.

Yep, Frank and I rode the ladies around town. They smiled and waved at everyone. The look of shock on the town peoples faces is forever etched in my mind.

The woman on my bike leaned over and told me, "Let me buy you boys a tank of gas before y'all go. Go back to the fill'n station were we met y'all."

I told her that I didn't think that was a good idea. She replied, "Don't you worry about that ole' coot, if he says anything I'll bye that place and close it tomorrow."

I couldn't resist. We pulled in the gas station. The attendant didn't know what to do. He looked at the man who had run us off. The man nodded and threw up his hands. The attendant filled up our bikes and wouldn't take any money.

We brought the women back home, they gave us a hug and some sandwiches to go. We left Malbis. I wasn't sure who wore the biggest grins, Frank and I, or the women.

Those women were the epitome of Southern hospitality. Their Alabama accents and spirits of adventure made me wonder what kind of girls they would've/could've/were when they were our age.

I told Frank, "I like the women of Alabama."

If I only knew what was to soon come that would forever heighten that felling, or how in the decades to come I would say that again - several times.

We finally made it to Pensacola about 6 p.m. We had planned to camp on the trip, Frank offered to pay for a motel room. I took him up on his offer.

We got a room. As we were unpacking and cleaning up, my forearms felt like something was crawling all over them. I remembered what Doc had said. The wind blowing on my arm hairs all day had created the sensation I was feeling. I decided that since it was imaginary bugs, I would kill them with imaginary pesticide. Frank felt the same way. We both took a couple of shots of whiskey, or perhaps more, and went to eat.

On the way to the hotel restaurant we passed the pool area where three gorgeous, blond girls about our age, one maybe a few years older, were packing up their tanning session. Frank and I slowed and starred at the bikini clad beauties.

To our surprise they waved to us. The oldest one asked, in a now familiar slow, Southern drawl, "Is that y'all's motorcycles?"

"Yep," I quickly replied.

Frank being a bit bolder asked, "You chicks want a ride?"

The youngest one said she did. The oldest girl pushed her and said, "We gotta go get ready, we're going to the concert tonight."

They started to walk off when the youngest one yelled out, "You can ride us tomorrow, we're in room 119."

The oldest one pushed her again and said, "You wild thing."

Frank and I looked at each other with the same devilish grins. Simultaneously we said, "Nah, can't be happening, huh?"

Frank called out to the girls, "Where y'all from?" In unison they slowly drawled, "Montgomery."

Frank and I looked at each other and in unison said, "Alabama? Montgomery, Alabama? Oh yeah."

We went into the restaurant. I asked the waitress what there was to do on this fine Friday night. She told us the hottest thing in town was The Bee Gee's concert. Frank and I looked at each other, smiled and nodded.

We went to the auditorium and bought tickets. This was right before the *Saturday Night Fever* album/movie catapulted the Bee Gees into the stratosphere of stardom for their second ride. I had always liked their music, but wasn't a fan per-se.

As we strolled around the auditorium, right up front, nearly on the stage, were the girls from the hotel. We approached them. Before we could say, "hello," they grabbed us and we were instant friends, after all, it was the 1970s. The scent of Charlie perfume surrounded them like the scent of a garden, a garden full of beautiful, freshly budding southern flowers.

The oldest one, Joy, was in love with Barry Gibb, if only with his voice and hair. Her goal was to try and get his attention, which she had, and to meet him. She told Frank and I to act like we were her sister's boyfriend's, and to not look like we were with her. Her sisters grabbed us and kissed us.

I leaned into Frank and yelled in his ear, "Sisters? Alabama? Dude, this is freaky!"

Frank replied, "No dude, this is cool."

Joy never got to go backstage. After the concert we all went back to the hotel, drank and partied - way too much. The sisters refused to let Frank and I return to our room. They insisted we stay with them. There was only one king sized bed. Like I've said, "Life is tough, always has been."

Frank and I decided Alabama sucked, but the women and girls from Alabama were great.

At some unrecallable point the next day, or the next day, Frank and I headed back to Biloxi. After all, the most definitive plan we had made for our trip was to "disco-down" in Biloxi.

I was tempted to go up through Georgia and Tennessee, then down through Mississippi to avoid driving through Alabama again, but we braved it out and made it to Biloxi.

Frank and I made it back to Biloxi and stayed at the Ramada Inn, about 10 miles from the center of the action in Biloxi.

We started out partying at *The Fiesta*, and went to several disco's that night. Incredibly, all I can recall was the ride back to our hotel.

Frank and I found our bikes after an exhaustive search of our memories, and with the assistance of a bemused bouncer. We mounted our bikes on the left side, stood them up, and immediately fell over to the right. We repeated the procedure several times. By the fourth attempt some of the curious onlookers helped steady us until we let the clutches out. We took off, surprisingly smooth.

Back then, nightclubs didn't cut you off simply because you had drank too much alcohol. There were no laws at the time that put responsibility on them, at least none that were enforced. Those were the days when the consequences of foolish actions fell upon the fools that committed them.

Amazingly, or more precisely, miraculously, we were smooth and steady once under way. Perhaps the cool night air was sobering. Personally, I've always given credit to my guardian angel for saving me from demise during my many foolish endeavors. He still does. Thank you God.

Somehow we knew not to stop our continuous motion, no matter what - like red lights and traffic. Rather than stopping we would take to the wide sidewalks that ran in front of the beautiful homes along the beach.

We made it back to the hotel unscathed. In the morning, as we entered the lobby, the desk clerk informed us that someone must have either played on our bikes or backed into them.

"Your motorcycles are laying on the ground," he said.

We shook our heads, for we clearly remembered giving up trying to put them on their side stands and had just laid them on their sides and went to bed. We sobered up that day and went to sleep at a decent time that night. It was time to go home.

The following day we rode into New Orleans feeling like conquering hero's, every bit the epic hero as Odysseus returning from his journey. We felt older, wiser, more worldly than our sixteen years. In truth, we were just a pair of idiots that had survived a reckless, unplanned trip into the unknown.

Another strong memory of the GT 380, one that my mom and dad and I still laugh about, was the time I decided to run away from home - in the dead of winter. My dad and I had not been getting along, the usual clash between age and teenage angst.

My father was a Marine in World War II and had seen many of the Pacific highlights of the war first hand, if not first. My dad was in counterintelligence, which is the key to how and why I had planned my escape.

One freezing November morning in 1975 I left for work in my car, a car that could barely make it to work. I looped around and parked the car a few blocks from home in an apartment complex parking lot. I walked home and quietly pushed the Suzuki away, having pre-packed for my getaway.

I was headed to Atlanta, Georgia. I figured I would meet my sister and brother-in-law, who were in Atlanta attending a conference. That was the sum total of my getaway plan. I obviously didn't learn a thing about packing for a motorcycle trip from the Florida escapade. I nearly froze to death. All I had was a wind-breaker, no gloves or heavy coat.

When I stopped along the way to warm up, I would call Lisa and charge the calls back to my home phone, you could do that then. After the fifth call the operator decided to get approval.

I heard my father's voice on the other end of the phone, "Sure, no problem," he said.

I knew I was had. He knew my position. It was getting dark. I couldn't go any further. I rode to the next exit and found a motel in, of all places, Spanish Fort, Alabama. I insisted on a ground floor room. For a small bribe the clerk rearranged another guest to accommodate me.

I registered under an alias, another thing you could do without question or identification back then. I put the motorcycle inside the room. I knew my dad was coming.

The next morning I decided I couldn't make it any further and headed home.

When I walked in the house my dad looked up, grinned and asked, "Did you have a nice ride?"

I nodded.

"Welcome home son," he added.

I sheepishly said, "Thanks dad." I started towards my room.

My dad called me back, "I have one question. What did you do with the bike last night?"

"I hid it in the motel room, I knew you had gotten my coordinates from the phone call."

He pulled out a piece of paper and read off three motel names.

"Which one was it?" he asked.

I told him. He grinned.

"Good thinking, because I found you. I just couldn't find the bike, and the motel offices were closed. Smart thinking, cause had I found the bike I was going to take it home with me."

We both laughed. I went to bed. Not another word was ever said, except for the times we still laugh about the cat and mouse game we played that November. The sad part is my parents car broke down on the way home, and they had to get a ride with a trucker. Again, another time, another world.

I think in retrospect my dad was more proud that I had outfoxed him than he was mad. He knew I was mature enough to take care of myself in the world, having handled New York City by myself at fourteen.

I witnessed Tiffany's being robbed, three muggings, an accidental subway ride into Harlem, a woman's fat ass in my face as we *slowly* ascended to the top of the Statue of Liberty, and a miscalculated, sixty block walk at street level.

New York is another story unrelated to motorcycling, so we won't talk about it.

When I think back in time, that Suzuki seems to have so many experiences and memories attached to it. Perhaps because they were so exciting. Perhaps because it was during my formidable years. Perhaps because I was sixteen and it was my first taste of wild-laced freedom. Perhaps because it was at the time when the culture was changing direction.

More importantly, I simultaneously matured a little, and decided that I would never grow up. Funny how experiences like the ones on the GT 380 influenced how I see the world to this day. The Suzuki provided me with a plethora of fond memories.

You know how a smell can bring a forgotten memory back to life? When I think about the Suzuki GT 380, there is one thing that I remember clearly; one thing that still makes me smile, and brings memories rushing back to life - the scent of "Charlie" perfume.

"Kind of young, kind of now, kind of free, kind of wow!"

MOTORCYCLE: 1974 SUZUKI TM 100

One hundred cc's of superstar, that's what it felt like. That's my memory of the Suzuki TM 100. The TM was a little jewel. It was a semi-ready race bike right out of the crate, and mine, was really tricked out. Let me start with the highlight of my time with this motorcycle as proof for such boasting.

Just outside of New Orleans, on the batture of the Mississippi River, in the town of Waggaman, was a moto-cross track that hosted a national moto-cross race each year. This track was fast and tough. Its foundation was built from soils that had washed down the river from Minnesota to Louisiana, churned into a combination that made a perfect loam. To describe the track in a word, traction. The track had traction.

The Saturday before the AMA National races, the local races would be held. Many times the factories would cart their up and coming unknowns around the circuit to let them compete against local racers, to make sure they had scouted the best.

The track would add a pro class to each category, naturally I entered. I finished the two motos with a first and a third place, garnering me a second place trophy. In the moto I won, I won by a large margin. Braggingly, I will simply say I smoked the two factories unknown up-and-coming's.

Because my brother in law was the new Suzuki dealer in town, I got to meet a lot of people, and had a pit pass to Sunday's National races. A team manager for a factory talked to me about my racing aspirations. Unfortunately the short end of that story is that I was still under aged and needed parental consent to play.

My dad stood strong to Southern Baptist rules about honouring the Sabbath, even if it were Sunday. I could only race once a month, twice if there were five Sunday's in the month. That blew the possibility of any factory tutorage out the window. Oh well, as I say, "Life is tough. Always has been."

The next day at the National Race, Ruben and I were walking around the pits when I saw one of my hero's, "Mr. Anonymous," sitting on a lawn chair. I went over and asked him for an autograph. He refused to give Ruben and I an autograph and rudely asked, "Why don't you kids go away."

Not the right answer.

We gathered up all of our friends and went to the back of the track, where it was so remote spectators didn't bother to go. We did, and started tormenting Mr. Anonymous on every lap.

He passed once. We were all we lined up shooting him the bird. He passed again, we popped out of the jungle-like growth and yell "Boo!" Next lap, someone was hidden in a corner and threw water on him.

Near the last lap, we decided to harass him once more. We all lined up around a blind turn, half of us in the track. Mr. Anonymous came into the turn and saw all of us lined up mooning him. He became so unfocused he dropped the bike and got passed.

As he was picking it up we all yelled, "Next time give us an autograph you asshole." We all ran off.

Rumor had it, our harassment cost him a place at the finish. The circle of life with Mr. Anonymous is interesting; my TM 400 DeCoster replica had front forks made by, and signed by, Mr. Anonymous. I got my autograph after all, decades later.

At this same National race, my sister was running across the track just as the race had started. She tried to hurry across the track and twisted her ankle in a rut. Terry quickly dragged her off the track, just as the pack of pro-riders raced toward her.

For decades, when one of our family or friends got injured, we always said in a slang tone, "It was a racin assident." That saying also originated at that race as well.

Myrna saw a black kid limping around, and she asked him, "What happened?"

In a thick N'Awlins accent, the young man replied, "Racin assident," and kept walking. Funny how a moment in time can become timeless.

Now that I have given background to my boasting about my talents and provided proof of my juvenile delinquency, let me refocus on the TM 100. The stories that relate to the TM need to be told in descending, or in condescending order, for I owned this bike during what would be a pivotal point of my life.

At that point in my life I rode as much as possible. I carried the TM around with me on bumper racks attached to my '65 Comet. If you remember cars with steel bumpers that could carry a motorcycle, then your showing your age.

I had to attend summer school for failing ninth grade English, an irony, now that I'm an English teacher. I would use the availability of time to sneak away after class and go riding at one of the many vacant lot tracks that existed around the growing suburbs.

I was also a full-out-fiend for moto-cross. I refused to wear anything but Suzuki and motorcycle related T-shirts to the private school that I was forced to return to after my public school dismissal. The principal finally gave up and just didn't seem to notice anymore. Of course I also knew, and abused, the fact that my even being at the school was a favor to my father.

I was fifteen, so I was able to drive myself to friends houses to hang out, talk, and work on our bikes. In August of '74 I was at my friend Glover's house. We were in his garage with another friend, Willis, working on motorcycles. All of a sudden I felt something that I had never felt before. I was suddenly caught in a thousand yard stare.

Willis and Glover asked me what was wrong. I didn't answer. They turned to look at what I was staring at. Walking up the driveway was the demise of my moto-cross focus, my first real girlfriend and future wife. I asked Glover and Willis who she was.

"Lisa," they unanimously replied.

I could hear the destain of having been jilted in their voices.

"I'm going to marry her," I matter of factly stated.

They both laughed and shook their heads.

"Not a chance," Willis sneered.

"Let me clear something up," Glover interjected, and in perfect time and harmony, Glover and Willis said, "That's Saint Lisa, you ain't marry'n her."

"I always win," I retorted.

Lisa came and talked with us. I still remember the scent her Charlie perfume wafering through the thick, humid, summer air. When she left I looked at Glover and Willis with a sly grin on my face and told them again, "I always win. I'm going to marry her."

And so I did. However, before that happened Lisa and I began dating on Friday, September 13, 1974. Within a year my focus, or lack thereof, on moto-cross had become literally dangerous. But that's covered in the RM 125 story, back to the TM 100.

It was *really* trick. One of the first bikes in our area to have a swingarm that utilized the leading suspension technology of the day, which was moving the shocks forward on the swingarm. Wow! And with Koni's attached. Double Wow!

I had shaven off every unnecessary ounce of weight from the already bantamweight bike. The TM handled, and it was fast. My mechanic, that's right *my* mechanic - remember, Terry owned a Suzuki dealership - had blueprinted, ported, and polished the engine. To top it off, all that power was gripped to the ground through Trelleborg tires... oooo!

Appearance wise, the Suzuki looked like a shrunken DeCoster replica. White fenders, still air box, the big Suzuki "S" on the tank, strategically placed Champion sparkplug stickers, and of course the number plates were emblazoned with the number six.

I had the TM geared to rocket to the first turn. I had learned from my first motocross race that getting to the first turn first was beyond important, it was imperative if you wanted to win. I practiced starts on the TM endlessly. Then I practiced them some more.

I finally perfected the art of the hole-shot on that little Suzuki, all in the comfort of my front yard. I also moved about five yards of dirt that was sitting on the sidewalk when I came home from school one day, the dirt was to fill in the trenches I had dug in the yard with the TM while practicing my starts.

On race day, while others would be out beating themselves up doing practice laps, I practiced starting and running through the first turn over and over again. I would usually walk the track once, and take a few practice laps to ensure that my mind had a photograph of the track, albeit one taken with the mentally wrong shutter speed - read, blurry.

The bike was fine-tuned and I was in great physical shape. Ruben and I trained relentlessly during the week, running miles and miles. Naturally we integrated all of the Torsten Hallman moto-cross exercises, as described in the still young *Motocross Action Magazine*, into our training program. *Motocross Action* was my second bible, remember, I'm Baptist, it could never be "the" bible.

I raced as much as I could, thankfully, my parents owned a bridal shop, among other ventures, that had them going to Dallas and New York markets, which left me home alone more often. I also had a drivers license and a car. I began sneaking off to race at tracks farther away, spending the Saturday night before the race in my car.

It was during this time that I developed either a smart or arrogant habit, if I wasn't in at least third place during a race, for whatever reason, I would stop and return to the pits. I just wouldn't bother to put forth the effort to lose.

Because I couldn't compete often enough to gain regional points, I didn't see the point of eating dust, taking the risk of a squirrely rider crashing into me, nor wearing out my bike. In essence, I believed in not wearing myself out if I wasn't in the position to win.

Since I was a child I would try something perhaps twice. If I didn't do well I assumed I had no talent for it and wouldn't try again. Football, baseball, basketball, and innumerable other things, I tried them once or twice. As well, I've never liked team sports, they irritate me.

Speaking of irritating things, because I couldn't race every weekend, Terry had to start helping sponsor other riders. Now *that* became a thorn in my side! Especially a guy that happened to be dating my third cousin that had moved from California. I had been attracted to her since fifth grade - remember, I said third cousin.

To make matters worse, just about every time I did race I kept seeing my fifth grade girlfriend, Pam, who was now "such a fox" that people walked around filming her. Pam had began dating older guys by ninth grade. It galled me to see her with her boyfriend, who was a good racer in the 250 class.

Alright, back to my winning, not losing; however, I didn't like that part of how the circle of life was developing.

One memorable sneak away race, Glover, Willis, and I decided to go to a new track at the State Fairgrounds in Baton Rouge. We left at the crack of dawn that Sunday morning.

We planned to get all of the milage out of being on our own, which included stopping at a restaurant to have breakfast, and a roadside grocery to buy beer for after the race, they sell alcohol on Sunday's in much of Louisiana.

We stopped for breakfast at the "Airliner Motel and Restaurant" near LaPlace. We walked in and were standing behind two older adult couples waiting to be seated. The hostess motioned for all of us to follow her. She sat the adults at a table for four and us at the next table. She gave us all menus and said she would be back to take our orders.

After she took the older couples orders she came to take ours. I noticed she hadn't started a new ticket. I kicked Willis and Glover under the table, they knew to follow my lead on whatever I would say or do.

I ordered a feast. Glover and Willis did too. I explained to them what was going on. We ate fast. When we finished, Willis went to the "bathroom." Glover, as usual, was in a panic over the thought of doing wrong.

The waitress came for a last coffee call, while she was there I told the people at the other table that we were going to run to the car, and that we would be right back.

They looked at me as if to say, "Okay, why should I care?"

You know how that ended right? Alright, so it wasn't right, and it isn't funny; none the less, we laughed all the way to the races.

We got to the track and raced. Glover crashed, Willis DNF'ed, and I got a third place trophy and a busted lip from the rocks being chucked at me from knobby tires. I have always been fairly sharp at covering my tracks, growing up under my father required that I develop such a talent.

I removed the trophy plaque that had the date and track name on it and placed the trophy behind my other trophies, on the remote chance that my parents might actually notice. Do recall, they were not supportive, nor enthusiastic, about my racing endeavors after having witnessed my first moto-cross race on the Yamaha AT3 MX.

One of the greatest experiences on the TM was the high I got when I rode with perfect precision. I can still feel the oneness I had with that bike, especially in left hand, high bermed turns. I could take those like I were riding on rails. The feeling of being a wheel length ahead of forty other riders when racing toward a first turn that was only wide enough for three bikes, and me being the one that had the right groove, still makes me smile.

I think the one experience that gave me the highest of highs on the TM was in the summer of '74. I was at the pinnacle of my being a fearless, focused youth. One race stands out in my mind as a reminder of perfection, precision, and pride. It was at the Slidell track, where I had first raced moto-cross.

During the first moto I had jumped into the lead and kept getting farther and farther head of every rider. Doc, my friend Frank's dad, was trackside giving me hand signals at every lap.

He had extended his right arm and leg out, and was making "slow down" motions with his hands. Doc was letting me know I was so far out ahead and advising me to back off. I had literally lapped every rider up to third place. I was in "fiend" mode and kept going faster.

I hit one jump so fast, and flew so high, I landed in the next turn. I dropped the bike. I jumped up, picked up the bike, and frantically began trying to start it. It started but was loaded up. Lapped riders began to pass me.

The bike cleared out and I flew out back onto the track. I was *still* ahead of second place.

Remembering my friends warnings from the boat launch when I tried to set the G-5 into orbit, I took Doc's suggestion and slowed down. I won the moto by a long shot. I realized that once again, my lack of moderation had hurt me, and that my showing off set in motion the fulfillment of the proverb, "Pride comes before a fall."

However, that feeling of acute focus, winning big, and the power of perfection at a young age, has followed me throughout my life. It has enabled me to appreciate and encourage young people to capture and utilize the power of their youth, and to warn them that it's both impressive and fleeting, and that no one's impressed when you're old.

That race, Glover, crashed and broke his collarbone, again. The ambulance bringing Glover to the hospital broke down about half way. They sent a second ambulance to bring Glover to the hospital. It got in a wreck enroute. The town didn't have any more ambulances available, the other one was on a delivery. I believe my sister ended up driving Glover to the hospital. The lesson? When in a small town and there's an emergency, take your own car to the hospital.

The most important lesson I learned from the TM was believing in the ability of youth. I should have been less enthusiastic about the power of youth when I became involved in a band filled with teenage musicians, but that too is another book that won't ever be written.

A lesson in chemistry that I learned during the TM tenure was the danger of mixing testosterone and estrogen together. It's amazing how the combination of those two chemicals can alter a young mind and utterly destroy one's focus. In less than a year I began finding myself riding less precisely. I began pulling off the track more often, finding myself behind third place more and more.

My interest in motorcycles and motocross was changing. Terry decided it was time for me to move up to larger displacement motorcycles. It sounded great to me, the bikes were free.

During the time I owned the TM I passed through some of my most formidable years. I fell in love, experimented with drugs and alcohol, and began forming life-long opinions and views, many which have remained constant. I learned to win. I learned to lose. I learned youth is powerful.

Since then, I've learned youth is fleeting. It seems the only place I can recapture youth is deep within the recesses of fading memories. And the memories of my time with the TM, are fond memories indeed.

