



THE WAY I SEE IT *by Genevieve Schmitt*

Riding Naked

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I DID IT AGAIN. I KEPT ALL MY CLOTHES ON AT THE STURGIS Motorcycle Rally — riding clothes, that is. Up until a few years ago, I'd cruise around in anything less than safe riding gear while at the infamous rally in South Dakota's Black

Hills. I'm a safety conscious rider, but the heat and hijinks of the Sturgis rally were enough for me to talk myself out of wearing that armored textile jacket I brought along one year. How could I possibly don that black garment in this heat?! My cool quotient drops, literally and figuratively, when I wear a protective riding jacket down Main Street or out to the Buffalo Chip. I go from cute, skinny biker chick on the hot, custom-painted Street Glide to ... well ... biker chick on a big bike when I'm wearing that jacket. Besides, most all riders in Sturgis, not all, but most, ride around with bare arms, bare heads, and bare legs sometimes!

That year, it was so darn hot during the rally — with temps soaring to the high 90s every day — that, I'm embarrassed to say, ego and peer pressure fueled by the heat pushed me over the edge one day. On this day, I was rockin' a cute pair of Miss Me jeans tucked into my brown leather lace-up boots with a bejeweled slinky camo-print tank up top. "I just want to be cool today, in every sense of the word," I screamed inside my brain as I straddled my bike, roasting in the driveway wearing my jacket as my friend and I were getting ready to leave for the day's activities. Seeing her looking all cute in just a shirt, in a huff I peeled my jacket off my sweaty, slimy arms. Of course, I made sure to slip my fingers into my brown deerskin gloves and plop my helmet on my head before

twisting the throttle and rolling out the driveway. My friend, "Diva" Amy, on her Swarovski crystal-encrusted Diva Glide, and I putted down Lazelle on our way to the Full Throttle Saloon. I smiled, loving the breeze — albeit warm — flowing over my arms, having not felt that sensation in a long time, but at the same time feeling like something's not right. I felt naked. I'd not ridden with bare arms in years, not since I was a naïve, young, uneducated biker in the early '90s. Back then, I thought a jacket and chaps' sole purpose was to keep you warm.

I rode extra carefully. I didn't want some idiot to run into me, forcing me to go down and road rash up my bare arms. As we made the turn into the Full Throttle lot, all eyes were on us gals and our Glides as we navigated the maze of bikes in search of a parking spot. We moved slowly; people were watching us. All of sudden, some Ryan Reynolds look-alike walked over to me and whispered in my ear, "Damn, you look hot on that bike." Alright! That's it! In a split second of shock that the comment was actually directed at me, followed by the realization that my bare, muscled, tan arms must be really workin' for me, I smiled back. "Thanks," I said and rolled on by. Then I laughed to myself, thinking that when you remove the gear hiding your assets, your cool quotient climbs sky high, so high that cute young guys flirt you up as you ride by, or for men,

young hot Bettys pay attention to you. That's never happened to me before, and certainly not when I'm riding around with a jacket on!

Later in the week, a few of us were riding from Deadwood up the canyon to Sturgis, me wearing just a denim jacket this time. The sun was setting. A couple of miles out of town we saw some people standing on the road waving their arms up and down indicating to us to slow down. Up ahead was a man lying unconscious on the pavement with a pool of blood spilling from underneath his head. His Ultra Classic was on its side nearby and a dead deer lay a few feet from both of them. No EMTs were on the scene yet. The accident just happened. Whoa! I gulped. Whoa! Tears welled up in my eyes. That's somebody's dad, husband ... son. Later, one of the guys riding with us told me the bystanders weren't tending to him because he'd already expired. His helmetless head just slammed down on the pavement so hard he didn't have a chance.

Now, this story is not a lecture on the wearing of helmets. I'm simply sharing with you what was a life-changing moment for me. It, and you know what "it" is, can happen that quickly. My denim jacket isn't going to save my arms. I do always wear a helmet, but after that experience, from that day on, I vowed to never let the ego-fueled excitement of Sturgis or any motorcycle gathering creep into relaxing the safety standards I've set for myself. Ego is a powerful thing, and it's all over the motorcycle world. I don't ride naked anymore.

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