

I found this on the net and thought it was worth sharing.

The Wave

The bikes passenger seat swept up just enough that I could see over my father's shoulders. That seat was my throne. My dad and I travelled many backroads, searching for the ones we had never found before. Travelling these roads just to see where they went. Never in a rush. Just be home for supper.

I remember wandering down a backroad with my father, sitting on my throne watching the trees whiz by, feeling the rumble of our bike beneath us like a contented giant cat. A motorcycle came over a hill toward us and as it went by, my father threw up his gloved clutch hand and gave a little wave. The other biker waved back with the same friendly swing of his left wrist. I tapped my father on his shoulder, which was our signal that I wanted to say something. He cocked his helmeted ear back slightly while keeping his eyes ahead.

I yelled, "Do we know him?"

What?" he shouted.

"You waved to him. Who was it?"

"I don't know. Just another guy on a bike. So I waved."

"How come?"

"You just do. It's important."

Later, when we had stopped for chocolate ice cream, I asked why it was important to wave to other bikers. My father tried to explain how the wave demonstrated comradeship and a mutual understanding of what it was to enjoy riding a motorcycle. He looked for the words to describe how almost all bikers struggled with the same things like cold, rain, heat, car drivers who did not see them, but how riding remained an almost pure pleasure.

I was young then and I am not sure that I really understood what he was trying to get across. But, it was a beginning. Afterward, I always waved along with my father when we passed other bikers.

I remember one cold October morning when the clouds were heavy and dark, giving us another clue that winter was knifing in from just over the horizon. My father and I were warm inside our car as we headed to a friend's home. Rounding a corner, we saw a motorcycle parked on the shoulder of the road. Past the bike, we saw the rider walking through the ditch, scouring the long grasses crowned with a touch of frost. We pulled over and backed up to where the bike stood. I asked Dad, "Who's that?"

"Don't know," he replied. "But he seems to have lost something. Maybe we can give him a hand."

We left the car and wandered through the tall grass of the ditch to the biker. He said that he had been pulling on his gloves as he rode and he had lost one. The three of us spent some time combing the ditch, but all we found were two empty cans and a plastic water bottle.

My father turned and headed back to our car and I followed him. He opened the trunk and threw the cans and the water bottle into a small cardboard box that we kept for garbage. He rummaged through various tools, oil containers and windshield washer fluid until he found an old crumpled pair of brown leather gloves. Dad straightened them out and handed them to me to hold. He continued looking until he located an old catalogue. I understood why my dad had grabbed the gloves. I had no idea what he was going to do with the catalogue. We headed back to the biker who was still walking the ditch.

My dad said, "Here's some gloves for you. And I brought you a catalogue as well."

"Thanks," he replied. I really appreciate it." He reached into his hip pocket and withdrew a worn black wallet. "Let me give you some money for the gloves," he said as he slid some bills out.

"No thanks," my dad replied as I handed the rider the gloves. "They're old and not worth anything anyway."

The biker smiled. "Thanks a lot." He pulled on the old gloves and then he unzipped his jacket. I watched as my father handed him the catalogue and the biker slipped it inside his coat. He jostled his jacket around to get the catalogue sitting high and centered under his coat and zipped it up. I remember nodding my head at the time, finally making sense of why my dad had given him the catalogue. It would keep him bit warmer. After wishing the biker well, my father and I left him warming up his bike.

Two weeks later, the biker came to our home and returned my father's gloves. He had found our address on the catalogue. Neither my father nor the biker seemed to think that my father stopping at the side of the road for a stranger and giving him a pair of gloves, and that stranger making sure that the gloves were returned, were events at all out of the ordinary for people who rode motorcycles. For me, it was another subtle lesson.

It was spring the next year when I was sitting high on my throne, watching the farm fields slip by when I saw two bikes coming towards us. As they rumbled past, both my father and I waved, but the other bikers kept their sunglasses locked straight ahead and did not acknowledge us. I remember thinking that they must have seen us because our waves were too obvious to miss. Why hadn't they waved back? I thought all bikers waved to one another. I patted my father on his shoulder and yelled, "How come they didn't wave to us?"

