

Never, never in my life, could I have imagined the sheer magnitude and number of motorcycles, the deafening roar of thousands of thunderous exhausts, continuous throughout the day and night. (A Harley proverb: "Loud Pipes Save Lives.") There were thousands of motorcycles parked on the ten blocks of Main Street alone.

And what bikes! I am a big motorcycle buff, but I am a lover of beauty: I have never seen so many beautiful motorcycles, so many wondrous machines. The majority were restored classic Harley-Davidsons, with mile-deep paint jobs and very fancy fittings; polished to within an inch of their lives. Even at night, the chrome was blinding. And there were models that, most charmingly to me, looked exactly like the drawings of motorcycles that my friends used to draw in high school -- you know the type, with the really, *really* long fork that gives the bike a "Grim Reaper" sort of look, and the seat canted backward to give the rider a semi-reclining position from which to enjoy the road.

Sadly, at one of the trade shows in this biker-dollar mecca (and believe me, that elusive "biker dollar" was being eyed with great respect by the manufacturers of motorcycle accessories and fashions), the Harley-Davidson Motorcycle Company had a display of the year 2015 models. I am sorry to say that they really looked like shit compared to the older, restored, customized Harleys. The new machines just looked unimaginative and clumsy, except the new one my brother Joe Silk wants to buy and Jim Hammond should trade his in for. Joe wouldn't get off the 2015 Road King till I took a bunch of pics for him.

And the crowds! The people! It was impossible to drive, impossible to park, impossible to walk. Well, okay, it was possible to walk, but not to converse -- but only after you parked, which was, as I said before, impossible. The bikes were parked in more places than I recall at the 50th. The 75th was mind blowing.

We were there for the commemorative Main

Street photo. Right place, right time! An announcement went out over the loudspeakers. People were crammed in around the bikes to where you could hardly see them. Look at the photo all the way to the left & you'll see us.

This trip was a year in the planning and I told everyone I knew. I'd hoped my girlfriend Jennifer Hutt would ride this with me like she did the last 'Too Broke for Sturgis' events. Here it was launch day, August 2nd, and my 'living for adventure' brother Joe was the only one raring to go.

James Hammond broke a little toe and claimed he had too many weeds at his cabin... so he bailed. Jim Austin was an 'almost' but drama struck him good. Warren McLaen's '62 pan was ready, but no vacation time either.

I had been riding to Sturgis from Mesa since '87 and would make the ride with many different friends for almost ten years in a row. I took a break for a while. This was my first trip since the millennium, so this was going to really stretch my memory of how to get there again... as taking the easy way with the freeways wasn't gonna happen. So brother Joe and I sat at O'Kelley's Bar and Grill in Mesa a few times and stared at routes and maps.

We started the trip from his cabin in Heber. Headed up 191 to Mexican Water, we hit our first-ever flash flood. It took forever to wash that red mud off the bikes. It was on to Colorado and made it to Ridgeway late at night.

With no sign of rain anywhere, we headed across the Gunnison and thru all the mountain roads we could climb. Everywhere we stopped there was always someone asking if we were headed to Sturgis. We were rock stars. If ya go next year, drive *around* Denver. We made the big mistake of hitting I-70 then to I-25 north to Wyoming. Traffic was really bad. We ended our 'day two' journey just south of Cheyenne at a super nice camping and RV park for a ten dollar spot by the Love's Travel Stop off of Collage Drive exit.

Our third day we saw, it seemed, more bikes

headed the other way at first. But every bar we saw had a 'Welcome Bikers' banner and we knew we were getting closer. I have a tradition stop in Lusk WY at the Silver Dollar Saloon for a burger and a beer. Here we saw hundreds of bikers, gassing up their bikes and hanging out. Lucky me, I made it the next 147 miles on fumes to New Castle. It was close. I could hear Bill Goodwin laughing and saying, "Don't run out of gas".

We hit a bit of rain coming into Spearfish and our crappy Arizona rain gear would get a facelift in Sturgis. There's nothing near as wet as a Harley in the rain. We stayed in a friend's backyard in Spearfish, set up our tents, and headed into town as the rain left for the week.

The 75th was huge. I have never seen the town so packed and so many vendors selling everything. We did an informal bar crawl and never waited for a beer at any bar. The town had tons of help and they needed it. Every street was full of bikes. In some areas vendors were doubled up in a spot. It was the best Sturgis ever so far.

We went to the Full Throttle the next day; wild and crazy as it is on TV. I have never seen so many ladies get body painted in all my years up there. Saw some cool bands play at the Easyrider Saloon and a few other places as well. Everywhere we went, it was a party. We shopped till we ran outta cash, then it was time to head home.

Made good time getting back. Took the I-25 south to Waldenburg then across thru Wolf Creek Pass. Got just outside of Heber and here came the rain again. Our new and improved rain gear worked. It was on to the Cabin Bar and Grill in Overgaard for one last party and met some mighty fine bikers and babes there to close the joint. Brother let me crash at his hideaway for the night.

I am planning on going again for the 76th. I hope to see you on the road with me. Get busy riding or get busy dying.

Jim Silk

