

RIDE ON

A Motorcycle Journey to Awaken the Soul

&

Rediscover Its Maker

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If one day

*If one day I find inside a sound
an image of your memory
floating around
I will Breathe it into my heart
as seeds sown into the ground
Ah, to be there then
as a simple memory Blossoms
and
Love is found*

There Is a Chance

[Battery, starter & ignition]

My whole childhood was spent at the end of a mile long dirt road in a small community in Wisconsin. That road had six houses—or seven if you count the one at the very end another mile away. In hindsight, our house and the endless acres of farm fields, tall strong trees, and meandering trails through the woods was a boy's heaven.

We had an acre lot. Combined with our neighbor's yard and the corn field, it made a nice baseball field where the kids could play catch. I remember congregating every summer back at the previous year's tree house to fix it up and do some needed add-ons. Deer meandered outside our back door in the 40-acre field, and we had a nice sized garden to work. In the winter, we would make snow forts in the deep ditches and dig endless holes in the piles of snow left by the snowplow.

This was the perfect place to have snowmobiles, four-wheelers or dirt bikes. You could tear the ground up for hours. It was the perfect place, that is, if you had these motorized vehicles. But we didn't have anything besides our riding lawn

mower and a push snow blower.

My parents didn't have much money as I was growing up and I knew that getting a dirt bike or snowmobile was out of the question. My brother and I understood. The problem was that our neighbors had all of those items and we were still not allowed to ride.

This was back in the day before four-wheelers existed. There were only three-wheelers—two in the back and one up front. Looking back at my parents now, I am not sure I would have let me go out with our neighbor on that three-wheel catapult.

In the winter, our neighbors would fly on their snowmobiles down the snow filled ditches and fields. I could not fathom why that would be dangerous given the fact that you fall into a puffy, white blanket of snow. But my father insisted that tree stumps would come up out of the ground, snatch the ski and send the driver flying to permanently imprint a tree into my brain.

We learned that motorized recreational vehicles that went faster than the third speed of our riding mower were death sentences and not to be enjoyed by our family. So, during the summer, my brother and I would hook up the red wagon onto the back of the Fleet Farm riding mower and we would go cruising. To really spite Mom and Dad, we wouldn't even hold

on to the wagon and would lean back with our legs extended.

Those were the days of freedom. The slow wind of summer blew through our hair as we rode down the road with the three-wheeler whipping by.



We boys only had a few of rules growing up. No tattoos or earrings or we would lose the body part they were attached to. We could not play high school football or participate in wrestling because we would wreck our knees. No alcohol or smoking was allowed. We were also never supposed to have girlfriends that were unknown to our parents.

Most of all, we were not allowed to ride motorcycles because we might, by the expert opinion of our parents, crash and crack our heads open. A side rule was that if we did crack our heads open, we were not to come home crying to Dad.

My parents were not too big on the journey side of life. They had great plans to nurture and develop well-adjusted, productive kids that didn't have tattoos, earrings, or sexual relationships before marriage. Destination-type goals.

Growing up, part of that training meant that I got a job. In the second grade, I was told that a lady would be picking my brother and me up from school and we would be going to her house to do lawn work. Granny Brown pulled up that sunny

afternoon in her van and we were off. That evening all I did was pick weeds and dream about the day that I could drive her John Deere riding mower.

The riding mower was off limits at our house, given the fact that we might run over rocks and have them shoot out and break the car window. We could take out a corner of the house if we cut it too close. Or, the most unfortunate of events, we could flip it over in the ditch and get crushed underneath while the blade ripped off a leg. I grew up fearing all these work-related incidents.

But it was different with Granny. I don't know if she was delusional about our skill level, had lots of faith in God, or was just so rich that it did not matter if we messed up. I was to work for her for ten years and would learn a lot of valuable lessons.

I ate lunch with her countless times, and the entrées were never ready when I came in the kitchen. It was always a several hour ordeal before I went back outside. For many years, I would get frustrated that I wasted so much time inside when I was hired to work outside. In my later years, I came to realize that while eating was important, the making of the meal mattered most. During that time of banter and interaction, my schooling began.

Because I spent so much time with Granny, her

perspective on how she viewed the journey of life, failure and taking risks became so en-grained in mine.

One summer I had systematically destroyed most everything in her yard. I didn't know you couldn't mow over the top of the water hose. I thought geraniums were just weeds. I took off the mower's side guard, only to realize its worth when I shot some rocks against the house. Mixed or straight gas, is there a difference?

