

MY MEMORIES

by Clive Sullivan

What little I had left!



Clive Sullivan
15th November 1948 – 12th July 2026

Contents

1 Introduction	3
2 Growing Up	4
3 Europe	6
4 Crete.....	8
5 Florida	10
6 Hippy Gary.....	11
7 Florida and a new V8 engine.....	13
8 Alabama, Mississippi, & Louisiana	14
9 On To Texas.....	16
10 Texas.....	18
11 Cowboys and Indians	20
12 Hello Mexico	21
13 Goodbye Mexico	23
14 Back in the USA	24
15 Arizona - My Fav. State	26
16 Flagstaff & Phoenix Az	29
17 "Grand Canyon"	31
18 California.....	33
19 Death Valley & "Las Vegas"	35
20 Bye To The Old Girl (Dodge).....	37
21 "Amtrak" Phoenix To Vancouver To UK.....	39
22 Back to the UK.....	42
23 Late 80's Berlin.....	45
24 Turkey.....	47
25 Altinkum Turkey, Home For The Next Year	50
26 Turkey & Cos Police Cell.....	53
27 Being Robbed	56
28 Fortnightly Bonus / Saving Lives/Me & Marriage.....	59
29 Me Married / Chris's Bike Wreck U.S.A	63
30 The Bahama's & Motorhome	66
31 3 Months In Miami Hospital.....	69

32 Gracelands /JD Distillery/Avril	73
33 Goodbye U.S.A. Hello Blighty.....	76
34 Other Trips Venice	78
35 Castles & The Alps.....	80
36 Prague	82
37 Egypt.....	83
38 Athens Greece My 60 th	87
39 Ride To China And Back	90
40 Ukraine & Russian Borders	94
41 Kazakhstan Border	97
42 Chinese Border A Few Clicks Away	100
43 Bishkek Kyrgyzstan Visa's.....	104
44 Stuck In Kyrgyzstan	108
45 Kaz/Russ/Siberian Border	111
46 Summing Up.....	115

1 Introduction

I was born in Karachi Pakistan 15th Nov 1948 I also have an older half-brother Gordon Donne 10oct 1944 also born in India, we share the same mother and Gordon is nothing to do with my Father Roland Skeaf, My Mother Gladys May Dring was also born in India as was her Mother Edith Mable Dring.

In 1949 I Was Christened "Clive, Russell Skeaf dad Roland was present and his name is on my Christening certificate, But I don't know if my parents ever Married, I have never come across any proof of Marriage? I'm not sure but because of something to do with British rule of India the Raj non- native people were invited to leave India early 1950s something to do with the independence of Pakistan, of which was when my Mother, Gladys and my dad couldn't agree on where to go my mum had never been to England but that was where her roots lay, and her 2 brothers lived, and had no connection with Australia at all, and this was where my mum, and our dad had to make a difficult decision, and dad chose to go to Australia.

2 Growing Up

He had to go to Australia to take care of his ailing Father (Grandad) , so my Mother, her mother, my brother Gordon and myself boarded a ship to the UK , I was only about a couple of years old, but I was told later that my mum had to find the cheapest way to get us to the UK, and that was on board a cargo steamer that stopped at every port both sides of Africa to off load and on load cargo, so the trip took nearly 3 months .

When we arrived in the UK we were given shelter by the 'salvation army' until we got a house of our own in a really nice village called Droxford. About 3 years later my mum got really ill with double pneumonia and pleurisy where they had to remove her ribs and left lung she had to go into a special Hospital where she remained for 3 years, Our Grandmother was not at all well and couldn't take care of Gordon and me , so we ended up in a Children's Home for 3 years, the home was run by the religious order of Nuns, and they were extremely strict, I remember many things there, and overall it wasn't a happy place, my bedroom had about 30 kids in it ! and I was the youngest aged about 4 and I will always remember being punished for wetting the bed I use to be in utmost terror if I woke up in a wet bed slap on the legs was the order of the day

Most of these children were orphans whose parents were killed during the bombings across England from the Germans in the 2nd World War. When it was time to leave the kids home our mum now better turned up to take us home and was cuddling me I screamed and Gordon said Clive this is mum, nah not my mum, my mum has a big white triangle for a hat, that was the "Sister nun".

Anyway, moving on 1954 Mum met my future step dad, Leonard Sullivan (Len) they married, and had my sister Avril, in 1955 he was a wonderful father and gave us a good life. I did the normal things kids do, I didn't do too well at school, I was always bunking off. I then started my love for Motorbikes i enjoyed motorbikes and went on many biker runs, I don't know if you are familiar with the "Mods & Rockers" in the sixties, I was a Rocker as I rode a motorcycle, and the Mods rode Scooters we hated them as much as they hated us, and every year around Easter the Mods & Rockers from all over the UK and Europe about 2.000 of us would always meet up on Brighton beach and took it over completely, and that's where we would beat the crap out of each-other, there was always a very strong police presence about 100+ as they knew it always ended up in a fight, and even though they steamed in with their truncheons made no difference, it all lasted about an hour or so, and was always televised on the news.

The police couldn't stop us even though some of us sustained some serious injuries, one year I ended up with a broken tooth, that went right through my very fat lip and a broken nose, the amazing thing was at the end of it we respected each-other's turf/beach for the rest of the day, and got our beers in separate pubs, it never got to shaking hands, but we

settled down to get drunk before heading home battered and bruised, but a good weekend had by both. On leaving some of them and some of us would shout "see ya next year I have been several times in later years but the fighting was very minimal we were all too old for all that nonsense anyway dentures are not cheap these days. There are a few die-hard mods & Rockers that still meet up every August Bank Holiday not too fight but talk about thier Lumbago etc and their shite Pensions lol.

I had numerous jobs by the age of 20, a jack of all trades and a master of bugger all, I just wanted to travel. While aged 14 still at school a friend and me sneaked into Southampton docks and boarded the big continental ferry to Le' Havre France, a 6 hour crossing when everyone was off the ship we waited till the French cleaners had finished cleaning and we just walked off with them, and through customs, no one anywhere, we then thumbed it down to Paris, We had no money what-so-ever or Passport, but survived by eating farmers produce and stealing from shops, we had fun.

