



THE WAY I SEE IT by Genevieve Schmitt

Stop The Sadness And Madness

I'm sick of having to watch out for incompetent drivers while I'm trying to enjoy my ride.

IN THE PAST, when I'd hear of a motorcyclist getting killed in an accident, great sadness would wash over me. I'd offer up a quick prayer for the family and friends of the deceased that they'd find peace and comfort in the

grieving process. I felt that's all I could do. Upon getting word of a particular accident earlier this year, my usual sadness was accompanied by madness and outrage. On March 25, a group of eight motorcycles carrying nine people stopped at a red light in Phoenix was plowed into from behind by a sanitation truck. Three riders died at the scene and another died the next day in the hospital. The rest are dealing with major injuries. In the initial reports, the 46-year-old driver said he was shuffling papers and didn't see the bikes. After an investigation, it was determined the driver was high on meth, and he was charged with four counts of manslaughter, five counts of aggravated assault, and seven counts of endangerment.

This horrific accident comes on the heels of many others caused by impaired or distracted drivers. The most notable recent distracted driving case involving a motorcycle was the "nail polish crash." Rider Anita Zaffke was stopped at a red light in Illinois in May 2009 when Lora Hunt drove into her from behind with her car. Anita died at the scene. Lora told police she was painting her fingernails at the time of the crash and didn't see Anita. Anita's son Greg was so outraged that he started the Black Nail Brigade, a campaign to raise awareness and funds for negligent and reckless driving legislation and to honor his mother. The Black Nail Brigade is getting a lot of publicity because of the sheer ridiculousness of what the driver was doing at

the time of the crash. Lora was eventually charged with reckless homicide, a Class 3 felony. A trial was scheduled to start in May 2010.

Part of my anger stems from the fact that I second-guess my decision to ride every time I hear of a rider dying senselessly, and I'm sick of that. And I'm sick of having to watch out for incompetent drivers while I'm trying to enjoy my ride. I love to ride, and they're messing it up for me. These deceased riders were doing what we're all told to do to reduce our chances of being involved in a crash. The Arizona folks were riding in a group. A group of motorcycles is easier to see than just one. Anita was wearing a bright high-visibility yellow jacket. After praying for the loved ones of the deceased in Arizona, I decided this time that in addition to prayer, I have to channel my anger into seeing that justice is done to prevent these kinds of accidents. I'm starting by raising awareness through the articles I write.

I also continue to support the American Motorcyclist Association (AMA) by being a member. As the leading rights organization that tracks legislation affecting motorcyclists, we have the AMA to thank for spearheading efforts, alongside the riders community, that give motorcyclists access to high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes. We also have the AMA to thank for making sure motorcyclists are not discriminated against when signing up for health insurance. One of the group's current top priorities is distracted driving. Ed

Moreland, AMA's vice president of government relations, told me he and his staff are tracking 300 distracted driving bills in 40 states. "The difficulty for law enforcement has long been trying to narrowly define what is distracted," Ed explained. Drivers have been distracted for as long as two-wheeled transportation has been around. "To define a law that addresses, narrowly, distracted driving as either texting and talking on the phone leaves open to broad interpretation what else might be included in distracted driving," Ed continued. "With the case in Illinois, they eventually came back with a more serious charge."

Despite what seems like an uphill battle, the AMA continues to ensure that motorcyclists are not overlooked. Ed pointed out that the association has long advocated enhanced penalties for those who are found to have caused a crash by being distracted while driving. The problem is trying to prove that the driver was doing something else while driving and that, as a result of it, the crash occurred. "All those lines get blurred when it comes to law enforcement," Ed said.

Greg Zaffke, Anita's son, told me in an e-mail, "This is not a motorcycle safety, visibility, or conspicuity issue. People are dying in cars and trucks, on motorcycles and scooters, on bicycles and even walking down the street because people are making conscious and fully sober decisions behind the wheel to focus on anything and everything but driving."

Are you fired up like me? Visit www.AMADirectlink.com and www.BlackNailBrigade.org. Get involved.

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