MOTORCYCLE: SPONSOR BIKES 1976 SUZUKI RM 125, TM 250, TM 400

Towards the end of 1975, Terry and I decided it was time to move me from the 100cc class to the 125cc class. The fact that Suzuki had just released the new RM 125, and Terry needed to show it off, was also a deciding factor.

What a fine motorcycle that was, the "shop bike." That RM 125 was tricked out to the n'th degree. The only issue we kept battling was trying to find the perfect jetting for the bike. It was so finely tuned that we began having to re-jet according to track conditions.

Besides the new RM, Terry had a TM 250 that I raced a few times. For grins and giggles he even tied me onto the beast of motocross bikes, a TM 400. After that ride I wasn't grinning or giggling, I was ashen and paralyzed by fear. Me, on a TM400, that only happened *once*.

Now, the RM 125? It was slick and fast, good thing, because the riders in the 125 class were numerous. It was at the height of outdoor motocross and there were usually three classes of 125 riders. I always found it better to ride the expert class, it was less crowded and the riders were generally more experienced. The bottom line, it was safer.

The most memorable race on the RM 125 was another "sneak away" race when my parents were out of town. This time "The Three Musketeers," as Glover, Willis, and myself had become known, went racing in Florida. Just so you know, we paid for our own meals on that trip.

Florida was a whole new track experience for us. The track was sandy, fast, and crowded. I really found a groove with the track. I was flying on the RM. I did more than my usual one or two practice laps, but I still focused on practicing my start, because this track had an uphill run into a blind first turn.

I always was one that liked to fly, and with the increased suspension on the RM, the larger jumps at the track provided a platform to become so airborne you could literally, and I mean literally, jump over slower riders. I was told by track officials not to do it again or I would be banned.

"Whatever," my mind mumbled.

Several times during practice the RM loaded up, I would sit track side gurgling and sputtering until it would clear up. Since this was a sneak away trip I didn't have my mechanic, Darrel, with me, nor did I have any spare jets. I figured the best way to ride was wide open.

The first moto was called. We lined up. I had a prime spot at the starting gate. As I looked down the line of nearly forty-five bikes, the rider next to me extended a hand toward me and said, "Good luck."

As a de-psychoing technique, I arrogantly replied, "Save it, you'll need it."

We're all familiar with the saying, "pride comes before a fall," it's a mini-theme in this book; well, that time, I sure set karma in motion.

The track official held up the "two minute" sign. Everyone focused on the uphill start, revving engines, creating an enveloping cloud of blue two-stroke smoke.

He turned it to "one minute" sign. Engines revved furiously.

He turned it sideways, the air was filled with the high pitch of screaming two stroke engines being held back.

The gate dropped. Clutches were released. Motorcycles leaped forward. I sat at a standstill with a loaded up, gurgling bike.

You know of my short temper for ill running motorcycles. I began screaming a litany of foul mouthed threats to the RM. I made petitions to God. The RM cleared out. I took off like a rocket. I was mad as a hornet - or just plain "mad."

As I crested the hill I saw the first turn was a tangled heap of crashed motorcycles. Riders were limping away from the carnage. My luck was changing for the better, or so I thought.

"Great!" I screamed, followed by a sinister laugh.

Suddenly, for the first time in nearly a year, I had focus again. I began passing riders like they were riding MX bicycles. I was using other bikes for traction in the turns.

I hit the first large jump so fast that I passed three riders while I was airborne. My wheels were as high as their heads. I remembered what I had learned during practice about the upcoming larger jumps, and forget what I had been told by track officials.

I was living up to my long earned nickname - "The Fiend."

After lap two I was in about eighth place. Soon, many of the slower riders were being lapped. By lap six I had third place in sight, as well as track officials starting to motion for me to slow down.

Out of the corner of my eye I noticed another official headed trackside holding a rolled red flag, I could have sworn it had my name on it.

There was no stopping me now. I was in full crazy mode. I was landing so hard that I bent both rear shocks, which only increased the impact with each ensuing jump, not to mention the bike start handling somewhat like a Husqvarna doing the "Husky Hop."

As I made the last lap and approached the largest jump, I thought, "Hit it balls-to-the-wall." I did. I jumped over the top of two riders at once. Third place was less than twenty feet away and in my crosshairs.

As I was descending, a lapped rider moved dead center into my landing path. I landed on the back of his seat and rear fender. A spectacular crash ensued, followed by four other riders joining the jumbled, tumbling, mass of motorcycles.

The bikes finally stopped. My right hand was woven between the spokes of someone's front wheel and bleeding profusely from between the little finger and ring finger. I pulled myself free and drug the RM from the pile of tangled bikes.

Two of the other riders, including the one that caused my crash - certainly it wasn't my fault - were on the ground moaning and tightly holding various parts of their bodies. I mounted the RM with the intent to continue. I felt no pain.

As I began kick-starting the bike, I noticed that it felt "squishy." About the fifth kick it broke in half at the frame between the tank and seat. It now sported a wheelbase nearly a foot longer. I threw it down and began one of my infamous tirades.

I approached the rider I had landed on. He was on the ground balled up in pain. I released the furor of my tongue. I removed my helmet and began hitting the poor guy. Thankfully, the track officials and emergency personnel arrived. They pulled me away.

I was told to gather myself, my bike, my friends, pack up, and to "get the hell out of Florida." They gave me thirty minutes to be off of the grounds or they were calling the police.

Willis and Glover helped carry the broken RM back to the truck. I was covered in blood from the gash inbetween my fingers. The man next to us told me that Super-Glue had been invented for such emergencies.

He poured peroxide on the gash in my hand and glued my finger back together with Super Glue. It worked. I still have a visible scar to remind me of the perils of greed, selfishness, and stupidity.

We left Florida. When we got back to Louisiana I went straight to my sister's house. I had to show Terry his bike and explain what had happened. I hadn't told them that I had gone to Florida.

The regional Suzuki factory rep, always looking for an excuse to come to New Orleans, wanted to come take a look at the RM. He hadn't heard of one being so thrashed and figured it may be worth looking at.

After Terry treated him to a great seafood lunch he said Suzuki would take the RM back for being "defected." They gave Terry a new one.

In the interim, Terry decided I should race his TM 250, another shop bike, while we waited for Suzuki to replace the RM. The TM 250 was stone stock and had more power than I was accustomed to, but I've always been a willing Guinea Pig for a new thrill - just ask my doctor's.

Off to the races we went. The first thing I noticed as I practiced starting on the 250 was that I had to sit on top of the gas tank to keep from flipping over backwards; that and a bit of clutch slipping seemed to be fairly effective.

The 250 was a challenge. When exiting a corner the front of the 250 was reaching for the sky while the bike was still at an angle. I had to use my leg, opposite of the lean, to counterbalance the desire of the bike to fall over. It was quite a show. Within two laps I had a small, yet very amused, crowd awaiting my arrival.

I was 5'6" and weighed 120 pounds, soaking wet. I had to use what little weight I had to fight the 250. I've always been told that I have a very unusual riding style, I employ a lot of body English. I've heard the same thing about my drumming techniques. Both look as though I'm moving more than necessary. I'm sure that's true.

I found jumping the 250 akin to using a Quarter horse as a jumper, too clunky, heavy, and the TM had poop for suspension. The way I launched bikes caused a rebound upon landing on the 250. That was confusing. I managed to finish fourth, something I was satisfied with, considering the situation.

It was evident that the 250 was not my forte', so Terry suggested we see what the TM 400 was about the next time we went-a-racing.

"Say whaaaat?" I thought, "did I just hear him say 400?"

In retrospect, I believe Terry was getting even for what I had done to the RM 125 in Florida.

The TM 400 Cyclone had the reputation of being the most dangerous bike ever built, and for good reason, it was. I will not rehash decades old magazine reviews, I will simply say that I made about two laps and was worn out.

My 120 pounds could in no way tame a forty horsepower beast that weighed ten pounds more than I did. I was into thrills and adrenalin rushes, but I wasn't suicidal. I honestly believe the Japanese dropped the TM 400 bomb into the American market in retaliation for Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Thankfully, the new RM 125 arrived soon. By that time, Terry had a new head mechanic, Herman. Herman had tricked the RM out. Herman was a very talented mechanic. Herman could perform magic on a Suzuki. Herman was also a gun tot'n, crazy man. I like guns, but not when other crazy people are pack'n 'em.

From what I heard, if someone, be it a little ole lady or a cop, would cut Herman off in traffic, he would pull up to the drivers window with one of his pistols pointed at them. At bike nights he would, allegedly, be in the parking lot and start shooting his pistols into the air like Yosemite Sam.

Herman was just exercising his 5th Amendment right to bear arms. He wore a pair of six-shooters on his sides nearly everywhere he went. I learned from being around Herman that wearing an exposed gun is legal.

Decades later I would pick up the same habit - exercising my right to bear arms. Several times I did that with the intention to draw the cops and a crowd, just to remind people of their right to bear arms. It's not something I would do these days.

Anyway, Herman had the RM fine tuned and ready to race. It was also about this time that my focus was becoming blurred by that mixture of testosterone and estrogen I've spoken of. My thoughts seemed to center only on Lisa.

My last motocross race at Waggaman was proof of every story ever told of a man's demise and fall caused by a woman. History is littered with examples: Samson/Delilah, Lancelot/Guinevere, Mark Antony/Cleopatra - you get the idea. Seemingly overnight my focus went from scattered to dangerous.

During practice I realized something had gone terribly wrong inside of my head and spine, the parts that give you courage. Either that or I had been castrated while sleeping.

Waggaman had an medium sized uphill jump that would land you atop the crest of an eighty foot downhill, which of course was immediately followed by an eighty foot uphill. When you crested the top of the eighty foot downhill you were looking across what seemed to be a canyon. That observation alone let's you know that I had lost focus of what was in front of me. Worse than that, I began to be afraid of the downhill. Me scared. Not good. Remember that much later in the book.

During the first lap of the first moto, as I approached the jump before the crest, my fears materialized. I lost all focus and flipped the bike. I was spit off the rear end. The bike continued to the crest, and then continued over the crest, and then continued downhill for about ten feet. The crowd loved it.

The next lap I noticed a larger crowd had gathered, and they were pointing at me. They seemed excited to see me. I had no focus. None. I repeated my previous performance, only this time the bike went a little farther downhill.

I got on the bike again. I also got applause. Funny how people are endlessly amused by *other* peoples screw-ups. I guess it makes them feel better about themselves.

For the entire next lap, my mind kept reliving the incident. As I approached the jump I noticed the crowd had grown larger. This time they were waving and cheering me on.

My mind told me to slow down, to focus; however, my right hand, as though controlled by some outside force, dialed the throttle on. I hit the jump faster than any of the previous laps.

My mind screamed, "What are you doing?" The world went into slow motion, from experience I knew that meant it was going to end badly.

The bike launched into the air, I could feel it was headed over the crest of the downhill. I was traveling at a velocity that I figured would put me way out in the air, above the eighty foot deep canyon. I figured it would be high enough that my descend toward the ground would increase in speed at an exponential rate.

"Get off! Get off!" my mind yelled, as I starred across the canyon with glazed, wide-eyes. I pushed myself away from the bike.

I slid to the top of the crest and watched as the bike went sailing through the air. I could hear the gasps of the crowd. The bike imitated the country club performance of the Yamaha AT3-MX. The front end came down slowly and smoothly, parallel to the downhill. Somehow the bike landed on both wheels and was headed downhill at high speed, until it began its end over end performance.

From the crest I watched as parts flew off of the bike. Terry and Lisa were there, already having heard about my guaranteed crash performance on each lap.

Terry walked over to me. As he stood over me, looking at me as though I were a stranger he had never met, all he had to say was, "Really?"

"I quit," was my only reply.

That was indeed the crash of my motocross aspirations. I would try racing again a couple of years later. Terry let others race the shop bikes. I became interested in other things, such as spending every spare minute with Lisa.

My other interest at that time had begun leaning towards music, double knit pants, and polyester shirts. Rumor had it I was running ponzi schemes at school, conning the rich kids out of their money. All rumors. I was innocent. Always have been.

Since I was a child I've believed there's been a secret conspiracy against my reputation; but I can't prove it, just as none of my accusers could prove their claims.

Oddly, or naturally, I had an interest in stocks and bonds during high school. I took the course for the SEC test. I passed. Arguably, I was the youngest person at that time to have passed the test.

Thankfully, I had the sense to *never* sell stocks and bonds. I realized that with my "Bucktown principals" I would most likely end up in Federal prison, probably because of outlandish and false accusations against my character by conspirators.

I did learn a few lessons on the shop bikes that have stuck with me throughout life. I'd have to say that the most important one is that dreams, aspirations, and abilities change, whether you want them to or not.

I learned that the old adage, "The best laid plans of mice and men go awry," is true. Now, as a teacher, I find myself having to bite my tongue when young students say they're going to become a professional athlete, especially those unable to play sports because of their D- average.

I think quietly, "Yeah I was too." I realize the dream doesn't happen for most, but it does happen for some, so I encourage them to follow their dream, as impossible as it may be. I also advise that they have a contingency plan.

One thing I know for sure, from both my actions aboard shop bikes and from what I saw in business through my own employees, is that we're all willing to take a lot more risks when it's with someone else's money or bikes.

A science or psychological related lesson that I learned on the RM 125 is that when the world goes into slow motion, usually when something bad is in progress, it isn't the world or the mind that goes into slow motion. Rather, I believe at the moment of calamity the mind is taking in so much detail, at such a rapid pace, that relatively, everything *seems* to be going slow. In reality, your mind is thinking at a speed approaching light speed.

I liken it to what it must feel like to step out of the space station. It seems as though you're not moving, yet you're going twenty-six thousand miles per hour, it's all about relative surroundings and mental intake. Now you know why I'm not a physicist or rocket scientist.

A lesson that I have never learned, though it was taught to me again during the time on shop bikes, is moderation. I have always been full on, or completely off. I wish I could develop the ability to do things in moderation. I always go full bore, which seems to shorten the life span, or enjoyment, of whatever it is that consumes me, including love and health.

The one important thing that I learned, and thirty years later remedied, was that a stock Suzuki TM 400 sucks. Contrary to the advertisements of the day, it is not as close to Roger DeCoster's Suzuki as mere a mere mortal can get.

I got as close as one can get, by buying the signed DeCoster replica that sat in my house as art. I never rode it. The DeCoster replica was too pretty to ride; or perhaps deep in my soul, I did learn a *very important* lesson from shop bikes, and that was to never, ever, ride another Suzuki TM 400, be it stock or not.

MOTORCYCLE: OSSA 250 TRIALS MICK ANDREWS REPLICA

After I had stopped racing motorcross - Whoa! Stop. Did I just write that? *Motorcross*? Take two: After I had stopped racing moto-cross and began wanting to play in the dirt again, I realized I hadn't tried a trials bike.

I had always admired the skill and finesse of trials riders. Trials seemed like a gentlemen's motorcycling sport; besides it was slow and you didn't have to wear a helmet.

I decided I should find one, keep in mind, this was before eBay, trials bikes weren't a dime a dozen around New Orleans. "Trials bike" was mainly mispronounced "trail bike" in New Orleans. Louisiana was not a big market for trials bikes, we have no hills, besides those that are man made. The only rocks to go over are oyster shells and dredged shells.

I recall a folklore of one trials event held near New Orleans's that tells of a trials rider, who midway over a log, discovered the log was an eight foot alligator. Trails just didn't catch on in south Louisiana

But none the less I wanted one. I had always thought Mick Andrews had style, so I went on a quest for a Mick Andrew's Replica Ossa. Amazingly, I found one - in New Orleans.

I was already three years past my ability to do an AT-3-type balancing act. The only place I had to ride was a two acre vacant lot down the street from Lisa's house. The lot housed an electrical sub-station surrounded by three foot deep drainage ditches. It would have to do.

One of the lessons I learned on the Ossa dealt with geometry and the physics of gravity when combined with a lock-to-lock steering. The first day I rode the bike it spit me off three times before I learned my lesson. I quickly learned a trials bike could turn, and turn over, quickly.

I was bored with the bike within days, it just wasn't much fun, nor challenging, to conquer a three foot swale. Happily, I figured out that first and second gear were reserved for stump pulling contests, or, for easy lofting of the front wheel.

"Oh yeah, wheelies!" I loudly exclaimed.

I was in heaven, a bike made to do wheelies.

Unlike the wheelies I used to perform on the Yamaha AT3 at fifty to sixty mph, the ones on the Ossa were nice and slow wheelies; and if need be, and need was, you could either lay it down or just step away. No harm, no foul, as if the bike had been designed to thrash and crash.

So there I was, on the parish line of Orleans and Jefferson parishes, next to one of New Orleans main thoroughfares - read: with an audience - playing like I was Mick Andrews. Of course the only resemblance between our riding styles was a cap, yeah, that's right, I even wore the trials cap.

I had found an outlet for my obsessive behavior, I started practicing wheelies on the Ossa for hours, several days a week. I became quite good.

I perfected doing circular wheelies. I would put one foot on the rear fender, loft the front wheel to where the Ossa and I were nearly vertical, then we would fall over; by happenstance I saved a fall and understood what to do as it turned. That revelation led to perfecting 360 degree turns in that position.

I had quite an audience during afternoon rush hour traffic, people would blow their horns in approval, or in disapproval yell, "Show off!"

Whatever, they looked.

After six months I tired of having a one-trick-pony-motorcycle. I wasn't going to be able to attend any trials meets, they were too far away and I only had one Sunday a month to compete. I put the bike up for sale.

Over the next few weeks I got tired of telling callers, "No, it's not a trail bike, it's a T-R-I-A-L-S bike, trials. The "i" comes before the "a."" I said repeatedly.

It got old fast trying to explain trials. I felt like I should be getting paid by the Trials Association for promoting the sport, they didn't agree.

Several people came to look at the bike, if nothing more than out of curiosity. People didn't quite grasp why I wouldn't let them ride the bike. But they would all ask to "try it out," anyway.

I have said, "Nope," to requests to try out the bike since I was thirteen, and I still do today. I never let anyone test drive my motorcycles. I do offer to refund their money, if after buying it they don't find it as I described.

I finally sold the Ossa. I would go on to own several more trials bikes through the years. Some of the best motorcycling times of my life was twenty years later on a Suzuki RL 250. The Ossa gave me an appreciation for trials bikes, a sport I wish I could have explored further.

I can't say that I learned any important lessons while owning the Ossa, not much to learn doing circular wheelies in a vacant lot, except that the New Orleans police are not kidding when they tell you the law says "wear a helmet." I was given the tickets to prove it.

I also learned the importance of understanding signs that read "private property," and that utility companies have always been rather picky about people playing around their sub-stations, even before 9-11.

Looking back, I suppose the important lesson I learned was to start having a little respect for authority, especially those in uniform and carrying guns. It pays to be nice.

I learned to smile again, and to ride for the sheer grins and giggles of it. I had fun nearly every day for months. My time spent riding and playing on the Ossa reenforced that which I already knew, "*carpe diem*," which in my translation means, "do wheelies today."

MOTORCYCLE: 1977 YAMAHA MX 100

Well, I made it through high school - thank you, Mrs. Driscoll - and headed off to college. In August, 1977 I began attending Southeastern Louisiana University, about fifty miles north of New Orleans in Hammond, Louisiana. SLU was a suitcase-college, everyone went home on weekends. However, from Sunday evening until Friday afternoon, I was "free at last, free at last."

My first semester had me living twenty minutes away from a motocross track. You know, the ones that were actually outdoors. I had a metal rear bumper and bumper racks on my second Mercury Comet. It just didn't seem right, all this and no motorcycle.

Of course nearly two years earlier I had lost my nerve to race, as told in the *Shop Bikes* story. I wasn't happy about that. I felt something had to be done. I was not a wussy-boy, afraid of being run over by forty motorcycles. Something had to be done. I had a plan.

I decided the 100cc class was a good place to transition back into racing, besides, I still weighed 120 pounds and was still 5'6", perfect for a 100. I decided I would like try the technology of Yamaha's monoshock bikes. I bought a Yamaha MX 100 and brought it to school.

You know by now that I don't think too far ahead, perhaps ten minutes, recall the GT-380, or any one of my stories. This time I created a previously unthought of dilemma, where to keep the Yamaha at school. I lived in the dorm, on campus, with a roommate that was a friend from high school.

After contemplating this "storage problem" for a while, perhaps thirty seconds, I wheeled the Yamaha in the side door, down the dorm hall, and into my room. I forgot to ask my roommate if he would mind if I kept the bike in the room. He didn't. I didn't think he would, that's why I didn't ask, plus his opinion didn't really matter.

The Yamaha stayed there unnoticed for most of the semester. The hush money I paid my dorm PA was minimal and worth it. Our dorm PA was great, for a few extra bucks he also lost his sense of smell and hearing whenever he came in, past, or near our dorm room.

Now I needed to find time to ride. Thinking the way to tackle college was to start early, I had scheduled 8 a.m. classes every day of the week, within a week that had become a problem. Making 8 a.m. classes is nearly impossible when you stop partying at 4 a.m. I found it was easier to stay up, eat breakfast, drink a lot of coffee, or, more conveniently, skip class.

At least for now I had most afternoons free to go riding. Soon, I would have three mornings free as well; I had to quit most of my 8 a.m. classes, before my grade stuck or the drop date came.

I started going out to the track several times a week. Within a few weeks my confidence was back. Once again I was flying around the track. I began to know every line of the track, good and bad. It was time to go racing again.

The next race, I was there. I was ready to race again. It was good to see some of the people I knew. One person I was happy to see was, Buddy, his mom owned a very successful company that makes seafood boils. They sell great seafood boils, none better in my opinion. They also sell tons of seafood boil mix, literally, and Buddy was as spicy as any of their products.

Buddy supposedly had a penchant for racing while on a concoction of pot, alcohol, and mushrooms, the kind that grow in cow fields. Buddy was fast and precise in his racing skills, regardless of whether the chemical intake rumors were true or not. Buddy was fast. He was also very motivational for me.

My first moto ended before the checkered flag fell, I was falling off and riding slow. I pulled into the pits and decided to go home. Buddy had other ideas. First, he took my car keys and wouldn't give them back, he did threaten to throw them in the weeds - the tracks, not his.

He berated me to humiliation for being a wuss. He finally walked away. A few minutes later he was back. He had signed me up for the 175 class, which was about to line up.

I bemoaned the issue until Buddy picked up my helmet, walked over to me, and told me to either put the helmet on and grow some balls or he would beat me to within an inch of death and castrate me, since I "wasn't going to use them." Of course his threats were a laced with a lot more verbal spice.

I looked at Buddy for a moment.