After a few days we snuck onto a train for Switzerland, where we got caught by rail police, then handed over to local police and put in a cell for a couple of hours we were escorted back to Le' Harve with, a rail police officer. This little jaunt cost our parents a lot of money, was good though, gave me the incentive to travel more. (legally though).

I got married to my first wife the Mother of my 2 daughters Debbie & Cara in 1970 we bought a tumbled down cottage in the countryside built around the eighteenth century, we totally rebuilt it over a 2 year period and decided to sell up and go north, and I went to work down the coal mines which I always wanted to do there are no coalmines down south, I found it very interesting, but dangerous, at least 2 miners were killed on my shift once

Back to the sixties for a moment, I had a short spell in the Army and when I left, me and a friend spent a couple of years "catch handing" that's where you get out on the Highway stick your thumb up and get a lift to the next town/city and get local work we did this throughout England, we got into all kinds of scrapes in and out of court for different things, nothing serious mind, I also found time in the sixties to play Guitar "Rock & Roll"

3 Europe

During the mid to late 1960s - 1970s I knuckled down and got a proper job as a welder, later, car mechanic, and many more adding strings to my bow, I worked out that I must have had 30+ different jobs. I got divorced mid 70s after moving back down south where I met my new partner to be for the next 11 years Heather She died of the big C a few years later, but not before I planned, and did a trip all around Europe, taking her, my Dad, and a friend in a Motor home. We did France, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, over the Dolomite's in to Venice Italy, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, It was a very good trip, but unfortunately it had to end, and go back to Blighty, and back to work.

When we were travelling through southern Germany (Bavaria) we visited one of the German extermination camps Dachau out of respect, for the genocide of those who perished, it was an awful place, seeing all the gas chambers, and incineration ovens, in Austwisch Poland between them exterminated over 6,000,000 Jews, you could stand there and feel all the sadness, misery and the suffering. I for one will never go back, we all said a quiet prayer for all the men, woman, and children who perished at the hands of adolf hitler, he doesn't deserve capital letters for his name.

Back in England and looking for work, a friend and myself got a job installing cavity wall insulation ,we would leave home on a Monday morning 04.00 and start the job furthest away normally way down in Cornwall and ending up nearer home by Friday, my work mate Dave and me would stay in Pub B&Bs, one evening we were traveling back to our digs when descending down a very steep hill, the brakes totally failed and the van slammed into a huge Roman built stone bridge. and put my mate through the windshield but he was stopped travelling any further as his legs were trapped by the seat, and other stuff, it was around mid-nite, pitch dark on a country road and no one in sight, he was conscious but in a lot of pain, I said we have to get out, as we were both soaked in petrol that we carry for the machine, I noticed that one headlight was still on and said we got to go Dave there is still power to all the vehicle one spark and were toast he couldn't move, I managed to get myself free, went to get out and as soon as my feet touch the ground I fell in a heap in awful pain, I didn't realise I had broken my left leg, But I had to get my mate out of this van or we all will be going up in flames, I managed to get round to the passenger side and I kept yanking on his right foot to free him, the surgeon later said I probably did much more damage to his foot than what the accident did, I can still hear the bones braking as I wrestled with getting him out, don't forget I was doing this in total darkness and I was in agony myself also the screams he gave out will chill me for the rest of my life, during all this he was punching me on the back of my head I don't think he realised I was trying to save him (ungrateful bastard lol) I managed to drag him well away behind a large tree and waited for the van to explode, but it never did ?? so he could have stayed there till the Emergency crew turned up, I did try

explain to him what had happened, it took him a while to realise what had gone on, about 10 minutes.

Later a car pulled up and this couple made us feel a lot better he sent his wife off to find a house to call emergency services, no mobile phones 1982 he got some material from his car and tightly bound my mates foot and ankle, to stem some of the bleeding and I pulled it back into its normal straight position at the same time, I learnt stuff like this during my Army training. I was ok really a broken leg, and cuts and bruises on my head not from the accident, but from the 5 minutes of my mate beating me around the head to make me stop, there's gratitude for you eh! It took my mate about a year of surgery to be able to walk. We were taken to the Royal Devon & Exeter Hospital initially, and later transferred to a Portsmouth Hospital very local to where we lived. His foot had to be seen by a fracture specialist from Holland as there was a chance he could lose his foot

He did thank me in the end for what I did to him he said I didn't realise he was being rescued, I said I knew what I had to do and was going to be extremely painful, so I didn't piss about, I just went for it, and I never felt a thing lol,

4 Crete

During the 80s I started buying and selling 2nd hand cars, only cheapies for first time buyers, I would buy them so long as they looked ok like good bodywork, clean and tidy but with mechanical problems. I wouldn't touch a scabby looking car, I just wanted to fix mechanical issues, did that for a few years.

In between work I would take off either with a mate or on my own, to places like the Greek island of Crete and do some Olive picking during picking season, November, December, January, February, that was having to put down light metal matting under the olive trees to catch the olives that fall when the branches are beaten with a large stick with a piece rubber tyre fixed to one end, and if you broke a branch you would lose all the Greek Drachma you had earned for that day, Here is a useless bit of information for you There are 17 million olive trees on Crete !! and just for your information, few people don't know what Virgin oil is ? It's the very first pressing to extract the oil before its pressed again, there you go useless info lol.

After Crete I came back home and learned to become a Multi-core cable jointer and did that in the UK for a while, then I spotted an ad in the papers for a cable jointer in Bermuda, Yep you got it I was off to Bermuda, because they were putting all the overhead cables mainly phone lines underground as when hurricanes hit they would be brought down time and time again, and being a Volcanic island it was bloody hard work, and where you couldn't dig a trench we put it through trunking above ground, 4 weeks later I had had enough, the company I worked for "Bermuda bell" paid very good money, but I didn't want to be digging, as well as cable jointing had words with the boss and I quit went back home and got a job with a big company cable jointing with no digging stayed with them a couple of years.

