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Dads Last Ride

Sometimes parents surprise you. Just when you think they were never young, with a wild streak and that they were always serious and responsible, and wanted to be: you find out they too had crazy thoughts and dreams.

Shortly before retiring my dad announced that he was buying a motorcycle! He started small, so it really didn't seem all that shocking – at first. It wasn't long though before he was buying a Gold Wing and he and mom were going on motorcycle trips. Soon we had no idea where they were half the time. Those afternoon jaunts to surrounding cities began to turn into overnights and then weeks and soon we had no idea when they were coming back from their travels around the country

At the end of each summer dad proudly gave us the grand total of miles they had put on their bike. He was really disappointed if they had put on less than 10,000 miles in a season. The little map he displayed on his tank eventually had a diamond chip in all the states but one, by the time he stopped riding on his 86th birthday. That was because he always said he just couldn't find the bridge to Hawaii.

Oh, the adventures those two had. Mom went along on almost every trip and had a wardrobe of colorful leather jackets to make a woman of any age proud. She didn't make the trip to Alaska though. That trip lasted a month and dad slept on the ground in a sleeping bag every night but one; that was because it rained so hard he couldn't keep the tent stakes in the ground. He was 80 at the time.

In the years of "the bikes" he went to Sturgis several times. There he enjoyed the unusual bikes, dancing with the girls and the tattoos. He laughingly showed off the pictures he had taken for years.

In 1988 they had a terrible accident. A young driver in a car, adjusting her radio did not see them pull out from a gas station and ran right into the back of them. The trailer they were towing probably saved their lives, because it took the brunt of the hit. There wasn't much left, of it or the bike. Both of them were in critical condition and in ICU for many days, but both lived to ride again. Mom's pelvis had been badly broken so dad had to lift her onto the cycle for awhile. She admitted to being a bit nervous after that, but she was always ready to go.

We never had heard the full story about his dreams of having a "bike" until the Lakeland Times ran a feature article about dad's years of riding. There for the first time we heard the story of how from a young boy on he had made it a goal to someday have a bike. He always encouraged everyone to follow their dreams.

On a sad fall day on his 86th birthday dad climbed on his cycle for one last time. He could no longer meet his own criteria for continuing to ride. Each spring he laid the bike down with a hoist. He said when he could no longer pick it up he was finished riding. He had not met his criteria that spring so he had had his bike converted to a three wheeler, but it was never the same for him. He wasn't converting it because it was cool; he was doing it because he needed to. When someone called it a trike it broke his heart and his spirit to ride.

There was one more ride though, on a beautiful spring day this year. He one more time went for a ride on the back of his old bike, held by me, in a small plastic bag, where perhaps a speck of dust escaped, so he could ride free one more time. So dad's last ride was when he was 90. I hope in some small way we gave him back his dream.

Blondie

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Some more news:

Indonesian Capital Limits Motorcycle Traffic

City officials in Jakarta are mulling over schemes to limit the number of motorcycles allowed in certain areas during peak hours to help unsnarl the city's acute traffic jams. The Indonesian Motorcycle Industry Association estimates there are about 35 million motorcycles in usable condition in the country, and in the capital city of 8.5 million people there are nearly one motorcycle for every person and growing by nearly a thousand new bikes every day.

This extraordinarily high number of motorcycles has exacerbated the city's already awful traffic, especially during rush hour, and plans are in place to begin banning bikes from a number of main thoroughfares in this mostly Muslim nation after the holy holiday of Ramadan, requiring riders to continue their journeys by public transportation.

Motorcycle numbers have been increasing for six years throughout the country, driven by affluence and affordable credit schemes. Today, a new motorcycle can be purchased with an initial down payment of Rp 500,000 (US\$50). www.ON-A-BIKE.com

Aging Road Warriors At Higher Risk

Continuing to ride a motorcycle may keep some senior citizens young at heart, but as the riding population grows older they are more likely to be injured or die as a result of a mishap when compared to their younger counterparts due to factors associated with aging.

Researchers at Rochester University Medical Centre in New York released findings earlier this spring indicating that half of all motorcyclists needing emergency treatment in 2005 were over 40, double the number in 1993, and accidents involving riders in that age group were twice as likely to be fatal as those involving younger bikers.

Of all injured riders included in the study, those aged 50 to 59 were the fastest-growing group, while those between 20 and 29 were the most rapidly declining group.

Age-related changes, such as decreases in bone strength and brain size, may make older riders more susceptible to injury. Other factors associated with aging, such as impaired vision, delayed reaction time, and altered balance contribute to motorcycle crashes in this population.

In the study, which was published in the March issue of the American Surgeon, researchers using the National Trauma



Databank reviewed the records of 61,689 motorcyclists aged 17 to 89 years involved in a motorcycle crash between 1996 and 2005.

The average age of motorcyclists involved in crashes steadily increased over the study period, which is consistent with published statistics from the Motorcycle Industry Council which report that the average age of motorcycle ownership rose from 33 years in 1998 to 40 years in 2003. www.ON-A-BIKE.com

QUOTABLE QUOTE: "Necessity is the plea for every abridgment of human freedom. It is the argument of tyrants, the creed of slaves." William Pitt (1759-1806), Prime Minister of England