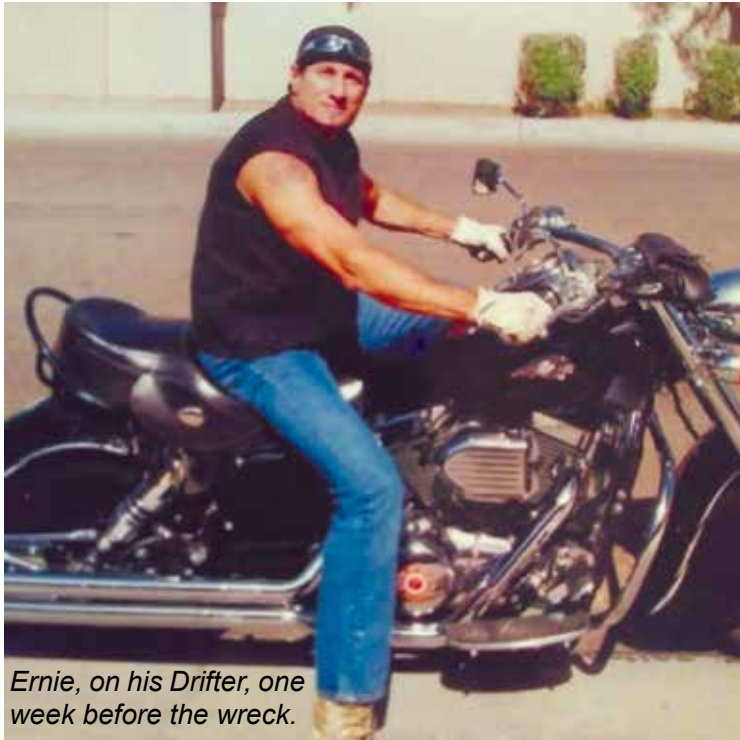


# Recounting the Worst Motorcycle Wreck in AZ History



Ernie, on his Drifter, one week before the wreck.

*First in a series of installments*

by survivor Ernie Lizarraga

My name is Ernie Lizarraga and this is the story of the worst motorcycle accident in Arizona history and me being able to ride again.

This is the first part of my story..... It was Thursday March 25, 2010. I had taken a vacation day from work as a Phoenix Firefighter because the previous day I had worked as a safety officer for mountain rescue training that had been going on at Lookout Mountain. After hiking up and down the mountain I thought I deserved a good relaxing motorcycle ride. At about 11a, I was riding north on the I-17 going to meet friends for lunch at the Roadrunner Restaurant in New River, a town north of Phoenix. They had all met at a QT gas station on the corner of Union Hills Rd. and Cave Creek Rd. at 10

with KSU at 10:30. I wasn't going to make it in time so I told Dayle who was leading the ride I would go directly to the Roadrunner and meet them there. Afterwards we were going to do some riding.

At Exit 232 for New River, I stopped at New River Road, turned east then north for 400 yards to the Roadrunner. Going thru the restaurant parking lot I rode through the gate in the wood fence surrounding the back of the restaurant; where there is bike parking and outside dining. I saw I was the first one to show up. I parked on the north end, shut her off, walked to the dining area, chose a long wood table to sit at, and ordered up a drink.

I probably wasn't seated for more than 10 minutes when I heard and saw about 10 bikes come riding through the gate, kicking up a little dust as they came through. My friend Dayle was leading with

friends Julie, Todd, Margie, Janet, Steve, and unfamiliar bikes behind them. Once they walked over we gave some hugs and I was introduced to Jason, Terry, Will, Dan, Steve, and Clyde.

After everyone was seated I learned Clyde was a Viet Nam Vet with two tours under his belt and was a commander for a Naval Special Warfare Unit. Dan was currently in the Army National Guard. Me being a veteran from Special Forces and having some time in the Arizona Active Reserves, we had a lot to talk about. Steve invited us to his house the following Sunday for some of his much talked about Louisiana BBQ.

We discussed riding to Bartlett Lake after lunch; about 40 miles east, by taking New River Road. It goes along the restaurant in an east-west direction. We decided to go west. It's the longer route, more scenic and no stops the first 9 miles; and there's gen-

erally less traffic. We weren't in any hurry. At 75 degrees and no wind it was perfect for riding and that's just what we were going to do.

After chow, about 12:30, we all mounted up, rode out thru the wood gate and got onto New River Road. Dayle was leading on her red Vulcan 800 Classic with custom paint of a Dreamweaver on the gas tank and personalized plates that said "SMYLN". Next to her was Todd on his Victory. Behind them were Julie on her Harley Sportster 1200 Custom, Jason on his Triumph Bonneville, me on my Kawasaki Drifter, Terry on his Ducati, Steve on his Road King, Clyde on his Harley Softail that had a small American flag tie-strapped to the sissy bar, Dan on a VTX 1800 Honda, Margie on her 750 Honda, and Janet on a Harley Low Rider. Riding sweep was Bill on his '88 Harley.

After going under the I-17 overpass we rode 9 miles before we came to our first stop of the ride at the Carefree Highway. We made a left turn then 6 miles to a stop light at the I-17 overpass. Here, Janet and Margie got on the I-17 and rode south into town. They both had to work that afternoon. They didn't realize it but they were probably the two luckiest people on earth that day. A dump truck pulled up and stopped to our right side. In a little over a minute that dump truck was going to make a big impact on our lives, for the ones lucky enough to survive the impact.

To be continued next month in the October 2019  
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*As shared by Ernie Lizarraga, in memory of dear friends gone but never forgotten.*

*Thank you Desert Wind Harley-Davidson Mesa for your hospitality.*

*Betsy & Bruce*