His girlfriend, Beth - that I had a terrible crush on - looked at me and said, "You know he means it."

I nodded.

Buddy thrust my helmet towards me. I put it on. I lined up to race in the 175 class. Buddy told me if I wasn't first into the turn he would hit me with the big stick he was carrying, and then beat the crap out of me, right there in the first turn.

You may think Buddy was a blowhard. I knew he meant every word he said. Buddy was crazy.

The starter was out. The gate dropped. All I remember was that I was in third place and the first turn was approaching fast. Buddy was standing at the turn waving his big stick. The other bikes began to back off for the approaching turn. I dialed the throttle on.

At that point I figured one way or the other, the first turn may hurt. If I wasn't first, I would be beat by a madman wielding a big stick. That would hurt. If I was first into the turn at the rate I was approaching, I would probably crash. That would hurt. I smelled pain either way.

In what seemed like a millisecond, I hit my brakes - hard - and shifted from fifth gear and third place into first gear and first place. It was as though I had pulled a parachute brake, like dragster cars have. I threw the bike into the berm, leaned it over hard left, and dialed on the throttle.

I took the lead and kept it. By the end of the long back straightaway I would get passed by one or two 175's, only to pass them again in the set of "S" curves that followed. On every lap I saw Buddy having a smoke in a corner giving me the thumbs up. I won the race.

By the time I returned to the pit area Buddy was already in first place in the 250 moto, which he won. He also won the open class that followed.

Buddy did one handed wheelies down the straightaways and cross-ups on ever jump. He had speed and style. He didn't do it to show off. He did it because it was fun. He just happen to win.

Buddy taught me that you can have fun and win at the same time. I've remembered that throughout my life.

As I stood trackside, watching the open class race, Buddy blew by; the man standing next to me commented, "That boy is flying!"

I laughed to myself and thought, "If you only knew how true that is," - allegedly.

At days end I had won the 175 class and Buddy had won both the 250 and open class races. It was time to go home. I thanked Buddy for what he had done for, or to me.

Buddy taught me a valuable lesson, a real life lesson. People don't lose their talent(s), they just choose not to use them. I've pulled that lesson up from memory many times during the last three decades.

More importantly, I learned fears can be conquered, if by nothing else than sheer determination and the threats of a mad-man.

Forget what some psychologist's say, the threat of pain is a tremendous motivational tool, always has been. Probably always will be. A universal truth.

If you need proof, say the words "homework" or "test" to seventh graders, and watch them wince in pain from the sheer mention of the words.

I can't remember racing the Yamaha again. I remember that race, but I don't remember ever racing moto-cross again. It was a great race, and a great way to end my days of moto-cross racing.

The semester ended, I flunked out of school, and sold the Yamaha, setting in motion a trait I have repeated since; if I get nervous about tomorrow, I sell my bike today.

I tried college on and off again over the next two years. I ended up being hospitalized for ulcers as a result of the non-stop partying and worrying. I didn't own another motorcycle for almost a year, my life was on a different trajectory.

However, I do keep fond memories of that year at college, all of the experiences it offered, and that I took advantage of. Most of all, I remember my last moto-cross race. My finale.

Mr. Webster's definition of a "finale" includes these words: "a performance, or a public event, especially when particularly dramatic or exciting."

I think that best describes my last moto-cross race. My last race was dramatic, exciting, and quite a performance. It was a finale. It was a last dance with a lost love.

MOTORCYCLE: 1977 SUZUKI RM 125

This motorcycle is the bike that I am posing with behind all of my trophies in a picture I call, "Mr. Motocross." I don't remember buying the bike. I don't remember riding the bike. I don't remember selling the bike. I don't remember much of anything about that time of my life.

When I look closely at that picture, I can see in my eyes that it was at the height of the Ativan fog doctors had me living in. By the hair and beard it was 1979 or so.

I learned some important, life changing lesson during the time I owned that RM. Foremost, I learned not to party myself into an early grave. I learned that ulcers hurt, and are very inconvenient. Hum... wait; I had a heart attack at forty-nine. I guess I learned nothing.

I did learn that a broiled soft-shelled crab sucks. Because of my ulcers, I had to eat broiled food, no fried anything, for nearly a year. Almost as bad, I couldn't drink alcohol or have caffeine either - and that's a problem for a New Orleanian.

For me, waking up without a few cups of Community Coffee with chicory is near inhumane, Spartan like torture. I also found not drinking because I couldn't, instead of because I chose not to, sucks. At this point in my life, I chose not to drink.

But most importantly, I swore I will never let my life get to a point, whether by choice or by medication, that I live so deep in a fog that I can't remember *one thing* about a motorcycle I've owned.

"What is it About Wheelies?"

Since I could ride on two wheels I have been fascinated by "popping a wheelie." I was good at it on my bicycles, I was great at it on the Yamaha AT-3 MX, and I just had a blast doing wheelies on the Ossa.

I think wheelies enhance my flirtatious attitude towards danger. Wheelies bring you to the edge, literally. One mistake, push it too far, and it's going to hurt. I think wheelies are like tightwire walking, you're either perfectly balanced, or you're not; and if you're not, you're going to fall, and it's probably going to hurt.

I've always been told I always go past the edge on nearly everything I do; however, no one that's told me that has been able to answer one simple question: how do you know where the edge is until you've gone passed it?

Russ, my brother in law, had a Yamaha IT-175 that he let me ride, once. As soon as I made one pass up the street I tried to do a wheelie. I found the edge immediately. I flipped the IT right in the middle of the street.

I used to get such a rush from doing a wheelie. When wheelies are done right they're the epitome of skill, balance, bravery - oh, whatever - they're a great adrenalin rush.

Wheelies remind me of the famous New Orleans drink "The Hurricane," a mix of so many things, that together, gives you get a great high; but, when you push it too far, you'll regret having ever partaken of the potion.

Kinda like a wheelie.

INTRODUCTION TO SECTION TWO: 1980-1989

By twenty-two I had the world by the tail. I was off and running. Business was good. I had a great apartment, a new sports car, and was married to my childhood sweetheart. Things were going great, at least in my mind.

Oh, the things that can happen within a decade. And that decade was the 1980s. If you partook of it's evil pleasures, take a moment to reminisce, and be thankful that you too survived.

During this time Terry was no longer in my life, it taught me an importance lesson; don't get attached to people or things, they come and go.

Terry had been a major influence on motorcycling for me. He was instrumental in getting my father to let me race. He provided support and help. He turned me on to the drum kit, but I don't hold that against him.

Worst of all, he and my sister are the ones that brought me to see the "R" rated movie, *Easy Rider*, when I was eleven years old, which you can see still influences my life today.

By the time I was twenty four, I had achieved a goal I'd had since I was six. I finally owned a Bentley. Driving a Bentley was everything I had dreamed, it went far beyond my expectations. Unfortunately, every car since has merely been transportation.

The Bentley, purely by accident, turned into a lucrative business. Soon my phone number had become synonymous with the term, "Le Bon Ton Rouleaux" for visiting rock stars, politicians, and movie industry people. The Bentley is yet another book unto itself, one that will never be written. The business generated by the Bentley was built upon discretion.

During this decade I learned what a disaster having too much free time and expendable cash can be when combined with irresponsibility and stupidity. I was blindly racing toward the metaphorical brick wall.

By twenty-seven my first marriage was over and the Bentley was gone, both victims of excess.

I soon married my second wife and we moved to Los Angeles. I had taken a job in the film industry as a "pre-production assistant," or more precisely, I had to find investors for films. It was intense and stressful. I hated it. We returned to Louisiana, and I to the family business. I began playing music in an all girl alternative band.

Smell trouble brewing? Did you hear a crash?

My actions concerning my second wife and daughter fall into the brain dead asshole category. Period.

By the time I was thirty, both my wife and daughter were gone. I still speak to my former wife regularly; I last spoke to my daughter when she was eight years old, over sixteen years ago.

The second decade of my motorcycling experiences was turbulent. It was filled with too much self indulgence and too little responsibility.

I was moving fast and running wide open again, and things that go fast crash hard; just like I did - again.

MOTORCYCLE: 1974 HUSQVARNA WR450

The Husky 450 was the first bike I kept inside of my house. I had owned a custom Schwinn Apple Crate that I kept indoors in fifth grade, but we're talking about motorcycles, so back to the Husky.

When I bought the bike, Lisa and I had lived in an apartment for nearly a year. They decided not to renew my lease, simply because they felt I was "a danger within communal living." They were right. But it just wasn't right to serve me notice on Christmas Eve. Interrupting their corporate Christmas party didn't help my cause. It was ugly, but I'm over it.

In 1982 my wife and I moved back to Bucktown. We leased a brand new, ultra-modern condo, steps away from the Lake Pontchartrain levee, where I had grown up riding motorcycles. It was two blocks from my parent's house, where I was raised.

Lisa still lives in Bucktown. I don't. Go figure. Lisa still makes money off of the pest control business. I don't. Go figure. Lisa's house is paid for. I don't have a house. Go figure.

Lisa wouldn't let me keep the Husky in the living room, not that she was against art, she agreed it deserved to live indoors, but not in the living room.

She didn't give in to my reasoning that the Husky was every bit as much of fine art as were the Boehm porcelain sculptures and Waterford Crystal. She didn't see it that way.

I had to keep the Husky in the spare bedroom closet - upstairs, reason #252 why my back hurts all the time.

The Husky, beautiful by design, like a blond Swedish woman with great curves. It was perfect. It was art. I'll always remember my one dance with the Swedish beauty.

Yes, in our time together I got to do the "Husky Hop." Not anything like Danny and the Junior's "Let's go to the Hop," no, not anything like that.

What the heck, let's start there. By now it was 1984. I had owned the Husky for several years and had ridden the bike perhaps three times. I decided it was time to ride the bike. Off to the Bonne Carre Spillway I went.

The Bonne Carre Spillway is an overflow basin for the Mississippi River into Lake Pontchartrain. When the river becomes dangerously high, the Corps of Engineers open flood gates that divert water into Lake Pontchartrain via the spillway;

inadvertently, it dumps tons of America's top soil from Minnesota to Louisiana in the spillway, creating a basin of rich soil, sand piles, and everything else that was in the river's current. You never knew what you might see.

Aquatic surprises and all, the spillway offered great riding. The Husky was in heaven in the tacky, loamy soil, it offered near perfect traction for the Husky's unbelievable torque; I think all of the Husky's horsepower reached the ground.

The Husky made spectacular rooster-tails. I rode for hours until I'd get a crick in my neck from looking over my shoulder at my rooster-tails. I'm easily amused. Simple minds, simple amusements.

Anyway, back to doing the "Husky Hop" with my Swedish beauty. Our first dance was when I was blazing through some whoop-de-do's. The Husky began to hop. It was jumping side-to-side uncontrollably. It seemed like an eternity until it stopped. That slow motion thing again. Oddly enough, I survived. I was stoked by the excitement. It was time to do wheelies!

Normally with a bike like the Husky, *especially* a bike like the Husky, you want to do wheelies. It's a wheelie-freaks dream. I didn't try to perfect long wheelies. I've found you can't perfect a wheelie until you go past the tipping point.

I've always had a knack for finding that tipping point, usually by flipping the bike within five minutes, but not with the Husky. I couldn't. The Husky was just too perfect.

The lines, the glitter of its aluminium fenders, and that Husky gas tank with the painted and chromed mirror sides - too pretty to damage; it was the first bike I owned that I struggled within myself not to ride - to just keep it in a closet.

Eventually, unsound reasoning won out. I rode the Husky. I rode for hours and hours, I was young, I was supercharged - it was the eighties. I rode until my muscles cramped, or until I could at least feel them cramping.

When I finally stopped to rest, deep within the forest, I had an impressionable encounter with nature. When I looked down I saw a line of insects, many various kinds of insects, very orderly and amicably waiting their turn to walk through a black liquid that was oozing from a huge, yellow mushroom.

It was amazing. I watched for ten minutes; however, I didn't get in line.

The serenity and coolness of the forest that day was a great place to sit and contemplate. So I did.

I saw quite clearly where my life was headed, and what a masked ball my life had become. From the thoughts, I wrote down some words, wonderfully so, a decade later they became a song. But that joy didn't sooth the intensity of my life, and an intense life comes with intense lessons.

The lessons I learned while I owned the Husky were mean, blunt, true looks at reality lessons. During the last year that I owned the Husky I had let a lot of undesirable habits escalate, which also brought undesirable people into my life.

I learned that a "fair and equal measure," as told in Proverbs, is the best way to conduct business. I found out that if one needs profit from a venture it's wise to not use the inventory for personal pleasures.

I also learned one should pay their bills on time. But I was supposed to have learned that from the Honda Cub megaphone caper. I guess I didn't.

I learned that stupidity can make you become indebted to creditors that show up at your door to collect on your debt. The one that came to my house offered what he felt was a reasonable time frame for repayment, "Now," he said.

Not having that amount of cash on hand, and not really wanting any type of physical or emotional altercation with said person, he offered another solution.

"How's about I walk through your pretty house and take what's fair and we'll be square," he asked.

It took a nanosecond to realize that was the final, and only option.

"Sure, come in," I said.

He looked at all of the pretty things downstairs. He didn't see anything to his liking.

"What-cha got upstairs I might like?" he asked, as he walked upstairs.

"Nothing really," I said.

I already knew where this was headed. He went straight to the spare bedroom. He looked around the room and opened the closet door.

The Husky *didn't even try* to hide - bitch.

He pointed in the closet and smiled at me, "Oh yeah, dat's what I'm talk'n 'bout. I want dat," he exclaimed.

"I knew you would," I mumbled.

And so the Husky had a new home.

The sad part of the story is not my having lost the bike because of my stupidity; no, the *really* sad part is that the guy totally trashed the bike within two weeks. He was doing wheelies up and down his street, flipping it every time.

His fun ended when the bike slammed into a parked car, folding the front end and squashing the beautiful tank. Ever wonder what happens to all the classic motorcycles? There's an example of one's demise.

During this time I learned once again, God is merciful.

The adage "live by the sword, die by the sword," seems to fit this time of my life - and the death and destruction of the Husquvarna. Tough lessons indeed.

As for my time with the Swedish beauty? Man, could she dance! And she sure was pretty.

I miss her.

MOTORCYCLE: YAMAHA 650 SECA TURBO

After my first marriage ended in 1986, I moved to Baton Rouge, Louisiana. My new girlfriend, and next wife, lived in Baton Rouge. Conveniently, my sister had a branch office located there I could help with. But how did I end up in Baton Rouge?

Much like I did when I saw Lisa walking up the drive and said that I would marry her, the same thing happened with my second wife. Russ, my brother in law, and I were sitting in my car. As she approached I asked Russ who that was.

Russ said, "Don't bother, you'll be wasting your time."

"Yeah, that's what Glover and Willis once said," I reminded him.

I married her. I have since stopped making that statement about approaching women.

I moved to Baton Rouge and rented a very stylish, albeit small, condo. I don't like Baton Rouge, never have. For centuries many New Orleanian's, like myself, have despised Baton Rouge; and tit-for-tat, many Baton Rouge natives dislike New Orleans and it's inhabitants.

Because of my disdain for Baton Rouge, I stayed within my condo compound except for a little work at night and midnight rides on the Yamaha Seca Turbo.

Ruben owned the Seca. Ruben was generous with the things he had. He lent me the Seca on an indefinite, almost forgotten, basis. He let me have possession of the Seca for as long as I needed it.

Now that's a friend, someone who will give you their motorcycle when you're without. An example of the saying, "He would give you the shirt off his back."

I had ridden the Seca many times in New Orleans. It was a rocket! When you found a place to "launch" into turbo mode, the anticipation of that turbo about to kick in was thrilling in itself, when the turbo did kick in - bam! Your eyeballs were sucked into the back of your head as fast as the tack and speedometer needles flew to the right.

The Yamaha's was the epitome of 1980s design philosophy, sporting sharp, angular lines. It was eye catching and comfortable. My wife enjoyed riding with me. We avoided the awful traffic of Baton Rouge by riding late at night.

Night riding was also more pleasant than riding during the 95 degree, 100% humidity filled days, which we normally spent in the pool or napping.

My penchant for riding on full moon nights is arguably a result of my romantic spirit, or proof that I am literally a lunatic. Either way, I love full moon nights, especially when I'm in love. And I was in love.

We would ride up Highland Road, which follows the serpentine twists of the Mississippi River. We'd blast through the flat, straight roads that cut through sugarcane fields. We would ride for hours, sometimes until the sun would begin to rise.

Of course many times we'd find a beautiful place to stop, lay back, stare at the stars, share romance, and dream/talk about moving to California.

During these rides my wife developed a particular penchant for enjoying the cool night breezes by standing on the rear pegs and striking a pose very similar to the Rolls-Royce mascot "The Spirit of Ecstasy" - very befitting for the halcyon days we were living.

On one of these stare-at-the-stars-stops we were having a glass of champagne. I was sitting on the Seca and my wife decided to sit with me. She climbed on in front of me, facing me. The unique lines of the Seca allowed for comfortable, face to face conversations.

"A very good ergonomical design," I thought.

We sipped champagne and talked. Soon we had talked ourselves into traveling down the road, while we were "in that position."

Call it reckless, stupid, the youthful mind-set of invincibility. Call it whatever, but for several decades I have called it memorable, exciting, and fun.

The fun continued for nearly nine months, my wife had a birthday and we decided it was time to chase our dreams to California. I went out to Los Angeles and found us an apartment. I landed a job in the film industry raising pre-production money for "B movies." I went back to get my wife.

We had already packed-up most of our belongings. One afternoon we returned to the condo to find the Seca chained to the carport column. It seems as though the management company had gotten wind that we were moving.

The management company and I had been in disagreement since I had moved in.

We had disagreements about my playing drums in the middle of the night, the fact that they didn't maintain the lawn and my patio garden to my specifications, and their slowness in making repairs. I had held back several hundred dollars from the last rent check. They held the Seca hostage.

There was a ransom note taped to the Seca that let me know when they got their money, the Seca would be unchained. I looked at the heavy chain, its ends were clamped together with a lock the size of my fist. I also noticed how they had chained the bike.

The chain was looped around the right rear shock and the carport column. I went inside, got a wrench, took off the bottom rear shock bolt, moved the shock, threaded the chain through, bolted the shock back in place, and left the chain and lock lying on the cement.

I couldn't help but to leave my own note that read, "Nice try." I signed it, "Houdini."

I gave the Seca back to Ruben. My wife and I packed up the truck and left town. My nine months in Baton Rouge, and time spent on the Seca, left me with fond memories and a couple of lessons in life.

Not connected to the Seca, but relevant none the less; nearly thirty years later I once again experienced that "circle of life" thing I often talk about.

In 2012, three lifetimes away from my time in Baton Rouge in 1986, I took a teaching job in Baton Rouge. As I was searching for a place to live I noticed there was a condo for lease or sale in the condo complex where my wife and I had lived. I went to see it.

The condo was next door to the same unit we had lived in. I nearly bought the unit on the spot. However, after only a week at work, I knew I'd be lucky to make it to December. I decided to wait. Good thing, I quit in December. I left Baton Rouge and moved back to Alabama. What a weird, wide circle life takes. I *still* don't care for Baton Rouge, I find it ten times worse post Katrina.

I did learn the value of friendship. Had Ruben not been the type of friend that would so willingly share his motorcycle, when I had none, then I would've never experienced the motorcycling related fun I had in Baton Rouge.

The Seca didn't provide the deep life lessons that many motorcycles I've owned did. But decades later, it has left an indelible impression in my memory.

More important than lessons, the Seca provided the opportunity to see dreams that I had at eleven years old on my Honda Cub 50 come to fruition; dreams of a beautiful woman and a motorcycle.

The Seca, as most every motorcycle I've spent time on, provides a mental record for me today, as to why I am broke, in pain, and smiling.

I have often wondered how automobile and motorcycle manufacturers come up with names for their cars and bikes. Do they research the etymology of the words they choose? To wit, I will *never* ride a Honda Valkyrie, but after researching the meaning and origin of the word "seca" I smile.

The origin of the word "seca" comes from the Latin word "secare," which means "to reap, to harvest." I find that befitting, very befitting. Seca well describes my time with it. For I did indeed harvest many fond memories and good times - real good times.

"Easy Rider Lied."

I can't begin to explain how much the movie *Easy Rider* influenced my life during my formidable years. Let's just say it was about as stupid as having been sucked into smoking in fourth grade by the television cigarette ad's of the sixties. I'm just a person that's easily duped by Hollywood.

I can't tell you how naive' I felt after I watched the anniversary DVD with Dennis Hopper's commentaries about making the movie. How disappointing it was to learn that the movie was piece-meal-fluke, thrown together by a bunch of stoned Hollywood kids. None the less, I still watch the movie at least every six months and dream of riding the open roads and hang'n with hippies.

Once I owned the chopper, it only took a few miles for reality to smack me in the kidney's and to figure out that you're not going anywhere on a hard-tailed chopper with a peanut tank, at least not with a bad back.

Yeah, I was duped by Hollywood. I was stupid. I believed what I wanted to believe. About the only truth in the movie was the dangers of riding through the deep south in the late sixties and early seventies.

I was duped by ninety minutes of celluloid fantasy. It's probably why I ended up working in Los Angeles in the film industry in my late twenties. Since I was duped by a dream, I figured I may as well be selling it to others.

I did learn something interesting from the commentaries on the DVD. The bikes that I have so lusted over were designed and built by two African American chopper builders, Cliff Vaughns and Ben Hardy. The irony to me is that choppers were mainly ridden by white people at that time.

The chopper craze was epitomized by the vision of two black men. I find that interesting. And from here on out, as long as I teach, during black history month I'll always feature those two men as some of the black men I admire, and make the students do a report on them.

INTRODUCTION TO SECTION THREE: 1990-1999

By 1990 my second marriage had failed, a victim of my selfishness and greed. My wife left, and I gave her sole custody of our daughter. I soothed my pain in self indulgence. I couldn't see through the fog of my own desires. First and foremost, I wanted to play music. So I did.

Eventually, the bass player, Tabitha, and I began dating. She shared the traits that had attracted me to all of my wives: intelligence, creativity, and beauty. Within two years we were married.

Tabitha and I were living large for little people. We had motorcycles, sports cars, Paso Fino horses, and a near autonomously running business. My parents had moved to Baton Rouge, I had sole control over the business again, not necessarily a good thing.

My office manager, Mona, and accountant, Vickie, kept it all glued together. Vickie is affectionately known as my "Conscious." She has kept me out of bankruptcy and federal prison by not allowing me to ever file my own taxes.