Met up with a woman, Tracey, and we became partners she moved in and later we decided to do America, I had a good friend from the UK who moved out to Chicago years ago, I phoned him and said we were coming out and could he put us up until we were ready to go. He was at O'Hare airport Chicago to pick us up and stayed about 3 weeks with him where I bought a V8 Dodge Tradesman Mini-bus and we stripped it out internally and took out all seats and put down a floor and built it up from there. We had everything we needed water, cooker, a bed, a fridge, TV, blacked out all the windows, made sure all doors had real heavy-duty security locks. We stowed away necessary spares we may need, like, alternator , distributor ,water pump, spark plugs, H T leads shock absorbers, brake shoes, thermostat, brake bleeding kit, and much more I managed to wrap them all in heavy duty Grease paper and fixed most of it underneath wheel arches, and under body work, so if it was going to give any problems we had the most likely to fail spares, but you can bet your bottom dollar the one bit you thought you wouldn't need, fails lol. And it did big time!

We left our friend in Chicago in middle of January amid 2 / 3 feet of snow Brrr and headed south passing through many states down through and over the Great Smokey mountains, one night in North Carolina mountains we bedded down for our 3rd night, in the Smokey mountains we hadn't done much mileage. It was very slow driving as a lot of roads were compacted with snow or closed altogether and I thought we were both going to freeze to death, I don't think I have ever felt this cold in my life. So, I had to let the dodge run all night, I turned the idle up so it would charge the battery better, as we had the heater motor blasting out and tick-over would not have coped, and there was no fear of the engine over heating lol.

We slept really well and cooked a big breakfast and set off south again, as we were entering Tennessee the roads became clearer and we were making good headway, our target was to go down through Georgia Alabama and into Florida, we weren't prepared for what was about to happen next.

5 Florida

We had just left Daytona beach after spending the whole day at "Kennedys space centre" and would highly recommend a visit to anyone visiting Florida. You can go into the huge building that houses the space Shuttle and even touch it while it's still in its hanger, then they take you beneath the Launch pad directly under the Shuttle where these enormous tunnels about 15-foot round 7 or 8 of them, these are where the huge exhaust gasses are directed away during ignition, and lift off.

From its hanger to the launch pad is 1 mile, it takes all day and sometimes 2 days to arrive from its hanger to launch pad on a rail. Very slowly. Inside the control room, and this is the actual control room used in every launch, there are dozens of screens, and what they do is sit you in these chairs and everyone has a screen in front of them and they then run the last shuttle expedition as if it was actually lifting off for real, you see, and hear everything, all the way upwards and onward, brilliant.

Then you go into this huge museum and you can climb into the capsule of Apollo 13 the mission that nearly killed them all it is the actual capsule not a copy, and it's so small you wonder how they all fitted in, there is so much to see, what made my days highlight was sitting in the module, that came back from space.

6 Hippy Gary

Jumping forward a few years, I wanted to mention, in case I forget later, When I was living in Florida, early 90's I lived about 60 miles (100 km) from Kennedy Space Centre, and if they were doing a launch I would watch it lift off on the telly, and then run outside and watch it from the garden in real time, Night time launches were absolutely Awesome. Ok, let's get back on track here to what happened next...

We were driving through Alabama ,and into the warm air of Florida, and the vastness of the Everglades, heading towards this town called *Clewiston*, not on the tourist guide which later on would play a big part my life, right now life on the road was great, both of us were happy and listening to the Eagles on our 8 track cassette player, when completely out of nowhere, " BOOM" my V8 Engine decided to blow its self-up, no rattles to warn me it just went with a big bang.

So here we are miles into the everglades with no sign of life, apart from the local alligators, the engine was between the 2 front seats so unclipped the housing to get access to see what had happened, all I could see was engine oil everywhere. Eventually I felt around the crank cases and in an instant, I knew what had happened, the engine decided to blow a rod and I could put my whole hand into the engine casing, and I knew then I was in a whole barrel of trouble, I never packed a spare engine!!!

It was midday and there was traffic, not lots as I would try to leave out the Interstate/ motorways , so I lifted the hood, and tied a white t shirt to the door handle to let people know I had broken down, a little tip my friend in Chicago told me, let me point out that when I registered the Dodge in my name and I was given an Illinois tag, and southern people avoided you if you were from Illinois as you were northern trash and not to be messed with ?? "don't ask no idea".

About 30 mins later I could hear a motor cycle and quickly we put on our leather biker jackets that we brought with us from the UK this big hairy dude (Hippy Gary) pulled up and parked his Harley and with a big smile through his 2 foot beard and a welcomed bikers Hand-shake, believe it or not he is a motor mechanic in the next town, Clewiston, about 15 km he told us to sit right where we were and he will be back with help. About an hour later we could hear this rumble a few km off and I was gob-smacked, there were half a dozen bikers and a very big pick-up truck they were very intrigued with us as they loved the English, (thank god) they brought Pizza and a case of Budweiser and we just sat for about an hour at the roadside talking, eating, and drinking, not at all talking about my poor engine.

When we were all hitched up to this Pick-up and towed the dodge to his workshop, and we carried on drinking, there is us worrying about are home and transport, and all they were interested in was partying one of the bikers, Casey, who worked as a train driver for the

sugar mill, said we could stay at his place for as long as it takes, we were over the moon, and relishing in our new found friends that people in the UK said were not nice people, how little did they know.

We ended up staying with them for about 4/5 weeks, what great people they and their families and friends were. After the first couple of weeks Hippy Gary turned up on his scooter (Harley Davidson) and told me there was a Plymouth Dodge coming in in the next few days and it has the exact same engine I needed. The car had been in a rear end collision and was a total wreck but engine was ok, a few days later my new-found friends were taking out my blown engine, we cleaned up the donor engine and fitted everything that was needed and Gary fired it up outside of the vehicle I said are you nuts Gary it's a bloody V8 wont it take off or jump around!! Nah he said 3 of us will steady it, we always do this before we install any engine, especially a V8 Christ what a relief and what a sound, there was no exhaust only the headers when he revved it up, the noise from this V8 was ear busting with huge blue flames from the headers, I was a very happy bunny, and they set about installing it into the Dodge At the weekend Gary did a full service on it and even took the head off and did a decoke on it, it ran like a dream. Later when it was all buttoned up we went to our local biker's pubs in it Less's Bar, and the Wild turkey Tavern, another of the bikers only pubs, boy what a night that was, well that's what they told me lol.

