

❖ PARDON'S PROGENY ❖

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T's on Two Wheels

By Dan C. Tillinghast

(Dan, John F., Henry C., Clark, Daniel, Pardon, Phillip, Pardon, Pardon)

As I think back, I guess motorcycles on some level have always captivated me. I think it started as a child in the 60s and 70s when I spent my summer vacations with my grandparents, John F. (Jack) and Janet Johnson Tillinghast, in Madison, WV. My grandfather (or "Granddad T" as we kids referred to him) [see *Pardon's Progeny II, Volume I, Issue I, December 1998*] was a consulting forester and my grandmother ("Grandma T") a teacher at the local high school. Madison is a very small country town located in southern West Virginia that has reminders of Mayberry in the Andy Griffith Shows from the 50s and 60s. One of the few attractions of the city was the local movie theater --- the Rialto.

My local friends and I spent many days going to movies at the Rialto and one film that sticks in my mind was titled, "Chrome and Hot Leather." It was a movie about a "motorcycle gang"; the name of the group I do not recall. The appeal of the "gang" was not my draw to the motorcycle culture; I suppose it was the free spirited attitude the members had that impressed me. Although it was not apparent to me at the time, this was the beginning of my desire to make motorcycles a part of my life. [Note: I prefer the term "motorcycle enthusiast" over "biker" because of the negative associations implied in the expression.]

Since I didn't have the resources at that age to afford an actual motorcycle, I had to use some ingenuity and improvisation. I had only one bicycle during my entire childhood and it was a product of JC Penny. It had high handlebars and a banana seat so why couldn't I convert it to a chopper I had seen during the movie? With that in mind, I took a hacksaw and cut the forks off another bike I recovered from a junk pile and added them to my existing forks making my own version of a "chopper." To make it as close as possible to a real motorcycle, I added the essential baseball card/clothes pin combination to produce just the right sound and all of a sudden --- I'm a "biker."

After graduating high school in 1979, I joined the US Army. The dedication required to succeed in the military and life never overtook my desire to own a motorcycle. I finally had the funds to purchase my first Harley-Davidson in 1985. I have never owned anything except a Harley. Not that there is anything wrong with other makes; I just never thought of owning anything else. Over the years, I have owned a total of four Harleys. I presently



own a Harley-Davidson Road Glide Custom (FLTRX), which in my humble opinion is the “Cadillac” of all Harleys.

Just like other hobbyists, Harley riders have big fantasies. Hikers may have the ambition to hike down the Grand Canyon and runners may dream of running the Boston Marathon. For a “biker”, the ultimate objective is to attend the most prestigious event in the country, possibly the world, the annual gathering in Sturgis, South Dakota. In 1936, Clarence "Pappy" Hoel purchased an Indian Motorcycle Franchise in Sturgis, SD, and that was when he formed The Jackpine Gypsies Motorcycle Club. In 1938, the first Sturgis Rally, known as the Black Hills Classic, was held on August 14th with a race of nine (9) participants and a small audience. 2015 marked the 75th anniversary of the Black Hills Classic for both the rally and the city of Sturgis. The small audience from 1938 grew to an estimated 1.5 MILLION participants attending this year. These participants come from all over the world. In fact, we met a rider from Switzerland who had shipped his motorcycle to the USA for the event.

My wife Amy and I have finally reached a point in our lives that would allow us to attend the event. This may not sound like a big deal, but the logistics of the trip are more detailed than it would appear on the surface. The trip to Sturgis from Benson, NC, our hometown, is approximately 2000 miles. Once the in-and-around miles were added, the trip ended up being more than 4550. Amy was not able to take part in the riding portion of the adventure, but joined us later in Rapid City, SD.

The trip started on Friday, July 31st with the gathering of three other friends, David, a friend and fellow rider, Craig and Chuck, a friend and fellow rider for 30 years and the Best Man at my wedding. Chuck met us in Winston-Salem, NC, because his starting point was Emporia, VA. After breakfast that morning, the remainder of our day was spent heading west. The goal was to reach Rapid City SD by Wednesday, August 5th, to pick Amy up from the airport. We would ride an average of 400 miles per day with the last day being the shortest so I would be on time to pick up my bride. While 400 miles may not seem like a great deal,



keep in mind that it is on two wheels and there are a lot of outside influences that are not experienced on four. The normal person who rides a motorcycle does not typically ride 400 miles in a day, an certainly not everyday. We also had to make weather a consideration. We left with the intent of not riding in the rain or after dark for safety reasons. Mercifully, bad weather was never a factor in either direction. In fact, the weather was awesome! This being true, we were also never subjected to night riding and that pleased the entire crew.

Join me stop-by-stop as we traveled. The first night (**Friday**, July 31st) was Teays Valley, West Virginia. The next morning (**Saturday**, August 1st), we travelled north through Ohio and into Indiana, deciding to stop for the night in Crawfordsville. The third day (**Sunday**, August 2nd) led us to our stop in Waterloo, IA. The fourth day (**Monday**, August 3rd) we were able to head a little more westward toward Sturgis and crossed through Minnesota and Illinois with the eastern coast of South Dakota on our radar. Monday was the longest day we spent riding when we logged around 525 miles. We did indeed make it and spent our night in Sioux Falls, South Dakota...our final destination was in sight at the end of this long, dark tunnel.

