

the
BURRITO



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August 5 to September 17, 1998

I can't really find another reason to write up this trip of mine other than giving my grandkids something to take to Show and Tell. Come to think of it, the story will be too long for that — maybe they could just read it when they learn how. The trip has been very important to me in so many ways and I would like them to know about it. Actually, lots of my friends seem interested, too!

The idea of doing this monster motorcycle trip had gelled over a period of many years, beginning with a need to see the West at ground level. That part of the country just seemed to have lost something as I flew back and forth at 35,000 feet. Over the past 35 years of my work life, I have survived on postcard pictures and snaps of other people's vacations. Now, in my third year of retirement, is the time.

Who shall I get to share this motorcycle ride with me? (I have been tripping on various motos for the past ten years.) Well, nobody. My retirement community yielded no one willing to chance the trip and young Danny, my Mexican biker friend, has to work for a living. What the hell, this trip is crazy anyhow, so how much crazier could it be by myself? I go for it solo which makes my story seem a little more reckless to my grandkids. Right?

I begin my preparations and spend many hours poring over maps trying to plot the perfect route that includes every important site in all 12 states and Mexico. That won't work, because I will be gone for a year, and that seems a little unfair to Barb (my wife). Besides that, my little Honda 250 Enduro will surely melt down by then. After much simplification, I decide on a do-able route and begin preparations.

I need to figure out how to get my house (tent), bed (sleeping bag) and chair (child's folder type) on this bike and still leave room for me. A trip to my friendly local Mexican welder for a homemade luggage rack and some killer highway pegs (to put my feet on when leaning back against my bedroll) and I am ready for a couple of fairly long trial runs in central Mexico. I learn the adjustments needed, including a heat shield (my right boot had a new burn hole in it the size of a golf ball).

I also learn not to let anyone else pump gas into my bike as the cute little Mexican girl at the Pemex shoots gas all over me and the hot motorcycle. No "lo siento," just a quirky smile which I don't understand.

Now I am set to go; Barbara is so tired of watching me fidget around the house that she insists that I leave early, which I do. Never would have thought of that without her! She takes my picture early in the morning rain and I go with fear in my head and joy in my heart. I get thoughts like "What the hell am I doing?" etc. as I roll out toward Chapala, hoping to make it to Saltillo by bedtime.

I am thinking I have 20 days to get to Erin's (my daughter) wedding in Seattle, and I figure I only need 10 days, so I can take it real easy — be safe — stop a lot. Well, the Big Ranger (That guy living up high in the sky) sees to it that I do take it real slow as I only make it two miles to Chapala before I need to re-pack my load which has shifted badly and probably won't make it through the day.

That done, I do the periférico around Guadalajara and get lost trying to find highway 54 to Zacatecas. It is 1:00 pm when I give up and ask a cabbie for help. I hook up with #54 and I am finally "doing" my trip. It feels great to finally be out in the wind away from traffic.

Five hours later I am in Zacatecas in a hotel and 5 hours short of my goal (Saltillo). Why the heck am I pushing myself when I know I have tons of time to get to the wedding? Guess I am worrying about a bad mechanical problem somewhere down the line. The hotel is noisy and earplugs yield a good sleep.

As I fall asleep I think of the little town out in the desert named "El Fuerte" (The Strong), and the flashing image of a Mexican woman emerging from the cactus carrying two white hens and balancing a small table on her head. I wonder if she sold the hens and for how much. I will be glad when I can get into the States to some safe camping.

It is 5 a.m. and I wake up coughing and wondering if that Ajijic "gripe" will ever leave me. I dress, load the bike in heavy rain and wait it out with coffee in the hotel. Too early for serving breakfast. I watch the fog open and close the view of the town cross with the neon lights outlining it perched high on the mountain and wonder how long I will be delayed.

As I leave the hotel I discover a back tire losing air. I spend 1/2 day sorting this out with the little Mexican mechanic sweating buckets with only simple tools, and then not charging me anything because I help and get just as greasy as he does.

I pay him anyhow and head off for Saltillo dodging rainclouds across nothing but chalk-line straight roads for four hours in the rolling desert. There are no gas stations and I have a 2-gallon tank. I use my 2 "Fabulosa" jugs (from my maid) full of extra gas

and make it fine. They may look funny strapped on my handlebars, but they are saving my butt and I love them!

I pass through four drug roadblocks and all but one just smile me on through knowing at first glance that I am just some wacky retiree out for a big fling, looking for the perfect mountain or tree or some heady enlightenment of some sort. Only one roadblock soldier gives me the evil eye, but he backs off at the last moment. "This is a test, and only a test" is the message I receive. I only make Saltillo today instead of Monclova and once again I get that itchy feeling as though I need to hurry on or miss the wedding.

I leave Saltillo from my American-style "Motel 6" experience and move on out looking forward to a full day's ride without getting lost or having a flat, and finally being able to camp somewhere in Texas. I spend the morning weaving through a "biker's dream" consisting of an empty mountain road, cool weather and misty views of mountains coming right to the edge of the road on both sides of me. I try leaning the bike into the curves a little harder with more throttle and find that my camping gear has made my rig pretty top-heavy — no hot dogging on this trip!

Soon the mountains melt away into hot empty desert and I lean back in my "rockin' chair" and count cacti. One more cop-stop prior to the border — no problem. I cross the border at Eagle Pass and the U.S. Border Guard laughs at the sight of me and my enthusiasm for my trip.

I get a good feeling as I hit the U.S. where drivers actually give bikers an entire lane to ride in as compared to the Mexicans who give you what's left over when they pass each other. In Mexico I ride as though I am invisible just to stay safe.

I still have daylight left so I move on to Del Rio and hear about Seminole Canyon, a supposedly good camp some 40 miles down the road. I arrive with daylight left and find an empty camp except for one other "Seminole" and his wife. They are from Michigan. The weather is perfect and I take a chance and hang my hammock out in the open. No bugs — strong breeze — full moon — small animals rustling in the brush. I have no food so I have a slug of water and sack out at dark. The moon is so bright that I put a towel over my eyes.

Now, they didn't call this place Seminole Canyon just for fun! This place was a ceremonial site for centuries with Indian markings throughout this deep canyon carved out of the rolling desert. I feel a little spooked as I fall asleep, and by 3 a.m., I feel the presence of the past inhabitants so strongly that my sleep comes to an abrupt halt. The wind — The brilliant moon. I get an unwelcome feeling and I am in the

shower, on my bike and out of here! Don't know what happened to the "Seminoles" from Michigan.

I am shooting down a Texas highway (a trucker song, I think) in the pre-dawn mist setting my sights on Carlsbad, New Mexico. Comfy in the morning but getting hot. Quick stop at Lloyd's General Store in Langtry, Texas to eat a huge "makeup breakfast" to make up for last nite. Nice guy about my age (about midways between 30 and 90 somewhere). I finally get to call Barbara and check in with the home front. I haven't seen a pay phone since the border. I shovel down excellent bacon and eggs and pancakes as I watch ole Lloyd run back and forth between two cash registers. One for food and another for everything else. He's sweating. It's 8:00 a.m.

The sun is relentless and temperatures must be well above 100, but I don't know for sure. Several hours go by and I find myself wondering how any of those desperate Mexicans could possibly make it through this heat and the hundreds of border guard shacks with their infra-red binoculars. I think of the little village back in Mexico, "El Fuerte," the Strong.