During this decade there was love, love lost, motorcycles, and music. Life felt good. Tab and I had a lot of fun, for a time. Fun has its cost. From 1990 until 1995, Tabitha and I had a blast.

Tabitha learned to ride a motorcycle with great expertise - in about fifteen minutes. She also allowed me to indulge myself in my motorcycle passion, to the max. Business was good. The times were fun. It couldn't last.

By 1995 cracks were begging to appear in our marriage, Tabitha had already left me once. Being a natural born salesman I talked her into coming back and marrying me. Actually, I begged her to come back. Begging, sales, same thing, right?

We lived in Old Metairie, a wonderful enclave in New Orleans until July 1996, when we moved to the country north of New Orleans. By December Tabitha had left. I was alone in the country, nestled in Tantella Ranch's beauty and serenity. It was me and my menagerie, which included, but was not limited to: horses, a peacock, cats, ducks, transient dogs, and a visiting pig.

My neighbor, Jimmy, and I were both single and shared many of the same interests. He was a Marine, so he had the discipline to go to work and be wise with his money. I had free time, money, and for the first time in my life, no one to answer to, except God. And I have.

For a while I wondered how I had ended up in the financial and emotional situations I was in. My conscious, Vickie, explained the reasons quite clearly.

"Hum, let's see," she said, "married once, divorced, split your assets and heart. Married twice, split your assets and heart. Married three times, split your assets and heart, plus your a spendthrift and stupid. Any questions?" she asked.

"No," I replied.

Within months of Tabitha leaving I started having what I like to call "creative diarrhea." I wrote and produced a children's audio story, *Buster's Farm*, based upon the antics of the farm animals. I began writing songs prolifically, not all good, not all bad.

This led to another expensive habit, making demo's of the songs in a recording studio. This is about the time I learned the meaning of "everybody's a critic." It's amazing when you share your art how many people have an opinion on how it could've been better, or how they would've done it. I learned that most critics create nothing more than criticism.

If you're creative, create, otherwise, you're a dreamer. I learned that the hard way in Los Angeles in 1985 when I had gone to an art gallery in Beverly Hills. I told the gallery director all about my paintings and sculptures. She asked to see my portfolio. I had none. I was told to leave and never return.

As I was being escorted out, she stopped, put her hand on my shoulder, and kindly told me, "Look around. I sell art, not dreams of art. Stop being a dreamer. Go home and create." I've done that ever since.

Having time to create is both a blessing and curse. During this decade I had time. I had plenty of time. Besides time I had a little extra money. I've never been able to justify making money without making time to spend it. And spend it I did.

Motorcycles, music, writing, and fun were the order of the day, nearly every day. Some days were spent just watching the sun make its way across the sky. I indulged my motorcycling and artistic desires until "my cup runneth over."

MOTORCYCLE: THE 1972 HARLEY-DAVIDSON HARD-TAIL CHOPPER

If I had to pick one thing from life that became deeply rooted within my imagination and has consistently spawned mental scenarios, molded my views of life, my desires, and totally misguided my ambitions; without a doubt it would be the movie *Easy Rider*. For some of you, this should be enough said.

When I was twelve years old I would sit in church and daydream about riding up to church on a chopper. I told myself, "One day I will have a chopper." I told myself that for nearly twenty-two years. I finally owned one, and when I did, I rode it to church.

November 1991, Baton Rouge Harley-Davidson:

They wheeled out the gleaming candy apple red beauty, the girder front forks sparkling in the sunshine, the chrome on the bike looked blue as it reflected the crystal blue sky. The bright sun did nothing to warm the frigid air. People stared in awe.

"Man, you're going to ride that thing?" asked one of many onlookers.

"Well, yeah, that's why I built it," I replied dryly.

"The thing doesn't even have gauges, or a tach, how ya gonna know when to shift?" asked one man, juggling his bags of coffee mugs and Harley trinkets.

I began to feel like a pioneer of exploration, like John Glenn about to be bolted into Friendship One.

"Well the way I figure it, when you have a piston the size of an oil can pointing at your crotch, you're gonna know when to shift," I retorted.

"Yeah? Well good luck man," he said, "that thing should be in a museum, not on Interstate 10."

His words would be echoing through my head within the hour.

"Nouveau bikers," I hissed to Tabitha.

Tabitha had grown to hate the Harley scene of the time. We had spent a half hour waiting to be waited on to pick up my *bike*, while the staff sold coffee mugs and clothes. Besides, Tab rode a 1974 BSA 650 Lightning and white leathers; nothing black, and nothing with a bar and shield design emblazoned upon it.

After paying my bill of over \$3000.00, for what I had expected to be a \$600.00 service, we fired up the classic bikes and headed towards I-10, sort of like Billy and Captain America. Okay, nothing like Billy and Captain America.

As we headed towards New Orleans I realized that building highways on top of swampland is a losing battle - settlement wins. I also learned that the roads are actually rougher and bumpier than they seem in a car.

Within forty miles I understood having stuck to the purist attitude - that all choppers should be hard-tails and have a nearly eight foot wheelbase - was just that, an attitude. By sixty miles I realized it was a mistake.

Straight pipes and fishtail tips become a deafening noise rather than a bad-ass rumble. There was no question that "springer" front forks are aptly named. At times I thought the bounce created by small bumps would be perpetual. But damn! I looked cool. And the chopper had attitude.

About fifty miles out I decided I should run it up to highway speed. I sensed that being passed by everything except some guy with a cross country bicycle rig must be an indicator that I was riding closer to the forty mile per hour minimum speed limit.

As I approached an equal speed with traffic, all of the aforementioned idiosyncrasies intensified. The bike's rail thin frame, even with the metal supports we had put on to strengthen the neck and rear tail section, did little to stop the frame from flexing. I continued at speed - I'm stupid like that.

I hit an expansion joint that was just shy of what happens to freeway sections after an earthquake. First, the springer started springing, then, a slight wobble started moving from the neck backwards. I backed off the throttle, a big mistake.

I dialed the power back on, by this time the bike was in a full-on high speed wobble. Fear engulfed me; fear unlike any that I had ever felt in my thirty years of motorcycling. The fear began running through my body. The wobble continued running through the bike, combined, the two issues were not good.

I know it probably wasn't a mile, but it felt like ten before the wobble, flexing, and springing stopped. I was finally able to slow down. I felt safe again, or at least as safe as a convict sitting in an electric chair that blew a fuse in the middle of his execution must feel.

During the journey home I found out the six foot long front brake cable was good for one pull.

It stretched so much that after the second pull the small front brake became totally useless. Throughout owning the chopper the front brake would have to be adjusted constantly - but it looked great.

As the miles continued, I felt as though I were slowly being sand blasted by the small dirt particles being thrown up from the fenderless front wheel. I now appreciate the function of a front fender. I thought perhaps I should have leaned more towards the design of the "Billy Bike" in *Easy Rider*.

The entire way home the man's words from the Harley shop echoed in my head, "That thing should be in a museum, not on Interstate 10."

"Yeah. Yeah. Yeah," I told myself.

I drove home real slow, so slow that a carload of stoners passed us.

Tabitha later told me the guy on the bicycle had appeared in her rear view mirrors, of course I didn't have any of those either, but I looked cool and had attitude. Somewhere deep inside I felt my attitude changing. We finished off the journey at about forty miles per hour.

We arrived home. I entered my garage through the side door. The chopper was so thin there was no need to open the garage doors, besides I didn't want any heat to escape the garage; I was semi-frozen.

When I got off I immediately began walking like a time exposure of the evolution of man - from homo habilis to homo erectus. I began walking hunched over, slowly standing more erect, and eventually walking upright. What was left of my discs had been used as rear shock absorbers on the ride home.

I tried to stretch up by holding my sides, it was then I fully understood the line by Jack Nicholson in *Easy Rider*, in the scene when they pull up to the diner and he says, "I think I'll order some kidneys, I think I left mine on the road."

Tabitha stood there looking at me with a smirk on her face, holding back laughter. I looked up at her and said, "Go ahead, say whatever your thinking."

She did.

"Well babe, you got your chopper, another dream fulfilled. Are you happy?"

She went ahead and laughed as well.

I sat down and looked at the gleaming bike. All I could say was, "What have I done?" "Why did I do this?"

Tabitha headed upstairs as she answered my self-questioning.

"You got your chopper and blew over ten thousand bucks." She giggled a little, stopped and turned to me, "Didn't you work in the film industry?"

"Yeah," I said.

"Why you built it still puzzles me. You should know Hollywood sells fantasies and lies to fools."

She shook her head and rhetorically asked, "How many times have you watched *Easy Rider*?"

"Over fifty times," I mumbled to myself.

"She laughed and headed upstairs.

"You brainwashed yourself," she called out as she disappeared upstairs.

I decided then and there I would never take the chopper on the highway again, I had a huge BMW R100 with bags and a fairing for that; no sir, this would be a street cruiser, from here to the lakefront...

Now I'd like to tell you about the previous fourteen months leading up the ride home from Baton Rouge. I'll try to place the elements of desire, fantasy, stubbornness, and foolishness into some chronological order.

I want to do this if only to follow the path that my money took. It was the one time that I didn't live up to the saying, "a fool and his money *soon* go separate ways." It took fourteen months in the case of the chopper.

July 1990: I was hanging out at a performance cycle shop, a small hole in the wall shop that had specialized in Triumph's, BSA's, and drag bikes for decades.

As I looked at an old Bonneville for sale I shook my head and said, "I really want a chopper, I should have bought that one when I lived in Los Angeles--"

"You want a chopper?" asked the shop manager. "I actually know someone that wants to get rid of one really bad. It's right across the street." He pointed to a tattoo parlour.

I should have paid more attention to the way the parts man grimaced and looked at the manager right before he shook his head and went in the back.

In retrospect I now recognize his look as a silent, "Aw man, you can't do that to this guy, I can't be part of this."

The manager called the man that had the bike. He hung up the phone and told me the guy was finishing up a tat and I could go see the bike in a few minutes.

I had a Coke and mulled around the shop basking in my good fortune. After a few minutes I saw a couple leave the tattoo parlour. I headed across the street.

I'm sure not every tatoo parlour looks like that one, but it was the stereotypical type that you would assume harbors hepatitis and every other disease that can be transmitted through a needle. It was seedy. I should have left.

The owner showed me the bike. Upon first glance it looked alright. I thought with a paint job, new seat, sissy bar, and some elbow grease I would finally fulfill a long time dream.

Two things at this point. Remember I said "at first glance," well, I should have taken a second glance. Secondly, this bike would eventually fulfill my dream, but not until it gave me nearly two years of nightmares.

The owner told me he had gotten the bike from a guy who owed him two thousand dollars for tatoo work and never paid him, so he took the bike. He didn't really know much about it, but he said it ran and he would get it running by tomorrow.

I should've realized that when he said that he "would get it running by tomorrow," that the bike did not run today.

I went home and returned the next day. The bike was running and he had wiped the dust off. I paid him the money and headed home. I was so stoked about being on "my" chopper that I really didn't notice what an awful handling, rough riding beast it was.

Once I got home I decided with such a high profile ride, that was in no way legal, I should get a motorcycle endorsement and a Louisiana drivers license. I was still driving around on my California license. "Piece of cake," I thought.

I headed to the DMV.

After forever it was my turn. I told the clerk/officer what my intentions were. She took my California license and began typing on the computer. She pulled my profile up. I didn't like how she kept glancing at the armed State Trooper across the room. She took a real deep breath and motioned for me to come closer.

As I leaned in she turned the computer screen slightly in my direction. I saw my picture, not a bad shot for a drivers license photo.

"Is that you?" she asked.

"Yes ma'am," I beamed.

"Uh-huh. So you thought you would just waltz in here and get a new Louisiana license?"

"Yes ma'am," I said again.

Her tone became very serious, she leaned closer to me.

"Well here's what I'm supposed to do. Call that trooper over there to arrest you. Then we're supposed to send your butt back to California--"

"What?" I interrupted.

"Are you unaware that you have three outstanding warrants in Los Angeles?"

"Really?" I said, shocked, "I had no idea."

I told her about the outstanding tickets and the missed court dates. I explained how they told me not to worry about it once. She laughed and told me a "how it works" story.

"But they told me not to worry about it," I repeated.

"Yeah, so they could keep doubling the fines and penalties. But they want to talk about it now. And you better be finding some big cash, this one's gonna cost you," She said, grinning.

As my heart sunk, she told me, "I'm going to do you a favor." She leaned closer to me, "get out of here and pay the fines, then bring me back a receipt. Now shoo." She waved her hand at me as though shooing a fly.

I left. Actually I hauled ass. I went home and called the California DMV. They were very pleasant and helpful. They said if I would send them a cashiers check for about \$3,600.00 they would cancel the warrants and clear my license.

I had no choice. I sent the money. This bike had already cost me thousands of dollars, and I hadn't even put twenty miles on it. I didn't dare ride until I got that situation cleared up, I learned in grammar school, middle school, and high school, that I do not like jail.

I finally got my new license. I rode the bike for about a week before the engine started making strange noises. The springer front end seemed to be getting further out, and the front end seemed lower. I finally decided to take a closer look at things.

The first thing I noticed was the front end was stretching further out, and becoming lower. The frame was cracked and splitting at the lower neck! More realistically, it was one good bump away from falling off.

I realized that it was time to start the "minor restoration project" I had envisioned. I originally thought a small restoration might cost \$1000.00, maybe \$1500.00. I began disassembling the bike.

I brought the frame and tank to the only body man I trusted, he had done several flawless jobs on some old British cars I had restored. His work was perfect, and you could trust his opinion.

By the time we finished discussing what needed to be done, and the paint job I wanted, he figured it would cost in the neighborhood of \$1,500.00. He told me the only way he would take the job was if I let him put steel reinforcements at the neck and rear frame triangle. He had found cracks beginning in the rear of the frame as well.

I agreed.

I brought the engine to Harley-Davidson in Baton Rouge. I trusted them, the owner was my principal, and a family friend, when I was a child attending a Baptist school. I never made the connection from his going from there to Harley shop owner, especially when I had first reunited with him in 1977, at that time he owned a hole in the wall Harley dealership in Hammond, Louisiana, way before the dealerships became Harley "boutiques." The circle of life thing again. Weird.

They told me they would take a look at the engine and see what might be making the sporadic noises from within. Understandably, no estimate could be given, the only hint was the service manger's comment of, "Whatever the noise is, it can't be good."

About a week later I got a call from the service manager. I knew the news was not going to be good when he opened the conversation with the statement, "You must be in good with God?"

"Why?" I asked, a sinking feeling already developing inside my chest.

"It's a good thing the frame cracked and you couldn't ride that bike," he firmly stated.

"A good thing?" I thought.

"That's the *good* thing?" I asked.

He continued. "That bike was a time bomb, and I don't know how it didn't already happen, but that engine was about to seize and come apart like a grenade."

"Huh?" was all I could muster out of my mouth.

"I don't know what idiot worked on that engine, but they," - and here is where I have to ad-lib, - "left out several shims and spacers, and put the main what-cha-ma-call-it in backwards. The insides of the thing-a-ma-jig were free to move about, and the crank is ruined, well actually the whole engine is fried."

"And?" I added, hoping good news was lurking in this conversation somewhere.

"You need a total rebuild, it's going to be about \$2,500.00, if I can salvage some things. If not, you're looking at over three grand to fix this problem," he explained nonchalantly.

Numb does not describe how I felt, if you replaced the "N" with a "D" it would be more accurate. My estimate of what it would take to make the chopper my dream bike was woefully underestimated.

"Do it," was all I could say.

The frame, tank and rear fender were finished being painted and cured. Candy apple red with ghost flames. Flawless. My spirits were lifted. The engine was ready a month later. The repairs easily went past the three thousand dollar mark.

As I looked at all of the freshly finished pieces next to the other parts it became painfully apparent that every piece of chrome, from the front wheel, up the springer, through the frame, and to the rear wheel, were nowhere near as nice as they appeared before disassembling the bike.

It all looked like poop next to the newly painted pieces and the fresh engine cases and heads. Every nut and bolt would have to be new, every piece of chrome re-plated or replaced.

Tabitha looked at the pieces laid out on the garage floor and then at me.

"Well?" she asked.

"I'm in too deep now, I have to do it right," I sighed.

She turned and walked away, her closed mouth laugh echoing through the basement. She added a tidbit of wisdom as she walked up the stairs.

"When your drowning your supposed to swim toward the top, not keep swimming toward the bottom, and going deeper," her voice trailing off.

After about a year the bike was finally together, it just needed wiring. I don't do electricity well, and I wanted all of the wiring hidden. Back to the Harley dealer the assembled bike went. A month later and many, many thousands of dollars beyond my expectations, brings us back to how this story started. Me picking up the finished bike in Baton Rouge.

My riding time on the chopper was more pain than pleasure. It was limited to late night bar hopping after band practice. I have to say, the fully restored iron-head Sportster was dependable; you could depend on the fact that nearly every time you rode the bike it probably wouldn't start, and if it did, it probably wouldn't run properly.

As we know, I have always had a short temper and a zero tolerance for ill running motorcycles. There are few things in life that make me as mad as a motorcycle that will not start or run properly.

As a teen I would kick the Kawasaki G-5 mercilessly. My temper tantrums are legendary. I'm not proud of that. In my old age I have nearly outgrown throwing tantrums. I'm coming to realized the futility of a bad temper.

The chopper was a catalyst to many a tantrum, usually in front of the restaurant where Tabitha worked, or in front of the bars we were trying to go home from.

I never hit the chopper, but I would beat my poor helmet on the ground until it looked like it had been through several plane crashes. I think I made up a whole new volume of profane words during the chopper tantrums.

It was too beautiful to beat. The seat alone was a hand-made work of art; white Connelly leather and python skin, with silver fringe-tips, I went all the way to Jackson, Mississippi to get the perfect python skin.

Just to add to it's night-time "coolness," I had the chopper tuned to where the right combination of throttle blips would shoot fire from the fishtail exhaust. It was cool. It wasn't cool the night I did that at a stop light - while my right leg was behind the front muffler.

I noticed Tab looking down at my leg, she was freaking out. I looked down. My snow suit, which I was using as a cold weather riding suit, was on fire.

I remained calm. I was not about to freak and drop the bike. I calmly dismounted and put the fire out. I blame that incident on my propensity for being cheap when it comes to riding gear. I don't mind paying money for a well tailored suit, otherwise buying clothes just galls me.

About this time Tab's sister was living with us. She was attending summer school at the same middle school I had attended, the one I hated. She needed a ride, she asked me to bring her to school on the chopper.

"A good idea," I thought. I had never ridden anyone on the chopper yet. We saddled up and headed to her school.

On the way, Amber nearly fell off the bike. We hit a bump, there was no rear suspension, Amber was sitting on a pillion seat that was about four inches wide, she nearly bounced off, but we made it to school.

Pulling into the school drive on the chopper, where the bus used to drop me off, was weird. It set in motion a mix of middle schools memories mixed with the present, much like riding it to church did.

I learned many things from the chopper, namely that *Easy Rider* was a fantasy film. I learned that front fenders are good. Long raked springers are bad. I learned temper tantrums do not start motorcycles, but they do attract the attention of the police and people in white coats carrying jackets that button up the back.

Most importantly, I learned to purchase fully restored machines from the people who spent years and way too much money on them, either because they could afford to, or because their pride told them they were "in too deep" not to finish. They always sell them at a huge loss. Like I did.

I sold the chopper a year after the restoration. The only person that was interested in buying it was a Louisiana State Trooper. Everyone else preferred gages, comfort, and a bike that was street legal.

The trooper said he didn't have to worry about the legalities of the bike. He told me that he had wanted a chopper since the day he saw the movie, *Easy Rider*. I guess he didn't notice me wincing and Tabitha walking away shaking her head, snickering under her breath.

After he left with the bike I asked Tab, "I wonder how many people in the world have been inflicted by the chopper bug because of *Easy Rider*?"

She shrugged her shoulders, put her hand on my shoulder and said, "Don't know babe, but I know it's true that a fool is born every minute; I just wonder how often they actually get to meet each other like you two just did."

As we walked toward the house she asked me, "Are you happy?"

I looked up the block just as the trooper turned the corner and the chopper disappeared from sight.

"Yeah, I'm happy now," I sighed.

MOTORCYCLE: 1973 BSA LIGHTNING

I bought the BSA as a birthday gift for Tab. Yeah, it's tough when your wife *wants* a BSA, plays bass guitar, and *didn't* want a diamond ring for an engagement ring. But enough about lucky me, this is about motorcycles and the lessons they've taught me.

This will be a short story, half of a story, the BSA was her's; however, in a community property state, half of it was mine. So, half a story it will be.

I have always admired British design, simple, classic, uncluttered. I used to sit inside my Bentley just to admire the design and craftsmanship.

Tab's birthday was approaching and she wanted a motorcycle, more specifically, she wanted a BSA. I had always wanted a Triumph Bonneville, but Tab wanted a BSA. After failing to persuade her that she *really* wanted a Triumph I got her a BSA.

The bike handled just like I had always heard Triumphs and BSA's do, it handled great. The BSA had good lines, not those of a Bonneville, but good lines non the less. It had a big seat, good ergonomics, and it sounded good with it's tulip pipe mufflers.

The BSA was a fun bike to ride on the backroads north of New Orleans. It liked twisty, forty-five mph turns. It didn't perform as well on the highway.

We had taken her BSA and my BMW to Wiggins, Mississippi on a camping trip. Yeah, "that campground." It was a two hour ride from New Orleans. A pouring rain began halfway there. The old BMW with its Windjammer fairing did great. Tab was miserable.

We made it to the campground, it was crowded and noisy. We left the next morning. We made it home. We didn't ride the BSA on the highway again.

At speeds above sixty miles per hour, things would start becoming loose, such as: nuts, bolts, screws, and wiring connections. It was a better bet that you would break down on a road trip rather than not. We simply stopped trying, and stuck mainly to blasts around town with the BSA and my chopper.

Tabitha, as did all of my wives, looked like a super-model, or actress, literally. All were mistaken many times for other people of fame. The fun wears off fast.

Tab was highly intelligent and talented. Many people accused Tab of having an attitude. They believed she had to prove she could do anything they could, only better. Which usually, she could.

This was especially true when it came to playing the bass guitar. She took a lot of crap from male musicians. When Tab played bass, she would tear it up, leaving all the people who thought a girl can't play bass speechless. This attitude followed to her motorcycling.

As with everything she attempted, Tabitha succeeded in learning how to ride a motorcycle within minutes - literally. She had a natural talent for motorcycling, and just about everything else.