Over the next few days I told them I had to leave to carry on our tour of the states as much as I would love to stay, they even got me work if I wanted to stay a bit longer. The next weekend they all got together and rode with us to where they sprung a huge Surprise on us, we pulled into this big Hotel on Daytona beach where I went to say good bye what I didn't know was we were all booked in for the weekend what a send-off that was. I was going to miss them but not before exchanging addresses I pulled out of the car park and we were both in tears and as were a few of them. What an experience we just had. But we were on our way again.

7 Florida and a new V8 engine

Meant to mention this earlier After the Dodge was all sorted we moved out of Casey's house and parked it in an RV (Recreation Vehicle) Resort park. We lived and worked in the park for the next 5 weeks and hanging out with our new founds Friends in the evenings.

I Spoke to the owner of the park about our plans for the next 10 months or, so touring the US and would he mind if we asked the people stopping here if they would like their Trailer (we call them caravans) washed for a dollar a foot plus de-mould their awnings, to earn some cash, he said go right ahead.

These people are nick-named "Northern Snow Birds" as most of them are retired people who every year spend about 6 months in the Florida sunshine and warmth away from there cold northern states and then go back in there summer. We knock their door and simply asked if they would like our service to wash thier trailer& awning for a Dollar a foot and of course, they said yes. We also did waxing at \$2 a foot very hard work especially when it's a 40 foot Motorhome, one this big wanting wash, wax, and awning, would earn us \$200 minimum.

One thing I have learned about Americans they love to put their hands in their pockets for any service you can provide for them, there were about 200 + trailers and about 20 odd RV, Motorhomes, so off into town to get kitted up like a couple of large buckets a couple of soft brooms, Chamois leathers, detergent wax etc.

We would charge a dollar a foot Plus awnings \$20 average size of trailers being 30/ 40 odd feet, that's at least \$50 for one, times at least 5 a day = \$250 a day x 5 days go figure eh! one-week (7) days we made just over \$2,000 Loads of money, with minimal overheads, we did this in several other parks on our travels and were always welcome, Ok will get back on track.

8 Alabama, Mississippi, & Louisiana

By the way the day after I told them I was going to leave soon, they tied me up, hands and feet and threw me in the back of a car? All they said was they were kidnaping me for my own good? The 3 of them all laughing and wouldn't tell me a thing, about an hour's drive to Fort Lauderdale they pulled up untied me and put a blindfold on me, went into this building... guess what it was a "tittie bar"

I wondered why we left Tracey behind, we all had a good couple of hours and drove back, not quite sure how Tracey took it, but we never talked about it. We travelled through Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana took our time and checked out the wonderful scenery, very pretty down there, booked in various motels as we did often on all our traveling through the US to get showered, and visit a laundrette to do our clothes.

Back to scenery for a min, the Great Mississippi River is beautiful picture all weeping willow type trees branches laying on the river with these big old wooden properties all different Pastel colours, and big old Porches with swing beds and these good ole boys "old black guys" we came across one of these Hill-billy guys strumming his Guitar and he beckoned for us to come and we had a good old chat I said to him to carry on playing, he asked if I played and I said yes, but not the way you're playing he went into the house and came out with a guitar we had a bit of a laugh eating sweetcorn and drinking beer.

I was intrigued by his guitar as he could make a real nice sound I had not heard before it's called Blue grass what was different was where you put your fingers on to make a chord. He tuned his guitar to that chord without him putting any fingers on and then he played using different non chords, but finger picked with his right hand, he taught me how to do it and I have played like that on and off when I got home, I can't play very well now due to an illness, but I try.

By this time there were all these black guys had turned up as there was word about this English couple in town, we were invited to stay a while and eat with them, Good ol Cajun food bloody lovely what an evening by 8pm there was dozens of these lovely people no whites. The Mississippi River and all the foliage dangling and flickering in the moonlit river, and the atmosphere was electric, by midnight the home owner invited us to stay a while, and we spent a couple of nights there with them, smashing people.

If you ever get to go there go easy on the "moonshine" its stronger than you think, loved it. Morning came and we all had breakfast, and just as we were saying our tearful goodbyes the Black mama came out with a bag full of pre-pared food like sweetcorn fried chicken corn dogs and many other vitals and she also gave us a bottle of their home-made moonshine and a bit of info on how not, to drink it, like not too quickly lol.

A few days later we drove into New Orleans, (The Big Easy) and had a day in the "Hard-rock-café" we drank and ate there and there were non-stop live bands didn't have to pay to get in, late in the evening we just went bar to bar and the whole town was music and nothing but a good atmosphere. In the evening we saw this Cajun Restaurant this very large wooden building full of Character and about 80 years old so had to give it a go we ordered up a "fillet Gumbo" the next night we tried "Crawfish pie" and our final night there we tried "Jambali" absolutely brilliant, there all similar to a good stew.

We had already parked the Dodge up in K marts car park for 3 days as we knew we would be plastered by the end of every day we got a taxi back to the Dodge and went to sleep. Into Texas Tomorrow.

9 On To Texas

Soon after leaving Louisiana and heading towards Houston Texas, about 50ks outside of Houston, we started to, what I thought losing power from the engine ? as it was struggling and at that same moment I could smell heat and as I took my foot off the gas pedal it slowed down very quickly i realised I had a seized brake, so I pulled off the road to check it out and as I was feeling behind the wheel to find that one seemed hot, it was the driver's side rear, and we were not in an ideal place to start any repairs so moved on a bit to where we could pull over away from busy traffic, I took the wheel off and tried to pheel hub off but was way too hot , I tried tapping it off from behind with a hammer but was worried about cracking the cast iron hub, so we thought we would eat lunch and let it cool down.

About an hour later I tried again but it wasn't going anywhere I then managed to release the shoes enough to turn the hub with a screwdriver through an adjustment hole, I could now at least turn the hub but I knew the minuet I put my foot on the brake I would be back to the same problem, so improvisation was needed, I found a hose clamp on the heater I could use so I turned the tap off that shuts off the flow of water to the heater, didn't need a heater it was hot enough, so got back under the Dodge and disconnected the hydraulic brake hose, folded it over and put the hose clamp on it, no leaks the job was a goodun, We got to the outskirts of Houston and found a repair garage to get it fixed, I knew what had caused It, the piston inside the slave cylinder was seized I told him I could fix it but didn't have the equipment.