Many a time my brother would force me to go in and tell Granny what I did wrong. With head down, I'd go inside to confess my transgression. We had all gone to the same Catholic church a few years earlier, so confession seemed like a natural approach.

Her responses always shocked me.

"Do you know the difference between a weed and snap dragon now?"

"Did you get hit by any of the rocks?"

"Do you know why the mixed gas is darker?"

"Oh, no big deal. I didn't like that hose much, anyway."

"Oh, no worries. The fire department needed some practice in how to deal with field fires."

The worst was when she just said, "Want to help make lunch?"

I had just ruined her mower, and she wanted to have

help making lunch? Who was this lady, and what is she doing to my ideas of how life is supposed to be?



I should have known I would do something stupid when I got my first chance on the rider.

I had been asking my brother for years if he would give me a try, and his response was always no. On this day, I worked up the nerve to bring my issue to Granny. I thought through my argument really well. I wouldn't go over second gear and would only do the small flat area next to the house.

She, of course, said yes, with a word of encouragement and went back to washing a few dishes. I was off to the garage. Flying out the door, I gave my brother the best Karate Kid¹ move I knew and told him to stand down.

It was my turn to ride!

With some quick instructions—which, of course, I did not need because I was already a lawn boy—I was off. Grinning from ear to ear, I took it from the garage onto the driveway to get used to the steering and then was onto the green pasture. This adventure lasted about five minutes.

I rode past the kitchen window and glanced out of the corner of my eye to see Granny watching with approval. About three turns around and I would have to encounter my first real

maneuver. A tree had been planted a couple years earlier in front of the kitchen window. My approach was flawless—except when I got close, I hit the clutch and not the brake.

For those of you that are mechanically challenged, like I was at this stage in my life, let me take a moment to let you in on a secret. You will need this when you start riding a motorcycle. Brakes stop the wheels from moving. Disengaging the clutch will stop the engine from moving the wheels but will not stop the forward progress of the wheels—at least not right away.

So with the clutch depressed and my forward motion not halting, I ran right into the tree in front of the window where stood the lady that was paying me to mow her lawn—not her trees. The mower finally stopped, not from my braking, but from the tree stuck in the blade. Adrenaline rushed through my body as a smiling Granny Brown dried a dish and watched me release the clutch. This, however, engaged the wheels and my deed was done. The roughly ten-foot tree was now a three-foot tree with a mullet haircut.

There was no way to delay the conversation on this mistake. Up to this point, I had never confessed to tipping over her play set or messing up the mixture of the hot tub chemical. I also did not confess the time we “needed” to get a new trimmer. But I could not think of any good reason that would wipe away

the sudden disappearance of a tree, especially with an eyewitness.

So with head down I just walked inside with my brother conveniently *not* by my side, to confess to a transgression that was already known.

“I’m sorry, Granny, for running over your tree. I hit the clutch instead of the brake, and it all happened all so quickly. I will work to pay it off and get you a new one. I also will not be using the riding mower for some time. I guess I wasn’t old enough to work it.”

Her response was a shock, even though it should not have been. “Don’t worry about it. That tree will grow back. If it doesn’t, then it wasn’t a very strong tree and we should have gotten rid of it, anyway. Now, I think you have a lawn to mow. Get back on that mower, and get your job done.”

So I grew up with conflicting messages from my parents and Granny: *Don’t do it because you might get hurt*, versus, *Give it a try and see what happens*.



There is a guy in the Bible named Peter. He ran over a few metaphorical trees in his day, always trying to do more than he was probably capable. The thing I like about him is that he kept trying. From his endless questioning² to his speaking

before he thought³, he always seemed to be missing the end result of what Jesus wanted.

The beauty is that Jesus did not usually care about the end game as much as how those He came into contact with were growing themselves. Did they learn from their mistakes, triumphs, pain, and joys? Did they go slow enough to notice the needy and poor among them? Would His followers stop long enough and listen to what He was saying, not just to what they wanted to hear?

In one instance⁴, those that were disciples of Christ were on a boat and the weather started to turn into quite a squall. Jesus was not present and they were starting to fear what would happen. Then, through the pouring rain and whitecaps, they could see this figure out in the distance.

It was Jesus! Or was it?

The only one with the guts to find out for himself was Peter. He was the guy beginning to understand the joys of the journey. So, with either extreme stupidity or great faith, he calls out to the figure, "If you are Jesus, ask me to come out on the water and walk with you."

If Jesus was my father, he would have said, "Just wait. I'll be right there." Or if He was my mother, he would have said, "Stay right where you are before you hurt yourself".