Tuesday (August 4th) was a pivotal point in our timeline. We had to be close enough to meet Amy in Rapid City the next day. We spent the night in Kadoka, SD, with 100 miles to go the next day. Because of the rally

there was a shortage of hotels and prices were rising as we got closer. Fortunately, I had made reservations for Rapid City six months in advance.

Wednesday was a breeze. We made a leisurely ride to Rapid City with plenty of breathing room to get to the airport. Amy arrived with no problem and we regrouped. I had towed my trailer to carry things we bought and our clothes so Amy didn't have to carry a lot on the plane. I also used it for overflow for the other guys' purchases. But for around the rally, we carried things in my saddlebags. Amy has her own bike and is a seasoned rider. But for this ride, she snuggled behind me on the back as a passenger.



Now was the time to catch our breath, do some planning and see a few sights. There are unlimited activities to take part in; most of them not Rally related. We wanted to see the surrounding area and explore as much history as possible during our stay. Since all of us were tired and not interested in getting caught up in traffic, we decided to limit our **Wednesday** activities to the Black Hills Harley-Davidson shop and surrounding vendors in Rapid City. We would get deeper into the other activities the next day.

Thursday was Black Hills Rally day for us. We had been advised that traffic and crowds could be avoided best by an early start. After a quick breakfast we headed into downtown Sturgis. Our strategy paid off. We arrived Main Street and had no trouble at all finding



a place to park the bikes. Although there were already a good number of people and motorcycles, arriving early was a fantastic idea.

It is hard to put into words the enormous number of vendors compressed into this very small township. The population of Sturgis on a normal day is only 6,741 people. During

this event, it increased over 2000%. Even pictures do not do it justice. There were no empty spaces available to put even the smallest table for another vendor to set up. Everything one could possibly imagine was available from motorcycle accessories to clothing to corndogs. This was the place to be for motorcycle enthusiasts everywhere, regardless of brand or type owned, to get anything they ever thought they wanted (or never thought of). We visited the infamous (in the motorcycle world at least) One Eyed Jacks Saloon for lunch. In talking to people working there, we learned that this establishment is only open during the Rally. It seems they make enough money to last the entire year in just a one-month period.

Later that afternoon, we made our way to another famous establishment in the motorcycle world... the Full Throttle Saloon. They claim to be the 'World's Largest Biker Bar'. They have been featured on their own TV

show on the TruTV network. It was since cancelled but will resume for a new season on the Destination America Network this fall. In fact, there were drones flying over the crowds while we were there filming for the first episode. At this point in this article, I want to dismiss the thought that we were out drinking all day. These stops were for curiosity purposes only with no alcohol involved. We take our responsibility for safety seriously. The Full Throttle Saloon is a very entertaining place with acts going on continuously. Some were more entertaining than others. We ended our evening early so we didn't have to ride after dark.



Friday, we headed out for our first full day of sightseeing. We went toward Mount Rushmore to see the famous monument. It was everything we had imagined and more. It is unbelievable the amount of effort that must have been put toward the construction of this sculpture. We left there and headed toward the town of Custer via Custer State Park. We embarked on a leisurely ride through the Black Hills taking in some beautiful scenery. Even though we searched the countryside, we never actually got to see any buffalo. I suspect it was due to the number of tourists and motorcycles traveling through the Park. We actually saw videos of buffaloes attempting to ram motorcyclists as they rode through. Thankfully this was not a problem we ran into (pun intended). We stopped in

the town of Custer and picked up the requisite Custer Harley-Davidson shirts before finishing the day riding through Keystone on our way back to Rapid City for the night.

Saturday, our last day, we would ride through Spearfish Canyon to the historic city of Deadwood. The route to Deadwood produced some of the most breathtaking scenery we ever imagined. The mountains and sheer rock walls in the canyons were spectacular. Once we arrived Deadwood, we visited the Nutt & Manns Saloon, the place where Wild Bill Hickok was shot and killed in 1876. As history tells us, he met his destiny because he cheated while playing poker in this very saloon. After spending the better part of the afternoon in Deadwood, we headed back to



Rapid City. This was effectively the conclusion of our trip because Amy had to go to the airport the next morning for her flight back to North Carolina.

On **Sunday**, August 9th, our return journey began. We dropped Amy at the Rapid City Airport and headed through the Badlands with a final destination that day of Sioux City. I learned then why they call it the “Bad Lands”. In my many trips throughout the world, this is some of the most barren lands I have ever witnessed. I thought as I sped along safely on my Harley to a known destination that day how it must have been to take a wagon or horse through this terrain. How staunch the pioneers must have been to survive it. It was good to settle down in Sioux City that night.