We chatted for a while and he was more interested in asking us questions about England, nice old boy, he was a 1 man operation in a what looked like a 100 year old workshop but had everything in it he needed, he disappeared into another room and came back with some beers, my kind of man, time was getting on so I said can you fix it for me, and he said if you know what you're doing you can use my equipment and get on and fix it yourself, as he was real busy and a guy was coming tonight to collect the car he was working on, Tracey was in the house entertaining the wife of the guy I was talking with, So I got on with fixing my problem and was going well until I tried to get the seized piston out, he took it off me and using compressed air he got it out, the brake cylinder was a mess no good cleaning it up false economy as we had many thousand miles to cover. It was about 5pm, and he said the parts shop in town will have one but by the time I get there they would be closed, he said you can put your wheel back on and move Dodge round to the side of the house and sleep in it there tonight, he said go on in and get yourselves showered, and he will be done in an hour or two he then said come eat with us and tell us all about England.....

There are some wonderful people in this world and there was 2 of them right here, they were a bit religious so had to watch my ps and qs we had meat loaf and veg and talked well into the nite. In the morning got up had coffee went out to the workshop, he gave me directions to the parts shop and gave me the keys to his pick-up, more nice people. Before I

left I checked out the other brakes and noticed a very frayed hose so got one as well, oh! and got a couple of hose clamps, had a good look round the Dodge and all was good. it was about midday and I asked the guy how much I owed him and he said "nothing" as he didn't do anything I tried to give him 50 bucks but he wasn't having any of it, I went into the house and tried to give it to his wife but nope she wouldn't have it, I said then give it to your Church, and left it on the table, We said a big thank you, and set off again.

10 Texas

My first impression of Texas was Cattle, thousands of them, and nodding donkeys, these are basically machines sucking up crude oil, they were everywhere, we stopped in Houston and spent the day checking this busy city out, We were checking out property prices and you could buy a nice size detached 3 bed and a fair bit of land twice over for the value of mine back home, and my house is a small terrace 2 bed with a tiny garden, amazing, thoughts of relocating got my attention, anyway gave myself a reality check.

There is not a lot to see in Texas it's pretty flat with dessert and grasslands. In the morning we drove the coast road of the "Gulf Of Mexico" to a town called Galveston, only went there because of the song sung by Glen Cambell very nice we found a good place to stop overnight, we built a fire and cooked a nice Juicy steak, only the one, as she is a veggie, bugger that, you're in the ideal place in America to get the finest steak, so I left her to munch on a carrot or two, had a swim in the Colorado river and bedded down for the night. We were woken by heavy rain beating down on the steel roof at 5am and not possible to get back to sleep so watched a bit of TV. We headed off for San Antonio, Texas, and just on the outskirts of town was this nice Bar & Restaurant pulled in and got a couple of beers and sat at a table outside, when this guy came out of the bar and introduced himself to us he said, you guys from England ? guess he overheard us shook hands and tipped his Stetson to Tracey what a Gentleman, I think Trace was falling in love.

He mentioned he had been to England a couple of times on vacation, and loved the people, the culture and our Pubs. we talked about our plans, and he asked if we were looking for work in between our travels, and I told him yes, he offered us work if we wanted. This guy was obviously the boss man, He was about 6 foot in his late fifties, well built with a cracking beige checked shirt, beige pants all well pressed, Cowboy boots and a very expensive looking Stetson, and a deep gravelly voice, yes mam, your exact looking "American Cowboy" only thing missing, he was in a very big fancy pick-up instead of on a Horse, He explained he wanted me to drive a pickup full of fence poles and fencing wire and a post-holer , oh and a very heavy sledge hammer , and drive around his Vast area of land , thousands of acre's he had for his Cattle, and repair damaged posts and fencing, and Trace would lend herself in the Ranch house helping his wife, cooking for the ranch hands not bad eh, and we could have earned a lot of money, but, I thought this was heavy work for me, I Don't mind hard work but not on this trip, and Trace didn't want to be indoors scrubbing floors and general house work basically, it's not that we didn't want the money, we had enough funds in an account to fall back on.

We thanked him gladly, and I said we really earn extra cash in RV Resorts without breaking a sweat ,He was ok with that, and bought us a couple of beers out and wished us all the best, he advised us to take care, and said there are people out there, not as nice as the ones you have told me about, and said don't let what I have just said worry you or to put you off just be aware. He tipped his hat and was gone. New Mexico & Arizona. Here we come.

11 Cowboys and Indians

We spent the next couple of weeks driving through, Austin, San Antonio, and explored the area's, we came across abandoned Forts, from the old Cowboys and Indians era, Mountainous area's more forts and other interesting stuff. Along the roadside for miles were a lot of interesting and colourful gift type Stalls with original Indians in all their regalia, selling Indian clothing, Jewellery, dream catchers and all sorts of souvenirs made from alligator skins, rattlesnake skins, turtle shells, in fact everything connected with their culture, Turquoise was very popular and we were told by our "Texan cowboy friend" earlier if you buy any turquoise to lick it, and it should have a salty taste, if it doesn't then it's not real Turquoise. these Indian people won't let you photograph them as they believe it takes their spirit away, but there were ways of taking a crafty one when they were talking to tourists, Oh a bit of useless info that is true, full blooded Indians do not grow any facial hair at all, if they have a 5 o'clock shadow don't buy anything from them as they are not full blooded Indians. All across America the different tribes were given vast areas of land as Indian Reservations, of which they have total control, and their own Policing, and schooling, In a lot of States in America there is no Gambling, except on an Indian Reservations, and they don't mind the "Non- Native Americans" spending their dollars in their gambling houses.

