

Born To Be Wild

Childs Motorcycles Through Alps

BY PARRI SONTAG

THE hills are alive with the sound of ... Harleys?

Last month, Glenda Childs and her husband, Ralph, spent two weeks motorcycling across Europe, through the Alps.

"We flew to Frankfurt, rented a Harley and rode through five countries — more than 1,100 miles," said Childs, executive assistant to senior vice president John Clark.

The tour was run by Edelweiss Bike Travel in Austria and included 19 people from the United States, ranging in age from their mid-twenties to their sixties.

"At first, riding on a motorcycle is frightening, because you're so exposed," said Childs, 45. "Then you start to enjoy it. There's a real sense of freedom. You can smell flowers and fresh air."



*Rothenburg, Germany:
Looks like Disney World,
but it's the real thing!*

The Childs read about the motorcycle tour in *Harley Enthusiast* magazine. When they signed up, the response of friends and family was an astonished "You're what?"

"No one could see me on the back of a Harley," Childs laughed.

But the tour included a nurse, a pharmacist, a surgeon, a bike mechanic, two

lawyers, a bartender and an architect — people from all walks of life.

The first day's ride took them to the medieval city of Rothenburg, Germany.

"It's a walled city, built in 970 A.D.," Childs said. "One of the neat things we saw there was a large cage where they used to put the town baker if he short-changed the bread. If a loaf was supposed to be eight ounces and it was any less, they would dunk him in water as punishment, right in the middle of town square."

Next, the Childs rode to Munich through the Bavarian countryside.

From there, they headed to Austria, carving through the Alps and visiting two of Mad King Ludwig's castles: the Disneyland castle of Neuschwanstein and the stately Linderhof. Then it was on to Andermatt, Switzerland.

Highlights of the trip included a ride through the famous Black Forest of Germany, with its cuckoo-clock shops and factories and picturesque ancient villages.

And yes, Childs said, "We had authentic Black Forest cake!"

Finally, the group crossed the Rhine River by ferry and rode through the vineyards of the French Alsace wine region.

They also visited another medieval city, Riquewihl, as well as the genteel old city of Strasbourg.

The beauty of the trip, Childs said, is that bikers could ride at their own pace.

"We met every morning for a briefing, where we'd go over detailed maps," she said. "Then we met again for dinner and talked about our adventures."

Between foreign road signs and traveling mostly back roads, getting lost was



Austria's scenery gave me the urge to yodel!



Signs were so hard to read, getting lost was a regular occurrence!

said.

"I was sitting on the back of the bike, and Ralph was talking to me over our communicator. He said, 'You're awful quiet.' I said, 'I'm praying.' We were going about 80 miles per hour and cars and trucks were passing us like we were

a regular occurrence.

There were other dangers as well — sections of German highway with no speed limit, for instance.

"It was very scary," Childs

standing still."

Equally frightening were mountain passes in the Swiss Alps. A pass is a narrow road, with no guard rails, on the edge of a mountain.

"Some of the passes were only wide enough for one car," Childs said. "There's no room to back up or pull over if another car is coming."

These mountain passes zigzagged up the sides of the mountains.

"All of a sudden, you turn a sharp corner," she said. "You better stay on your own side of the road, because you can't look around the curve to see if anyone is headed your way."

Childs got into biking last summer when her husband bought a Harley.

