

Ghost Story #2: Motorcycle Angel to the Rescue Don Creamer

One of my early jobs in higher education was dean of students at a new and very large community college located in downtown Dallas. The work was fulfilling and challenging and by weekends, I was ready for something else entirely. For a short time, that weekend distraction was dirt bike riding. It was, for the most part, lots of fun to learn to control those motorized beasts through rough terrain, shallow creeks, and deep holes. Occasionally, I came home a bit bruised up here and there, but never was seriously hurt despite what now looks like some pretty risky behaviors.

I rode mostly Enduro style bikes designed for long distance competition but for a time had a Trials style bike designed to be ridden standing up on very complicated terrain. It was during this time of owning a Trials bike that one of our riding friends talked us into a long weekend trip deep into West Texas to participate in an Enduro race. One could register to participate in the entire race of 150 miles or ½ race of 75 miles. The only smart decision I made that weekend was to elect the ½ race.

The Enduro race is scored by how closely the rider comes to a precise time between checkpoints along the way. These checkpoints might be only a mile or two or they might be several miles apart. Points were lost if you arrived too early or too late so the experienced racer had to plan the event carefully.

One thinks of desert terrain where this event was held as relatively flat barren land with a few plants and small rocks. Let me assure you that not all desert terrain is like this at all. The Enduro race leaders had us in remote woods with incredibly challenging trails to follow. Apparently, it had rained a day or so earlier because there were several water hazards on the trails for the entire route.

So, here I was in race where I had no rational reason for being there, riding the wrong style of motorbike, and completely unprepared for the experiences to come.

We started the race in waves or heats and I already was placed near the last group to begin and I quickly fell even further behind. I must surely have been near the last rider in the race because I hardly ever saw another biker for the entire 75-mile torturous experience.

Within the first 5-10 miles of this most painfully memorable early-life experience, I was completely exhausted. Motorbikes are heavy, even the Trials bike is heavy. I found myself manhandling the bike through the difficult trails much more than would have been necessary by an expert rider.

It would be fair to say that after 50 miles or so, I was barely hanging on to the bike and hoping to find a way to escape this torture. At least, I had sufficient awareness to know that I didn't know where I was even if I got off the trail. So, I kept going as

best as I could. I made mistake after mistake, fell a few times but always seemed to crawl back on the bike and keep going down the trail.

Then, at about 70 miles or so into the trip, I noticed a large water hazard ahead, wider than the trail and probably more than 10 feet across. Now, every dirt biker knows to traverse such hazard with your weight shifted to the rear wheel. Most of the time when done properly the rider can come out the other side unscathed. What I didn't know, nor could I have known was how deep the water was. I made a quick decision—the wrong one as it turned out--to ride to the right edge of the water hazard.

This decision clearly was the wrong one because my bike plunged into the water and SUNK with only the handlebars showing. I was thrown off the bike and into the water from which I extracted myself in a pitiful manner of crawling like a very old turtle back out of the water.

As I lay there choking from the water in my lungs and gasping for air, I wondered if there would be some final sweep of the area by an ambulance looking for fools like me who didn't make it to the end.

It was then that I saw her. She was short and stocky and had walked out of the woods beside the water in which my bike was irretrievably stuck in the muck and water.

No doubt I was dazed by my mishap but she looked to me to be an American Indian. She actually had a cloudy haze around her. She looked me over as if to say, "You could use some help, couldn't you?" but she never uttered a word. Rather, she waded into the water, lifted the motorbike from the muck, seemingly with little effort, and walked it to the other side of the water hazard.

I was by now propped up on an elbow watching this miracle occur when she wiped some of the water off the seat and climbed on the bike. She then proceeded to crank the engine. It sputtered a bit as it expelled water from its lungs or whatever internal gadgets make that infernal machine run. Next, she stood the bike on its stand, engine still running, and came to help me to my feet. She led me to the bike and helped me back on it. I started to leave but stopped to say something lame to her like, "Thank you" but by this time she was walking back into the woods, looking even more as if in a cloudy haze than when she first appeared.

I managed the last leg of the race now determined that I would never ever do anything quite this stupid again in my entire life.

When I told my friends who were already back at our camp about the rescue by the Indian angel, they wrote me off as completely delusional and handed me a beer for a quick cure.

I have never known what to make of this really strange experience. It was real. There is no doubt about that, but really now, who is going to believe that an idiot motorbike rider in the middle of the woods in some God-forsaken desert would be rescued by a small Indian woman who never uttered a word?

How about you? Do you believe it?