As we are driving aimlessly we go off the beaten track and come across abandoned Homesteads all derelict and quite a way from any towns, they look like they have not been lived in for 60,70 years, but in a weird way of being interesting, I feel the hustle & bustle of 19 century family life, with kids growing up, and the homestead becoming too small and needed a bigger home and more land for growing crops and rearing cattle, so they moved on to pastures new. We followed the Rio Grande over the next week up to El Paso, on the American / Mexican border, we arrived late afternoon at the border and decided not to cross over today, as I wanted to give the old Dodge a good service, she had done over 3,000 Ks since our second hand engine was fitted, so new Oil, oil filter plugs, splashed out on 8 new H.T leads, coil lead, distributor cap, as these were the old ones off my blown engine, and I needed to bleed the brakes on her, as brake pedal had become a bit spongy, and had to pump the brake to get a decent pedal, I thought I had better do it Stateside where they speak English, as my Spanish was not up to scratch, and if anything went pear shaped doing the service, I had a better chance of getting it sorted: "Off to Mexico"

12 Hello Mexico

left early for the Mexican Border, I was very excited as I had been looking forward to Mexico. With Passports, Vehicle docs, and paperwork all sorted and ready for border Guards perusal, and was very surprised to be just waved through, not in the least bit interested ?? Guess there not to fussed about who enters there country, but as I looked across to the vehicles leaving Mexico entering the US there were dozens and dozens of cars, trucks, lorries, people, all being checked and searched, with some cars with seats, carpets, luggage all out on the tarmac, (Blacktop) of course, drugs.

There was a lot of Mexican people on the Mexican side trying to sell peso's for US dollars and they just surround you, shouting in very broken English offering best rates, but I didn't want to, as I didn't want to be ripped off, I would change them in the next town that I was heading for, which is what we did, I couldn't believe it I changed a 100 dollars and got about a Quarter of a Million Peso's back (very Grubby notes) I felt like I should wash my hands I have never felt so rich, Carried onto the nearest town Chihuahua, about 90 Ks and pulled into a very big eatery where there were a lot of people sitting outside in the shade eating drinking playing cards, and it felt quite welcoming sat down at the table and this untidy waiter with a huge Moustache came out with a menu, didn't have a clue what to order it was in Spanish eventually an older guy who was sat near us came over and helped us out I had a burrito and they didn't know what a vegetarian was, I joked and said bring her a carrot to chew on, she'll be fine, lol she went inside and pointed to food items and came back with a salad, no carrot though ??.

We walked around and I couldn't believe how a culture and buildings and people could be So different and divided by a river these little square flat roofed houses with 2 foot poles sticking out of there walls just below the roof, had no idea why, they don't hang anything on them, and I still don't know. later on we heard some Mexican music coming from a bar, so went in there, and had a few drinks, spent a lot of time talking English to them while they answer back in Spanish ! no one had any idea what the hell we were saying to each other, but you know what, it didn't matter, we spoke for like 2 hours, and you were none the wiser of what we had chatted about, I remember my belly was aching from all the laughing. It was a good evening, it was very warm with a sweet smell in in the air, we decided to go to the outside of town where it would be Quieter, and parked up behind a shabby tire place for the night, it was away from the road and quite dark, so got onto the bed to sleep couldn't get in bed it was too hot. About 2 am I woke up to hear some whispering in Spanish I woke Tracey and said shush listen, I didn't understand Spanish but I knew they were up to no good, they have seen the American tag and were curious, I'm not sure if they knew anyone was in side, I moved very Quietly inside to get my baseball bat I had bought in Chicago for this very situation, just at that time I could hear someone trying the door handles, and were still whispering quietly, I said to trace we stay in here coz this is our safest place inside, a few

minutes went by but felt like an hour, I could work out they sounded quite young i don't know 15, 16, but by now I had had enough so I quietly unlocked our padlock we had fitted in Chicago and told trace to stay inside, I threw the double side doors open in a flash and jumped out screaming like a banshee waving my bat like a mad man and they ran off with thier tails between thier legs, still screaming at the top of my voice I ran after them but only a few yards, just to let them know I wasn't afraid of them, I was, but what other choice did I have ? I must of looked, and sounded like a psycho. She said we better go park somewhere else, I said no way it's too late, and you can bet they won't be coming back (I hope)

13 Goodbye Mexico

Woke up about 7am, slept well considering our middle of the night Prowlers, cooked up some bacon and eggs for me, and yeah you're getting the hang of this !! carrot and eggs for trace lol. did a good check over the Dodge where we had stuff fixed no oil leaks, or any signs of brake fluids, we had a look at the map, and didn't quite know what we were looking for exactly, so just headed South and go off the main roads to check out the small Villages and local cultures. As we were driving the whole landscape looks so primitive, most of the vehicles were dirty and damaged, with bits missing and old, mind you it all seemed to blend in with everything else like nothing has changed for 100 years, even there small homes were not planned in an orderly fashion ? just build it where, and how you want, very few had any kind of gardens, and no fences for borders. No matter where we went, all you see is the same, everywhere are these people in grubby smocks squatting on stone doorsteps well-tanned little scraggy faces, staring back at you with no expression what-so-ever, quite unnerving really, I said lets go get a beer, so we stopped at a bar and got a couple, a bit like the first bar where we all chatted away not having a clue to what was said, only these guys didn't say anything, even though I tried to smile and look friendly, I'm starting to think these Mexicans don't like tourist.

We left there dusty bar and travelled on to a bigger city where we parked up and had a look around, went into a food store and stocked up on supplies food & beer, even in this city you felt eyes boring into the back of your head, the only thing I could think of they were not on a tourists route after noticing very few white people. We decided to go back north as we never felt at ease here, and our main objective was to tour the States, but we knew before we left England we were going to be driving along the US and Mexican border, and would be a shame to not cross over, so headed back the 2 days to the Mexican & US border, leaving a bitter sweet taste in my mouth and quite upset of my expectations. But realising that if we were in Cancun or some other tourist place then it would be a different story. When we arrived at the border It was our turn to queue, loads of vehicles maybe 40 + waiting their turn, up ahead of us were blue lights and lots of kaffuffle with border police and regular police I said we are not going anywhere soon, so locked up Dodge and went to see what was what, they had these 2 guys looked like afro/American being handcuffed while other guards continued to strip there car, obviously drugs.

Had no idea how long we were going to be there so got a couple of beers out of the cool box found some shade and chilled out 2 hours later it was our turn, I thought here we go I gave them our passports and paperwork, while they were rummaging through our stuff he asked why we were only in Mexico for a short while and I told him we were touring the US and it would have been a shame not to have a look, he was ok with that and called the guys over and basically said in good broken English ,we were free to go, and he shouted saying, have a safe journey, and maybe you come see all of Mexico sometime, not bloody likely lol.