In Ft. Stockton I find a little laundromat and wash my three changes of clothes (I'm on my 4th day) by sneaking into the restroom and putting on some cutoffs and throwing in what I'm wearing too. While I'm waiting, some drunken hitch-hiker lady about 6' tall — with a dog — tries to pick me up for a "fun" ride to wherever I was going as long as it was West. Her hands are the size of hams and completely field-worn. She has picked her share of cotton somewhere along the line. She doesn't see my loaded-down bike out in the parking lot. All clean and pretty, now, I reload the bike with all my stuff which has been piled up in the parking lot and head to Pecos, Texas.

When in Pecos for gas, an R.C. & a Moon Pie, the air conditioning in the gas station feels so cold that I am glad to get back outside. I fill my helmet with water from their hose and put it on my head. Fifteen minutes later I am dry. Could somebody please tell me why we wanted Texas? My buddy, Joco Bob, is a helluva man. He lived much of his life down the road in Odessa.

On to Carlsbad, New Mexico (I want to see the caves). Along the way I see none of the sheep and goats that old Lloyd said were raised around here — only one deer and a wild boar. No other wildlife — no other tame life — Just me. I am in the groove now, and feel as if I could ride forever. The sore spots on my backside are turning into tough spots. I have discovered a dozen ways to "sit" on a bike for variety and I know how to stretch out my legs, arms, shoulders and neck so that I can go long stretches from tankful to tankful.

Finally at Carlsbad Caverns National Park, I make reservations for a tour tomorrow and set up in a little private camp nearby. (No camping in the park?!) This place is "Wally World" with no visible signs of any kind of peace and quiet (spirituality) that I can find. The usual crowded drive-in-camp kind of thing. I hang my hammock under my prized shade tree and wait out the heat til sundown. In the dark we are set upon by four vanloads of foreign high school tourist kids — thank God for earplugs! I eat a dinner of lunch meat and crackers from the grocery store while sitting along a quiet wall at the side of the building away from everyone.

This morning I go for an early cave walk to avoid the throngs who are still back at the camp rattling pots and pans. What a wonderful surprise this turns out to be! I walk down into the entrance on a switchback trail that takes me nearly straight down for an hour. This place is an underground jewelry collection that I am so glad I stopped for. Not hot in here either!

I lounge around in the underground restaurant and watch people for a while — talk to a nice old guy looking for his family and kinda scared. I try two out of the three tours and am ready to face the land of sun again. One minute in a manned elevator and I am back on top. This huge cave was found for the white man by a lone cowboy looking up this canyon for lost cattle. Of course the red man knew about it for a few thousand years before that.

I return to camp to find the teen-age Nazis who raised hell all night had moved on, so I decided to stick around another day and rest. I met a schoolteacher guy from California who was doing his summer walkabout and we spend the rest of the day chewing the fat and reading. I spend a lot of time with my old friend the hammock under my prized shade tree and enjoy every minute as I drink as much water as possible getting ready for the state of New Mexico in the morning.

Up early and gone before the drive-n-camp people are awake and find a good mom-and-pop restaurant for another killer breakfast. I find out the waitress (a country girl) speaks New Mexican and French. She is obviously worth a lot more than what she is making in Carlsbad.

The southern half of New Mexico is pretty much a repeat of Texas jackrabbit country. See one cactus/mesquite/sagebrush combo and you have pretty much seen them all! Four or five hours of dodging bugs and counting cacti and things start getting green. There are mountains in the distance and I know the higher elevation will soon raise me out of some of this heat. I am revived. Near Santa Fe, a deer jumps out of the pines and eyes me. I react. He decides to spare me and heads back to the woods. I am wide awake now!

I skirt the city (as I do most cities) and continue North to some little town near the Colorado border for camping and food at Earl's restaurant, a very busy holdover from the '60s with an automobile hot-rod flame job painted on the ceiling. Glazed waitresses are gliding about on platform shoes serving up Tex-Mex delicacies. The crowd consists of freaks, wannabe mountain men with their mud trucks hitched up out front, Mexicans, Indians and me. I like it but I am not sure why except that it's weird.

This morning (my 6th day) I am actually cool. I change the oil and fix my headlight, say goodbye to Esther, owner of the camp, and split for Colorado. I am feeling like a true road warrior by now and can sense that my destination is reachable. That my bike is trustworthy. The "Big Ranger" is looking over my shoulder, and that whole church full of people in Ajijic (whom I don't know) really is praying for me like they said they would. I am truly blessed. I feel safe and confident.

I breakfast at a sleazy-looking Mexican "family" restaurant and cannot eat all of my delicious breakfast burrito. It must weigh a pound! A strange looking weirdo at the end of the counter stares at me the whole time out of his coke-bottle glasses, full scraggly beard/day-glow orange baseball cap/cigarette smoke ambiance. It must be true love! I pay and bug out of here without even a nod.

I feel that most people are leery of me and will not look at me unless I make the first move and "show teeth." I do have a bit of an outlaw look beginning to develop as the bike takes on a crust of oil and dirt along with all my gear. My moustache, dirty tanned skin, ponytail and crusty clothes added to this make for an overall unfriendly impression, especially when I am getting tired. However, most people will warm up immediately if I make the first move.

Thirty miles North and getting close to the Colorado line I am making good time through wide open desert with a few rolling hills. Big mountains are bordering everything about 50 miles in the distance. I see huge storms spotted all around me and one special "tormenta" (as the Mexicans say) headed straight for me with enough lightning to supply Vegas. I figure I have 10 minutes to do something before it hits and I am clearly not going to drive through it. There is nothing out here!

I do find a side road with a locked gate and a for-sale sign that blew away as I arrived. Maybe five minutes left. I pull in, madly unstrap the gear from my bike and throw it in a pile in the weeds near a fence. That 10' x 10' tarp I brought is gonna earn its keep now. I fix my little nest on top of my gear and pull the tarp over me.

I lie here in the storm thinking about my buddy Bob who got struck by lightning and killed in 1956 when we were practicing football behind the high school. Not a bad way to go, really. He was so young. I fall asleep at the height of the storm.

The sound of a car on the side road wakes me as the storm lets up a little. The guy lives back there in the cactus somewhere, I guess. He unlocks his gate and I feel a little silly crawling out of my hideout. You O.K.? Yes, I'm just waiting out the storm. Any problem? No. Stay as long as you need to. He hides his gate key back under the rock he got it from, smiles and takes off down the empty highway. Nice Guy.

The lightning is mostly downwind from me now, so I get on my rain gear, load up and take off North covered with mud. The light rain washes it off as I roll along.

I am headed for more open country according to the map and I will have to be careful about finding a cheap motel. Need to take the first one I see. After the mud/rain experience I need a shower, some good food and a warm bed. By 6:00 I make Villa Grove, Colorado — a 3-building town sitting perfectly flat, snowcapped Rockies 50 miles to the East and the Sawatch Range 50 miles to the West. One family owns the whole town! Gas, Food, Rooms on one side of the highway and a pottery store opposite.

I drop my rain pants around my ankles at the gas pump to get my money out and some local in his pickup truck comes up and cracks a joke. He later tries to bait me into a fight in the restaurant. I tell him to chill out, that I am too damned old to be doing that crap! He leaves. I find my room (1 of 3) out by the gas pump area.

I bathe (shower not working). I hit the sack in a bed of 2 x 4s and sleep well. I am awakened at 2:00 a.m. by the sound of "new age" hippie music wafting from across the highway. The potters have come to work and are throwing pots in the cool of the night. Relaxing!

