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Continued from page 9

After a while he just kept a hold of my forearms. I can still smell the sun in the air, smell his cold medicine breath on the back of my neck. I can still smell the rich sweet exhaust.

The next day we rode that thing all over the neighborhood and all through the park. I was the happiest poor kid in the world.

But it sucked. Because I still couldn't get it to start. He always had to start it and he wouldn't let me ride it by myself. For a WHOLE WEEK I had to beg him to take me riding. He kept telling me that if I couldn't start it I couldn't ride it on my own.

Some days we would just roll it into his garage and I would work on the wheels with the wire brush while he did stuff with the carburetor or the engine. After a while I noticed some old pictures on the walls in his garage. Pictures of some guy on a motorcycle.

The summer kinda flew by that way. I was dreading the return to school. But was excited to tell all my classmates about my motorcycle. None of them seemed interested though. Most of them didn't even believe me.

Winters in Cleveland are much like the Winters here in Milwaukee. Cold, wet, snowy, and just miserable over all. Sam, the guy with the funky breath and dirty beard, let me put my bike in his garage for the winter. Looking back I have to pause here. I expected to be telling you that over the course of the winter and the school year the bike slipped my mind. I thought I would be telling you that I didn't think about it. But that's not the case. Most ten year old boys would indeed forget. At least sometimes. Everyday I thought about it. I would sit in school and day dream about riding it around the playground. Or about riding it in the park. Showing off for the rest of the kids at school. I even imagined riding it in the snow.

One Saturday in spring I noticed Sam's garage door open so I cut through the yards and went over to see what he was doing.

I was struck dumb. I thought I was going to puke. I thought I was going to pass out. I thought I was going to kill the crazy old son of a bitch with his own screwdriver! Scattered all over the floor of his garage was what was left of my motorcycle!!! I just stood there with my mouth hanging open. When he saw me there he just smiled and told me I could "help clean up this mess". I could utter but one word..."Why?"

He said "Well, winter is for tear down, spring is for clean up, Summer is for riding." After a while to get my now 11 year old mind wrapped around the situation I handed him tools, asked questions, annoyed him and got in the way while he put my motorcycle back together over the next few weeks.

I had grown a bit, but I still didn't have enough ass to kick the damn thing started. He took me over to the park one day. To the hill. And he showed me how to push start it!!! I could start it myself!!

Every day I would push that thing to the park two blocks south four blocks east. And I would roll down that hill, and I would RIDE back up!!

I ripped around on that thing all summer. Spending my allowance on gas, cashing in soda bottles to buy gas. Every dime went into the tank of that thing.

By the end of summer I was able to get one foot solidly on the ground while sitting on it. When winter rolled around again it went back into Sam's garage. Right around Christmas time that winter something happened to Sam. The police came, an ambulance came. I never saw Sam again. I'd been introduced to the word of illegal narcotics by then. Though I didn't yet know the word narcotics.

The summer came and I broke into Sam's garage to get my motorcycle out. I had a hard time getting it started that year so I sold it to an older kid from the west side.

Sam didn't really teach me much about how to work on motorcycles. And as for teaching me how to ride, well that left a lot to be desired too. But If it weren't for him I may never have gotten that thing going, and may never have gotten into motorcycles at all. But one thing Sam taught me is still with me to this day. Winter is for tear down, spring is for clean up, and summer is for riding. To this day, every winter, whatever bike I have owned has been torn down, at least as much as I had the ability to do so. Every spring it got cleaned up and put back together, and got the hell ridden out of it all summer.

For those of you who would care to know that rusty old bike was a little Harley known as a "hummer". 165cc's of dirt track fury.

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