14 Back in the USA

Well Mexico was not up to what I thought, mind you where we drove was the real deal and not all tarted up for visitors, and I guess deep down I got what I wanted, True Culture.

Leaving El Paso behind us, we drove heading for Arizona and camped up outside a small town, the scenery was very pretty, with a lake, river, and mountains as there was about 3 hours till dark we went waking and taking in the scenery and decided to stay for 2 or 3 nights, and giving me a break from driving, later on we walked, the 10 minutes into town from where we parked up, and had a great evening in this Bar come café and got on well with the locals. {Oh, forgot to mention everything in Mexico is so cheap we bought a bottle of Tequila Mescal for 2 US Dollars, for those that don't know what the difference between a bottle of "Tequila", and a bottle of Tequila "Mescal" is the Mescal is a Grubb like larvae that has a hallucination effect when eaten?

Who knows, by the time you get to the bottom of the bottle your so god dam drunk, I don't think anyone would notice. Ok well back to now. We had a great time and one guy said if your hanging around for a couple of nights come back here tomorrow night (Saturday) as we have live bands on and so we did, they told me to go get our Dodge and park it behind the building, so we didn't have far to stagger home, what a great few days we had listening to some good "Old Southern country music," and I can remember thinking this was exactly what I imagined America to be like. About 300ks later we Crossed over the Arizona State line and pulled into a Gas station to fill up and have some lunch, and we had our map on the table and looking where to go next and the Gas station attendant said we must head for a town called Jerome, and he pointed out on the map and said there are no signs for Jerome as the town is no longer advertised, take this dusty old road for 30ks and you will come across an old gold mining town, it's now one of Americas protected places ? I'm surprised it's not been vandalised.

We set off to it and was astonished to see a whole town with stores, Barbers shop, hardware store, groceries store a big ole bar and music hall etc there was no one about and you have to picture this, the main street has wooden buildings on both sides of the street with the old raised wooden walkways you can walk through the swing doors and look around the music hall and bar tables and chairs were all like in place, everywhere was covered in dust over the last 80 years we even went into the Sherriff office with cells and books it's very hard to imagine but look back when you watched the old cowboys and Indians film it was like that to a tee, there is a plaque saying when the Gold in Jerome ran out the people left to go where there was more gold, they just upped and left leaving the old town fully Intact behind, I think it said around 1890 we stayed there all day and went to the Jerome Cemetery , and there were so many miners buried here all died while mining. I don't know how true this next bit is, but sure made me chuckle.... It said on the head stone, Here lies the second fastest gun in the west, it could have been quite true, as the grave

looked authentic enough, We camped there overnight right in the middle of town, and we thought Gerome was so eerie in the daytime sunshine, you won't believe how spooky it was in the moonlight, absolute quiet with only the sounds of Crickets no lights anywhere Just moonlight. The next day we had a look for the open cast mine entrances and found a couple but they were all well closed off, I'm off to the river and do a bit of "Gold Panning", who knows there has to be some bits left for me.

15 Arizona - My Fav. State

My new-found job as a "Gold Miner" Panning for gold didn't really get off the ground as got bored after about an hour, but I must admit there were minute bits, I mean, minute tip of a needle. not quite enough to retire on. Back on the Highway and heading towards The painted Desert & The Petrified forest national Park, with huge sand dunes both sides of the highway with many different layers of coloured sand, white, yellow, pink, charcoal black, brown, very pretty and just on from there is the "Petrified Forest" where all the trees were under water millions of years ago and turned them into stone, the main trees are gone or laying down from maybe high winds or whatever, But there are 2 foot stone stumps, and hundreds of bits on shattered petrified wood / stone lying about over a vast area, there are notices all over telling tourist to please do not remove any of the stones to take home as souvenirs , as come one day they will all be gone, forever. So I respected that, Honestly Officer, I have absolutely NO Idea on this Earth how that Petrified wood got in my Dodge ??

Ah let me go speak with Her, she doesn't read too good. Lol. Yes, I did bring back a nice piece about 8 inches round 2 inches thick and its solid stone, looking down on it you can see all the yearly growth patterns, and each growth pattern is a different shade of pink, its remarkable, and I'm glad I relocated a piece to the UK. I felt it had to be done, it was always, and still is a talking point. And I will always have a Piece of ARIZONA And while we are on the subject of wood turned to stone, When I was down the coal mines in the UK I was working on a certain coal face I spotted something quite strange, so I hacked away at the coal, it was an eel, !! perfectly petrified with its mouth slightly open, and you can even see small fang like teeth, and 2 small ears each side of its head, I couldn't save the very fine fins, it only measured 2 inches round and 10 inches long , it was obviously a lot longer, didn't have the time to get any more as the coalface cutter machine was on its way back, and in a moment the rest of the eel would be dust, and gone forever. I don't have it anymore ??

It must have got lost when I moved back down south not seen it for years, This pit was just over a mile deep. There is so much to do, and see in Arizona, I will mention a few. We are going to spend 2/3 weeks in this State. on the way we were Heading off to Tucson, a terrific small Western town with a hell of a lot of History, they even have the original cell in an untouched condition that " Billy the kid" was caught and finally brought to Justice around 80 odd years ago, I remember reading about him on a plaque, a ruthless young gun slinger Most of all the cowboys we know, like Jessie James, Wyatt Earp, Buffalo Bill, Doc Holiday and Wild Bill Hickok, a man of many vocations like a lawman, Wagon train master, gun slinger, and much more, all had connections with Tucson.

We stopped off at Winslow where there is a huge Meteor crater the largest crater on earth, worth a look. We came across a signpost stating that you are now entering an Indian reservation belonging to the Hopi Indians, and they live like they did back in the day in very big Wigwams and do not welcome Tourist, so me being me went to check it out, it was a

good hours drive up a dirt road and came across their village, quite big, lots of cowhided Wigwams and rustic stone built bungalow type houses with glassless windows no doors just a ladder and they enter by going in through the roof I found out later that they don't have doors coz of Rattlesnakes.