At daylight, I unchain my bike from a fencepost, load up and return a wave from some cowboy in another old pickup as I head north to the "real" mountains. The restaurant isn't open yet.

Within a half-hour I am going up a mountain over 9000' high and through Poncha Pass. My "rookie status" begins to show as the temperature plunges to the 30s. I am freezing. Do I want to stop — unpack my stuff — dress up — repack the bike, just for one mountain? No! I go on for another 30 minutes and get to the base on the other side. I am shaking involuntarily and have a hard time getting off the bike. Next time I will be ready!

I drink lots of hot coffee at a little general store/bar and watch an old-timer slug down a shot of whiskey. He says he always stops in here for a shot when passing through. I wonder how many other places enjoy the same loyalty. A sign on the wall — "If you poach, there will be hell to pay"! I just knew when I left on this trip that this place and many others like it would be just sitting and waiting to amuse and amaze me. I fight a huge family of tourists for the bathroom and move on. It's 9:00 a.m.

Somehow I miss the turnoff that would have taken me to Leadville and Aspen. Oh well, I get to see Gunnison, Montrose and Grand Junction instead. There are no wrong turns on this trip — only other turns. No sense backtracking when it is all so beautiful with surprises waiting at each bend.

It is mid-day and I am coming into Montrose and see a Honda dealer. Now it is hot again and I am peeling off and strapping my jacket and stuff on top of my load. I look like the biker version of a bag boy. I am still trying to get a headlight to continue working. \$15.00 and 15 minutes later I am back together. I shoot the bull with a couple of guys alongside the hi-way as I fix the light. Nice to have some human contact once in a while. They say it's working with the familiar "thumbs up" sign and I am gone. The bike (which I have named "Burrito") is still running impeccably except for some gasping for air this morning on the high mountain pass.

After fighting heat again to Grand Junction, I follow my good friend Louis' advice (from Ajijic) and go North from there to Rangely. A wonderful ride for a rather tired butt with another high mountain pass to cool me. I am almost finished with Colorado and I didn't realize how far I had gone today. My butt knew. This state has blown me away! Thanks to the "Big Ranger" for moving me safely through this picturesque place. I will never forget it. I am thinking as if my trip is over and I still have 4 or 5 thousand miles of "gratitude" to go yet.

In Rangely I find a little town park to camp in with nothing for company but a few prairie dogs. I put my 5 dollars into one of those "honest" boxes without seeing anyone and head on into an empty spot. Level, but with a busted picnic table. The place is loaded with trees and a little spooky. I will keep my trusty hatchet handy tonight. Looks like a good place for beer parties and other teenage hi-jinks. I walk the town, find some good Italian food and hurriedly ride back to my tent which I am a little concerned about. Nothing happened. Next morn, the town cop comes by while I am brushing my teeth and says I'm glad you're o.k. This is not a good place sometimes!

This morning I am still trying to check in with Barb as I have been trying to do for a couple of days. There always seems to be some problem or reason why I can't get through. I call five different times at the breakfast restaurant and finally give up. She

doesn't worry, but I need to hear her voice. The road does get lonely sometimes. The "good french toast" recommended by a local turned out to be exactly that and the waitress from last night's meal remembers me and gives me extra attention. Clean town, good people. Half an hour up the road at Dinosaur I finally get to speak with Barb from an outside phone next to a huge plastic (you guessed it) Dinosaur. I feel better. I miss her.

Today I will cut across the Northwest corner of Utah and point North to as close to Jackson, Wyoming as I can get. I wear out at Pinedale which is halfway up the state. Along the way I pass the Wind River Range of mountains with peaks above 12,000 ft.

Back in Rock Springs at about mid-day, I stop for one of my famous R.C. & Moon Pie lunches. Parked at the restaurant/gas station are 4 or 5 Harleys fully decked out. Two are custom bikes that would grace any showroom floor. I am eating and talking with another local old-timer. My bag-lady bike is parked alongside. They come out with their heavy leathers and biker "ladies" to ride to Denver. Have been to Sturgis North Dakota to the Big Harley Rally. Will load their bikes on a trailer soon and fly back to Florida. They roar off without asking where I and my little "Burrito" are headed. If it ain't Harley — it's chopped liver.

South of Rock Springs, Wyoming, is the knockout scenic "fandango" of the day. Flaming Gorge Reservoir. I am running out of superlatives so I will make some up. I marvel at the rich russet cliffs, clear water, pines and mountains that combine to dazzle me one more time. I am going to have to take a day off from riding to let some of this sink in! Visual overload.

The area surrounding this place (forget the dam — impressive but only man-made) is so dewy and piney. They have just mowed the sage alongside the road and the road smells like an Indian ceremony with their smudge sticks of sage. The road — perfect — winding — no traffic — heaven. Just have to continue to monitor for deer as I glide effortlessly through this little paradise. They say you never see the deer that gets you. I am careful but not preoccupied...would spoil the trip.

At Pinedale for the night (way short of Jackson, my goal) I am fried. No camps around so I go off onto a back road and scramble straight up a grassy foothill and find a semi-level spot. That's what dirt bikes are all about. I am concerned that my hot bike could start a grass fire. It doesn't. I mash down grass, set up a ground cloth and sleeping bag combo and sleep under the stars. I am once again sitting in a reserved seat watching God's creation. I am in tears from the sunset, the reflections in creeks and moon below and then the stars. I eat my granola bars, have a slug of water and drift off to sleep. What a day. I am content.

As I wake, I feel a coating of ice on my sleeping bag and the towel over my head to keep the wind off. I don't realize I am very close to the Great Divide and at a pretty good elevation. What a switch from the desert a few days ago! I brush my teeth with what's left of the drinking water, pack up and clear out. A good experience here — I need food! Barb's mosquito gel stuff did a good job last night. The mosquitoes must have overcoats up here!

Riding along the Bridger-Teton National Forest I find a restaurant and do another "manly" kind of breakfast (my favorite meal). I talk to a frumpy but kind-looking Mexican man with his wife and cute kid. He is a champion horseshoe pitcher and is headed for a tournament. He practices two hours every day. I think of Wayne back in Indiana. Also a horseshoe champ — taught me how to make homebrew.

My target today is Sun Valley, Idaho, a place where Mary Lee (Ajijic friend) has set me up with lots of contacts. I am looking forward to staying an extra day and being with some people for a while. I cross from Wyoming to Idaho thru Idaho Falls and on to a high desert plain containing Craters of the Moon National Park. Another word for hell on earth with lava beds coming up to the highway on both sides and stretching on for too many miles. Even the cactus seem to be pleading for mercy out there. After 100 miles of the boredom of the desert (have seen a lot of this by now) and the hostility of the lava beds, I welcome "Picabo" and other little towns leading into Sun Valley.

It must be the weekend as I have no luck finding a room that doesn't cost up into the hundreds. The contact phone numbers I try aren't at home. The place is touristy beyond my tolerance point. I am needing food and rest. Finally after hacking thru stoplights up and down the main drag a couple of times I give up and head for the woods north of town a few miles. I was so anxious to get out of the traffic and congestion that I forgot to eat supper. I am learning that I don't die if I skip a meal now and then. Didn't know that.

I find an isolated spot in a National Park — foothills of the Sawtooth Range. I get the hammock up right away and rest. Then the tent and other stuff. After my first experience with town I am just about ready to hit the old trail in the morning. Wait a minute! I am making great time and I need to back off a day. Chill out — give it a chance, O.K.?

