

Prologue

I lay in the mud and rain, the front tire of the motorcycle spinning in the air beside my head. In an instant, my life had changed forever. I had started the day as a student at an off-road training course. Even for a day of riding early in the season, the weather was miserable. It was cold and rainy, and the woods were damp.

Our path led us to lush mixed pine and hardwood forests awakening from their winter hibernation. Our every breath brought smells of spring: the moist earth, damp bark on the trees, spring flowers, extravagant new undergrowth, the proliferation of green everywhere amid the puddles along the muddy, rutted trail.

Every so often, our instructor would stop, dismount and demonstrate how to navigate a particular hazard, and then we'd try it ourselves. Challenging ourselves, learning new skills and successfully steering around, over or through obstacles was invigorating and empowering.

Noon was on us before we knew it. The final reward for a morning of accomplishments was a stimulating ride through another part of the forest on the way back to the base for lunch and a chance to warm up. I was exhilarated, but I was also recognizing the onset of fatigue as unfamiliar physical exertion and the battle with the elements extracted their price.

As I crested a hill and began to descend, I saw my instructor and Nancy, another student, already stopped at the bottom, just before a small water hazard. What I didn't see until it grabbed my front tire was a huge rut in the middle of the trail. I flew off my bike. I landed solidly on my right shoulder. I knew immediately my life had radically changed, if only because my right arm refused to move. I had yet to comprehend the magnitude of that change.

The instructor and Nancy ran up the hill to help. Someone pulled the bike off me and parked it to the side of the trail. I could see no obvious trauma and my arm didn't hurt if I stayed still, but try as I might, it wouldn't budge. I sat in the cold and rain, helpless.

My business centers on motorcycles, and it was the beginning of the season. This couldn't have happened to me. I was fifty-four years old and on my own. How would I ever manage?

I believe everyone we come into contact with has a message to share, and so it was that morning. Trying to distract me, Nancy pointed out the trilliums carpeting the woods directly in my field of vision. I had noticed the flowers, or thought I had. The symbolism didn't sink in until Nancy drew my attention to them. I had chosen the name Trillium Motorcycle Tours for my business because to me it meant springtime, growth, rebirth and hope, and it was the flower of Ontario, my home province.

I am right-handed, so everything I do involves my right arm. And on the motorcycle, the right hand controls the throttle and the front brake — moving forward, accelerating and stopping — all having to do with control and power. Even so, I was calm, partly because I was in shock and denial, but somehow I also knew a divine experience was unfolding. A course correction had just occurred and a special lesson awaited me. Now I had to discover where my power really was.

Nature is where I go to get grounded: walking along a deserted beach and marveling at the immensity of the ocean and the ceaseless cycles of the tide, or gazing at the stars and planets in an indigo sky on a cold, clear night. Most invigorating for me is a hike through a hardwood forest, and I am fortunate to have plenty of that in my backyard. I find a spiritual quality in the woods and an energy that doesn't exist anywhere else for me. But this time my motorcycle had taken me into the woods and grounded me. When I came out in the passenger seat of an ATV, my shoulder was broken and my life was about to be very different.

What followed was the darkest period of my life. I felt broken, alone and abandoned. It hurt physically, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually. I didn't know how I could ever be whole again. I tried to focus on my belief that out of the darkness comes growth. I tried to want what was to come: exploring, discovering and listening to my inner self. I knew the growth process would be immensely rewarding and meaningful, but the light seemed so far away.

As I recuperated at home in quiet emotional darkness amid spring rains, though, ideas could take root. It was time to reflect, refocus and restore direction. This book germinated during that period. I decided I would collect stories from women who rode: stories about how they triumphed over challenges and grew. Some of the stories would be about motorcycling; others would be about how lessons learned through motorcycling had gotten the riders through challenging times.

I soon realized as well that I needed an answer to a big question in my own story. How did I get to the point in life where I had needed to be awakened at forty-eight years of age, but then still needed a spiritual wakeup call in the woods six years later?

And so this book grew.