But I love what he says, "Come on out Peter. Try to do

something you know you cannot do. Come feel the wind on your face and the water on your feet. Come out Peter and stop looking at the picture, but become a part of it.”

Peter jumps out of the boat and for a bit walks on the water. Then he, as I did with Granny, runs right over his own metaphorical tree while Jesus is watching. No way to hide the problem, he lacked faith and started to sink. But with outstretched hands he grabbed onto Jesus.

Jesus pulls him up and responds with “Oh Peter why did you doubt yourself? Why are you so faint of heart?”

Scripture does not say what happened next but I have to believe that they walked back to the boat together. I just cannot visualize Jesus carrying the big burly Peter like a baby or on His back. Peter got on his mower and got back to work. I could just see Jesus saying, like Granny would say to me, “Hey you want to go back to the boat and make some lunch?”



When dreams of the open road and freedom on the motorcycle started to crop up, I knew that I still needed to ask permission of those that were important to me. Granny Brown was no longer with us, but I had a sneaking suspicion what she would say. I think I had my wife convinced because she thought I would only get a scooter. My kids just shook their heads and

gave me that, “Here is one of Dad’s crazy ideas” look.

But I still had one more obstacle to jump to release the genetic makeup of the man in me: My parents. Yes, even at the age of 34, I needed to get my parents’ permission on these types of issues.

Without their go-ahead this would be a dead-end proposition. No matter how old you are, your parents’ opinion still pulls weight in your life. If they said no, no it would be.

I made the call to my mom first. I have always thought mom to be my easiest obstacle to scale when getting what I wanted. Over the years, I saw glimpses of her desire for change and for enjoying the journey. If any major change happened in our house, it was always when Dad was gone for a fishing trip. We would move the furniture, paint walls, or get a dog all while Dad was gone.

After one of our Sunday afternoon lunches, I mustered my courage, as well as the answers to any possible questions about the safety and upkeep of a motorcycle, and started the conversation. It went something like this:

“Mom I have a big question to ask you, but before I do I would like to remind you that I am 34 years old. I have signed mortgages on three houses. I have responsibly cared for three kids and a wife. I have completed two college degrees. With that as the basis of my request, I would really like to purchase a

motorcycle. It will save our family tons of money. It is easy to keep up, and I plan on taking a safety course.”

What I thought about adding to this discourse was, *What do you think about that mom? I am a big kid now, and I am going to break one of our family rules.*

I did not, of course, add this because I was afraid she would grab my earlobe and twist it while saying how disrespectful I was.

But instead she replied, “That is great.”

My mouth dropped open. I couldn’t believe how easy that conversation was. She didn’t even ask if I understood how dangerous it was to ride motorcycles or if I had my life insurance policy updated. Half of the parent combo was sold, and I was on my way to victory!

Then, some serious questions formed while she continued, “My brothers have motorcycles, and they really love them. I got to ride in the sidecar once. I would love to ride with you someday.”

I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. My mom said yes, and I was delighted but subsequently felt the fabric of my family foundation crumbling. As quick as my joy came, so came all the questions.

My uncles ride motorcycles? Why didn’t anyone tell me this was part of my heritage?

My uncles love their bikes? Where has that information been?

The most shocking news was that Mother has been on these motorcycles, and she would like to ride with me. What had happened to all our family rules?

Do you not care about standards, Mom?

Do you not know you can die on a motorcycle?

Obviously, she was the one that needed someone to set her straight.

And where in the world was my father when she got on that bike?

The changing of these family rules was rocking my foundation.

So, are you saying, Mom, there is a chance that I could watch an R-rated movie or reruns of Cheers? Would it be acceptable if my brother got a tattoo? Is there a chance that Dad was going to walk in the room sporting an earring?

What was happening? I was happy and excited that I got the go ahead, but I felt as if my upbringing was starting to unravel and I was falling into a dark hole.

I started to do some research and found out that not every football player has bad knees. I never found a guy that got mysteriously grabbed by a tree while on a snowmobile. The shocker of them all was when I found out you do not get a girl pregnant by holding her hand.



At this point, I didn't even care what my father thought about the idea of me getting a motorbike. Rules obviously did not matter to either of them.

I had green lights from all sides and I was not looking back. I could publicly say, without worrying if my parents heard through their many spies, that I was a hard-core, no regrets biker!

I do wonder sometimes if my mother had any long lunches with Granny Brown before she passed away. I'm encouraged with my parents to see that even as you get older, you can jump out of the boat and do something totally unexpected. Even with their growth, I am still positive that there is no chance my father will ever get an earring.

My heart opened even more that day, and my soul was awakening from its slumber.