I get a visit from the park ranger (not the Big Ranger) telling me I need to pay money to camp here. Funny, what do I do — nail it to a tree? I must go to town tomorrow and buy a piece of paper to get legal, nice guy. Has caught 39 sturgeon this year. I caught one in '92 on the Snake River. Took 1 hour to pull it in. This guy spends lots of time fishing!

A local wakes me in the middle of the night by shining his light from an over-equipped pickup. Not a word! Just a little long-distance warning to not screw around, I guess. He's probably paranoid about some biker doing weird things to him in the middle of the night. Who knows — This is the Wild West.

I haven't really cleaned up since back in Central Colorado, so this morning looks like the time. I kind of like my dirt, but I am going to town today and maybe even locate some "friends of Mary Lee", and the desperado "look" might not be real appropriate. I take my little kid-sized folding chair, the mirror off my bike handlebars and cleanup gear and head for the little mountain stream that did such a good job of singing me to sleep last night.

I set my chair in the stream on a flat spot and proceed to wash, shave, etc. in the coldest water I have seen for a while! I haven't had a cold shave like that since Fort Knox Army days back in '63. (The sergeant told us that we needed to keep shaved so in case we got captured, the enemy wouldn't think we were hard up!) I'm glad no cars came down the road during this operation or they probably would have performed a citizen's arrest on me for showing a tad more skin than is normally allowed in public.

I'm wide awake now and ready for another "make-up" breakfast. I ride to town and immediately spot the busy "local" place (cars parked everywhere). No room in the inn. I am forced to eat across the street at one of those yuppie espresso places. Good food — high prices.

I shop around town a little and look at all the great Stetsons and cowboy shirts which I can't have and meet another Mary Lee (local waitress). She is madly filling all the washing machines and dryers as if she has 10 kids and only 15 minutes to do the laundry. Once she slows down, I ask where the nearest motorcycle shop is — she knows!

I do my laundry and go over to see if they have a headlight bulb (#3 of the trip). I get the last one from a very friendly and helpful guy for only \$6.00. This time I find an electrical short — borrow stuff at the shop and fix it. Something tells me I got it fixed this time. Turns out this is the shop where Steve McQueen (movies and motorcycle guru) used to hide out. I feel like kissing a wrench or something!

I find some of the "friends of Mary Lee" whom I have phone numbers for and spend a few hours with them. Feels like family. I am revitalized. Back to camp for rest and preparation for my next target — Missoula, Montana. Little do I realize what is waiting for me up the road tomorrow.

To me, there is something very special about the birth of something. This morning I am cruising through the perpetual birthplace of the Salmon River in central Idaho. Witnessing this event is an honor which I will never forget and which no-one could ever take from me. I think of the most staggering scenery I have ever seen on the silver screen complete with every high-tech device to amplify it. Nothing could begin to compare with this valley and the view of it as I top a mountain and curve to a stop to soak it in. No background music is needed. The dead silence and serenity emanating out of this sacred place stand alone. I could live here. I could die here. I am speechless. When do I leave? It takes a while.

For 100 miles or so I aim my bike to a sort of rhythm as I wind along the ever-growing Salmon through rocks, pines and mountains. Sometimes, I am flowing along adjacent to the water and other times climbing high on a ledge looking down on the riffles. By the time I reach the town of Salmon the spell is broken and the river runs off west to the Oregon state line to the "Hells Canyon" (the place I caught my sturgeon). Man alive, I am glad about this trip!

I pass the Bitterroot Range (which is also the Continental Divide) and push through Lost Trail Pass to calmer ground leading to Missoula, Montana.

I try a Quality Inn at Lolo and pass on the \$52 rate hoping to find a mom-and-pop place which never happens. I wind up paying \$62 in the city. Oh well, time to quit for the day.

I have been trying to decide for the last several days whether to use my extra days to continue on up into Banff, Canada, or make a hard left at Missoula and go straight to Seattle. My baby daughter Erin (age 29) is getting married in a week. At the last minute I tilt left and go to Spokane, which is the first leg of my remaining distance to Seattle. I need to spend some real time with Erin and her fiancé, Lyle, before the wedding whirlwind sets into motion. There will be plenty more to see on the trip back to Ajijic!

I do 150 miles or so of superhighway to Spokane. (Up to this point my trip has been almost all back roads). This part of Montana and the northern panhandle of Idaho (the best-kept secret in the original 48) is serious logging country and I kick back in 40-degree weather and enjoy the ride. This is the most x-way riding I have done and I really don't like doing it, but the little roads through here look all cut-up and I am looking at getting to Seattle before a big weather front comes through and slows me down.

I get to Spokane in good time and decide to try for Wenatchee, Washington today. Then if the weather is bad tomorrow I will only be a couple hundred miles from

Seattle. I choose U.S. Highway #2 which takes me through the rolling wheat fields of eastern Washington State (No need to go to Kansas). There is more variety out here than I expected with occasional canyonlands and lakes interrupting the farming.

At one of my many gas stops a "launcha" (big old boat of a car from the '70s) as the Mexicans say, pulled up alongside me. They were Mexican farm hands packed in there like sardines. They see my Mexico license plates. "Hey man, you ride that thing all the way from Jalisco?" "Si, señor! You guys from Jalisco? Yeah! Guadalajara!" They were all smiles and so was I. The gas station guy said that's the only time he has ever seen them smile. Made my day. Later I pass a little shack/restaurant along the hi-way with a closed sign. The name — "Little Chapala".

Getting closer to Wenatchee I follow valleys filled with apple orchards. The kind of apples we pay 10 pesos for when we can get them. This area also clicks in my mind as one of those places a person could live. I will later learn that my daughter and husband-to-be are thinking along those lines. I roll right into a cheap but clean motel with free Golden Delicious in a bowl on the check-in counter. Dallas gets beat by New England in a preseason game played in Mexico City tonight. First t.v. I have seen for a while. I miss the football. Tomorrow will be my 13th day on the road and I am ready for an oasis. Some home cooking and real furniture would be good.

The map shows two mountain passes waiting for me tomorrow and then some x-way to North Bend, my destination. I am a slow learner, but tomorrow I will dress warm.

The bad weather I wasted time worrying about is not happening; however, warm clothes are definitely recommended! I wind through the Wenatchee National Forest and then fly past the Mt. Baker/Snoqualmie National Forest on the interstate. Before I know it I am following my wrinkled directions to Erin's house and into the driveway. It looks just like the pictures. I rev the engine a few times and out comes Lyle. Erin is showering. There are big computer-generated "WELCOME" signs hanging on the front of the house. God, it is great to safely arrive and enjoy a big hug from my Erin, my baby girl (29) who is getting hitched!

I have about a week to spend with Erin and Lyle before the wedding and I know I had better make myself useful or they will be sick of me by the time the wedding day arrives! Lyle has yard work, Erin has wedding decorations to paint, the back porch needs some fixin' and before you know it the week is gone. We did have time to spend one day riding motorcycles (Lyle has a vintage Triumph) together and sharing a good brunch at their favorite mom and pop restaurant out in the boonies.

Everyone begins to arrive for the wedding and the activities begin. We rehearse, we have a big cookout, we meet the in-laws (good people), we pick up tuxes, we set up for

the outside wedding and inside reception. The time has come. I walk my baby daughter Erin (29) to the altar without tears (we agree in advance that we don't feel like crying). The ceremony is charming with harp music in the woods all orchestrated by Erin and Lyle (mostly Erin I think). I cried anyhow and so did Barbara when Erin gave her a rose. The reception was a blast with few casualties and my 82-year-old mother-in-law, Frances, made it through the whole thing with a smile!