The next segment of our trip (**Monday**) had a destination goal of Bentonville, Arkansas. There was no particular reason to go to Bentonville except that it is the birthplace of Walmart. I made a joke on my Facebook page that my life is now complete because I had not only been to the ultimate motorcycle event, I now had made the journey that every hillbilly dreams of... the home of Walmart. After spending the night, we set off toward our next milestone, West Memphis, Tennessee.

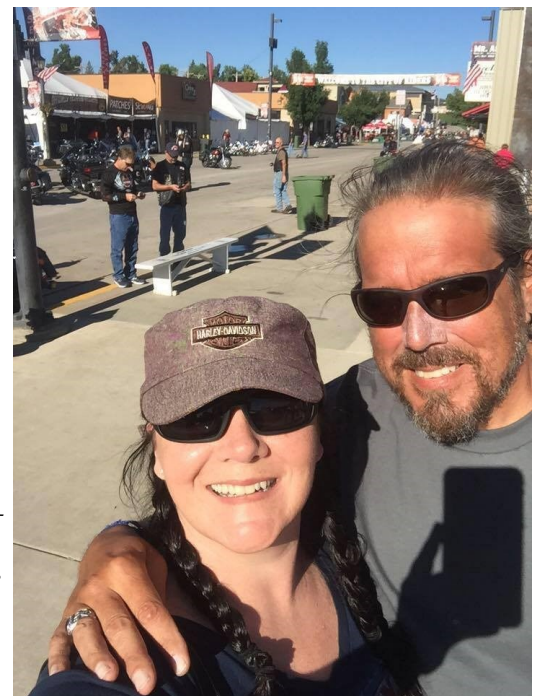
Tuesday, it was a short trip to West Memphis where one of our group has four grandchildren. I had never been to Arkansas and was amazed by how much their mountains resemble those in my home state of West Virginia. The weather was cool and made the ride that day very refreshing after days of warmer, sometimes hot, conditions.

Wednesday, we headed toward Crossville, TN, but just had to stop in Memphis to validate the fact that Elvis Presley is indeed dead. With that in mind we found our way to Graceland. It was to my surprise the amount of deterioration present in the area for such a notable landmark. Nonetheless, there *is* such a place as Graceland Harley-Davidson and a shirt from there would be great for the collection. And then since it was such a short riding day, we thought why not ride to Mississippi and the Harley dealership there. After all, we were so close and didn't really have that much riding to do.

Thursday was the last day of our journey. We rode through Tennessee into the western mountains of North Carolina and the rest of the way home. It is curious how much easier the ride gets as you near your personal home to sleep in your own bed after two weeks on the road. It is sort of like a vacation as a child. The trip there seems so much longer than the trip back home.

Overall the trip to Sturgis, South Dakota, was an amazing experience. In a way it was on a spiritual level. In today's world, none of us seem to have the alone time with no electronics or other outside stimulus. I had a lot of time to think, reflect and meditate in a way, which was therapeutic or at least nourishing to my psyche. I guess in retrospect this was an ongoing chapter in the life of that young man who saw a movie in a small town in West Virginia and converted it to reality. If ever you have the chance, I would highly recommend a trip such as this. We will do it again.

About the author --- Dan C. Tillinghast lives in North Carolina with his wife Amy, two Australian Shepherds, two rescue cats and a Blue Dumpy Tree Frog in Benson, NC. He holds a Masters Degree in Organizational Management from Ashford University, Forbes School of Business. He retired from the US Army in 2003 and has worked with US Government Civil Service and several Defense Contractors. Most recently, he served as the Director of Operations for WorldWide Language Resources in Fayetteville, NC. In March of this year, he went into semi-retirement and works for himself as a private consultant to prospective Defense Contractors.



Editor's comments

Greetings. I am so pleased to have Dan's article about his motorcycle adventure. He gives us a great picture of a Tillinghast adventure in the here and now. From the beginning, it has been my plan to have historical articles balanced with stories of family members who are doing interesting things in the present. I encourage all of you to write your stories and send them to me for consideration. If you have received awards, started a business or led a social movement of some sort that is notable, please share it with your cousins. Pictures will be wonderful.

Notice that this paper comes in two parts again. Donna T. Casey has an interesting historical puzzle that makes up the second part. Be sure to save both parts together.

Elder Pardon's burial plot was groomed and cared for again this summer under the watchful eye of Bruce Tillinghast. Thank you for your donations.

The founding board of Tillinghast Society continues to meet by telephone to seek chartering and non-profit status. Bruce now chairs the board. In addition Claire Hauenstein, Donna T. Casey, Jeannine Dietz and I sit on the board. Todd Lawrence facilitates the conference call. We are grateful for the efforts of this board and look forward to the time when your gifts will be tax deductible. Thanks to Blair Cashman for her service on the board.

Several newsletters have been returned to me as undeliverable. Please look at the names below. If you know these cousins, please tell them to contact me with their new email addresses. It is my guess that many of them have changed address and have failed to let me know.

Greta

Newsletters sent to these members have been returned to me as undeliverable. If you know these cousins, please have them send their email addresses to my email address. Please do not rely on Facebook communication to give me updates. I may miss it. Use: gtyler@casinternet.net

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