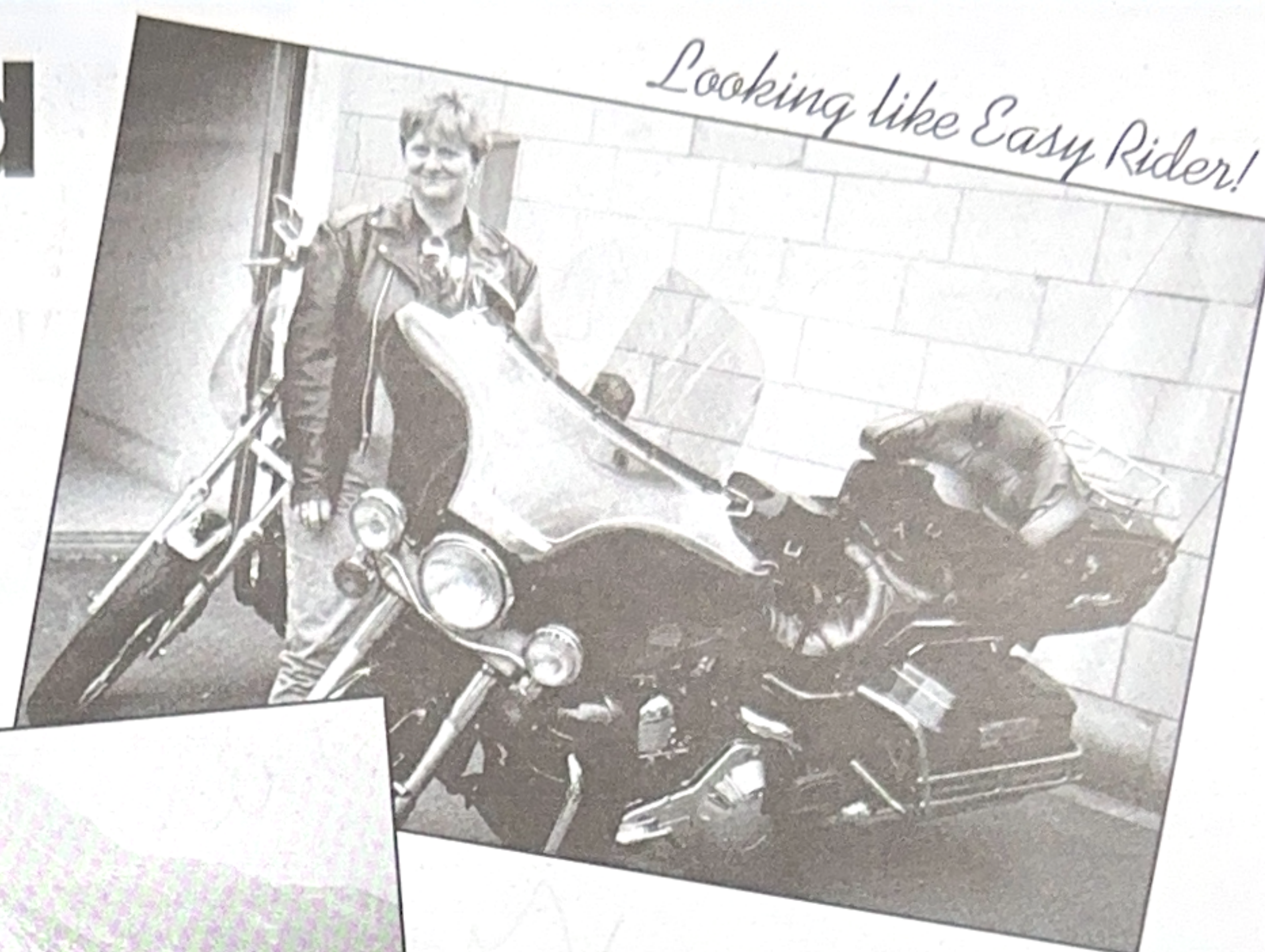
"After years of taking one class at a time, he finally received his college degree," she said.

"Ralph went to school for most of our married life. It wasn't easy to work full time and raise two kids. I thought he deserved something special. He'd always wanted a Harley."

Last year also was the couple's 25th wedding anniversary.

"We found out Ralph had cancer last February, so it was a rough year," Childs said. "Now it appears he's beaten it, so it was

time to celebrate. We both realized how precious life is — that we won't be around forever, so maybe we ought to do some of the things we've always dreamed about." ■



Looking like Easy Rider!