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After all the fluids were changed, I checked the battery. It was dead. Normally I would have bought a new battery. Motorcycle batteries don't last over four or five years - much less over ten. But Marybell was definitely different. I charged the battery and it took a charge.

The next thing was to fire her up. I set the choke and hit the starter button. The engine whirred a few times then she fired! It was a beautiful sound. The Harley panhead is the best sounding engine they ever made. It is very quiet mechanically with a mellow soft exhaust tone. It was as if I had died and gone to Harley rider heaven. Marybell was amazing! After over ten years she ran perfectly. I took it for a short ride to check everything out. She was ready for the road. She seemed eager to go too. It was like she was just waiting for Josh to hop on, hit the starter button and go.

I decided to take a ride up to Busick to show old Jed the bike the next nice Saturday. I was sure that he would like to see her back on the road. It wasn't until Thanksgiving weekend when I got a chance to go. When I got to Jed's farm, it was all boarded up. He was gone. I stopped at the general store on rt80 and they said that he had moved to a home somewhere on the "flat lands" near Charlotte. The proprietor and some of his customers followed me out to Marybell. They asked if it was Marybell. I said that I had bought it from Jed and had just got her back on the road. They were glad to see her again. They all had good things to say about Josh and Marybell.

It was such a nice day that I thought I'd take the long way home and ride some of the back roads up in the mountains. Marybell seemed to really like the mountains again. As we rounded a turn she didn't respond and went straight for the ditch. It took all I could do to keep from laying her down. Something stopped her from turning. All the way home, I rode really slow just in case her steering got hung up again. Luckily it didn't.

Once I got home, I took the front fork off to check the steering head bearings. I hadn't checked them before. After pulling it apart, I saw that there was nothing wrong with the bearings, race or any of the steering mechanism. It must have been maybe something in the road - a rut or something that I hadn't seen.

I didn't go back during the winter. The mountains can get very cold and icy which is no place to be riding a motorcycle. I just rode around the Shelby area until spring.

Spring didn't come too soon, I really love riding in the mountains and during the winter, I miss it.

It was a mid-April Saturday. The sun was out and in Shelby, spring had sprung - with all the dogwoods and azaleas in bloom. I knew that it was still winter in the mountains but warm enough for a bundled-up ride. I took Marybell up rt 80 out of Marion. She loved the twisties and we climbed all the way to the Blueridge Parkway. I decided that as long as I was close, I find out why she almost wrecked in the fall. I rode down the same road and took it real slow where she didn't turn before. There were no ruts in the road but Marybell still would not turn. I pulled off the road and noticed a footpath going into the woods. It was a little over-grown but still passable.

I took my camera and started hiking up the trail. It went out into a beautiful valley. It was a clear cloudless sky and the sun was intense. The leaves had not made their spring appearance yet but the view was still awe-inspiring. I paused for a few moments taking pictures when something caught my eye. It was something bright orange, way down in the valley. It was up in the trees flapping in the breeze. I couldn't tell what it was but

I took a picture of it. I could blow it up on the computer when I got home. I walked back to Marybell, hit the starter, put her in gear and headed home. The steering was fine again. It was only on that particular road at that particular spot. It was very strange!

When I got home, I pulled up the picture on the computer and enlarged it. The bright-orange object was a hunter's vest. There was also a shadow that looked like a person in a tree stand. It wasn't hunting season so I thought that it must be something else. The next weekend, I rode Marybell up to the mountains again and I stopped at the ranger station. I showed the ranger the printout of the enlargement. He was concerned and asked where it was. I told him the whole situation with Marybell and explained how to get to the place where I took the picture. He took my name and number and said he'd look into it.

A couple weeks passed and the ranger called. He told me that when they finally got down to where the bright orange vest was, they discovered some skeletal remains in a tree stand. It was identified by dental records to be Josh Wilson, Marybell's long time owner who had been missing for over ten years.

WOW! Did Marybell really know where he was? Was that the reason for the steering problems - to make me stop and look? This reminds me of Steven King's "Christine" but without the evil twist.

I went out to the garage and told Marybell that Josh was found. I felt funny talking to her that way but I also thought that she understood.

While I was on the phone with the ranger, I asked where Jed was living. I wanted to stop by with Marybell and talk with him for awhile. He said that he was living just south of Winston-Salem at an assisted living home. I decided to go visit him the next nice Saturday.

When I got there, I asked for Jed at the desk. The nurse seemed uneasy when I asked for him. I asked her if there was a problem with him. She said that he was really depressed and the doctors didn't think he'd last very long. Then she showed me to his room.

Once in his room, I noticed that he had really changed since the last time we visited. He looked much older and his color was almost gray. He had heard about finding Josh's remains from the ranger. I told him the whole story about Marybell's steering problems and how I saw the bright orange vest. I also told him that Marybell was outside in the parking lot. He wanted to see her so I wheeled him outside. A big smile got on his face when he saw her. He leaned over to touch her seat in almost a caressing motion. He talked to her in a low voice that I couldn't hear then told her goodbye. I wheeled him back to his room. He was talking all the time about Josh and Marybell and their escapades - like they happened yesterday instead of over ten years ago. I stayed for about an hour and he talked my ear off about Josh and Marybell. They must have really been something in their day.

I said goodbye and rode Marybell home. A couple weeks later, the nurse from the rest home called me. She told me that Jed had passed away in his sleep the night before. She also said that he had seemed more at peace since my visit. I went out to the garage to tell Marybell about Jed. When I did, a drop of oil slowly ran down from her head gasket. It seemed like a tear. Was Marybell crying? She had known Jed for over 40 years. [wallywer44@hotmail.com](mailto:wallywer44@hotmail.com)

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