At one point we were going to build a vintage BSA road racer and let her race it, on the pest control's dollar, I mean with the companies sponsorship. That didn't happen. But back to her supposed attitude.

One thing you didn't want to do was to insult or be rude to Tab while she was driving. She wasn't as bad as Herman the mechanic from the *Shop Bikes* story, only because she didn't pack two guns, only one. If you pissed her off while she was driving, there was going to be a showdown.

Early one morning we were returning home from our favorite neighborhood tavern in Lakeview. It was about 2:30 a.m., a time in New Orleans where statistically over half of the drivers on the road are likely to be intoxicated. No argument from me.

The route along Metairie Road narrows as it passes by the magnificent Metairie Cemetery's monumental tombs and crypt's. We bury our dead above ground in New Orleans. Some dead people make quite a show of it.

At the cemetery's, the road narrows from two lanes to one, right before an even more narrow bridge that crosses the now infamous 17th Street Canal.

New Orleans is known for its bad, rude drivers. At the last red light one such individual had pulled up so close to Tab they nearly hit her. Tab told them something about it before the light turned green.

As we pulled away, Tab was ahead of me. The car pulled along side of her. They began exchanging words. I noticed she was trying to get reach inside of her jacket. Tab pulled close to the car's passenger door and kicked the door so hard it dented. The back-shock from her kick nearly moved her bike off the road.

I would have blown my horn, but the chopper didn't have one of those either. I watched prayerfully as Tab and the car jostled toward the converging lanes.

Tab won, turned right at the light, and sped home. I caught up with her as she pulled into our driveway. I was speechless. I was angry at her for taking such a risk.

She ended my speech by reminding me that I wasn't her father, and I wasn't going to be able to take her drivers license away. She stamped the conversation closed with the imperative command, or decree of, "So just shut up about it."

What could I do? She was right and she looked hot. She had a great riding outfit: black cowboy boots, great fitting jeans, and a white leather jacket with a cool BSA patch on the back.

One incident that is deeply etched in my mind, and still makes me cringe, was what happened as we prepared to go for a midnight ride to Parlay's, our favorite hangout, after band practice late one night.

We wheeled the bikes out of the garage and somehow an argument ensued, probably fueled by the fact that we were both half drunk, or more. For whatever reason I held Tabitha's arm, she pulled away hard. Her elbow and forearm smashed through an aquarium that was on the table outside.

When Tabitha pulled her arm from the tank she was bleeding profusely. She said it was okay. As she bent her arm to look at the elbow area I could see bone, she couldn't. I put a tourniquet on her arm, put her in the car, and we rushed to the hospital.

It takes a turn for the worst at the hospital, that "circle of life" thing again. Tabitha's arm required many stitches, let me reiterate, she required *many* stitches. The doctors thought she would require surgery, and plastic surgery to follow. The surgeon on duty came into the room.

When he walked in, my heart dropped. He looked at Tab and I with a "don't I know you," look. He did. Since Tab was a bit pissy she threw some gas onto the fire by reassuring the doctor that he did indeed know us.

"We're the pest control company that told you we didn't want your business," she loudly told him.

Boom!

"Just drop the bomb babe," I thought.

He just nodded and sewed Tab's arm back together. Very polite, very professional. A hush fell over the room. Let me explain why.

At that time, New Orleans was suffering from a pestilence of biblical proportions, Formosan termites. They were brought into Louisiana via dunnage lumber from the South Pacific after World War II. In south Louisiana, Formosan termites found a home, equal to or better than their native land. To save you the entomology lesson I will give a synopsis.

Formosan termites can consume a foot of 2x4 in less than a month. Key word, consume. You're left with a paper mache' replica of the wood you once had.

They cause power outages, create aerial colonies, and sub colonies; in short, they can do substantial structural damage to your home before you know they're there. I've found them over forty stories high in an office building. All they ate were \$100K of negotiable bonds from *within* a wall safe!

Back to the emergency room silence scenario. The doctor had bought a condo in a refurbished warehouse district, in the epicenter of the epidemic. Our company had the termite contract, and had fought the problems in that building for a year.

When the contract renewal came up I witnessed my father, for the first time in my life, tell someone that he didn't want their business. Go ahead, guess who that "someone" was. Yep, the doctor.

What relevance is this story? Well, it happened when we had the BSA. It happened in front of the BSA. And if I'm not mistaken, it happened because of the BSA. More importantly, I learned to be thankful that night.

As we left I told the doctor, "Thank goodness you didn't tell us that you didn't want our business."

"I wouldn't have, nor could I have," he replied.

I learned that America still has one the best health care systems in the world. I also learned a very healthy respect, or more accurately, I developed a severe paranoia for glass.

What other lesson did I learn during my tenure with the BSA? Hum... let me think. Okay, I did realize how cool it is to have a beautiful wife that rides her own bike. I also learned never to ride "bitch" with her again. I had to ride with her once when my Harley broke down. She wouldn't let me drive *her* bike.

"Either that or walk," she offered. I took the ride.

I remembered she once had driven off and left me with a six mile walk home. It's not that she was cruel, she just had no tolerance for the ignorant games I played.

I also learned not to play roulette with cars. Doing that is akin to playing "Paper, Scissors, Rock." The motorcycle always loses. I also learned how to remain focused on the road while riding behind Tab. Did I mention how good she looked on that BSA? I did. Then that's really all I learned. I guess this story's over.

MOTORCYCLE(S): A COVEY OF CUB 50'S

Image you're one of the late night crew closing up the village coffee shop. It's 1 a.m.. You look up and see a gang of brightly colored Honda scooters enter the empty parking lot. Their yellow and blue colors accented with glowing, white, plastic legs guards.

They stop. They line up. They take off. They're racing!?! They begin looping around the parking lot, quickly forming a line. They use the sloped parking spaces as a banked turn, sparks trail behind their dragging kickstands. In near silence, they speed toward the coffee shop.

You remember a video that featured "scooter gangs" from England. You become nervous, wondering if they're "New Age Mod's" low on caffeine. You reach above the table you were clearing and turn the sign around to "Closed."

Suddenly, ZOOM! A blue scooter flies past the window.

ZOOM! ZOOM! A yellow and red scooter buzz past the window.

"Brrr..." a white scooter putters by. You notice the driver is sporting a huge smile.

Relieved, you realize "you meet the nicest people on a Honda," and they're just that group of crazy's that live in the neighborhood, play loud music, and frequent the coffee shop - a lot.

"Good customers," you think.

"Better tippers," you remember aloud.

You turn the sign back to "Open."

The mini-road race in the empty parking lot continues for an hour. You finish closing up, feeling like the kid who had to rake leaves while the other kids played ball.

END DREAM SEQUENCE. BACK TO THE "COVEY OF CUBS."

I can't remember who said it, but I firmly believe in the statement, "How many motorcycles are enough? Just one more."

At one wonderful point in my life, somewhere in my early thirties, the only thing that stopped the insane momentum of my purchasing motorcycles was a lack of space in a fifteen-hundred square foot basement. I just couldn't fit another bike in, that and the lack of money.

Among the collection was a covey of Cub 50's that were: red, white, and blue, I see the irony and the Japanese humor, and there was a yellow one too. All had fresh tune-ups and tires. They were the "any time is fun time" bikes.

Tab and I were playing a lot of music at the time, jamming every weekend until midnight or so. Many times after practice four us would go riding through the beautiful Live Oak lined streets of our neighborhood, Old Metairie.

We would wind our way through the neighborhood, exiting onto Metairie Road, which cuts through the heart of Old Metairie's great specialty shops. The neighborhood streets were virtually deserted after 1 a.m., perfect for riding and scooter racing.

The parking lot for the coffee shop, post office, several restaurants, and boutiques was larger than most. It was slightly bowl shaped, with large covered drains in the basin to drain the rain water. It made a great Honda Cub sized road racing track.

I would usually play-race with Tab. Most of the other guests were new or novice riders. They were just getting used to riding, and enjoying every minute of the new experience.

It was a great feeling to expose so many people to the joy of motorcycling. The Honda Cub is the perfect bike to ride for your first time motorcycling. It could offer a guarantee that riding one will put a smile on your face.

Many times I would here laughter, yelping, and hooting emanating from behind me as we rode through the neighborhood, the vocal expression of excitement from those experiencing driving a motorcycle for the first time.

Eventually Tab and the others would stop and wait for me to finish playing. Many times they would just go back to the house. I would stay for hours, pushing my Cub to it's limits. As I had learned twenty five years earlier while riding a Cub 50 in the dirt, you can push a Honda Cub to extreme cornering speeds, as long as the tires are gripping.

The Cub's weren't just late night fun, they were great for family BBQs and such. My father in law at the time was the epitome of the manly-man biker, he refused to ride a Cub 50 with his daughters.

"I ain't rid'n no girl's bike. No real man would ride those things," he would say.

"Take's a real man to ride one of these things. One that's sure of himself," I would retort, as I rode off.

Never have understood his attitude. Fun is fun, it's not measured in cc's - okay some people do.

Honda Cub's are fun, inexpensive, and virtually maintenance free motorcycles. I've always said that if I live to be really old, a Honda Cub will probably be my last bike.

It seems I've learned a lesson from every motorcycle I've owned; however, these little Cub's could in no way offer lessons of life like my first Cub did, but they did offer a few important lessons.

I realized I had become too focused on business. At the time, frivolous lawsuits were flying at me two at a time. From my time with these bikes I learned that it's healthy to smile until your mouth hurts. It relieves tension and reminds you that many times, simple pleasures truly are the best.

I learned not to grow old. Business and responsibility will age you fast, and worse, the only rewards are monetary. Having fun never grows old, and I believe those who have fun, never grow old.

One of the most important things I learned, or understood more deeply at that point, was that whenever I get on a motorcycle the troubles of the world don't ride with me. They can't exist within the world I retreat to when I'm aboard a motorcycle. The troubles stayed behind at eleven, and they stay behind still. Hope that remains true.

Not to go off the Emerson edge, - well, actually, I will go off on an Emersonian rant. It's my book. So here I go.

No matter the size, make, or model, a motorcycle has always been a refuge for me. It's the only place where the world and life make sense. Motorcycling is as close to being transcendentalistic as it gets for me. A place where mind, body, and machine are one. Motorcycling gives me the earthly utopia that the transcendentalist sought.

With that said, perhaps Emerson and Thoreau should have bought some Honda Cub's to help spread their gospel of transcendentalism. I bet more people would have understood their message if they would have taken them riding on a Honda Cub 50.

Amen.

MOTORCYCLE: 1973 BMW R/100**"The Cop-Bike"**

I wanted a big cruiser bike, but I didn't want a Harley Davidson. I knew BMW had an excellent reputation, and I like older BMW's. I began looking for an airhead cruiser, in the age before eBay.

After much searching and patience one suddenly appeared in the paper for sale. The bike belonged to a meticulous engineer that worked for NASA. He lived on the edge of the swamp near French Settlement, an hour from New Orleans.

Normally this wouldn't be a problem. It was then. My back was out, and when my back went out it left me semi-paralyzed. I was barely able to walk twenty feet before having to stop.

My back also had an annoying habit of leaving me temporarily semi-paralyzed. If I was standing when it took a notion to go out, I would just drop. Numerous times I would have to be carried to my bed.

I explained my situation. The man selling the BMW was an atypical realist. "No problem," he said.

"So you'll hold the bike for a few days?" I asked.

"No. I have three people coming out tomorrow. If you want it, come get it now. I'll hold it 'til 7 p.m."

Off to French Settlement we go. I eased into the passenger seat, biting an imaginary bullet for the pain. Tab drove. I brought my helmet.

As we wound around the swamp's edge, on a road that twenty years later I would ride again on the Yamaha V-Star and 650XS cafe' bike, we finally arrived at the man's house. I thought the police were there; it turned out to be the BMW parked out front. It looked like a cop's bike. I liked it already.

I limped over to the BMW. The man came out. As he went through the meticulously kept maintenance records I looked the bike over. It looked like a police motorcycle from bygone days. It was classic, very classic. It was cool. Have I mention it looked like a cop's bike?

It was painted black and white. A huge Windjammer fairing with a tall windshield was mounted up front. The fairing's sides wrapped around and had glove boxes on each side.

The BMW had beautifully sculptured white fiberglass luggage mounted on the sides; thin chrome rails wrapped around their sides.

It had a spring mounted solo seat and a large multi-railed luggage-rack mounted on the rear fender. The windshield was bigger than the one on my MG.

The Beemer was big and heavy. I was young and stupid. I bought the bike on the spot. He said he would hold it for a week if I wanted. I guess he figured perhaps by then I would have evolved from walking like a procragnum man to walking upright.

"Nah, that's alright, I'll ride it home," I said, as though I had just received some miraculous healing at the Pool of Bethesda.

I swore I heard the words, "Get on the bike and ride."

It may have just been the radio playing the song by The Troggs that says, "Get on your pony and ride," but I'm not sure.

Tab being Tab, gave me that smirk I loved, shook her head, and handed me my helmet.

"I'll be right behind you," she said, "just in case you fall off. At least I'll be expecting it," she added, laughing.

"I'll be alright," I told her.

"No. You'll never be all right," she sarcastically added.

I ate another 7.5 Vicodin, and with the help of two men I saddled up.

"How you gonna take off?" a man asked.

"Simple. You two steady me upright until I take off. I've done this before, when I had to get back to a hotel in Biloxi when I was a teenager." I somehow felt more encouraged by my own words, the men seemed more confused.

They steadied me upright. I took off. I rode home. I don't know how. I rode into my front yard. I stopped. I fell over. I lay there unable to move. The neighbors and Tab got the bike upright, put me on a blanket and brought me inside.

For two days I lay in the bed staring at the ceiling, smiling, not from the pain pills, I was smiling because I had gotten the BMW I wanted. I was happy.

Days later I was finally able to ride. I immediately learned that riding a motorcycle that looks like a police bike is a lot safer, especially one with a European quick-flashing headlight.

I quickly noticed that the "few performance modifications" the previous owner had made, whatever they were, worked. In first gear, under acceleration, the front wheel would momentarily leave the ground, which was confusing, being enveloped within the Windjammer fairing.

The big Beemer had plenty of oomph. It rode like a Cadillac, and had about as much storage. An added benefit of the big faring was that I could smoke while I rode. Now my deadly habit could come riding with me too!

I began using the motorcycle to make my inspections around town. Normally I don't ride a motorcycle in New Orleans, at least not past the area I live in; but everyone saw this bike coming. It looked like - oh you know.

Of course it looking like a cop bike had some interesting incidents connected to it. One I still laugh about. A woman had cut me off, she pulled right in front of me. When I hit the dual air horns she took notice and slowed down so much that I had to pass her.

As I was passing her she was shyly looking away. I pulled along side of her. I threw my left hand in the air, as if to say, "Duh. Heads up!" She nodded.

I happen to be stopping for gas, as I pulled into a gas station she followed me. Curious, I approached her. She was already getting her license out and said, "I am so sorry officer, I didn't see you."

I told her I wasn't a policeman.

It was amazing, she immediately went into a foul mouthed assault on me and motorcycles. I couldn't help but to tell her that even though I wasn't a cop, I could make a citizens arrest.

She left the parking lot in such a huff she was literally burning rubber as she shot into the street, right in front of a police car, so close that he locked up his brakes - and hit the lights. I felt that swift and fair justice had been served. I got my gas and waved to her as I left.

One of the most embarrassing things to happen to me on a motorcycle happened on the BMW. I was making a slow U-turn in a neighborhood when, as is common in New Orleans, someone pulls out in front of you. I hit the brakes while still in a slow turn/lean and dropped the bike. Of course they kept going.

I tried all of the tricks I knew to pick up a heavy bike, all to no avail. Reasons 622 and 623 why my back hurts today. I had noticed two young men enter the house across the street.

I went and knocked on their door. When the man answered the door I introduced myself and my dilemma.

I felt like a little kid when I asked, "Could y'all help me pick up my bike."

We all laughed about it as we picked up the German beast. I thanked them, dusted off my pride, and continued. It's still embarrassing. From then on I called the bike by its proper German title, "Dicke, fette Frau," or "Big fat woman."

Spring came. Tab and I decided we should go camping. She decided we should go primitive camping. I grew up camping in a thirty foot Layton travel trailer. I wasn't much into anything that started with the word "primitive," except art and music.

Primitive camping Tab wanted, primitive camping it was.

We decided to go to Wiggins; me astride the behemoth Beemer, Tab on the BSA. About twenty miles out, monsoon-like rains began. I was fine on the BMW. Tab was being pelted with rain needles. We stopped under an overpass until the rain returned to a usual downpour.

We made it to the camp grounds in twice the time it should have taken. We arrived in time to pitch the tent and set up camp. Around sunset the "kumbaya crowd" in nearby camping sites started with guitar serenades. They serenaded everyone well into the night.

The next day the place was full of noisy kids, obnoxious adults, mud, and mosquitoes. I was longing for the serenity of suburbia. We packed up and returned to the quiet of our home. The old BMW did great on the highway, more than can be said for the BSA.

I rode the BMW my normal length of time - until boredom set in - about nine months. I liked the big BMW, it was funky. It had a great worn patina, I didn't have to worry about scratches or treating it like a garage queen. Just get on and ride the heck out of the thing.

I decided I needed something smaller, more sporty. I needed the BMW R65LS Cafe bike that I saw in the paper for sale. I went and looked at it. I bought it. That numbered the days of R100.

After a month I put the R100 up for sale. I sold it to the first person that came to look at it. And I made a profit to boot! I miss the days when I used to be able to make a little profit on a used bike. With eBay, you can find anything, and have it delivered to your door; however, these days shipping costs eat up any chance for a re-sale profit.

My time with the R100 "Cop Bike" taught me a few lessons. Number one: no matter how much a motorcycle looks like a police bike, it's not, even when others think it is. Lesson two is somewhat connected to lesson one, just because everyone thinks it's a cop's bike, don't use that misconception to your advantage while riding in traffic.

I found out it's not advisable to think that you can park wherever you want to because the bike looked like a cop's bike. That attitude is best reserved for driving a Bentley, where you *can* park any place you want to, because it's a Bentley.

Other things I learned from the BMW really didn't sink in until 2010, while on my trip to Canada with my Softail. That trip made me wish I would have done marathon motorcycle rides to places like Yosemite when I was younger. Not one to regret much, I do regret not having taken those trips when I was more able-bodied.

The toll of abuse has now gotten to where a couple hours on a motorcycle is like the Tin Man sleeping in the rain for a week. I get so stove-up I can't move. Who knows, I may still make that trip one day. Hey, you have to hold on to some dream.

With that said, I suppose the most important thing I learned from the BMW R100 is that I should have taken my own advice through the years, "Live for today."

In the case of the big BMW I didn't. I hesitated. I waited. I lost out on the window that offered me time, money, and something neither of those can replace, the physical ability to make a cross country trip.

As the old adage says, "He who hesitates loses."

Like I told the kindly old woman in Malbis, Alabama in 1975, "Opportunity knocks, sometimes only once." I should have opened the door when it did.

Yep, I could've taken the BMW across country, and with that big Windjammer fairing, I could have smoked and rode across the plains, just like my childhood hero from when I was in fourth grade, "The Marlboro Man."

MOTORCYCLE(S): A COUPLE OF 1973 BMW R/65'S

I don't remember how I ended up with this pair of old airheads. They were in pretty good shape and had the classic BMW styling that I like. I suppose as Dr. John once said, "I must'a been in the right place."

About the only story to tell about these bikes was the trip that Tab and I made to DeSoto State Park in Ft. Payne, Alabama. DeSoto Park is on the less crowded side of Lookout Mountain. It has all of the scenery and about a fourth of the people as the Tennessee side.

Of course overcrowding wasn't usually a problem, Tab and I had to take vacations in November or December, the off-season of our business. This trip was in November. It was cold.

We left New Orleans with the bikes on a trailer, the temperature was hovering around forty something degrees. By the time we got to Mississippi a light rain began falling, and continued to fall, as did the temperature as we headed north.

By the time we arrived at our cabin we had two ice sculptures on the trailer that resembled vintage BMW's. It looked as though these old bikes were discovered along with the fully intact, frozen Woolly Mammoth, the one with Buttercups still in its mouth.

I attempted to unload the bikes but the tie-down latches were frozen solid. I tried to pull in the clutch on my bike, it was frozen solid too.

"You realize how insane this is," Tab stated. She hadn't posed a question.

"No problem. We'll give 'em a bath in hot water in the morning," I cheerful quipped.

"Okay," her voice trailing off as she headed inside.

We went to bed and awoke the next morning to a winter wonderland. It had snowed during the night. I started running hot water. Tabitha started having doubts about going for a ride, and having married me.

It took about twenty-five gallons of hot water, but I finally thawed out the cables, brakes, and throttles on the bikes. The streets had shed most of their snow by then. It was time to ride through the beautiful snow dusted, ice encrusted, mountains of Alabama.

As we road toward our lunch destination I realized that my propensity for not purchasing proper riding attire was taking its toll, especially on Tab. She kept slowing down to the point that I had to wait for her.

My legs were freezing, but my upper body was comfortable. Years earlier I had found a coat at a thrift store, a place I swore I would never set foot in, but Tab turned me on to the cool stuff hiding within, but the coat, which I still own, is nicknamed "Nanook of the North." It's warm.

Nanook must weigh ten pounds, it's some weird animal hide, lined, and has "buttons" that could easily be ripped off, placed in your palms, and be a pretty good defense against a bear attack. The buttons are like huge claws. I think Admiral Byrd wore the coat to Antarctica. Over twenty years ago I paid \$15.00 for it and have worn it every winter since.

The coat is considered "unacceptable motorcycle riding gear" amongst most people I have ridden with; they're embarrassed to be around me when I wear it. What can I say? I'm a man who's not afraid to take a fashion risk. Like I said, it's a warm coat.

Meanwhile, while I was toasty, Tab was freezing. I persuaded her to try and make it to our lunch destination. She agreed. We took off with me in the lead, she wanted to follow so that she could, "see where the black ice is, when [I] go careening off the road."

We continued. I looked back and didn't see Tab. I slowed to allow time for her to make the turn. She never came into view. I turned around and went back to find her.

As I came around a turn there she was, standing in the road, waiting. She wasn't sporting that smirk I adored. She didn't seem injured or have fallen. I still got the sinking feeling there was trouble, at least for me. I stopped.

"Where's your bike?" I asked, puzzled.

She pointed to a snowbank on the left side of the road, right in the turn. Like a scene from a cartoon, there was a hole in the snowbank of a silhouette of motorcycle and its rider.

