

LIFE AND DEATH

Riding side by side through small town USA at 100 mph has been one of the biggest thrills in my life to this date. Scott and I had only been friends for about three months, but found we had much in common. Our new motorcycles gave us the thrills we were craving. Racing around corners and blasting down the straight roads at twice the legal speed limit was exhilarating. It gave me the feeling of truly being free. Then one day, Scott's need for speed permanently changed my behavior when riding a motorcycle.

We went to look at motorcycles in mid-May, although neither of us had any intention of buying one. We both had spring fever, and the sunny spring weather persuaded us to make the purchase. The bikes were brand new, yellow and black, and begging to be ridden. The exhaust was polished chrome, shiny enough to see my reflection in it. The engine and plastic were clean enough to eat off. The gauges in the dash glowed an indigo color when the lights were on, and the odometer read five straight zeros. Even the handlebar grips were amazingly clean and flashy.

Taking the motorcycles home on a trailer was an endless drive. From the second those bikes came off the trailer at Scott's house, they were ridden for many hours at a time whenever the weather would permit. Scott even rode his motorcycle thirty miles to work on a dreary, rainy day! His decision-making skills were always spur-of-the-moment, but I do have to admit, he was a normal 18 year old man.

Scott was always the type of person that would say things a little out of the ordinary. Making comments like, "You're a dandy", or "Bling Bling," were not out of the ordinary for him. He would make derogatory comments in public that would get a normal guy a swift slap in the face, but he always had a way of smooth-talking his way out of trouble. He also was known to follow through on everything he said, no matter how crazy or unrealistic it was. The one statement that even I didn't believe was, "If the cops come after me on my bike, I'm not gonna stop." It was hard to think he was serious, but was he?

On a sunny July day, Scott was on his way home from work in La Crosse at about 6:30 in the evening. Once he was on a backcountry road outside West Salem, that need for speed must have come upon him because a local police officer took a radar reading of 108 mph. For obvious reasons, the officer pursued the speeding motorcycle. This was the exact situation Scott had talked about, and it probably never crossed his mind to stop. About two minutes later, Scott veered off the road where he was killed upon impact with a tree.

The memorial service was the next Saturday. Although just one day in my life, it had more impact on me than the last 18 years. As I arrived at the church, my heart was racing. I had a feeling of responsibility because Scott died doing what we enjoyed. He had been next to me for the past two months and that came to an abrupt halt. There I was, confronted with my first experience of death and had one issue on my mind. Would I be the next person to be killed on a motorcycle? I had learned to ride with the same aggression and forcefulness as Scott, so it just as easily could have happened to me.

One week later, I cleaned up my bike to showroom condition and traded it in on a different style motorcycle: one with less power and a cruiser-style looks. It didn't have the same flashy appeal or neck snapping acceleration I was accustomed to, but I no longer had the desire to be whipping around corners or flying down the straight-aways. That need for speed was replaced with an appreciation for the scenery and the life on our planet. The sky and animals gave me that same high as the corners and back roads had in the past. I now had a new ambition when riding my motorcycle: going the distance. The 300 mile road trip was more exhilarating than the quick jaunt around town. The continuous purr of the engine had become more to my liking than the deafening scream of Scott's motorcycle.

Although I lost one of my best friends, I gained a new appreciation for life and learned some valuable information about myself. Gone are the days of riding on the edge. Now it's cruising all day and enjoying what has been given to me. Every time I pass the site of the accident, I am reminded of Scott. But more importantly, I am reminded of how much there is to be thankful for on this Earth.

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