

Finding freedom on two wheels

Linda Crill, 62, of Reston, Va., has been riding a motorcycle since she was 18. She tried to follow the advice of friends on how to move beyond her grief. They encouraged her to focus on eating well and getting lots of exercise and sleep.

Crill started bicycling up to 120 miles a week, sleeping nine hours a night, and "eating more holistically than Whole Foods." None of it helped.

"I was still miserable 18 months later," said Crill, who is now 62 and lives in Reston, Va. "I finally blew up one day and said, 'I'm an overachiever and it's not working.' I thought, what is the most extremely opposite thing I could think of to all this advice?"

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By: Barbara Ruben

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When Linda Crill was widowed six years ago, she tried to follow the advice of friends on how to move beyond her grief. They encouraged her to focus on eating well and getting lots of exercise and sleep.

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So Crill bought a BMW touring motorcycle, and within a month joined a group of bikers on a 2,500-mile ride along the Pacific Coast.

Despite her initial feelings of utter terror at riding in rush-hour traffic — not to mention riding up the steep ramp of a ferry boat in Vancouver and on a road that suddenly deteriorated to hazardous, tire-spewing gravel in California — Crill became a convert and found a way to recover joy in her life.

"When I'm riding on back roads...you don't let your mind just wander like in a car. You're constantly there. That's what so many of us like."

"The joy of motorcycling isn't to get somewhere. It's to enjoy the ride," Crill said. She's also made many new friends on her trips through the U.S. and Mexico.

An added bonus of taking up motorcycling was that her daughter thought she was cool. "My daughter was in college and at the age where many people don't want to bring their friends home to meet their parents."

"As soon as they found out I went motorcycling, all of them wanted to meet me. I became sort of a status symbol for her," Crill recalled.

Crill, a former executive coach, writes a blog about her experiences called "Blind Curves." Recent entries have titles like "Welcoming the voice of fear," and "First aid for lost passion."

The online blog has brought her many fellow travelers and interested readers, and has led her to compile her many stories into a memoir she hopes to publish soon with the title *Blind Curves*.

Motorcycles go mainstream

There may once have been a stereotype of motorcyclists as "toughs" or "hoodlums," but that has changed as motorcycles have become more mainstream means of transportation and recreation.

Since 1998, 1.25 million American households have added a motorcycle to their family's vehicles, according to the Motorcycle Industry Council. And Harley-Davidson reports that their average rider today has an income of \$80,000 to \$90,000.

With their "who me? I'm not getting older" mentality, it's not surprising that baby boomers make up a majority of motorcyclists. Today, boomers outnumber younger motorcycle owners two to one.

And though motorcycling is still primarily a male sport, more women are joining them on the road. According to the Motorcycle Safety Foundation, more than 4 million women in the U.S. know how to ride.

Safety is paramount

Motorcycle riding may be popular, but it can also be dangerous. That's why Crill, Rudderow, Hall and O'Neal all emphasize the importance of safety while riding.

The statistics can be frightening. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reports that motorcyclist fatalities have increased for every age group, with a larger increase in the 50-and-above age group.

Similarly, the University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute (UMTRI) found that the number of motorcyclists 45 and older killed in crashes in Michigan nearly quadrupled from 2001 to 2005.

"As people age, their bodies become more fragile and their chances of dying as a result of a crash increase," said UMTRI researcher Lidia Lostyniuk.

To help hone riding skills, the Motorcycle Safety Foundation offers courses. A list can be found at www.msf-usa.org.

Crill has taken a number of classes. "I'm a strong safety advocate," she said. "I really think so many motorcycle accidents are unnecessary if people had the training."

Carol Sorgen contributed to this story.

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