"The bikes buried in the snowbank," she dryly announced.

My look of puzzlement must have prompted her explanation without my asking.

"I couldn't feel my hands and arms. I swear I'm getting frostbite," she coldly stated.

I knew I was.

We pulled the bike out and got it running again. As I turned the bike toward our destination she looked at me and simply asked, "You're kidding right?"

I started to plead my case, "I--"

"I'm going home, to Louisiana. If you want to stay, ride your bike home. I'm leaving within the hour," she firmly stated.

I knew she would leave me. We rode back to the cabin and loaded up. We went back to New Orleans. It was a quiet ride home, the warm heater of the truck helped thaw the arctic air coming from Tabitha.

I can't remember anything else connected to the BMW's. I can't remember another ride. I can't remember selling the bikes. But after that ride everything would have been overshadowed anyway.

What did I learn from these BMW's? Proper riding gear is essential - not really, I still haven't learned that. I did learn that "Nanook of the North," is a great coat. But let me think, certainly there was something to be learned from these bikes...

Okay, I know. Don't bring your wife on a trip like that? Wait till the snow melts to ride? Have an enclosed trailer during winter? Nah, nothing I learned really comes to mind.

Oh wait! I did learn that I really like the styling, handling, and feel of the older airhead BMW's, and that I wanted another one day. That day came years after Tabitha had left. You can read about that BMW later.

But from these Beemer's I more clearly understand the saying, "It's classic." That trip to Alabama, "It's classic." Very memorable. Somehow it seems that *all* Alabama related motorcycle stories I have are memorable and classic.

MOTORCYCLE: 1982 BMW R65LS

Not much to say about the BMW R65LS. I wanted it. I bought it. I didn't particularly like it. I sold it. Pretty much true in some sense with every motorcycle I've owned. I wanted it. I bought it. I sold it. The LS just didn't fit.

The front fairing, whew! What a tragedy of design. If the designers would have curved the fairing's bottom corners it would have appealed to me a lot more. I used to park it at angles in the garage that didn't accentuate the lines of the fairing. But it was a cool, stylish, cafe' bike.

As a kid reading *Cycle World* magazine I was semi-attracted to the Bohemian biker style of the early Cafe' crowd. Tab and I rode to our favorite coffee shop many times per week, a short ride through the neighborhood. The LS seemed a natural bike for the occasion.

The LS handled the demanding journey of six blocks - straight up a 20 mph street, a ninety degree right turn, proceed one hundred feet, a ninety degree left turn - ride very well; except that it felt like it wanted to turn over from going so slow. The ride hurt my wrists, but it got me prepared for owning Ducati's.

With the exception of the fairing I liked the LS. I have always been attracted to air heads - motorcycles, not women - well alright, several of those as well. But the LS was just not comfortable in town, nor was it designed to be.

The LS looked good clad in silver. The seat and rear cowl created a mental mimicry of the always beautiful BMW R90S that I have always admired. However, after only a few rides the bike started becoming eye candy only. About this time I was beginning to learn that just because a motorcycle is not ridden doesn't stop the maintenance costs. The motorcycles in my basement were becoming painfully plentiful.

Since I hunted as a child, I'm familiar with the concept that when the herd gets too thick you need to thin 'em out. I believe it to be the right thing to do. I went down to the basement and reviewed each member of my motorcycle herd. The BMW R65LS was the weakest. It had to be put down. I sold it.

The one lesson I learned from the LS was that bikes with handlebars, or rather, handles, mounted anywhere below one inch above the triple clamp is not designed to go slow. By nature and design they are not comfortable below sixty mph, ninety in the Ducati's case. And they don't like slow, sharp corners.

Another thing I learned owning the LS was that it's great to own a motorcycle for every mood.

I wish I was rich, but I just didn't have the time to work and accumulate money. It took four days a week as it was to spend and enjoy what I had. But when it comes to bikes, more is always better. If I would have had a lot of money, I would have keep every bike I've owned.

But such is not my life, so it was a short stay for the BMW LS, but then again, I have a short attention span. In summary, what I really learned from the BMW was that I wanted a Ducati. I became alert for a Ducati. As fate would have it, one was lurking just around the corner.

MOTORCYCLE: 1982 DUCATI 500 SL PANTAH

Horse-trading, just the term conjures up the idea of someone getting the raw end of a deal. It carries the connotation that someone is hiding the truth in order to pawn off something to an unsuspecting or naive fool.

I've done honest to goodness horse-trading before. I learned a valuable lesson from it. I also learned what the term "foundering" means in horse talk. But this is a story about the horse-trading of motorcycles.

One afternoon, while at my favorite coffee shop, I ran into an old acquaintance. We knew each other from racing motorcycles years earlier. Turns out he had a small motorcycle repair shop.

He was skilled with offbeat, off brand motorcycles, the ones that most shops won't work on. At one time it was as though he spoke the motorcycles native tongues, like the "motorcycle whisperer." Not really. He was a sneaky, self inflated ass - remember I admitted that I knew that.

In conversation I told him about how recently, in order to snag a Montesa trials bike, I had bought a "take all or none" package of bikes. The package included an MZ 250, and a vintage BSA road-racer rolling chassis along with the fairing and cowl. In essence, a basket case BSA. I mentioned how I was considering building the BSA for Tabitha.

He said he would like to take a look at it. He followed me back to my house. At the time, the basement was full of motorcycles, ranging from the Harley chopper, a few Honda Cub 50's, dirt bikes of all sorts and sizes, Tab's BSA - all tolled, nearly fifteen motorcycles were lined up neatly on the black and white, checkered flag patterned floor.

My "friend" dug through the pieces of the BSA basket case and promptly explained that most of the pieces didn't match and about the only good parts were the rolling chassis and the fairing.

He was quite convincing that the project wasn't worth the effort and money, He suggested that perhaps we could do some "horse-trading." He told me he had a Ducati Pantah at his shop that he wasn't interested in keeping. He said he bought it, rode it once, and didn't like it.

"What kind of nut does that?" I thought.

You would think, being in the pest control business, I could smell a rat.

But instead, I said, "A Ducati huh? I was just thinking I

needed a Ducati."

I told him I would stop by his shop the next day. He seemed happy. I should have realized something was amiss, for who's happy at the prospect of parting company with a red Ducati?

Posing the question to him, as Ruben had done to me on the playground three decades earlier, came to mind. I wanted to ask him, "What-ya some kinda fruit?"

When I walked into his shop, "I saw her standing there. My heart went boom." There sat the Pantah, red, shiny, sleek, and looking like it was doing a hundred miles per hour standing still.

He started it. The V-twin purred with an Italian accent. The Ducati was Gina Lollobrigida on two wheels. I was in love. All I could think was, "I had to have her - but I'm married."

I didn't think anything about the fact that immediately after turning off the bike he quickly wiped some areas down. Nor did I think anything when he removed a rag that was stuffed below the tank/seat area. He said he must have forgotten it when he changed the oil.

He decided a fair trade for the Pantah would be the three bikes: the Montesa, the basket case BSA, and the MZ 250. I had paid \$600.00 for all three.

My mind did some math, it seemed like I was getting a way better deal. He didn't know what I had paid for the bikes, and I didn't know what he paid for the Pantah. It just seemed the scales were tipped in my favor. We shook hands and made a deal.

I told him I had my truck and we could load it up now. He explained how he had to deliver another bike, and would throw the Pantah on his motorcycle trailer and meet me at my house later that evening. He said he would be there before dark. I left.

Later that evening, right before dark, he showed up. We unloaded the Pantah, exchanged cash and titles, along with the usual bill of sales that include the "as is" clause and "no warranty or guarantee". We loaded up his new bikes. He drove away smiling.

Tabitha came downstairs and saw me staring at the Pantah, smiling. She looked the bike over and asked me, "What's wrong with it?"

"Nothing, it starts right up and sounds great," I beamed.

"So did that thing," he said as she rolled her eyes toward

the chopper.

"Did you ride it?" she inquired.

"Nah, I didn't want to ride it uptown, not on those streets," I reasoned.

It made sense. Certain New Orleans streets look like Bagdad after a bombing, they have potholes that can swallow a Hummer.

I headed for my helmet. Tabitha reminded me that we were already late for dinner at her mom's. My ride would have to wait.

The next day I finally got through with my morning appointments and rushed home to ride the Pantah. I wheeled it out of the garage and into the sun, admiring it's shiny red paint as I strapped on my helmet. I threw a leg over, hit the start button, waited about ten seconds and headed up the street.

I had gone less than a mile when I felt my crotch feeling warm and wet. I stopped and noticed my pants were drenched in oil, as was half of the bike from the tank back. I felt that strange dropping sensation in my chest again. I slowly drove home.

By the time I got home oil was dripping off of the bike. The area just below the seat was soaked. I pulled off the seat and noticed it seemed to be coming from the breather. "Perhaps it's just loose," I prayed aloud.

I fiddled around until I had exhausted my knowledge of Ducati's, about three minutes, and went for the phone book. I called the Ducati shop in Baton Rouge. Remember, this was during the NIE - No Internet Era.

I explained the situation to the mechanic.

He said, "It sounds like a blown main seal. How much did you say you got invested in it?" he asked.

When I told him about \$700.00. He advised me to get rid of it.

"Why? How much is it to fix?" I nervously asked.

"At least twice as much as you got in it now."

He went on about what else could be wrong. I hung up with the feeling he was wrong. I started calling Ducati shops all over the country. I kept getting the same response, "Sounds like a blown main seal."

This is where my obsessive compulsiveness kicked in. I kept calling Ducati shops. I knew someone, somewhere, would tell me what I wanted to hear, "No problem man, just..."

I called Ducati shops all over America for hours, when long distance was still charged by the minute. Finally I decided this would be the last call. I called some shop in Massachusetts.

The mechanic said the same thing, but then he asked, "He told you he had just changed the oil?"

"Yes," I replied.

"And he owns his own little shop?"

"Yes."

The mechanic chuckled.

He told me to, "Try this. Drain the oil, and put a big bucket under it. See how much oil comes out."

"What?" I asked, confused.

"I knew a mechanic that got interrupted during an oil change and he put twice the amount of oil in the bike that he should have. You just might be lucky. Let me know," he added.

Faster than a speeding Ducati I had the tools and a big oil pan. As I made the last spin on the oil plug it shot out into the pan.

Oil started coming out at a rate that would have made a Texan shout, "Gusher!" Oil drained and drained. When it finally stopped, way too many quarts of oil had come out.

I put the proper amount of oil in. I started it and went for ride. Not a drop of oil anywhere. I went home and called the "friend" that I had sold me the Ducati. I just had to rub it in. I realized all the little signs of him trying to con me that didn't register - thankfully, this time.

When I called, I could hear the trepidation in his voice. I told him the bike was great, been riding all day. I told him if he ever wants to do some more horse-trading to call me.

"So the Pantah's running great huh?" he asked startled.

"Oh yeah, I'm glad you put fresh fluids in it, all I have to do is ride."

"Uh-huh," he murmured.

I figured it was time for the knock out punch.

I told him, "Just so you'll know, the Pantah doesn't take five quarts of oil."

He stammered for words. That was reward enough for me. I hung up.

That weekend I loaded the Pantah and Tabitha's BSA onto the trailer and we drove across Lake Pontchartrain to go riding on the twisty country roads. The Ducati was a thrill.

One section of road had a long sweeping turn, followed by a tight right, then a sweeping left turn. It was so much fun that I kept running through the section while Tabitha sat by the roadside. She was used to my compulsions, like playing a song I like over and over, perhaps twenty or thirty times.

I kept getting faster and smoother with each pass, testing the limits. As I entered the left/right section I realized I was going too fast, all I could do was keep the power on, lean lower, and pray louder.

That was my first knee dragger. I wasn't wearing leathers or cups, just blue jeans. When I came out of the turn, I pulled in where Tabitha was waiting. I was laughing and whooping like a mad man.

That's when I felt my second wet warm sensation from the Ducati. Blood was running down my leg. As the adrenalin wore off the pain set in. We went home. I had a blast, and a really sore knee.

I found the bike to be useless in town. The streets of New Orleans combined with clip on bars left my wrists, neck, and back hurting so bad that I was worthless for a day after riding in town.

Over the next few months I had several more thrill rides on the country roads. The downside was that a lot of gravel and logging trucks use those back roads, timber and gravel pits are a main source of income for that area. This added more than a few surprises in the turns, once I was completely sideways in a turn from loose gravel.

I decided the Ducati would kill me, because let's face it, you don't own a Ducati or a Ferrari to putter along like an old woman going to church. They're designed for speed. Knowing I wouldn't ride it slow, and there were no tracks anywhere nearby that offered track days, I sold it.

I learned several things from the Ducati, foremost, that horse-trading is a gamble. I happen to win that one, knowing

full well that it could have turned out to be a financial disaster like the chopper had been. I learned to be more cautious when getting involved with used bikes, especially exotic ones.

What I really learned from my time with the Ducati was that the Italians have a corner on the market for all things painted red that go fast and handle well. I understand now that it's not just the women and food that make Italian men notoriously virile, it may be their mistresses as well - fast, Italian bikes and cars.

For once, I had let pragmatic, sensible thought prevail over my desires, like selling the Ducati because I knew it would hurt me one day. I hated to sell it, I wanted to keep it, if only for the aesthetic pleasure it gave me, but I was glad I sold it.

Which makes me wonder, "What kind of man is happy to part company with a red Ducati?"

He must be "fruit or someth'n..."

Or something.

MOTORCYCLE: 1976 SUZUKI RM 250

The RM 250 came in a package deal that included an MZ 250 and a Honda SL 70. I never rode the Suzuki RM, it just sat there, looking poised, ready to race. My back at the time was so whacked-out I didn't dare ride a motocross bike.

I've always admired the styling of Suzuki motocross bikes. Even though I didn't ride it, I liked looking at it. The Suzuki RM 250 and the MZ were the beginning of my owning motorcycles purely for aesthetic pleasure.

The Suzuki had style. The MZ was ugly and weird. The MZ was like something you would see at a carnival side-show, or driving slow to gawk at a car wreck, you had to look. It was so ugly it made some people squeamish.

There's no real stories connected to the RM250. I did learn something about myself when I owned that bike. I realized how I spend money uselessly on motorcycles. I also learned that I don't mind. I learned that motorcycles are pleasing to look at, but not as pleasing as they are to ride.

I also realized how cool DeCoster's Suzuki had looked in the early seventies. I thought about making the RM look like a DeCoster bike, but I didn't like the new RM. I still longed for the style of the TM Suzuki's from the early 1970's. I decided to do nothing with the RM. I sold it.

I rather enjoyed having a Suzuki racer in the house just to admire, it planted the desire to one day own a first class DeCoster replica. Yep, the RM took me sailing into dangerous waters, owning bikes just to admire. A motorcycle just to look at. That ain't right, huh?

MOTORCYCLE: MZ 250 ENDURO**"The Bearded Lady"**

An MZ 250, perhaps you've never heard of an MZ. If not, let me clarify. MZ stands for Motorradwerk Zschopau, which translates to "no where near as cool as a CZ." Which come to think of it, I've never owned a CZ. I still regret not having bought the two radial finned CZ's that were still crated and left abandoned in the old CZ shop, I could have had both for \$500.00. But this is about an MZ.

MZ is headquartered in Zschopau, Germany. So now it's all clear to you right? You're thinking, "Darn! How did I miss out on owning such a fine piece of German made equipment."

As it turns out, MZ actually is a fine piece of German engineering. Can you think of something they make that isn't?

MZ won the International Six Day Trials seven times, won 13 Gran Prix races, and had 105 turns standing on the rostrum from 1955 and 1976. In the 1960's, their two stroke engines were so powerful that the Japanese copied them. Much of the technology of the championship winning motocross bikes from Japan in the 70's was purportedly "borrowed" from MZ.

I suppose MZ's were kind of like the goofy looking nerd from junior high that went on to be a billionaire through tech-stocks. As successful as you may be, you're still ugly.

There are a plethora of adjectives that can describe an MZ. A few that come to mind are: ugly, unattractive, unappealing, hideous, unlovely, unsightly, horrible, frightful, awful, ghastly, vile, revolting, repellent, repulsive, and repugnant.

I came about the MZ as part of the package deal I made with a man moving overseas. I remember thinking that the MZ was so weird looking that I had to find a hole for it in the dirt bike line-up in my basement. I stuffed the MZ between the Suzuki RM 250 and a Honda SL70.

The MZ was a great conversation piece, and that's about all. It didn't run, it had some "electrical issues." I don't deal with electrical issues unless I have to. I never rode it. It just sat there starting conversations. I couldn't find anyone in New Orleans that would even attempt to work on it.

About the only lesson I learned from the MZ is there's no cure for ugly. I really have nothing more to say about my MZ. You've read what I told everyone that looked at it. The conversations generally ended in one accord and statement, "It's ugly."

The MZ's presence in the motorcycle line-up was like having the bearded lady at a circus side show living in my basement, and not paying rent - and that's a fine analogy of the MZ. I'll stop here.

MOTORCYCLE: 1970-SOMETHING HONDA SL70

The SL 70, what a good looking little bike. I've always liked the looks of the Honda SL350. The SL70 looked as though a 350 had been put through a shrinking machine, like the one on Disney's "It's a Small World" ride. The SL was part of the package that included the RM 250 and the MZ.

The little SL 70, and I mean little, was cool to have in the basement. It was another one of those little Honda's that are a blast to ride, much like the Cub's. I used to ride the SL around my yard in Old Metairie. We had a double lot, so there was plenty of room to play on the SL.

I used to take the SL screaming around the yard, which was a constant left hand turn, sort of like NASCAR on grass and two wheels. The really fun part of playing on the SL was its ability to wheelie out of turns while it was still leaned over.

You could do cross up's and leg stretches, you could put on one heck of show that looked as though it were happening faster and was more dangerous and daring than it actually was. It looked somewhat like me racing the RM 250 shop bike. The SL was fun.

I didn't own the SL very long. Someone who had come to one of the band practice/parties made me an offer that doubled my money. I sold it. If I still had the SL today, I would get a ten fold return on what I paid for the little bike.

Not a lot to say about the SL70 that the world hasn't already mentioned. I did learn something from the SL, a simple lesson, a lesson that I keep telling myself to remember, particularly in life post Katrina.

The lesson from the SL70? Smiling feels good. Smiling is good for the mind, body, and soul. And no matter what, we should take the advice of Wet Willie, and keep on smilin' through the rain - and wear good rain gear, which some day I will own.

MOTORCYCLE: 1972 HONDA CB350 "PINKY"

It was 1997, I was living at Tantella Ranch. I was bikeless, having unloaded toys to purchase the house, which was meant for rental purposes, but became a permanent residence after Tabitha left.

I needed a bike, any bike. The horses weren't fulfilling my need for self-propelled fun. I needed horsepower encased in a piston clad corral.

I bought a 1972 Honda CB350 for one hundred dollars from my genuinely insane, Uncle Bobby. I have to say, buying this motorcycle was the best thing I've ever done with a hundred dollar bill. Yep, even better than that.

The CB350 was a great running, bullet proof, old Honda that still wore a faded candy-purple/pink paint job from the early 1970s. Jimmy started calling the bike, Pinky. The name stuck.

Pinky had some good trials tires on it, other than that it was a street model CB, down-swept exhaust and all. I took Pinky for morning rides through the country roads around my house. Pinky and I explored every road in a sixty mile radius, including logging and fire roads.

The first time I took Pinky through the trail at Tantella I was surprised at how well it scooted through the woods. It was a little heavy, say a hundred pounds or so too heavy, but it held it's own keeping up with Jimmy's four wheeler.

I suppose this is were I'm supposed to boast about my riding abilities, you know, like how Roger DeCoster could beat anyone even if he was riding a moped, but I won't. 'Cause I just did.

Jimmy and I rode up and down the trail, meandered through the woods, and realized two things: we needed more trails, a lot more trails. The underbrush of wild privets was easy to clear, if you had napalm, I didn't. I had a machete.

The next day I began clearing trails with my machete. Within hours I was amazed at the headway I had made, plus I was having fun pretending to be slaying bad knights and dragons with my "sword." An added benefit was the great exercise I was getting, exercise that helped with drumming - strength wise - but not the quality of my playing.

Over the course of several years we had cut several miles of trails through the woods. Jimmy has not stopped to this day. Today, the woods of Tantella look like a state park, just better maintained.

Pinky took the trails amazingly well. The trails were a typical blend of topography that borders any south Louisiana river, and the Little Tchefuncte River runs through Tantella. Depending on the amount of rainfall, the river's depth ranges from a few feet deep and twenty feet wide, to twenty feet deep, and a half mile wide during the monsoons. To say, it provides for a variety of trail terrain.

The trails are uphill, down hills, whoop-de-do's, sand pits, quagmires that would please a pig, smooth pine needle trails, and cypress-root laden sections that will rattle filling's out of your teeth. Pinky took it all. I thrashed Pinky to within an inch of it's life for several years on the trails, day in and day out, and all the while riding thousands of miles on the country roads.

A true testament to the durability of the old Honda's, and why the European brands of the same era all but vanished. The Honda required little to no maintenance. The only maintenance I performed were oil changes and tightening and oiling the chain. I once put in some new spark plugs, only because I felt she deserved them. With all of the jumping and thrashing not once did I find a drop of oil from the engine or front forks.

I also had an unexpected and interesting circle of life event with Pinky. I had gone over to neighbor Willie's one afternoon to enjoy conversation and cold beer. As we sat talking, Willie mentioned a friend of his was going to stop by.

Willie suddenly had an epiphany.

"Neighbor Ed, you might know this guy, he's from Bucktown too, not the part you're from, but Bucktown, yeah, you might know him," Willie announced.

"What's his name?" I inquired.

"Fritcher, everyone just calls him Fritcher," Willie said.

"Fritcher? Grew up by the country club?" I asked with a note of astonishment in my voice.

"His parent's house is by there, yeah, you know him?"

"Oh yeah. I know him," I said.

I shared how I knew Fritcher through the five dollar megaphone and kite capers, the ones I shared in the Honda Cub 50 story.

A few minutes later Fritcher pulled up. He was as surprised as I was of the chance encounter.

We both laughed about the stories and caught up on life. I learned as you get older, "catching up on life" is less amusing and generally sadder than rehashing humorous stories from the past. Sort of how it's better to watch a rerun of a *Mr. Ed* episode than it is to watch some of the new television shows.

