



RIDE ON

WHEN LIFE GOES SIDEWAYS

Julie Hasse

In March 2016, while riding my new-to-me 2003 BMW F650GS, I broke my leg on the Alpha Base Camp ride into the Mohave — day four of RawHyde’s “Intro to Adventure” course.

I’d been assigned to write about my experiences by a motorcycling magazine, and along with fellow riders, had just passed the weekend off-road skills training course.

I felt ready to apply the skills we’d all just learned. During the first 100 miles of what was supposed to be a two-day, 340-mile ride into the Mohave, I felt like I was flying — ecstatic, free and capable of anything. I couldn’t stop grinning as we rode under the huge white wind turbines that stood along parts of our ride.

Then the bike and I went down. I simply lost my line on a gravelly, sandy uphill turn and flew off my bike, landing hard on my left leg. When I got up to turn my bike off I collapsed from the pain. Another rider behind me went down at about the same time so we both had to get evacuated out by the coaches. The other riders were bummed to see us go but, hey, they had to carry on.

Everything I thought and felt about falling was amplified by the fact that it was a group ride and I was now holding the group back. In addition to being upset that I had failed at a challenge for which I had worked so hard to complete, it really unsettled me to have to ask for help.

Breaking my leg brought deep emotions to the surface. I’ve always had a fear of doctors and their weird pharmaceuticals, their obsession with needles and their coming at me from all sides with sharp objects.

Once, as an eight-year old, I bolted out of our family doctor’s office and ran amok around our town square refusing the doctor’s inevitable probing. My mother didn’t catch up to me for 30 minutes.

This phobia remains. But with this injury, I didn’t bolt. Instead, I sought out less invasive ways to combat pain

and to heal. I regained the strength of my muscles and fostered the healing of my leg by swimming, performing gentle and gradually increasing weight-bearing exercises, and plenty of massages.

After several weeks of this, I was antsy and felt that if I didn’t get back on my motorcycle soon my interest would fade away. Within about 15 weeks after my accident, and clearly against doctors’ orders, I climbed back on my motorcycle and rode 500 miles over a two-day period, camping along the way.

Then, on July 7, I received the news that Jim, my boyfriend, collaborator and riding partner, died in a terribly swift ATV accident.

I was gutted. I had been struggling to heal from my accident, and now I’d lost the man who had introduced me to the wonderful world of off-road motorcycling. My love.

But there was more to come.

A few weeks later, I had a seizure. I’d never had one before, and there was no warning or reason to expect this one.

By law, this event yanked my driver’s license away for months until I could prove to the DMV (Department of Motor Vehicles) that I was seizure free.

Compounding my grief and adding yet another blow, the medicine prescribed to me made me feel terrible. I felt inebriated for months. I was suicidal, slept as much as possible only to feel sleep-deprived. I have long hours of not remembering what I did or how I even functioned. So I stopped taking it and, thanks to living on the West Coast, found ever-so-slowly a combo of CBD (Cannabidiol) medication that made me feel reasonably well and kept me seizure-free.

I lost many friends. Many people couldn’t handle my state of grieving Jim and lost confidence. It was hell trying to explain to people I disappointed or annoyed by not



meeting deadlines or being foggy in my brain, or suddenly sick. They were used to Julie being active, upbeat and extremely fit and healthy.

Between my health and Jim's death, I decided to take a hiatus from riding for about six months to gather myself.

During this time I let myself grieve, sold my motorcycle, found a therapist and a hypnotherapist, sought out spiritual counselling, and watched a lot of comedy. I also watched motorcycling movies, continued to follow my friends' adventures and wondered if I was becoming one of the many injured, traumatized athletes who switched roles from participants to spectators. I now understand why someone would make such a decision and I judge no one for walking away from the arena.

Meanwhile ... I'm stubborn ...

I longed for the freedom of riding. It became clear that I needed to take action to get out of this dark period. So, in February 2017 I bought a 2016 BMW G650GS and began riding again with a few close friends. I started out slowly, so that I could ride without shaking like a leaf or shitting my pants. I still felt conflicted about riding.

Over time, I steeled my resolve and committed to becoming a rider, not just as I had been, but a better rider, knowing my limitations and not being timid to state them.

I needed better gear: preferably a full suit of armour

straight out of the Middle Ages. I reached out to Klim and briefly told them my story. Since they didn't have any steel armour in stock, I was gifted a Klim-Gortex adventure jacket and pants.

