

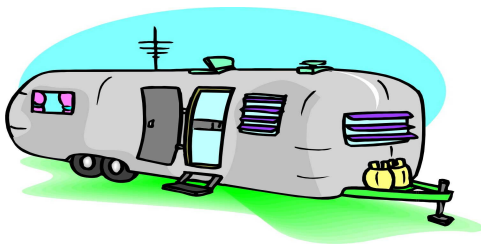
MY FIRST MOTORCYCLE MEMORY

Born in the 60's, I missed the motorcycle madness that was taking place all over America, but I do remember my first experience with the two wheeled motor vehicle. I came from a large family with three brothers, two sisters, a half sister and two half brothers, nine of us in all. My mom also came from a large family, her having three brothers and three sisters. The good thing about large families is that you always have someone to play with, someone to talk to, to climb high up in the apple trees with and to make memories with. My Dad was out of the picture by the time I was three, and it was just my mom struggling to raise her seven children. The two half brothers belonging to my dad left when he



did. We planted a garden every year, and watched the seeds grow into something we could eat. We played in an old trailer, rode our bicycles in circles around the apartment complex, climbed the apple trees and ate the fruit before it was ripe. More times than not, a lesson learned the hard way, we climbed down holding our stomachs in agony from eating too many green apples. We ran around the property chased by bees that built their hives under the metal awnings of the old silver trailer. The landlord's house was on the property just up the hill. In our child's minds, we were certain that an old Ogre inhabited it with his ugly stepdaughter and we stayed clear, because children know, Ogres can eat you up and use your bones for toothpicks.

One hot summer day in Ohio, the seven of us children were scattered like flies around the place, running from tree to tree, playing hide and go seek and climbing the fence into the adjacent playground of the elementary school. My little sister, Debbie whom we called "Little Bit", and who never left my



side, were playing a game of tether ball while my sister, Rhonda, sat at the bottom of the see saw with the other end protruding high up into the air, since she didn't have anyone to take the other seat and balance it out. For hours Little Bit and I would stand on opposite sides of the pole batting the ball back and forth in hopes of being the one to wind the rope tightly around the pole and win the game. On this wonderful day, a day that only a child can experience, with no rain and no worries, no welfare and no bills to pay – just the sun beating down on our little faces, the rope was finally wound and the game was over. Just then, far in the distance, we heard the roar of Harley thunder for the first time in our young lives. Rhonda looked toward the apartment and stood up. Debbie and I turned to see what the

noise was all about. The Harley made its way around the circular driveway and Uncle Bill, shirtless, muscular, and tanned, grinned at us and waved as he continued around past the Ogre's house and came to a screeching halt on the other side in front of our apartment. The back tire slid sideways and stirred up a cloud of dust. At the same time, Debbie and I broke into a run, waving as we came closer to the apartment; Rhonda, a little slower finally got her feet moving and followed us at a fast pace, half walking and half running, stopping occasionally to hold her aching side. Halfway around the circular driveway was the old metal trailer; Randy came flying out of it with little Johnny, just a baby, toddling after him.

My mom came out of the apartment drying her hands on an old dish towel and grinning widely. The kids hovered around the bike oooing and ahhhhing, all of us in awe. Uncle Bill said to Mom “get on”, and she just shook her head “no”, all the while walking towards the bike. She surprised us as she hiked up the skirt of her dress and lifted her leg over the seat like an old pro, tossing the dish towel to the ground. Helmetless, but with a silk scarf tied snugly around her chin, she climbed up on the motorcycle and wrapped her arms around her brother, delighted in the opportunity to take a break from



her arduous housework, and ride off into the wind on the old Harley. As it roared away from us, the carburettor back fired and the smoke puffed out of the pipes. It momentarily choked, but then caught hold and flung the riders into forward momentum as the bike gained speed and roared out of sight. All of the ruckus alerted my oldest sister Ruthi, a teenager, and she came out of the house with my brother, Ronnie in tow. When Ronnie was born the doctor's told Mom that he would never walk and in the first months of his life he had several operations on his legs and feet, and he needed a kidney transplant. But Doctor's aren't always the final authority on things like this. More often than not, it is a higher authority and the persistence of moms that influence the outcome. And my mom was no exception. She refused to accept the doctor's grim diagnosis, and although there were metal braces from his feet to his hips, he waddled out the door to see what all the fuss was about. Uncle Bill loved his sister and he loved her children. He always came bearing gifts and this day was the biggest gift of all as he allowed each of us a turn on the back seat of the Harley. He even lifted Ronnie on the seat and gave him strict instructions to hold on tight. There is nothing better than watching a little handicapped boy riding slowly on the back of a motorcycle. Even as young as we were, each of us knew this was a special moment, and a seed had been planted that would grow into something one day, an eternal love for riding. This, my first experience with a Harley molded my future and is a memory I will always treasure and will never forget.