I stay at the newlyweds' house while they are on a short honeymoon and spend time with son Clay, Shelly (Killer) and grandkids Kaela & Cody. We tour Seattle and do some woodsy stuff. Good fun, but too short as usual.

It is time to begin my return trip and I am anxious and ready to jump into my "west coast" portion of the trip. I tell Erin and Lyle not to get up early with me when I leave since they are still recuperating from the wedding. I am firing up the moto at 6:30 a.m. and feeling a little sad as I slip away unnoticed. It has been a great week and I have a son-in-law that I have gotten to know and appreciate. Things are good.

My intentions today are to spend as much time as I need touring the Mt. Rainier area and then spend the rest of the day pushing southwest toward the Pacific. 2 miles down the road from Erin's house the bike starts running rough. There is no way I am gonna do 3500 miles like this! I change the spark plug alongside the highway to no avail and remember a bike shop in Issaquah. I shopped for a new rear tire there a few days ago. Well they didn't sell me a tire, but it looks like they're gonna sell me a tuneup right now if I can get there.

Struggling at 20 m.p.h. on the emergency lane, I make it to the bike shop. It's closed, looks like I will be the first customer. I get real lucky as the store opens and a stringbean kid from Holland is free to fix my bike.

Turns out he had a bike just like it and could tear one down with his eyes shut. Well, he kept his eyes open this time and had me back on the road in a couple of hours. I gave him a 5.00 tip and told him I would be back to get my five bucks back if the bike doesn't make it to Mexico. He says "no sweat."

I pick up all my stuff off the shop floor, re-pack the bike to the amusement and amazement of the Dutch kid and his garage buddies. The bike fires up just like brand new and I am gone. It's around 11:00 a.m. and my day has a serious hole in it. Oh well, I'm just real glad it wasn't any worse! The wind feels good as I feel a great sense of relief pointing the "burrito" toward Mt. Rainier.

An hour or so down the winding 2-laner I get my first shot of the mountain from a distance. It is awesome! Then it disappears behind the piney woods not to be seen

again for another 50 miles. I am at the entrance to the Mt. Rainier National Park leading up to the lookout point and I still can't see the old boy for all the big pines.

I pay my 10 bucks and, feeling a bit ripped off, I move steadily up the mountain. First I go straight up for a while and then begin the switchback routine. Pretty soon I am getting blasted with this great view of the mountain with every hairpin turn on the switchbacks. First it is facing me and then the view is in my mirror. I am having a hard time keeping the bike on line and have to chill out a little and wait for the summit to do my thing.

I am at the lookout point (a lodge with tourists) and leave the bike to climb up and away from people so I can sit quietly and let this sink in for a while. The view is such a shock at first. The same shock I remember as a kid looking through one of those old clicker-type viewfinders with the (almost) 3-D effect of the Grand Canyon set into those round slides you could buy. This was pre-T.V., you understand!

I hike a short while and find a rock to sit on with only a few passers-by. The day is crystal clear. The contrast between the snowy peak and the blue/violet sky is crisp and vibrant. The glaciers folding down both sides of the mountain are feeding tiny creeks that unite into streams which parallel the road I came up. I want to drink from it. That snow taste must be in those little creeks.

I worship the mountain for an hour or so and reluctantly trail back to the lodge for another "road lunch." Monster Oatmeal cookie and coffee. On the way back to the bike I pass a tour bus. A cute little silver bullet (those cute little retired gray-haired dowagers) hops down from the bus and comes over to my bike. "Oh, what a wonderful way to see the mountain," she says — "Where are you from? — or is this your life?" I think on that a while. "Yes, ma'am — this is my life." She seems happy with that response.

I am rolling through the gap between Mt. Rainier and Mt. St. Helens now, heading west. I don't see St. Helens anywhere in the distance — guess it's harder to see since the top blew off. I run through pine-tunnels and then out into more open country to an interstate. There is a big forest fire on one of the eastern mountains and many trucks and people are rushing to it with lights and sirens going.

Now I am going south toward Portland and needing to find a camp before hitting the city. I don't have the energy to fight the Portland spaghetti bowl tonight! I find Paradise Point St. Park 20 minutes north of Portland and pull in. I am so tired I accidentally drop the bike at the ranger station while registering. Embarrassing, and I break my right side mirror. Oh well. I favor the left side anyhow.

The camp is empty — quiet before the storm — day after tomorrow is Labor Day. They're probably all home right now packing up the old Winnebago. I sleep out in the open again in my hammock. 3/4 moon with a 10 mph breeze. I am getting the system for sleeping in a hammock and using a sleeping bag at the same time.

Today is the day to finally get to the Pacific for that long coastal ride to San Francisco. Probably 1000 miles or so. I am really looking forward to the change in scenery! I pick a dud for breakfast; another espresso joint that doesn't serve real food. I settle for a bagel and coffee.

The spaghetti bowl in Portland fulfills its goal of total disorientation and I wind up on county road 6 going to Tillamook — not a planned route. This consists of a couple of hours of super tight turns through 3000-foot mountains on a road just wide enough for two Model Ts to pass without exchanging paint. I could enjoy this ride a lot more if I could only lean the bike into turns and roll on the throttle, but fog, top heaviness and a few early Winnebagos are preventing it. I lean back in the rockin' chair and enjoy the view to Tillamook.

The Dutch cafe yields a good blue plate special with world-class peach pie. I am a few miles from the beach but it is still out of sight. I turn south onto highway 101 and begin the trip down the coast. First time I have gone south in the last four thousand miles.

The Oregon Coast — rugged and spectacular — is one state park after another all the way south past Coos Bay where I camp at Bandon. I ride the entire afternoon winding round and round — up and down through cliffs and beaches so numerous that I feel them starting to run together. Very few people — A small town every 20 miles. The wealthy have cabbaged — onto most of the good residential ground with golf courses seemingly as close together and as numerous as the little towns. I am not disappointed with my ride!

I have dinner in Coos Bay — a total logging town — a place where a clean white dress shirt would be hard to find and dangerous to wear in public. The waitress asks about my bike and my trip. She proudly shares that she also is a biker, and a few years ago she rode a "750" to Alaska by herself. Came back pregnant with twins. Took the twins up to visit their dad a few months ago! For a while here at the restaurant my trip is seeming a bit bland compared to hers.

At Bullards Beach State Park I am assigned a spot all alone and isolated from all the other campers. Those bikers, you know. Never know when they might fly off the handle! The camp is full of R-Vs but no people. Apparently everyone has grabbed a camping spot for the Labor Day weekend and is willing to pay for the unused spot several days in advance. I never liked people like that. Maybe because I have always

been too lazy to plan ahead. The beach is 1 1/2 miles away with no trail leading to it. I settle for the sound of the surf which is surprisingly loud from that distance.

Holy sand-dunes! I have covered most of the Oregon coast in one day. By 10 this morning I should be crossing over state lines into California. I stop at a stretch near Gold Beach, Oregon, and spend some time all alone strolling this lonely beach looking for sticks, stones, feathers and shells to take home for Barb's collection. I get a large collection and then remember I am on a bike. Three or four small things in a plastic sandwich bag are all I can allow room for. The surf is huge, and I spend time just sitting, looking, listening and wondering why I am so fortunate. I feel very small and insignificant as I climb through the dunes and back up to my bike.