But back to Pinky. I have many memories of Pinky. The most amazing thing about Pinky was what happened when we parted ways. I sold her for three times what I had paid. Wouldn't the world be idyllic if everything in life offered such fun, reliability, and cost efficiency as Pinky did. And wouldn't it be great if everything gave back a three fold return after all the fun, like Pinky did. And if life was like that, wouldn't we be living in some alien utopia opposed to this dystopia?

Pinky was proof that motorcycling is about fun. Once I'm in the saddle of a motorcycle, it really doesn't matter what the bike beneath me looks like, what brand it is, or the size of the engine, none of that matters.

What does matter is how big of a grin I get across my face when I ride it. Pinky always provided me with a grin that stretched from ear to ear, that's what a great bike is, fun; and Pinky was fun. Like I said, buying Pinky is the best thing I've ever done with a hundred dollar bill.

MOTORCYCLE: 1974 SUZUKI RL 250 TRIALS

Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Christmas Day, 1998.

My Uncle Bobby, the one I had bought "Pinky" from, had called for Christmas. He asked me how the "ole girl was holding up."

After a few minutes of chit-chat he proposed a challenge.

"I know you know your motorcycles, but I have one that I bet even you don't know what kind it is and what it's for; and if you guess right, you can have it," he stated.

I was all ears. He continued.

"It's a 1974 Suzuki dirt bike, but not like any you've had, it's got a tiny little seat, a really weird riding position, it's geared so low th-

"RL 250 trials bike!" I shouted, as though I had just won bingo, but only better. "When can I pick it up?" I beamed.

In semi-shock he mumbled, "After lunch I-

"I have tie-downs in my truck," I added.

I ate dinner. I hadn't swallowed my last piece of pie before I had my coat and truck keys in hand.

"Let's go get my trials bike," I said to my dad.

Later that afternoon I brought the RL to Tantella and started playing with it immediately. Bobby had told me, "The bike will always start on one, maybe two kicks." For several years that turned out to be pleasantly true. No matter what I did to it, and I did use/abuse it - funny how adding the prefix "ab" to the word "use" clarifies how I used the RL.

The first thing I did was ride the RL to the rear of my property where it meets Neighbor Jimmy's property. Jimmy's property has a long alley of Live Oak trees, a great place to do wheelies. So you know I did. I played wheelie king for hours, repeatedly flipping the RL, trying to find the sweet spot.

I see doing wheelie's as equal to walking on a tightwire; it's either perfectly balanced and amazing, or it's unbalanced, which, at times is more amazing to watch. It's a balancing act, and having an audience is like performing at the circus.

The neighbors, Willie and Karen, are Jimmy's relatives and my friends, their houses also bordered the oak alley.

They all came out with the kids and refreshments to watch "Neighbor Ed" wheelie and crash, over and over again, until it was boring - for them.

I finally wanted to stay on the bike for a while, so I took the RL down the trail that led to the river on "Neighbor Al's" property. I rode to the river, which is a shallow creek until it rains, and began riding along the sandy beaches and into the river. What a blast! I had only owned the RL several hours and I already loved it.

To be honest, I've wanted an RL since Terry had the Suzuki shop. Having owned the Ossa and Montesa years earlier without a proper place to ride a trials bike was a let-down, but the RL and Tantella Ranch were a match made in heaven. Great riding!

I finally stopped to rest and admire the bike. As I ran my hands along the beautiful, sculptured aluminum tank, decades of time fell away. I felt as though I was in a surreal dream of being fifteen years old again, except with the freedom of being thirty-nine. I admired the RL's lines from every angle. I was happy. It was mine.

If you've ever seen an RL you know what I mean when I say that the bike is beautiful. It's like a lissome gymnast, skinny but full of power. It's small, agile, and able to perform unbelievable maneuverers. It's as thin and as cool as "Twiggy" was. To me the RL's gas tank is a classic, like a Sportster's peanut tank.

The tank was in beautiful shape - except for the long, one inch deep crease/dent running down the entire left side of it. That mishap took place the day the original owner had bought the bike. As he was loading it into his pick-up truck it fell over, the tank smashed against the truck bed's top rail, leaving a perfect imprint in the RL's tank. That would have killed me.

As I sat and admired the bike I thought, "Enough ogling - I needed to ride."

There were plenty of places to ride, Jimmy and I had cleared miles of trails through the woods. The woods of Tantella were a mix of hardwoods on high ground, crisscrossed with slews and ravines as deep as thirty feet. The ground had pockets of loamy soil, sandy soil, and a mix of clay.

Cypress swamps in the low areas that held water. Downed trees offered Mick Andrew-like trials obstacles. The only thing I didn't have was big rocks, Louisiana is shy on those.

I began getting really in tune with the RL. When I made new sections I would ride them for hours, until I mastered them.

A trials bike is like a thoroughbred horse, the rider and the horse seem to meld into one. The RL gave me the delusion that my body had 18 horsepower and two wheels. It could effortlessly go anywhere.

During the time I owned the RL several people that orbit in my "circle of life" that I often refer to, came through my life again. The circle of life connected to the RL went round and round, like flat-track racing, or a dog chasing it's tail.

The first circle of life connection was Cousin Bobby. Second connection - well, you'll need a little backstory to fully appreciate this circle, or better, this "serpentine of life."

My first middle school girlfriend in 5th and 6th grade was Pam. I've mentioned her in earlier stories. She was tall. She had long blond(ish) hair. She was pretty. By high school she was, to use the vernacular of the day, a 'stone cold fox!"

Every Tuesday night the local CZ shop would show Super 8 movies from the previous Sunday's motocross race, the opening film montage was *always* someone following Pam around the races and filming her.

Pam and I have seemingly ran into each other about every ten years. Somewhere around 1984 I ran into Pam at a wedding I was doing with the Bentley. Her and I enjoyed the reception together. Oddly enough, the bride of the wedding was the first girl I ever kissed, a mutual neighborhood friend of Pam and I.

At the reception, Pam and I danced and drank. We caught up on life. She had a one year old daughter, was divorced, and living at her parents. We danced and drank some more. Of course she noticed my frequent need to go to the bathroom, which was my excuse in those days to sneak off and hang out with the Devil.

We quit dancing and just drank. She asked about the devil in my pocket. Renewed with fresh energy we drank some more. The reception ended. She needed a ride home. I said, "Okay."

She lived forty-five minutes away, on the northshore of Lake Pontchartrain. Once we crossed the twenty-six mile long Causeway Bridge, we stopped at a club by the lake. We spent several more hours talking, and drinking, and hang'n out with the devil.

Our encounter ended a day or so later when her parents were contacted by my wife.

They concluded that Pam and I had "run off together." We hadn't, we had gotten lost in a fog of memories. We just couldn't remember where we were supposed to be.

So back to winter 1999, Tantella Ranch, and the circle. I was at Neighbor Willie's house. We were all hanging out talking when, Karen, Willie's wife, told me the new guy working for Willie, that went by the name, "Jimmy Dude," had told a bartender, that he was trying to get a date with, about his boss' insane neighbor.

"You," Karen clarified.

In conversation the bartender became curious about the insane neighbor on the motorcycle that had an affinity for wheelies. The next time Jimmy Dude came in she asked if the neighbor's name was Edwin. Well sure enough it was. And sure enough the bartender's name was Pam.

All I remember asking Karen was, "Pam? Pam?"

"Yeah, that's it," Karen affirmed.

"Well tell Jimmy Dude *that* Pam's mine!"

We all laughed.

I called the bar/restaurant that she worked at the next night. We set up a date.

"Pam," I thought, as I drove to pick her up, "after all of these years, what a small world."

Small indeed, and getting smaller.

Pam and I attended the *Offbeat Magazine* Music awards show on Tuesday February 1, 2000. The French Quarter is used to rowdy, insane, and lascivious behavior. "The House of Blues" is a wild nightclub in a wild place. Given that, who would have believed that Pam and I were asked to leave.

Pam and I began hanging out during the ensuing months. She wasn't busy. I wasn't busy. She had free time. I had free time. I had expendable cash, a win-win situation for all. The fun lasted until Pam got a job.

Pam ended up working with was a person from my childhood that's family are my families friends from Mid-City Baptist school and church, from my childhood, she is also a cousin of Pam's. Our mutual friend connects by marriage to another person from my twenties that worked with me, but that circle of life becomes way too deep, it's another story.

Strangely enough, that same group of people come orbiting through my life again, through tragedy, in the last story of this book.

Anyway, Pam got a job. I was left alone. I had no one to play with.

I wasn't lonely long. Pam's daughter, Jasmine, the baby in 1984, was now nineteen years old. She was gorgeous. She was crazy like a fox, and looked like her momma when she was that age. I met her at their family's store on the parade route during Mardi Gras 2000.

Jasmine didn't work. She had free time. I had free time. I had expendable cash - another win-win situation. How lucky can one man be?

We began hanging out. We had a lot in common. She liked a good party. I liked a good party. She liked excellent cuisine. I like excellent cuisine. She liked to spend my money. I liked to spend my money. Plus, we liked, no, we loved the fact that it bothered everyone that we were hanging out.

Having met and worked around celebrities, I have experienced first/second hand the natural charisma of "celebrity." Jasmine has as much as any celebrity I have ever met. When she walks into a room, any room, she owned it.

Jasmine also had a bad habit of getting arrested. I developed the bad habit of posting her bail(s).

Jasmine had her twentieth birthday party at my house. Jasmine and I went out for my 43rd birthday. That party went nonstop for two days, and covered three states. It started with a five course dinner at a great New Orleans restaurant, went to after dinner cocktails in the lobby of The Le Pavillon Hotel, with me playing their grand piano while Jasmine sprawled across the top, sipping champagne, and looking like a celebrity.

From there we crashed a highbrow sorority ball in the hotel's grand ballroom - until we were drawing so much attention we had to leave. The party took to the road and picked up Jasmines gorgeous friend. The party finally crashed in Memphis, Tennessee a day or so later - how was I to know that the Jasmine and friend weren't supposed to leave the state of Louisiana?

Either way, we had such a blast that I haven't celebrated my birthday since, you can't do better than perfect, so why try. But my, how I digress.

Pam married Jimmy Dude. Jasmine went on to - well, let's just say I learned that old adages come from truth; for example, the one that says, "play with fire and you'll get burned."

Like I said, the circle of life with Pam is more serpentine than circular. The RL brought Pam on her cyclical orbit through my life again.

Back to riding the RL.

One warm summer day, I decided a refreshing loop through the river was in order to cool off. Jimmy kept daring me to try a complete river crossing. Sounded like fun to me. I began my crossing.

Things were going great. I plonked through the water slowly, looking for logs and snakes while trying to judge the depth of the water, a very tricky task in the Tchefuncte. Suddenly, very suddenly, the water went from the bottom of the skid plate deep to near bottom of the tank deep.

I tried in vain to loft the front wheel, but the weight of the water weighed down the bike. I kept in motion, heading toward the other side. Amazingly, the RL crawled up the river bank on the opposite side. As I sat there laughing, the poor, wet RL began gurgling. I kept the throttle open.

For several minutes the RL engine sat gurgling, and then, it died. As the engine died, it make a sneezing sound, spitting water out somewhere below the seat. I tried to start it. One kick. Dead. Two kicks. Varoom! The RL fired up and ran smoothly. I wheeled my way back across the river, reaching the shore like the conquering hero I was.

Days turned into months, and months into years, the RL just kept providing fun. About the only thing I did was put gas in it and changed the plug once, because much like Pinky, it just deserved a new sparkplug. I had to change the rear shocks, they had both bent from thrashing through the woods.

The RL provided more grins and giggles than almost any bike I have ever owned, probably more than any two bikes combined. Several times the RL got the last laugh. One of those times happened as I raced up the trail headed toward a ninety degree left turn - at the top of a fifteen foot high ravine, with a small creek at the bottom.

The ravine was loaded with Cypress knees, snakes, and assorted flora, fauna, and wildlife that inhabit such places. To say, not a place you want to play, let alone land and be wounded, lying immobile in a hostile land.

I was rapidly approaching the turn. I hit the rear brake, or at least tried to hit the brake pedal - I missed.

When you push it to the edge and screw up, you go over the edge, and in this case, I literally was headed "over the edge."

As I sped toward the edge, and a low lying branch, I ducked so I wouldn't smack my head. As the RL shot off the ledge and above the ravine, I reached out and grabbed the branch with both hands. As I hung, swinging in a wide arch above the ravine, I watched from my aerial perch as the RL landed in the creek with a deep, "plah" sound; it was buried up to it's axles in sand.

I used the momentum of my swinging to propel myself back to the ravine top behind me. I felt like Indiana Jones. Once again, all I could do was let out a loud whoop and laugh until my eyes watered.

The laughter stopped after an hour of using the winch on Jimmy's four-wheeler to pull the RL out of the sand and snake pit. At times we were losing the battle. The RL kept getting stuck deeper. We persevered. We won. Once free, the RL started on the first kick. Amazing.

When I rode the RL I noticed things happened fast. Riding it reminded me of riding my Paso Fino horse, Buster, he too has a short wheelbase and makes fast, precise movements. Of course mentioning Buster reminds me of one of my favorite things to do before leaving or returning to the barn on the RL - chasing Buster around the field. He enjoyed the game as much as I did.

Buster and I have always enjoyed chasing each other around, me on a motorcycle, he on his hooves. That's one of the reason's I had to start using a motorcycle, otherwise in a game of chase, Buster always won. I needed to even the odds.

One evening in early 2000, Buster and I had just finished off our second bottle of champagne. We were celebrating what looked like a home-run hit at the National Association of Television Producers convention earlier that month. A company wanted to do distribution on my children's story, "Buster's Farm," only later did we find out they didn't want to *produce* the animation, but we didn't know that yet, we thought we were on the road to fame and fortune.

Anyway, Buster and I were chasing each other around when he became confused and thought we were playing soccer, which we used to do. As I chased Buster, suddenly he turned and headed straight for me!

Buster has always gotten a little rowdy when he drinks champagne. (Note: Buster is now reformed and no longer drinks alcohol, mainly because he's twenty-two years old.) As he headed towards me, I hit the brakes. I stopped. He stopped.

I started yelling, "No."

Buster snorted.

I turned around to put the bike up, he charged, head down. I gassed it. All of a sudden I felt the impact. Buster had head butted the back end of the RL, pushing the rear wheel off the ground while the bike was on a sideways pivot.

The rear wheel landed solidly on the ground. My hand slipped off the clutch. The bike stopped. Thanks to the physics fact "that a body in motions continues in motion," I flew off the bike as though I had been ejected.

Buster realized he had gone too far, much like the time when he had opened *all* of the paddocks at the stables when he lived in New Orleans. On that infamous adventure, Buster took all of the horses at the barn for a walk up a main boulevard in New Orleans, it made the news.

Buster ran back into his stall. I put the RL in its stall, thus ending our little game.

I learned an important lesson that day. I learned not to play games on a motorcycle with a horse that can't remember the rules, or one that can no longer hold his alcohol.

I owned the Suzuki RL longer than I've owned any bike, nearly fourteen years. I sold it after it sat in Russ' garage for three years.

"A waste of fun," I thought. I put it on eBay.

Within a day, a man bought it and drove in to Birmingham from Tennessee to pick up the bike, all in the same day.

When he saw it he was elated to find an RL that was usable and cheap. He asked me if there were any tricks to starting it.

"Yes," I told him, "if it doesn't start every time within two kicks, then it's dead, throw it away."

He laughed and asked me, "I guess the carb will need cleaning at least?"

I poured a little pre-mix gas in the tank, opened the petcock, shook the bike, flipped the choke on, kicked the bike over, and in one kick, after three years of sitting, rode off and did one final wheelie, albeit a very small one.

When I pulled back in, the man was standing there smiling. I handed him the bike and said, "I wasn't kidding. Enjoy it."

I miss the RL and Tantella Ranch. Rarely do I miss one without thoughts of the other. If I ever moved back, Tantella wouldn't be the same without the Suzuki RL. They went together, "like carrots and peas," to quote Forrest Gump. Yes, I quote him a lot. I feel as though Forrest Gump is one of this era's great philosophers.

There were many lessons garnered during my time with the RL. Of all the lessons, I think the one that stands out most vividly is this: I really haven't learned a thing concerning my major stumbling blocks in life. The kind of stumbling blocks that when you approach them again you're supposed to remember what you learned before. I'm a slow learner.

For me and motorcycles? I learned zip. I still did wheelies to the point of crashing. I still hurt from crashing. Me and beautiful women? I learned zip. I may as well just give them my money and save me the pain. Between the two, I instantly possess a single digit IQ.

What I did learn was that Suzuki RL 250s are indestructible, which in reality, due to their rarity, obviously isn't true. I learned more fully that trials bike are a kick in the butt, especially if they have challenging terrain.

You know what I learned in my time with the RL? I learned that getting what you want, albeit belated, is always a good thing. I learned that the women I have cyclical relationships with are great to hang out with, albeit belated. I learned that having a date that is half your age for *any* birthday above forty is a wonderful thing, albeit it too late.

Once again, as usual, I learned how much enjoyment motorcycles have provided, and continue to provide me. The RL250 reminded me that adrenalin rushes completely overpower fear and sensibility.

I learned that I like motorcycles, women, a good party, and adrenalin rushes. I learned that my mind is no safe haven to sanity nor sensibility. And for the protection that has been provided to me, I learned to say, "Thank you, God. It sure has been fun!"

MOTORCYCLE: 2000 HARLEY-DAVIDSON 883 SPORTSTER LOW RIDER

Tuesday October 19, 1999:

There I was, months before the new millennium. I had completed my six termite inspections, which took five hours, reaping a net return of over six hundred dollars. I had finished a great Vietnamese lunch. I was miserable.

I was so burnt out from business. My mind was muddled by the sugarplum fairy dreams of the riches and success surely coming my way from a few creative ventures that were gaining attention.

I was sure that the ten thousand dollars it had cost me to rent a booth for two days at the upcoming Television Producers Association Convention in January 2000 would return a reward of riches. At least that was my sense of peace for a possible escape from my miserable job - that paid extremely well - especially considering I only worked Tuesday through Thursday's, most weeks.

As I made my way home, the traffic message board proclaimed the Greater New Orleans Bridge over the Mississippi River was backed up. "Expect an hour delay," it warned.

I had no desire to sit in a snarled mess for an hour, so I took the next exit and decided to pass time looking at Harley's. After the experience I had with the chopper, I really had no interest in owning a Harley, but I had no patience for traffic, and besides, there was free coffee.

When I walked in the dealership the first thing that caught my eye was an orange Sportster jammed in the front display window - this was before the Harley mega-shops were the mandatory de rigueur of design. The sun gleamed off the Sportster's chrome pipes, the spoked wheels sparkled as I moved past.

I got some coffee and looked around a while, unimpressed with the mammoth touring bikes. I really had no desire to tour the country on a motorcycle, not after the trip to Florida through Alabama in 1976, no sir.

Besides I'm 5'6" tall and weigh 130 pounds. I had already experienced the shame of dropping my BMW R/100 touring bike and having to get help to pick it up. And anyway, who wants to bother traveling the country on a bike? What kind of fun is that?

I kept meandering through the shop, sipping coffee. Like a bug to a light, I kept finding myself staring at the orange Sportster.

A salesman approached.

"Sit on it, it looks like it would fit you perfect," he suggested

"Nah, I'm not a fan of Harley's," I said.

'Why not?' he asked. "You must have owned an AMF model."

I looked at him and grinned, took a sip of coffee and nodded my head.

"I understand, I had one that I finally gave away." He patted the solo seat on the Sportster and added, "This ain't no AMF, those days are gone, AMF in Harley slag today means, adios M-F'er."

I laughed, handed him my coffee, and swung a leg over the saddle. Damned if the bike didn't fit me just right. I ran my hands along the lines of the legendary peanut tank. I started having flashbacks to fifth grade, sitting in the chair in front of the TV, wearing my helmet, and watching weekly episodes of *Then Came Bronson*. I snapped back and jumped off the bike.

We talked a bit.

He said, "Think about, I can make you a sweet deal."

"I will," I said noncommittally.

He returned to his desk. I got another cup of coffee and looked at my watch. "Traffic must be clearing by now," I thought. I also thought what might help boost my deflated entrepreneurial spirit was a new toy.

To me, money alone has never been a sufficient reward for labor. No. I need toys. More specifically, I need two-wheeled toys to make it worth my time and effort. And what the heck, who knew what disasters lay ahead at the stroke of 12 a.m. on January, 2000. We had already been warned the banking systems were going to crash. Bank crashes didn't concern me, I didn't have any money in a bank, or anywhere else for that matter.

I returned to the Sportster and stood admiring it's low slung lines. The salesman came up and handed my his card. He tapped the card, "The figure on the back is what you can take it home for. Nothing down. We do the financing. Sign three papers and take it home. Think about it." He walked off.

I looked at the figure, looked at the bike, looked back at the salesman. There, I thought about it.

"How long would it take to get it ready?" I called out.

"It is ready," he said. "Are you?"

"Yep," I said, grinning from ear to ear.

I did have one question for him. I was confused as to why I had to pay over three hundred dollars extra for spoked wheels. After he explained about the new cast wheels, and that spokes were an option, I realized that I had been riding motorcycles so long that spoke wheels had gone from the only option, to a luxury option.

Within the hour I had bought a new helmet, signed the papers, and put on my work crawl suit. It was a crisp October afternoon. I didn't have a jacket. I headed home.

By the time I got to the Lake Pontchartrain Causeway I was impressed with the bike. It was as far as I had ever ridden on a Harley without it breaking down.

I had trepidations about getting on the causeway, a twenty-six mile long bridge with no shoulder. It was also getting cold. I headed onto the bridge.

Driving across the Lake Pontchartrain Causeway gives you time to think, it's a straight twenty-six mile run. For several miles in the middle of the bridge you can't see land.

I was enjoying the mellow sounds of the V-twin. I thought about how, thankfully, I don't suffer from buyers remorse. I also realized that I had no idea how I was going to get my truck home the next day.

When you're impulsive, or as I like to think of it, possess the ability to make decisive decisions quickly, you don't think about the little details. You see the big picture, like, "Give me the bike *now*."

I made it across the lake. I was cold. I took I-12 to the exit that put me on the country roads that made up the last leg of my seventy-five mile journey. I finally pulled into my driveway. I had made it home on a Harley! A monumental day.

I was shivering and my teeth were chattering.

I parked the bike, went inside, and poured myself some anti-freeze. I went back out to admire the bike. The setting sun cast a warm, mellow glow over the orange paint and chrome, the engine ticked rhythmically as it cooled. I was happy.