"Don't know. Sometimes they don't."

I remember feeling very puzzled. Why wouldn't someone wave back?

Later that summer, I turned 12 and learned how to ride a bike with a clutch. I spent many afternoons on a country laneway beside our home.

Kicking and kicking to start my father's T55 BSA. When it would finally sputter to a start, my concentration would grow to a sharp focus as I tried to let out the clutch slowly while marrying it with just enough throttle to bring me to a smooth takeoff. More often, I lurched and stumbled forward while trying to keep the front wheel straight and remember to pick my feet up. A few feet farther down the lane, I would sigh and begin kicking again.

A couple of years later, my older brother began road racing, and I became a racetrack rat. We spent many weekends wandering to several tracks in Ontario-Harewood, Mosport and eventually Shannonville. These were the early years of two-stroke domination, of Kawasaki green and 750 two-stroke triples, of Yvon Duhamel's cat-and-mouse games and the artistry of Steve Baker. Eventually, I started to pursue interests other than the race track. I got my motorcycle licence and began wandering the backroads on my own. I found myself stopping along sideroads if I saw a rider sitting alone, just checking to see if I could be of help. And I continued to wave to each biker I saw. But I remained confused as to why some riders never waved back. It left me with almost a feeling of rejection, as if I were reaching to shake someone's hand but they kept their arm hanging by their side.

I began to canvass my friends about waving. I talked with people I met at bike events, asking what they thought. Most of the riders told me they waved to other motorcyclists and often initiated the friendly air handshake as they passed one another.

I did meet some riders, though, who told me that they did not wave to other riders because they felt that they were different from other bikers. They felt that they were "a breed apart." One guy told me in colorful language that he did not "wave to no wusses. He went on to say that his kind of bikers were tough, independent, and they did not require or want the help of anyone, whether they rode a bike or not.

I suspected that there were some people who bought a bike because they wanted to purchase an image of being tougher, more independent, a not-putting-up-with-anyone's-crap kind of person, but I did not think that this was typical of most riders.

People buy bikes for different reasons. Some will be quick to tell you what make it is, how much they paid for it, or how fast it will go. Brand loyalty is going to be strong for some people whether they have a Harley, Ford, Sony, Nike or whatever. Some people want to buy an image and try to purchase another person's perception of them. But it can't be done. They hope that it can, but it can't.

Still, there is a group of people who ride bikes who truly are a "breed apart." They appreciate both the engineering and the artistry in the machines they ride. Their bikes become part of who they are and how they define themselves to themselves alone.

They don't care what other people think. They don't care if anyone knows how much they paid for their bike or how fast it will go. The bike means something to them that nothing else does. They ride for themselves and not for anyone else. They don't care whether anyone knows they have a bike. They may not be able to find words to describe what it means to ride, but they still know. They might not be able to explain what it means to feel the smooth acceleration and the strength beneath them. But they understand.

These are the riders who park their bikes, begin to walk away and then stop. They turn and look back. They see something when they look at their bikes that you might not. Something more complex, something that is almost secret, sensed rather than known. They see their passion. They see a part of themselves.

These are the riders who understand why they wave to other motorcyclists. They savor the wave. It symbolizes the connection between riders, and if they saw you and your bike on the side of the road, they would stop to help and might not ask your name. They understand what you are up against every time you take your bike on the road-the drivers that do not see you, the ones that cut you off or tailgate you, the potholes that hide in wait. The rain. The cold.

I have been shivering and sweating on a bike for more than 40 years. Most of the riders that pass give me a supportive wave. I love it when I see a younger rider on a "crotch rocket" scream past me and wave. New riders carrying on traditions.

And I will continue in my attempts to get every biker just a little closer to one another with a simple wave of my gloved clutch hand. And if they do not wave back when I extend my hand into the breeze as I pass them, I will smile a little more. They may be a little mistaken about just who is a "breed apart."