



Motorcycle Dreaming - Riding the 'Beauty Way' - Chapter 04 - Death Valley Day

Christine Irving

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It was love at first sight. No, maybe love came later with the first kiss. Perhaps it was recognition at first sight, as when two friends separated for a long time meet once more and resume where they left off.

Whatever “it” was, John and I were astounded and unprepared. However having found one another, we resolved to journey together. Innocently we set off, not foreseeing we would meander through such strange landscapes; terrifying emotional ones of jealousy and fear, blissful ones of perfect understanding, crazy kaleidoscopes of coming and going through exotic cities, pastoral countryside, dessert, ocean, field and mountain. Nor did we know that, as in every life, these spiritual, emotional, and physical territories would weave themselves indistinguishably together.

John and I were born into military families whose peripatetic lifestyle bred wanderlust into our bones. We’ve lived in seven countries on four continents, explored all over the globe and have visited or resided in most of our own fifty states. For the past twelve years the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been home but wherever we sink temporary roots, to travel has been our passion and our delight.

Given this preference for an itinerant life style, it isn’t surprising that John’s work as an airline captain is also his joy. To fly is to travel constantly and to live with a pilot is to share many of those travels.

Our explorations teach us that no excursion remains simple; no undertaking exists in only one dimension. The more we learn of this, the more enamored of travel we become, seeing a significance in each trip that reverberates through the days following our return.

Most of our jaunts have been short voyages circumscribed by the requirements of work or family. Rewarding as these have been, we have longed for a real journey; a lengthy excursion through new territory, combining the qualities of pilgrimage, adventure, distance and renewal.

Just as some people have a “dream house”, John and I have always had a “dream trip.” Incipient builders, planning over a number of years, change dimension and style as their tastes change. We too changed our minds as we discussed which route to take but as often as the itinerary changed the mode of transportation remained the same — a motorcycle.

During the early years we wanted to blast through the Pyrenees on agile Italian Ducatis. No autobahns for us, the twistier, steeper and wilder the road the better; we longed for bouillabaisse, red wine and fast bikes. Sometimes the venue changed. We would plan to drive from Tierra del Fuego to Fairbanks or perhaps, take a year or two off and circumnavigate Africa with the babies strapped to our backs. Poverty and ambition delayed and frustrated these grand schemes but there were lots of short trips on second-hand bikes we rented, borrowed or bought. Although we never got as far south as Magellan did, the world opened to us and we traveled extensively. Even so, John and I continued to fantasize about a series of long, leisurely motorcycle journeys. As time went on, though, the route followed a more established pattern and we began to dream of crossing our own continent.

I read an interview once, given by James Baldwin in which he described living abroad. He had moved to

Paris, which has traditionally welcomed Black Americans, and was shocked to discover that it was his nationality rather than his color that made him so different from the Parisians.

It's humbling to discover that a large part of one's own personality is composed of national characteristics. It is also comforting. It means Thomas Wolfe was wrong. You can always go home again. Home to people with whom you share bone deep convictions about how things work and why they work that way, sharing world views which begin below the conscious level of the open or closed mind. Isolated from one's fellows, it is similarities rather than differences which are remembered.

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