

Perceptions

by Jim Scott

This story starts about 30 miles north of Milwaukee, WI in 2012. I was going through radiation following surgery for cancer. Doc called me in April and wondered if I would be interested in a long bike trip. "How long and when?" "About 2500 miles in August." "Thought you said long. I am in." He admitted later he thought I would turn him down. Damn it.

We would ride over to Medora, N.D. to meet eight riders his brother was bringing down from Edmonton, Alberta. Yup. A bunch of Canadian riders. I do not like bunches of any riders, but, what the hell. We were going to ride the Black Hills and go on to Wyoming, over Bear Tooth Pass, split up and head home. I had been over Bear Tooth and to do it again was not going to be missed.

August came and off we went. When we found them in Medora, the home of Teddy Roosevelt National Park, it was a testy introduction evening. Ted, the socialist critic of my country, decided to single me out for testing his theories on our short comings as a nation. Wrong f'g veteran to start that with. Almost spoiled a perfectly wonderful meal at the Buffalo Bill Restaurant in downtown Medora. His friends rescued the evening, but the atmosphere was established. Shit. I had served this country during Nam, beat back cancer, raised a family, and road a really nice American bike. F' him.

Our stay in the ranch house we rented in Custer was nice. We took day rides all through the area and did it in small groups so it was never a 10 bike snake trying to navigate highway 16A. I can ride with the most aggressive and agile of them, or relax and enjoy a leisurely pace with Dave and Grant, who are more my age. At dinner the first night, I found out my old buddy Ted suffered through the same kind of cancer I had. Bond number one. Screw the politics. The last day we were in the area, we all planned to meet at the Easy Rider in Sturgis. Grant lost his wallet....wallet, credit cards, and pass port. Every one of us spread out looking everywhere in town we had been. Nothing.

I suggested we call his wife to see if someone had called her. Maybe it was found. Sure enough. A local fellow by the name of Pat found it and called the number that he had found in the wallet. It was Grant's mother-in-law, who called his wife and said, "Honey! Do you know Grant is in the US and at Sturgis??!" We got the number of the fellow who found it and called him. He said we should stay put. He would bring it over. What a reunion. On the way home, Ted bought steaks for everyone and we enjoyed a "home cooked meal" our last night in Custer.

When we got to Thermopolis, Wyoming, one of the riders, Brent, who had been really quiet, found out his rear tire was going down. Sure as hell, we found a nail in it. We went over to a bar, got a phone book, and started looking for a place to get it fixed. We found one thirty miles back up the road in Worland. We called the guy. Yah, he had that tire. He would come down that night and get the bike. It would be ready at 8:00 am. He got there at a little after 11:00 pm.

I told Brent that night that he could pilot my bike in the morning to go get it and I would ride "bitch". He took a couple of laps on my Victory Vision to get the feel before we left to get his V-Storm. A little different. Two other riders came with us to make sure we had no more issues. When we got there, the bike was ready and the price was for the tire....only the tire. It was a custom shop and he was a rider. We needed help. He gave it. Brent dropped more than a few bucks on "stuff".

Bear Tooth in the rain was enough of a challenge, but when Doc's brakes went out due to old brake fluid on the way down, things got a little dicey. When we got to the bottom at Red Lodge, Montana, we found another custom shop. The fellow at Bone Daddy's figured he could have us ready to go by 8:00 in the morning, but he had to go to his son's high school football game right now.

We had a dinner in Red Lodge that night. It would be our last night together. A toast was raised to a good time and then the tradition of allowing each to express, in a few words, some perceptions they came away with. When it got to the quiet one, Brent....the lawyer with the flat and attitude for the first half of the trip....he said this; "When I found out that there were two yanks" coming out on this trip, I almost canceled. I have not been fond of dealing with them. I have had my perception changed." He raised his glass and looked to Doc and me.

"Thank you. I have seen something in your country that has changed my mind. I have never had this much fun, ridden such great roads, enjoyed the company, and encountered nicer people, in all the trips I have done."

I could not leave that alone. I asked him who he had dealt with in the States. He said people on both coasts. I said, "Hell, we can't stand those bastards either." Another toast.

The following morning, Doc and I headed east, and they all headed north.

Before they departed, we had breakfast and I walked with Ted to the restaurant. We agreed to disagree on politics. I promised to send some info on American/Canadian relations that I had studied. Then he gave me a special pin he had bought commemorating our ride over the Tooth.

When you share life on the edge, like we do, trivial stuff melts away. The brotherhood we share can focus perceptions on what matters. For us, it seems to be different. By the way, the 2500 miles were really 4100. Doc's math is not so good. But I was happy.

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