

Heroes and Helpers- Mark & Mike

Heroes & Helpers #4

"Mark & Mike"

Around the time I turned 25 my boozing and drugs were taking a toll on me and my family. I was good enough at them to turn pro, but the price I was paying was far too high. Something had to give. I started to get the itch to ride again.

Around this time we hired a high-strung young guy named Mark at work. Mark had a van with stickers in the window and raced every weekend. Man I couldn't get enough of his racing stories. After a few months I could not take it any more, I had to have a bike again! Mark told me "Whatever you get, make darn sure it's a Honda". Some of the best advice I ever got.

Much to my surprise, my wife was very supportive of this. I went to Greenrose Sports Center and got an XR250. It was a brand new design that year and suited me well. The motor was lots of fun and the suspension was worlds better than the stuff I used to ride. It was almost like riding again for the first time.

One of the biggest changes since I quit racing in the 70s was the gear. It was now way more extensive than before. Better helmets, better pads, better boots. And the new plastic chest protectors made me feel invincible. And the speeds were much higher now. I could not believe how much younger I felt when I was in the saddle. Mark guided me through all the new stuff. He introduced me to lots of people that I still ride with almost 30 years later. Mark took me to many new and wondrous riding spots. The Brickyards, The Cane Run Floodwall, Eagle Creek, Livingston, S-Tree, Cave Run, and the great old Edmonson County MX. My world opened up. I re-focused. The binges and hangovers became a thing of the past. For this I owe Mark a ton of thanks. Mark broke part of his hip a few years later and gave up riding. I missed his company very much.

About two years later I went riding with a friend and he had invited someone new to join us. The new guy was Mike. Mike was a longtime racer. He had everything and he was fast! Mike and I became good friends. He really set the hook in me for racing too. He taught me how to really CARE for a bike. To him they were not just chunks of metal, they were living, breathing, creatures that needed tender loving care. His maintenance regiment was incredible. After every ride he tore the bike down to the frame. Every part was cleaned, lubed, and re-installed lovingly. Mike liked his stuff to look brand new and run like it. And they did. When people bought one of his used bikes they were getting a bike that was almost better than when it came out of the factory.

Mike had one peculiar habit. He liked having new bikes. So he would buy a new bike and leave it sitting in his living room for a full year before he would ride it. Meanwhile he rode and raced the bikes from the previous year. I called his living room bikes "Coffee Table Bikes".

Mike and I went riding all the time. We rode regardless of the weather. When I would get up and look outside and see gloomy, grey skies, I knew it would only be a matter of minutes before the phone rang. If it was 10 degrees and snowy, there was the phone again! I'd answer it and hear "You ready to go?" he'd chirp. "Aw come on man it's too cold" I'd whine. "Dude! We can't let this kinda day go by without riding! I'll be over in 20 minutes and you better be ready!" His pushing made me a better rider and a much better wrench. Mike moved away after a few years and I missed the good times we had. I owe Mike more than I can ever repay him.