A few more hours of beach road — across the state line into California and the redwoods begin to appear. I have always been fascinated by and attracted to trees, ever since that huge dead oak fell over for my benefit in Kentucky. I was 8 years old and picking blackberries by myself up on the mountain. Why did that happen just when I came along? I was impressed! As an adult, I have been known to hug trees. The idea of someday being able to actually spend time among these redwoods has always been a dream of mine and today it will come true.

I get off the main road and parallel it on a thing called the Redwood Highway which runs for 80 miles or so. This little road, narrow and winding, snakes through the redwoods. Sometimes going around a tree too large to deal with. When one of those "bad boys" dies of old age and drops across the road (or anywhere else) it is just left there except for the section sawed away for the road. This leaves me riding past cross sections of trees several feet higher than my head.

My sense is that this must be kinda what it would feel like to ride down the main aisle of an old European Gothic cathedral with the columns reaching very high to support the arches above. Once again, Mother Nature puts me in my place — makes me "right size" — small. Tears well up as gratitude flows through my body. I am actually doing this! Fortunately there is practically no traffic around to diminish the effect of cruising through this haven alone. As long as I live I will carry the memory of this spiritual place with me. Only other bikers and hikers could really know the intensity of this experience.

The first campground I come across is jammed for Labor Day and I find space in a second one down the road. More primitive and more to my liking. I find a spot on the edge of this huge camp and ride right past the "designated" tent site and into a little "den" down in the woods. There is a big cabinet to put my stuff in (bears) and the usual picnic table.

There will be no pop-tent tonight. I hitch my hammock up to two of those big redwoods with the help of my extra rope to get around the huge circumference of the trees. It's a funny looking sight — a 6-foot hammock tied to two 7-foot-diameter trees. Should be stout enough! I dream all night long — wonderful "tree" dreams. A squirrel is looking at me when I wake up. He has a helluva long trip to get down here from his house up top.

On down the Redwood Highway to a little "berg" whose name is not evident or important for breakfast with the locals. There is a little paper ad on the table of the cafe — the owner sells bee caps that you can take as a health supplement. Cures most anything that ails you. Now bee caps are not little hats, but the wax that is removed from the top layer of the honeycomb to facilitate extraction of the honey. I had bees back on the farm. Didn't know I was supposed to eat the stuff!

Out through the picture window I have to laugh at this tiny little bungalow across the road. White picket fence just like Little Red Riding Hood's house. There are 7 giant Redwoods in his little yard which dwarf the house and make it look like a "hotel" from a Monopoly set. I wonder if he has a root problem under his house?!

I watch a little boy of 5 hug and love on his daddy (a hunk of a lumberjack with steel lugs on the soles of his shoes) as we all eat our breakfast. The man is very patient and loving with the boy. Lucky kid.

Leaving the Redwoods behind, I have about 150 miles of Highway 1 to enjoy before I start getting into civilization. The beach is filling with weekenders now, and some places are solid R-Vs for a mile or two. In between these unsavory spots are stretches of farmland interrupted by cliffs hanging out over the sea. Since the city is coming to the country this weekend, I may as well move on to the city.

Thanks to another wrong turn (other turn) I wind up cutting the beach trip a little short. I get fouled up at Bodega Bay and wind up inland at Petaluma, California. This is a prelude to the civilization known as San Francisco. I feel myself adjusting my armor and girding myself for the dubious pleasure of fighting my way through millions of Labor Day-crazed urbanites to my destination in Palo Alto. My friends Doug and Barbara (from Mexico) keep a home there and God willing, I aim to sleep in one of their beds tonight.

There are 75 miles of spaghetti bowl between me and them. In a little over two hours, I finally drop off the eight-laner into Palo Alto, having had a wonderful stoplight by stoplight tour of downtown San Francisco and experiencing a literal near-death experience getting brushed off the interstate by a lady driver with big diamonds and a big car. I don't wish her the best.

I call Doug from the Col. Sanders place and he guides me into his lovely home. They seem a little shocked at my "road" appearance, but quickly adjust. Barbara shows me my bed and the washing machine and I am set for a 2-day rest stop. We catch up on things, enjoy some meals together and even go to a flea market, Frisco style. All the freaks are there buying and selling in the hot sun on an old airstrip near the bay. The stuff is fun to see and the freaks are real entertaining. A fine meal afterward on the bay closes out a great day. We don't buy anything, although I am very tempted by a couple of old hats. I like hats.

Doug and Barbara snap my picture as I leave their street armed with clean clothes and bountiful instructions about how to negotiate my way across the bay and in the general direction of Yosemite National Park where I hope to spend the night. In less than an hour I am across the bay and lost in suburbia, but with a little help from the locals at a pit stop I get back on track again.

The heat is fairly intense as I work my way through the foothills loaded with huge windmills. Thousands of them. The kind with hi-tech airplane propellers. Only a few are turning. Seems like an awful lot of expensive hardware accomplishing nothing to me.

Through miles and miles of good California growing country and finally, in the distance, a few mountains begin to appear. It is the end of the Labor Day weekend now, and all the poor city folks are fighting their way home. The traffic on my side is light and I make good time to the cool of the mountains. Several mountain passes and one set of switchbacks and the sweat running down my back is only a memory.

At a country grocery crossroads, the last gas before Yosemite, I kibitz with the clerk, a jolly overweight country woman. "You sure are in a good mood after two days of holiday traffic! Bet you made some money!" "The boss did. I'm just lookin forward to takin these shoes off." I stand in front of the store fan for a minute and finish my Gatorade before entering the National Park.

As I find out later, my luck is continuing to run on the good side — This park is always crammed with people and reservations are needed just to camp. Just by chance, this naive biker from Mexico by way of Indiana and Kentucky just wanders in on one of the few days when the camp is half empty. After going through what seems to me like a lot of unnecessary red tape (National Park) I get to my spot and set up.

There are signs and pictures of busted cars warning about the bear problem, but I figure they are scare tactics used to prevent the idiots who feed bears along the road from getting their arm chewed off. Anyhow, I put all of my stuff except my bike into this metal casket I call a bear box — locked it and went off for dinner.

One veggie burger and fries at the camp eatery and it is beginning to get dusky. The hikers (serious gear) hanging out at the restaurant sure do look healthy. There is a mountain climbing school here — ropes and all that sort of thing. Makes motorcycling look like Girl Scout camp! Lots of young people speaking German, French, Italian.

I realize at this point the importance of this park. A big old glacier slid down through here a long time ago and left some mighty impressive scars. The alpine meadows full of wildflowers stretch out for miles between mighty peaks.

At dark I am all set in my little pop-tent with my penlight flashlight and Walkman radio. I know it is going below freezing up here tonight, so I sleep in my clothes and sleeping bag.

I doze off listening to my radio for awhile and awake to see the shadow of a bear against the side of my tent. He is on all fours, snorting and sniffing and sounding out of breath. He is a foot away and nothing but a thin layer of rip-stop nylon between us. I doubt that the people who named that particular kind of nylon had taken bears into consideration. At any rate, after a few very tense moments on my part, the bear moved on to greener pastures since I had no edibles on board (except for me).

Next morning at the community john/shower I saw what he had done to a trash can as he was looking for scraps. Not a pretty sight.

The night was much colder than anticipated, and in spite of precautions I am cold all night. I am up very early and out of there in no mood for anything but food and warmth. I make a face mask from my bandanas and move out into the wind. The sooner I get down the east side of these mountains and into warmer levels the better I'm gonna like it. I do stop halfway and enjoy some overlooks of the amazing glacial cuts formed into the mountains. Once again I am made to feel small and insignificant. Big scenery is an ego buster for this lone biker!