I admired the bike, finished my anti-freeze, and pushed the bike inside my house and parked it in front of an Art Deco, burlled maple armoire.

I stood back and admired the bike under the dimmed spot lights. The bike and the piece of furniture looked timeless together. To me, motorcycles are "ridable art."

At sunrise the next morning I took off on my sixty mile loop through the countryside. The route runs through a section of Louisiana know as "Little Kentucky" for the abundance of horse farms in the area. Very pretty country, the winter rye-grass was a brilliant, emerald green.

For weeks I enjoyed early morning, mid day, and afternoon rides on my Sportster. I was amazed at how smooth, even with the low suspension, the bike rode. Suspension versus a hardtail suddenly made sense. I also liked the belt drive over a chain.

The 883 turned out to be another "stand up bike." One that could fulfill my desire to stand on the pegs, hold the hand grips gently, and blow through the air with nothing in my sight except flying above the earth.

I loved to lean forward and watch the front spokes sparkle as the spool hub turned... yes, I know, another mental clip/scene embedded in my brain from *Easy Rider*. Not to mention, I paid extra for those glittering spokes.

Motorcycling in a standing position has, as closely as possible, fulfilled a reoccurring dream of mine. Since I've had a conscience memory, I've had dreams where I just spread my arms slightly, float weightlessly a foot or more off the ground, and begin effortlessly flying through the air,

When I saw the sculpture installment, "The Chase," in front of the Barber Motor Sports Museum it instantly became my favorite sculpture. The sculpture embodies both my dream and fondness for a standing while riding position. But again, I wonder off topic.

Spring arrived in South Louisiana. Covington, a small town ten miles up the road, began their annual spring/summer Friday night block parties. The town would close off three blocks and let cool cars and motorcycles park. Restaurants and bars would have counters built out from their front windows to serve passing people. The cool art and antique stores would stay open, and outdoor bands played to happy, like minded people who enjoyed the finer things in life, like cool transportation, great food, art, music, and alcohol.

As I sat on my bike, parked next to a couple of huge Harley's, one the bike owners walked up. He was your stereotypical "biker trash," with scraggly hair, tatoos, wife beater shirt, and he weighed nearly as much as his Harley. His wife was bigger, and uglier. Dare I say, he was a pig on a Hog.

He looked over at me and said, "That's real gentleman like, you watching your wife's little bike while she's gone. Where's your bike?" he asked.

The bunch of them laughed and clanked their beer bottles together.

The pig asked, "Why didn't you buy a real Harley?"

Feeling brave and empowered, mainly because the police officer I had been talking to was in ear shot and had moved within five feet of our conversation, I retorted, "'Cause I didn't need to buy the biggest, most powerful Harley on the planet; they're reserved for fatassed fools with pig-ass wives to haul around."

He stepped in closer. Thank God, so did the cop.

The cop and I decided it was time for me to go home. I strapped on my helmet and started my bike. I was pleased to find the 883's acceleration was faster than a four hundred pound biker. I went home and decided next month I would ride the Buell to the party. But you haven't heard about the Buell yet.

I enjoyed the Sportster until October 2001. After 9-11 I began to panic. My business suffered its first noticeable hit in income - ever. I feared things might become worse. I started selling off my financed toys at fire-sale prices.

It didn't take a week to find someone to buy the Sportster. The man that called told me they would pick it up the next day.

When I answered the knock on my door I was stunned to see a petite, beautiful woman in her late thirties; unfortunately, the man accompanying her was her husband. He was buying the bike for her.

As she sat on the bike she asked me, "You must be going through a divorce to be selling the bike so cheap, was this your wife's bike?"

Chagrined and silent, I just shook my head.

"No," was all I said.

I exchanged the title and paperwork for cash and bid then adieu. As they drove away, I thought how utterly ridiculous the Harley culture had become. Sportster's were once ridden by king's of rock-n-roll. Sportster's had torn up flat tracks, dragstrips, and road racing tracks, ridden by men with nerves of steel and courage.

Now, they're delegated, by some, to some second class citizenship within the motorcycle world, being thought of, and labeled, as a girls bike. I'm just glad that Harley engineers and designers haven't taken away the sculpted peanut tank, and haven't started running the frame rails in a downward swooping fashion like a girl's bicycle.

I've never labeled any motorcycle as a girl's bike nor a man's bike. I learned to overlook ignorant comments and comparisons like that when I was eleven - on the Honda P50.

I find that twisting a throttle and blowing effortlessly through the air, no matter what the motorcycle, can only be called fun. The Sportster is a fun bike, for a man or a woman.

Kind of like the "Slinky" toy ad used to say, "Slinky/ a Slinky/ A toy for girls and boys" - just like a Sportster!

"Would You Ride a Trike?"

As we watched the parade of bikes at Thunder Beach, someone asked me if I would ever ride a trike?

I didn't have to think about it.

"Absolutely," I said, "and with a big smile on my face."

I have often pondered the day that I will not, or cannot, ride a two wheeled motorcycle. I would have no trouble replacing two wheels with three. The older I get it has even crossed my mind for the sheer sake of comfort.

I can't say I would go the Can-Am route, I prefer one wheel out front on a motorcycle, to say, I would have to buy a used Harley trike. I believe Harley's have been "triked out" long enough that they should be perfected.

I imagine riding a trike to be as fulfilling as riding a motorcycle. In essence I see it as the same experience. Let's face it, you're blowing in the wind and not enclosed within a vehicle. From experience I know a convertible topped car is not equal to motorcycling.

When your sitting *on* a vehicle, instead of *in* a vehicle, it seems that you see, hear, smell, and feel the world that you're passing through in its full glory. And so far, I haven't found anything else as good as that, whether it would have two or three wheels.

INTRODUCTION TO SECTION FOUR: 2000-2009

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 lawn. The pest control business had taken a big hit after 9-11, something I've never been able to explain. I wanted to play around with something new.

I decided to get a Realtor's license and take advantage of the signature loans that mortgage companies were offering. 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 Tantella as well, using the profit to buy another house. I bought a condo in the Lakeview area of New Orleans. I sold the condo within nine months and bought another house.

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, me, her worst student in her sixty years of education. And I was helping her put her forty years of "Bible Class" notes, all handwritten, into a manuscript for her new book. Remember, I had to make a score of 124 on her test in *that* class nearly three decades earlier in order to pass high school.

We went to lunch together often. We also rode out some tough times in her life, I was honoured to be there to support her in any way I could. And I am ashamed for her life-long friends that 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 motorcycle 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 to go home and sell my house.

"But I like that house," I thought.

It was a cottage on Lake Pontchartrain, in Old Mandeville. I also felt that I should get ready to close the business. I got a very clear understanding 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 once when a car pulled up. The man asked me if I was selling the house. I looked at the for sale 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," I thought. "What could kill that cash-cow?" I asked myself aloud.

I moved back to Jimmy's, into my room at the edge of the woods - a sloping, cracked concrete floored shed. No running water except for the well head outside. Nearest bathroom two hundred feet away. I loved it. It was primitive. Now I like primitive camping, as long as it has air-conditioning and heat.

My conscious told me not to, but I made an offer on another house, one right on the water. Somehow my credit got tangled into someone else's and the loan got denied. It took weeks to fix it. We got ready to close on the house. The closing got delayed, a storm had moved into the Gulf of Mexico, and no one writes flood insurance during that time.

Days later Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans. 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 of the map. There were no houses to have contacts on.

I had to evacuate to Birmingham. I spent the next six months with my ninety-four year old grandmother, living with my sister and brother-in-law, Russ. My grandmother and I wondering what had just happened to our lives. Everything we knew was gone. My granny and I talked a lot during the next several months.

I also discovered the Barber Motorsports Park that October in 2005. I did a lot of walking as well, on the same trail where months earlier I was led to sell the house and get ready to close the business.

I thought about what I was going to do with my life. I had never had a real job, and it seemed as though everyone wanted a college degree just to apply for a job.

My grandmother and I kept hanging out, soothing the pain with afternoon toddies. She liked an Old Fashion, I like my whiskey in a glass of water. I taught her the joys of playing drunk-dialing. She caught up with all kind's 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, so did my granny. I would bring a chair for granny, 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 that where living at my sister's - me and Granny.

It was during one of these conversations with Granny that I told her that 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 Fashion 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 college full time, eighteen hours per semester, summer school as well. I made the President's List with a 3.6 to 4.0 Grade average. College 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 college by May, 2009.

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 schedule. My schedule and nearly forty years of gluttony of food, drugs, alcohol, and life-style, finally caught up with me. Someone must have told the piper where I was, and he wanted to be paid for the party.

I had a heart attack September 12, 2008. I only missed two days of school, finished my two English papers on time, and lost thirty percent of my heart.

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

Through the changes and the turmoil, motorcycles were there to sooth my pain. I had some great bikes and great rides from 2000-2009. So let me share some of the stories with you.

MOTORCYCLE: 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 several months, it was time, or rather past time, for the 5000 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 Buell's 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 Buell's 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 1200 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 your 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 rides 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 paper work'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 going to get the Sportster home from Baton Rouge.

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 was a hinderance. I tried to take my friend, 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 straight forward 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. So 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 cousins 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 was riding helmetless; being a southern gentleman I had offered the ladies the safety of my half helmet. Once on I-12 we would blast down I-12 to the next exit, exactly one mile away. ETA, about 36 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 still am. 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.

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 Suzuki's were beautiful. They possess a sleek, crisp timeless design. They have world championship winning craftsmanship. 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 at "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 Tantella, depending on the angle at which I chose to admire it from.

In the years I owned it, I never started it. I would pull the sparkplug, hand crank the starter, and shoot WD40 into the cylinder. Not riding the bike didn't take away from the pleasure of owning the bike. It was great to look at and to polish.

If you had seen the bike, you would've understood. I sold it sometime after 9-11, after I had started panicking about money, or the lack thereof. This is a motorcycle that I *really wish* I still owned. This 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 fourteen years for the book of stories to reach fruition, but that's better than the idea having died on the vine.

MOTORCYCLE: 1974 SUZUKI TM 400 SIGNED ROGER DECOSTER REPLICA

"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, 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 sold me.

So off to the races I go, looking for an epiphany of sorts.

Stopping at the track gate, two effervescent teenage girls take 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 5'6" 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 CZ's, I don't see any Maico's 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 fuelled 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 PE 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 5:30 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? Hum... 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 e-mail alone I have 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.

MOTORCYCLE: 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 Daytona Orange R90S on the showroom floor until I nearly rubbed the paint and chrome off of the bike, lost in a vision of me owning a R90S one day.

That day 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 motorcycle(s) when he wishes to purchase another one that catches his eye.

At the time, I was on a autographed motorcycle kick. I contacted Mr. Reg Pridmore, who had won the first Superbike champion 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 Tantella 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, for motorcycling, the ground impact is generally a horizontal impact, skydiving is

a vertical impact, or in other words, a sudden stop. But back to earth.

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 under way the R90S engine purred through the backroads making it a complete joy, both esthetically 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. However, now, it only happens during the summer months when I'm not working.

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 anything else. 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 became friends with Bill Gates, then I could keep all of my bikes!

MOTORCYCLE: 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 upswept mufflers. Shiny, chrome, upswept mufflers. Good looking upswept mufflers I might add. But the CL can in no way be compared to a BMW GS.

I was living at Tantella, 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 inbetween 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 \$108,108.10 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 bullet proof Honda CB350 that I had thrashed within an inch of it's life, left me with the impression that all 1970s model Honda's 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 70's. 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 one's I was riding on near Tantella. "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 Honda's.

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, who 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 Suzuki's 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 Honda's. Billy knows old Honda's. His shop sold some Chinese knock off of the old Honda Mini-Trail's. 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 carburetor's.

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 talk 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 massed produced. The CL was mass produced. CL's 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 Clause or the lottery. I believe there's more documented cases of people meeting Santa Clause than having won the lottery.

But again, I digress. My time with the CL 350, particularly on those early fall morning rides, was a another belated dream come true. It was fun to fulfill it. Move on.

A 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.

MOTORCYCLE: 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 gator's, 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 moto-cross 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 moto-cross tracks. Tracks with hilltop jumps and whoop-de-do's 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-bucks fun, the Maico made the four hundred dollars I had spent on a thirteen thousand foot, ninety second skydiving adventure seem like a wow-whee moment bargain.

Motorcycles Post Hurricane Katrina

Motorcycle: 1976 BMW R100/7

Written November, 2005. Birmingham, Alabama.

"Time Travel"

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 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 BMW's 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 decent 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 psychologist, 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 Davidson's, 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 couples 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 Harley's 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 60s, glued securely through time on its maroon and purple gas tank.

Old school knuckle-head, hard tail, choppers. Honda's, Yamaha's, Husqvarna's, BMW's, Matchless road racers, Bultaco's, Ducati's, Sunbeam's, BSA's, nothing newer than the mid '70s, the archaic, the extinct. Name the marque, and it was there.

The motorcycles conditions ran the gambit 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 Vincent's, the Norton's, the Triumph's, even the inbred Tritons.

The Vincent's. Ah, the Vincent's. 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 thought, "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 Vincent's.

The pit area: gorgeous women, Dick Mann, old men in shorts and flip-flop shoes wearing Jimmy Buffet type hats and shirts, puttering 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 motorcyclist are inventive, practical people, as I walked past the track side 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 rider's 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 \$600.00. Dumbest thing I ever did."

A very shocked man, after hearing the current value of one of the Vincent's, "I sold a Vincent like that for \$1100.00!" 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 unexpected, 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. I went home and 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.

MOTORCYCLE: 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 Cafe' 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 , 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 were 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 towards 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 cafe' Yamaha could sing. It could bellow out a harmonious baritone through it's 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'en's a quick history lesson to the connection of their modern superbikes to the DNA of vintage cafe' 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 that 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 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-ed's wanted a ride. I solved that problem when my brother-in-law 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.

Katrina had erased my life of twenty-plus years overnight. I had returned to school after nearly a 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.

MOTORCYCLE: 2005 YAMAHA 1100 V-STAR

"Ain't nothing like the real thing." Well, that statement's true, especially when it comes to big cruiser's with a V-twin engine. However, this isn't a story about Harley-Davidson's, 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 Cadillac's, 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 (f'n-uglyest) 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 R/100 "Cop Bike" I had thought about owing 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 handgrip's. 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 begin to happen, the roads became lumpy, bumpy, and it started raining. I pulled over to try out my cheap rain suit. We continued down I-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 colony of wasps; for once the rain didn't make me feel like a dart board 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 never had 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 I-55 and the Old Hammond Highway that runs parallel, and ground level, between Ponchatoula and Manchac, Louisiana.

The difference between riding the elevated I-55, verses 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, when 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 down shifting 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.

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 I-55. I would sit and enjoy the sunset, the swamp, and my beverages, lost in time.

I have always enjoyed having a beverage and polishing my motorcycle(s), 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 began 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 let down 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 BMW's and Ducati's 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 BMW's 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 it's homeland, Japan.

"Sayonara anata nise jo!"

Which translates to, "Goodbye you phony Joe!"

MOTORCYCLE: 2005 BMW R1150R "NAN'S BIKE"**"Another Girl's 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 Orleanian's 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, who 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 "girls 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 are 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 Tantella 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 6'3". I've always had to balance BMW's 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 how the front suspension worked, but it worked well.

A reoccurring problem I have with BMW's is the position of the right foot pegs. It's not in harmony with the rear brake pedal, or the design of my right, 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 BMW's 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 beach 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 snow bank 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 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 Harley's. 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 1920's. Bottom line. You either like the look of a BMW, or you don't. I do.

The summer of '09 past. 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 your 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 GS R1150R. 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.

MOTORCYCLE: 2002 BMW R1150 GS

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 R1150GS. 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 that 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/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.

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 and 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, 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 it's 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 ice 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 is 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(s). 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 Cherahalla Freeway. We had a great pork-chop and mashed potato's 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 had.

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 valley's, 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 1800's.

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 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 5'6" 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 add 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 complain 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 \$1,500.00.

"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 the next.

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 make 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 BMW's 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 it's element, check out the movies *The Long Way Down* and *The Long Way Round*, 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 would 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 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 that 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, smart phones, 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: 2010-2014

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 companies 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 toady's job market. I can only image 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. 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, and presently I'm living in Valley, Alabama.

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 days 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 fizzle's 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.

The past four years have been somewhat uneventful. I've only had three great motorcycle trips and a "May-September" romance (which oddly ran from September to May) with a beautiful, intelligent, co-worker. 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 upside of the past four years were some memorable motorcycle trips and owning some great bikes.

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 self-fulfilling prophesy. On the other hand, I have fulfilled what I used 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.

Meanwhile, let me share the stories of the motorcycles, adventures, and lessons I have had since 2010 until now.

Motorcycle: 2005 Ducati ST4

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 shorten 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 2WHLSEX (two wheel sex), because the ST4 was the sexiest motorcycle I've ever owned. That wasn't just my opinion, everyone who saw the Ducati drooled and/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 to 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 R1150GS. I was on eBay looking for something interesting. I was actually looking for a Ducati Monster, and then I saw her.

The bikes curvaceous lines were absolutely fluid. The deep gloss black paint reflected various parts of the bike as they flowed into another beautiful crafted piece. The lines, the gloss, the reflections, all liquid smooth; and to use an overused term, the bike looked like it was doing 100 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 jack-knifed 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 bad a 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 it's 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 that 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. Arrrrrg! 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, non stop. 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 mph. 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 110 mph, completely comfortable. Thank God Bambi was never out for a stroll.

I was never able to get my co-worker 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 rattlesnake's. 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 Ducati's 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 wished you had."

"Great advice," I agreed. It's especially true if your 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 Tantella Ranch, which was the playground of the Hamilton's of Picadilly 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's 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/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 Ducati's right now.

MOTORCYCLE: 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 say's, "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.

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."

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 nick names?

I still don't quite like the connotation of my biker nick name, "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, for a woman to tell 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 biker's, 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 that are 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 5'6" 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 that were 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 wedding 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 chained smoked throughout the entire ordeal/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 web-site. I liked what I saw, so 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 Heritage's 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 - "Hello, 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 kidd'n, 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:
(1.) Getting what you want, when you want it costs money.
(2.) It feels good to get what you want, when you want it.
(3.) 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.

MOTORCYCLE: 2010 HARLEY-DAVIDSON SOFT TAIL 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 one's 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 \$225.00.

You know what I said, "You're kidd'n, 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-Royce's, 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 gripping 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 summer's up north are nothing like summer's 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 corn fields we arrived at a neighborhood, complete with a golf course, built in the middle of cornfields. Terry's mom had a accommodating house for drop-in's, 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 danc'd 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, it looks 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 become 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 wondering 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, 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.

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 Harley's, 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 Gitche Gume* 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, had 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 replied. "Why would you assume I might?" I enquired.

"You're riding a Harley-Davidson, your 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 fueled the *Easy Rider* trip/fantasy I was on.

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 summer's 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 litre's.

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 don't know it, we won'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 your 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 pay 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 that was sitting outside 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 - their's, not mine.

Their daughter is also a teacher, who earns nearly twice what I earn, but as they explained, it's all relevant, 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 on 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 boarder 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 10:30 p.m. The place was packed and vibrant. I did mention it was a full moon?

I found a seat at the bar, which since time immortal 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, who's 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 to 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, "There 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 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, and 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 made 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 that 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 and waiting out the storm and have 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 let-down. 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 I had I seen so many people, ranging in age from their early twenties to their late seventies, that 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 ever 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 car full of atypical movie-type, huge, redneck, Alabamian's 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* Alabamian's I've met are helpful and polite. Anyway I looked at the car load 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 a Alabama fan?"

Thoughts started running through my head at a 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 Bubba's. In the event of that type of show down 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 cost as much as some new cars. For the most part, the only people that 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 contact 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, i.e. 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 in to our rooms. Later we cooked a great dinner and went to bed early. A big day of riding lay ahead 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 Cherhalla Freeway. 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 e-mail's 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 it's 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/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 safety, which always make 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 Alabamian's 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 a 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 it's 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 parent's house, I had a gut feeling that I should slow down. I wasn't speeding, but I felt that I 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 45 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 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 broad-sided.

I decided right then that I would rather have twin disk 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 Heritage's 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 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 one's sure held their value better than a Heritage did. I had been looking at another BMW, in particular, a black BMW F650GS, with aluminium panniers.

I own several Zero Halliburton attache cases, as well as a mix of aluminium cases. I seem to have some fetish for aluminium 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 highway's of America as well as a Harley-Davidson can, it's home turf, Harley get's 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 again 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 80 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?"

MOTORCYCLE: 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 F650GS's 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 your 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 conscious laughed.

He ignored my noncommittal pitch.

We talked. I bought the bike. The next day the bike was on its way to Birmingham.

Two days later, at 10 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's 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 55th 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 55th birthday, on a fun bike, on a beautiful spring day, and I'm obsessed with dying in a motorcycle crash. My recent paranoia's are mainly because several doctors and pharmacists have advised that I stop riding, because I take Plavix. Plavix basically makes you a free bleeder, and doomed in a crash, any crash. The doctors and pharmacist's 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 your 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, 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 \$150.00 an hour, it cost me \$5.45 in gas.

Over the next month I decided to ease my paranoia's 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 orientated.

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, I want to be seen.

A scarier thought is that maybe riding BMW's 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 BMW's and Ducati's 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 girls bike, the little BMW has handled everything I've thrown at it so far: highway speeds of 80-85 mph, 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/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 a week has not 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 everyday at a "normal job," teaching is about as close as it has come thus far. I could not image 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*. Yep, over and over in my head it played...

"Summer days, those summer days/ I cloud nine when I want to/ Out of school/ everything is cool/ hot fun in the summertime/I boo-boo-boo-boo when I want to/ out of school."

As I sang and rode, a funeral procession past 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 65 mph, 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 it's maiden voyage. Two, a Road Glide would have never done that. And three, "I need a Road Glide." That I said aloud, I heard it loud and clear.

I felt like the character's in the movie *Dumb and Dumber* wobbling down the freeway on a mini-bike.

Of course that led my thoughts to my former neighbor that 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 sister's were great neighbor's. They put up with my crazy and tolerated my obnoxious band practice/parties, without calling the cops. The one thing that made the Landry clan great neighbor's 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 heals 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 65 mph on the BMW R100, with it's 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 any more.

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 image working on a production line in a windowless factory, especially in America, especially for the Korean's 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 life-long 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 loose 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 road 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 it's face, 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's, I parked the BMW and finished editing this book.

As I've read theses 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 are 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 the 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 the 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, I've taken my own advice from the lesson I learned on my first motorcycle, 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

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