

The Last Ride

By Jim Scott

There is a bitter-sweet feel to the day. I just got done with two days of riding in an uncharacteristically warm March. It reminds me of the year, 1973, I discharged from the Air Force out of North Pole, Alaska (Yes Rebecca, there is such a place.). We got home to 60 degree, short- sleeve- shirt days, only to get record snow around April 8. My tire chains allowed me to be the only car on Milwaukee streets, besides one cop car. But I digress.

I rode the back roads near my home in light gear with the wind whipping through my aging mane, smiling as I was finally back in the saddle after almost five months of lay-up. The season had commenced. Time to really plan some excursions. Then the currier truck pulled up with my copies of the FRP I distribute. As usual, I stopped what I was doing and read everything in it. I got a lump in my throat when I read Preacher's column. So the bitter part of the day came crashing in. Not that I was totally surprised. I know what an effort he puts into getting the "rag" into your hands. I also know how hard he works and what the Express business requires. It is more the realization that he might be right.

I have been planning a 4000 mile ride this summer. People ask me if I am riding with anyone. Nope. All alone. I am seeing people along the way that I served with in the military. I am seeing offspring of friends who have moved out of state. I am seeing relatives and friends. But the over-riding reason for doing this is real. I am buying as many sympathy cards lately as birthday cards, and before my wife has to receive them (The former as opposed to the latter), or I have to send them to the folks I want to visit, I am going to ride across this country and embrace them.

Good things end. Pastor Sam's story touched me in the March-May issue. I know folks like that. I spend time with them to give them something to talk about. An old mechanic who can't do what he did anymore. A school teacher who has closed himself off, and closed off the knowledge he has to share. The divorcee who is trying to make a life after. The FRP that I look forward to and have fun putting into other people's hands.

So the long ride I am planning might be the last one of its kind I do. Then again, I like to see the glass half full. Who knows what the Good Lord might grant me. Maybe I should contact Pastor Sam. The realization that there may not be a tomorrow, or a FRP, or a lot of things, makes what we are blessed with that much more special. Every day I suck oxygen, I give thanks. I just arranged for one of my grandsons to get his cycle certification. Riding with my grandsons was something I never expected.

One never knows.

I am looking forward to a summer of new rides, new friends, and new experiences. I am going to places I have never been before. I am in my 7th decade. That ain't too bad. What's around the corner....I have no idea, but no risk/ no reward. And what I used to tell my old girlfriends....no promises, no regrets (Actually stole that from a Tom Rush song).

Every ride should be a good ride. Not all are. I have been stranded. Broke down. Rained on. Fogged in. Froze out. Back in the day, help appeared pretty quickly. Today, not so much. I guess it says something about faith. Both in me, and in others. I can't judge why things have changed, but they have. I see a lot of it shifting to a focus on self....from others to "me". So be it.

Where is this going? It's going for one more ride. Might be the last one! Might not! I'm old school and have seen a lot. What looks like a closed door might be a change in direction. I know this. Being a part of FRP, short as it might be, has been a hoot for me. To be in the same pages as Pastor Sam, Kenn Hartmann, Sally Beauchamp, Sky Pilot, Denice Nobs, Dave Zien, and so many others has been a ride all by itself. To have met many of them, because Preacher made it happen, was even more meaningful. Will it keep going? No promises.....no regrets.

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