I find a log-lodge which is closing down for the season and have a plate of eight-dollar pancakes (hopefully the last) and an hour later I am rolling out onto the flatlands again. I begin to thaw.

Next stop — Vegas! But not before I realize how far away it is and have to double back 20 miles to a gas station to get my extra gas jugs filled. There are only three little towns along the way and no-one seems to know for sure if there are any gas stations. One of these towns later gives me a giggle as I ride past the little local high school with the usual highway sign out front reading — "Home of the Tonopah Muckers"! Now that must be one inspired football team!

In the next 300 miles I only find one station, so my little jugs did wind up empty. I trail through a couple of hours of pine knolls similar to what I remember in N. Carolina and then out into the open desert once again.

It is at this point that I get my first whiff of home. This desert is primarily what I will see for the next 1500 miles or so. About five days from home, my throttle hand clamps down a little firmer. It has been a long ride and I feel my resolve to get back to my own bed strengthen a bit.

I promised myself that I would cruise the Strip in Vegas at night. Just to see the lights. As I arrive in the suburbs, exhausted from rain and heat, the idea of locating and cruising the Strip appalls me. Especially after gassing up at a local chomp and slurp and watching some of those poor glazed gambling addicts yanking the handles on one-armed bandits pushed in between the bread rack and the candy rack. No thanks. Not my bag.

I lavish in my Motel 6 and chain my bike to a light pole outside my window for easy surveillance. Next morning I hop up to the spaghetti bowl through Vegas (I always thought of Vegas as small) and give a salute to the Strip as I enjoy by-passing it at 60 m.p.h. Why I hate this place is another story; one which I will only tell to special friends.

Somewhere out in suburbia I locate a bike shop (from the yellow pages) and stock up on special bike oil. I figure if I am going to ask my little "Burrito" to carry me and 60 lbs. of stuff all this way, the least I can do is oil it in a first-class kind of way.

One of my most anticipated spots on the trip is next. Grand Canyon. I hope to get there tonight and tour it tomorrow. Rain clouds are closing in, so I opt for the quicker interstate to insure my arrival at a decent hour. I realize I am passing on an opportunity to do a stretch of Route 66, missing such tempting-sounding places as Hackberry, Valentine and Peach Springs. My choice, however, turns out to be a wise one as the weather alternates between drizzle and downpour all day long.

A Harley "Fat Boy" passes me with two up and gives me the wave. Since they waved, I knew they weren't hard-core. Also, they didn't have rain gear or heavy leathers and it is fairly cold with the rain slapping you in the face at 65 m.p.h. Turns out that they are two yuppies from Boston who flew out here and rented a Harley to see the Canyon.

We get acquainted as I stop and help them pull the "Fat Boy" out of a ditch under one of the overpasses they were using for shelter. Apparently, the thing went rubber side up when he stopped on a slant and lost it. Were it not for a big shot of adrenaline I

don't think we could have set the thing upright. We did, and she (his wife) was o.k. after her nose stopped bleeding.

Nice young people. Kinda felt sorry for them. We shared a couple more overpasses before the turnoff toward the Canyon. Never saw them after that.

Still raining, I come to a cheap motel 45 minutes short of the Canyon and sign up. I opt for the cheapest (bunkhouse) room and sleep fine in my battered but clean little cell. Storms pound all night and I am up early and into a restaurant before it opens sipping coffee poured by an understanding Indian waitress. Navajo. She and I enjoy a little pre-opening serenity by listening to recorded Indian flute music. I look out the back window at the wet desert plants and flowers while she quietly sets up for work. She looks a lot like "Marilyn" the wordless Indian woman on "Northern Exposure." Round and kind. Long braid. I always loved that character.

The clouds are intermittent now and the air has been totally washed free of any pollutants. A double rainbow appears, and I watch from my bunkhouse porch til it fades. Forty-five minutes down the 2-lane and two rains later I pay my way through another federal roadblock to get into the Grand Canyon. Don't I remember paying for this park back during those hi-tax years of the 70s, 80s and 90s? Oh well, I didn't come all this way to let another 10.00 stop me. Fortunately, I am early and traffic is very light. I am going to get to see this thing without being hassled by the Winnebago Nazis.

I park and lock the bike — walk through and around the visitor center looking for a trail to the rim. Finally I am on my way through the piney woods for a 15-minute hike to the rim.

I am about to have a major life experience and my body senses it. The trees thin out — I see open space — tears begin to flow even before the rim is reached. I reach the rim and know the greatness of what I am standing before, but cannot see it for the tears. I seem to have instantly been struck dumb, for there are no words. Only feelings. There are 1 or 2 people standing around and they obviously are not affected as I have been. I am embarrassed that they might notice me.

I wander off down an empty side trail, looking for a place where I might be alone with this incomprehensible place. I find a point projecting all by itself out into the free-falling space that is the canyon. I slide on my butt inch by inch until I am on the very edge. I get my breath.

Eventually I begin trying to absorb the vista. Still, no words come. Only the feeling that this is a thing like the Universe that is not really meant to comprehend or

understand. God things are like that. After 30 minutes or so I have soaked in and stored as much detail as I can handle knowing that I will draw upon this memory many times in my remaining life.

I look south toward the tourist path and a man with a huge telephoto lens is shooting me. The spell is broken. I inch back off the point and return to the visitor center feeling spent.

In the visitor center, among the art work and poems done by children and shown in a gallery, I find the words that would not come to me out on the rim. Once again, in tears, I try to copy a few of them. Only the very young seem to see things as they really are and have clear enough minds to describe them simply. Here they are:

Beautiful skies soaring above rocky cliffs, capturing my heart. (Grayson Gillette, Texas)

The beautiful canyon — erase my great pain with your beautiful colors (Lebre Cesar)

The Grand Canyon is so big and I am so small, and the sky is above us all (Mirjam Winkel, Germany)

High sharp canyons, incredible cliffs, is a nice gift. (Cassandra.)

Nuf sed.

I ride around the rim trying to find the road to other western vistas only to find out that I must park and ride a shuttle bus along with all those Winnebago Nazis lined up over there. No thanks. Only in America could we turn a marvelous creation like this into Wally World. I hit another vista on the way out but the people are thick and I am gone. Glad I came and glad I'm leaving. I thank the Big Ranger for the experience.

Because I am road-weary, I skip other side trips I had marked on my map and go south toward Prescott, Arizona where my friends Scott and Teresa are expecting me. The weather is good now and this should be a short travel day — 5 or 6 more hours, I figure, once I get back to the interstate.

I decide to cave in and eat one of those Big Macs that I have avoided so far. As I dismount, I see a large group of Japanese hopping off tour buses and looking for food (same as me). I know this spells trouble, but I go on in and get into one of the 6 lines behind a bevy of Japanese.

This turns out to be very interesting as I wait patiently (different for me) and watch this ingenious waitress (a classic Afro-American) handle these people who speak no

English. She wrote the book on creativity as she used great expression and sign language to get the job done. Never stopped smiling that big Whoopi Goldberg smile.

Later when things died down I told her she deserved a raise. She says "Thanks, this is my first day." I do hope she is making more money by now.

The trip on to Prescott (that's Pres-cut, not Pres-cot) is an enjoyable 3 hours of piney woods and three hours of mixed desert and scrub land. Prescott itself is nicely nestled into the wooded mountains. I call my buddy Scott from the public phone near the golf course knowing for sure that he will have played here and can guide me in. He does! A short hop through what looks to be a real dandy town and I am at Scott, Teresa & Tiffany's home for 3 whole nights. A neat place on a hill with huge boulders for neighbors and a fine view of mountains.

