

Member Spotlight...

The Ride of Our Life - By Gayle Thomas



Marrying a motorcycle man must have been in my blood. My Dad bought a metallic lavender Indian Chief in 1938 so he and my mother could tool around the San Antonio area while I was yet unborn. Is that riding three up? Mother rode behind Daddy until she was too large to fit on the "buddy seat." As a child I rode with my Dad until he went into the Navy in 1943. After the war he bought an English James. I remember how he loved two wheel riding.

While a student at Brackenridge High School in San Antonio, I met this tall handsome guy with dark wavy hair in one of my classes. As soon as I—at age 15—saw him, I knew that "this is the one!" However, it took that shy lad nearly three years to realize what I knew instantly.

G. L. (Gene) began working after school at age 14 at HEB and bought a Cushman Scooter to scoot around on; it quickly turned into a Harley Davidson 45 motorcycle. In 1954 or 55, he bought a 1952 Harley Davidson 74 full dresser and rode it to school. He was the only boy at Brackenridge with a motorcycle. Of course, back then, very few kids had cars. Kids walked or rode the bus.

My parents had been daredevil's on their motorcycle and assumed all motorcyclists were; so I was not allowed to ride with G. L.; even though he was very mature and careful. (More mature than now, except in age) We had one sort of date when I was 15, he 16 and nothing more for two years (he worked six days a week). In our senior year, we started dating; so G. L. sold his beloved Harley and bought a '53 Mercury convertible that my parents allowed me to ride in.

In 1956, we graduated from Brack and G. L. entered the Army. He came home on leave Christmas 1956 and we were married. Two teenagers left for Berkley, California to start our new lives together. In 1957 California, G. L. bought a '47 Harley to ride to the base and within two weeks, it was stolen.

Eighteen years and three children later, G. L. bought a '75 Honda 750cc in Houston (he could not afford the Harley he wanted). In '76, we loaded that Honda with camping equipment and took off for Colorado. That was my first real riding experience. After some of my anxieties came to light, like fear of falling over and throwing my legs out when he slowed down, maybe a little screaming at inappropriate moments; G. L. told me to get my mind right or he was putting me on a bus home. I really did not want to go home! Two weeks and four states later, I told him I didn't care if I ever got in a car again. My mind was right and I loved motorcycling! On a Louisiana trip in 1978, G. L.'s cousin had a 78 Harley full dresser but had to rest every 30 miles due to dead butt. G. L. eagerly offered to ride the Harley while the cousin rode G.L.'s 750. His cousin would not get off of the 750; so G. L. had to ride the Harley the rest of that trip. That experience cured G. L.'s desire for a Harley.

At age 31, G. L. started college while working 60+ hours per weeks. He graduated from Sam Houston State University attaining his BS in Police Science Magna Cum Laude; the same year our oldest daughter graduated from high school. In 1978, he attained his Doctor of Jurisprudence with honors from the South Texas College of Law, Houston and by this time, he had two grandchildren. He was sworn in as an attorney at law in May of 1979. His graduation gift to himself was a 1979 Gold Wing GL1000. Within a month we headed to Canada on our dream trip, covering 6300 miles in two weeks. We loved touring and since 1976, we have not missed a year touring somewhere. We joined GWRRA in June 1982, became charter members of Chapter C, Baytown and soon we were appointed Area Representative (CD) for Chapter C. We are now Life members.

In 1987, G. L. transferred to Austin with the state. In 1988, with 100,000 miles on the 79, G. L. purchased the blue green '89 GL1500 that we rode for 14.5 years and 175,000 miles. At the 2004 Region H Rally, the lure of a 2004 GL1800 and O. D. Hughes were too much to overcome (some will understand this); we went to the GL1800 that we currently ride.

Together, G. L. and I have 340,000 motorcycle miles through the 49 continental states, all of the Canadian Provinces and Territories except Newfoundland and one 1,000 mile trip into Mexico. Our longest trip was a 1994 camping trip to Canada and Alaska covering 3.5 months, 13,000 miles and 7 weeks in Alaska. What a wonderful 50 years of marriage and the last 31 years, on two-wheels, have been the best ride of our life.