I wanted to come to grips with my physical fears. While in the process of deciding whether to directly face my leg-breaking failure at RawHyde, I went to their Castaic site and eyed the trails cautiously.

I wasn't sure I wanted to go off-road but also envious of other riders who seemed to be having no difficulty at all. There was a tug of war in my brain. On the one hand, I didn't want to fail, fall, and get hurt; on the other hand, needle-pointing was out of the question.

Jim Hyde, the owner, was encouraging and more than happy to let me have another go. So I took the plunge and I signed up for my "do-over" for the Intro to Adventure course slated for February 2017. I planned on renting one of their motorcycles since my newly acquired G650GS was all stock with street tyres, no crash bars and no bash plate.

The date of the do-over kept changing for a number of reasons. The new creative director of the magazine I wrote for thought I was such a jerk. Despite his angry outbursts, my pride wouldn't let me tell him about my many setbacks.

In hindsight, the delay turned out to be just fine. It



gave me time to continue prepping my mind. Additionally, I decided to use the time to prep my own motorcycle for off-road use. I contacted RevZilla and spoke with them about how hell-bent I was to get back in the saddle. I revealed to them that riding was my balm to sanity/insanity. The folks there all have incredible riding experience and easily understood how important it was for me. They gifted me Sidi boots, crash bars, a bash plate, gloves, dirt tyres and even two pairs of socks.

Perhaps I should own more than a Swiss Army Knife, but I must confess I'm not mechanically inclined ... yet. My oil changes tend to look like murder scenes covered up with kitty litter. Modifying my bike was a piece-by-piece situation. In the process, patience with others and with myself was necessary as little-by-little things came together over the next 8 months. With the help of my friends and their toolboxes, I installed everything but the tires.

A local friend, Jenna Stellar of Stellar Moto Brand, loaned me her Dyneema Stratosphere jumpsuit to test during the RawHyde training.

During my time of recovery, well over two years by now, I had been graced riding with some elite riders. Their generosity with their time, as well as their knowledge, helped keep my fires stoked.

My riding buddies James and Toby would get a wild

hair and without much warning I would find myself following them on a mountain trail or alongside sketchy industrial areas hemmed between the railroad tracks and the Los Angeles River. My biker brain would tend to lose control while manoeuvring through ballast and deep silt, all while heading for a steep grade and then across the train tracks, reminding me of deadly target fixation.

I was thrilled with these escapades, for these were the moments I felt most alive ... wild and full of laughter. These two road dogs understand me and know how to help me shake off my fears by playfully engaging my riding skills. They helped me to banish my demons by helping me become a demon myself.

Finally the date of my do-over arrived and I rode to the RawHyde off-road course along with my friend James, who would be taking the course and photographing the experience.

The three days of training were rigorous, and with the 36-degree Celsius heat I often felt nauseous and nervous. The experienced coaches kept a careful watch over our group of seven rookie riders. I was the only female and the only one that had a bit of dirt experience, aside from James.

Nonetheless, I was still a rookie and still in recovery from all I'd gone through.

This was a challenging curriculum to cover and we had



a lot of laughs, high fives, and a few bruises. We were encouraged to celebrate when we dropped our motorcycles (and, boy, did we drop them) with a flurry of beeping horns followed by a helping hand to right the motorcycle. The world would be a better place if we all behaved this way every day.

I was moved to tears realizing this while up in our adult playground. I smiled often despite the irritations of heat, the fatigue, and the biting flies. One reason I smiled is because I had rediscovered my determination and had returned to RawHyde.

Fireside chats with riders and coaches about overcoming the inevitable obstacles life hands us were unplanned opportunities for reflection that dredged up many of the emotions I had felt since the start of my motorcycling in 2014.

Over the course of the weekend, I was able to remember the exhilaration of learning, taking risks, and being in the moment so deeply that nothing else mattered; all while some hard-earned fun was percolating back into my life.

I graduated the training unscathed.

Shortly before his death, one of my last text messages between Jim and me went like this:

Julie: Jim, please know that I appreciate your support

as both a motorcyclist and as a writer.

Jim: Julie, please know that I will always support you as both a motorcyclist and as a writer and I hope you never abandon either of them.

Looking back on my return to riding, perhaps I've been chasing Jim's ghost and want to feel our connection again. What I have found is my very own compass, including an extra star in the sky.

Dedicated to the late Jim Downs, July 7th, 2016. **JH**