Scott immediately takes over doing his Chamber of Commerce thing, entertaining me, introducing me to his friends (a picnic on the mountain) showing off his 400-horsepower entertainment center and tour guiding me all over the place. Teresa waits on me hand and foot and Tiffany smiles me to death (she's still learning English). I do love them like family. Scott's right — Prescott is a fine place to live. I'll be back!

Once again, some of the neat little places I marked on my map including some cliff dwellings are now much too far to ride considering my "going home" state of mind. I take a direct route south to Tucson where I hope to locate a long-lost blood brother, Mike and his mate Linda. This day's ride is long and hot with little of note along the way that my other 2000 miles of desert travel hasn't already shown me.

I get to Tucson before 4:00 p.m. and begin my detective work. The phone book has several Mike Day listings and I get his phone recorder on my first try. I say howdy and get on down to the downtown tourist info place to try and locate his address on a map. After much puzzlement, this nice lady does pinpoint it and I spend the next 1 1/2 hours trying to figure out why the heck this boy scout cannot read a map!

Finally I pull into this mysterious hidden street and there's ole Mike standing in front grinning like he knew exactly when I would ride up. I get myself invited to stay the night and we enjoy a good Mexican meal together while catching up on the last few years.

They are outdoorsmen/women of high esteem with all that rock climbing gear and cool camping stuff. They are having a life together that I admire and am learning to appreciate, where there is a relationship, and there is plenty of personal time as well including long times and trips apart from each other. Healthy.

Well, we breakfast together and they go to work. I clean up back at their place and pack my bike for a trip across the border into old Mexico. I am 3 days from home and the throttle hand is itching mighty bad. I am choosing the toll roads all the way home which means doing nothing other than burning gas and paying tolls. Nowhere is the Pacific visible along the way. I will not be camping anymore because of the absence of safe places. Mentally, my trip is about over and anything I see or do from here on out will probably be incidental. To put it bluntly — I'm bushed!

I cross the border at Nogales and once again meet no resistance from the fuzz. I creep through Nogales, Mexico as I get an anxious feeling about the numerous cops standing around, and I am having to re-adjust to Mexican drivers. Bikers in the States are spoiled! Mexico is a mine field by comparison. The jitters begin to disappear as I move on out into the countryside.

Soon I am crossing the ever-popular Sonoran Desert where all the banditos are rumored to be. Didn't see any. If I had, my plan was to say the heck with the highway and just take off cross country. I doubt that their Chevy would be able to handle that!

I roll into Hermosillo a little early and do the motel thing — nice place — free breakfast and all that. Mostly coffee, flour and water, but enough to get me on the road.

Next stop — Mazatlan. Now today is Mexican Independence Day and it is every man for himself. If you ain't armed and drunk, then you ain't Mexican. I have a long day planned and will have to really watch it especially late in the day. The highway is fairly empty since the locals cannot afford the toll road so I press on.

Actually the day is very pleasant, and except for minor tension on my part, the Mexican shootout does not affect me — except as I pull into Mazatlan around dusk I ride into what could only be described as chaos. I mean this town is going nuts! People, buses, vendors, dogs, drunks and angry housewives, as thick as flies and all hell-bent for leather. I can barely make a move on the bike without being honked at or shouted at by somebody. In order to get anywhere you have to flat cut someone off in traffic. A carload of young bucks fly by hanging out car windows and flipping me the bird.

I am not in a good situation here. I need a place to hide and I need it now. I know this is a great resort town with lots of good hotels but they are not to be found. I am stuck over here in old town somewhere riding around aimlessly looking for anything that will get me off the street.

I find it. A little flea bag place with a nice big iron gate which I will pay to get on the other side of. I am the only customer, and the kind gatekeeper shows me to my

9-dollar room complete with a post outside the door to chain my bike to. I shower and hit the streets for supper and right back to bed. Guess I will have to come back some day and actually "see" this place.

After heavy rain all night I push off the curb into 6" of water and try to figure out where I am. After only one 15-minute lost period I work my way back onto the highway for my last day of riding. The road from Mazatlan to Tepic has a bad reputation and I am about to find out why.

Honest to God, if it weren't for the dirt bike I would have my doubts in some places. The road goes from narrow but o.k. to narrow and non-existent. The rainy season has obliterated the road in many places for 2 and 3 mile stretches at a time. Big trucks are groaning along bumper to bumper rocking back and forth at 5 mph through mud and potholes. I am the only thing out here doing any passing and making any progress thanks to Honda engineering and Kentucky bullheadedness. By the time the "burrito" gets me to Tepic we are brown and frazzled. We are about halfway home.

The drizzling rain continues on, but finally the toll road re-appears. What a contrast! About 1 1/2 hrs. down the four-lane, the sky opens up and lightning drives me to shelter at a rest stop. The day is getting short. After an hour I move out in spite of fairly decent rain. Some of the mud is beginning to drop off the bike and me but I am soaked to the bone. This last day has truly been a test.

I peel off the big road and after another 1 1/2 hrs. of back roads through hacienda country, I pop out at Buena Vista, south of Guad. — Then Joco, then San Juan Cosala, Ajijic and home. My boots squish as I dismount, and all I can think about is getting inside for dry clothes, but my dog Ushi and some of my good neighbors are in the street to greet me. A nice welcome.

Now being a Gringo and knowing how important "bottom lines" are to Gringos, I will sum up by giving you the —

BOTTOM LINE

1. Total distance traveled on land - 7,050 miles
2. Total distance accidentally traveled in air - 26 feet
3. Actual days on the road - 23
4. Number of gas stops - 92

5. Things lost

- a. 3 pairs of flip-up sunglasses
- b. 2 pairs of clip-on sunglasses
- c. one sock (which got returned by Doug from S. Francisco)
- d. 1 bottle moto oil
- e. My fear of the unknown

6. Things found

- a. Misc. rocks, sticks, feathers for Barb's collection
- b. my self-confidence

7. Things broke

- a. One homemade hatchet handle
- b. One right-side motorcycle panel (melted down from exhaust heat)
- c. One saddlebag (melted down with the side panel)
- d. Right-side rearview mirror (when I dropped bike)
- e. One ripped sleeping bag

8. Things fixed or worn out

- a. one major tune-up and valve adjust (Seattle)
 - b. One new rear tire (Seattle)
 - c. Three head lamp bulbs (had an electrical short)
 - d. Me (worn out)
9. Number of times lost - never (There are no wrong turns — just other turns)

Since My Return

Two months since my return, as I think about how to close out this writing, I find myself a little short on words. This trip has been a really big deal for me. Actually, it has changed my life. I think going alone has had an awful lot to do with how it has affected me. Seems like the things I don't want to do (go alone) are actually the things I need to do.

During the trip, a whole new range of emotions opened up to me. Things I remember feeling as a kid, but lost somewhere along the way. I like that.

As I write this on my 58th birthday, it is good to know that I can still be a kid and enjoy things in a childlike way. I know one thing — my memory bank is well stocked with good stuff to review in my mind when I finally hit that rockin' chair.

The "burrito" has been sold to my Mexican biker buddy, Danny. He has wanted it ever since we went to Mazamitla together last year. I am scanning the Guadalajara want ads for my 5th bike. There will undoubtedly be more memories for me to make.