I thought be a good place just to park up by their fence maybe cook something to eat, so opened the double doors on the side so they could see what we were doing and see if they come over, within 10 minutes there were loads of them mainly kids sitting on the ground just staring at us from about 50 meters away Trace wanted to take a pic as it looked really good would've made a brill pic but I said no as they believe it takes their Spirit away, and I wasn't too keen on getting scalped lol, They didn't bother to say hi, so half an hour later I said lets go, as I started to drive in a circle to go back the way we came in I went off road and ended up with my rear wheels sinking in the sand, bugger, I tried going forward and backwards a few times and it was just getting worse and it was nearly down to the axle, they could see we were having a problem I thought they may come help, nope I said to Tracey, we had better get a few small rocks and stones, I pulled away the sand down to the bottom of the tyre and put the rubble in a 3 foot line and tried slowly to drive out no wasn't going to work, this sand was like silica sand, very fine and the sun was dropping quite quickly I thought we are only going to get one chance of doing this so I told her to go get the pillow cases and go fill them up with small stones and rocks while this time I dug out in front of the front wheels quite a way and I crawled underneath and cleared a path all the way to the front wheels.

About an hour later we had a clear run, we put our road material from front to back and decided to put our leather jackets over the stones in front of the back wheels to give it a better chance of traction, Still they looked on quite amused I guess, Well here we go told her to push all she could the moment I started to move very slowly I felt it get traction and I gently gave it a bit more gas a little by little and hope our road holds up it was going to be dark in a short while, but thank god managed to get back on the road, picked up our jackets and I turned to them and took a sarcastic bow and a big wave would have preferred to flip them the bird, but after all, we were trespassing on their land, my own bloody fault, lesson learnt. In the morning Left Winslow and went to lake Havasu, a really nice place, and this was buzzing with tourist, Lake Havasu is big and all the way round it they have built replica cities from around the globe Venice, Paris, New York, London, they look and feel like you are actually in that country, Back in 1968 Arizona State Governor bought our London Bridge that spanned the Thames in London, it was built here in 1860 and it needed Maintenance work doing on it, and is spanning part of the lake, and the Colorado river now, I believe it sold for One and a quarter million Pounds. We had a few days there doing the Tourist thingy it was ok, the guide was telling you all different things very interesting. Next place we arrived at was "Tucson" found a decent hotel so we booked in for several nights so we could do laundry, and shower, plus needed to do a Service on our faithful old Dodge it was nice sleeping in a real bed, we did have the odd motel here and there but beds were nothing to

write home about, we had been on the road since leaving Chicago must have been about 5/6 months now, hard to remember. not sure on distance must be about 8,000 9,000 Ks ok onto flagstaff and Phoenix then "Grand Canyon"

16 Flagstaff & Phoenix Az

I Decide to do a service on the Dodge, as I have been noticing the water temperature gauge rising, and put it down to ambient outdoor temp as it's in the high 30s + but shouldn't be running in the high 90s+ I think normal would be about 80-85 I checked rad and not losing any water, so had to be thermostat, believe it or not yes I had the old one out of my blown engine I took top and bottom hoses as well , so got on with service while I was undoing thermos housing it just dawned on me I didn't have a gasket !! too late now broke the seal, and can't see any car parts locally , but while walking about this area I noticed a small engineering co and they gave me some Gasket paper and a bit of Gasket goo, I wouldn't have bothered about a thermostat I could have left it out, but would have to have a gasket either way, so tapped out a gasket, and with service all done we drove into Flagstaff, went had lunch and took off to a snow capped Mountain, not before checking for leaks, temp gauge staying at 80c.

Boiling hot down here and could feel the temp drop as further up we went cooler it got. We spent a few days here and went for a few scenic walks and Spent a couple of days driving to Phoenix, very big city, very cosmopolitan, I'm not a big fan of cities but Phoenix is so open plan with very new sky-scrapers not crowded or cluttered, very clean and tidy I could live here, in fact after my return to the UK I always said, when I retire in 25-30 years' time I want to retire to Phoenix, the climate is spot on not humid or muggy, you could run down the street and not break a sweat, whereas in Florida you only have to stand still and you will break out in a sweat, the only drawback is, if your into boats, and beaches. then it's not a good place to live as Arizona is totally landlocked, and the nearest water is the Pacific Ocean off the Californian coast about 900Ks drive.

This next bit I was not going to include, but decided I would in the end, as its part of my memories. We went up to the top of one of the tall skyscrapers where they have a viewing area on the roof , when we noticed a lot of people were gathering behind us on the other side of the roof and some shouting, and some people crying, then we saw what it was, There was this Black Lady on the edge of the sky scraper threatening to jump, which after a couple of minutes she did just that, and just before the people on her roof tried to get to her, you couldn't actually see her fall all the way to the ground, as you can't get close enough to the edge. i know that sounds a bit tasteless, but it's like being at a race car track, and a bad accident is about to happen, then I would want to see it!! it's going to happen if I am there or not but that's me, I'm interested in life and this is part of my life. If this offends anyone, then I apologise.

We stayed in Phoenix for a few days and went to the Cinema at a midnight session, i can't remember what film it was, but no, not a mucky film. Just remembered an event that took place while we were driving through the Texan dessert, nothing to see for miles when we looked to our left and off in the distance about 2/3 Ks i saw this huge black tornado wide as

you like with a long tail almost laying on the ground and being pulled and twisting, I pulled over and got my camera out to take a couple of pics I wasn't to bothered as it was well away from us, and not exactly coming our way, or so I thought!! what I didn't realise was you can't see the wind its creating, and it hit us so hard I thought a truck had hit us and lifted the Dodge right up from the side and nearly went completely over, and rainwater was being forced in through closed doors and windows, and everywhere around the dodge, it was being forced in under immense pressure and after it passed and the dust had settled there were 2 wild deer and a road sign nearly landed on us, this only lasted a couple of minutes but felt a lot longer, I don't think I have been so scared in my life, we had a roof vent that was open and the amount of water that came in soaked everything, clothes, bedding, the lot, the noise was tremendous and our ears popped under the pressure, went outside to see the deer were dead. we carried on to a service station about 50Ks up the road and found an area we could lay all our stuff out on the ground to dry, it was a very hot day around 35 c only took about a couple of hours and it was all dry. I won't be hanging around if another one comes my way, that's for sure.

17 "Grand Canyon"

Well we spent 2 weeks driving around Arizona and visiting different National Parks while heading on our way to the "GRAND CANYON" We followed the muddy looking Colorado River for quite a way, and camped up along its banks, and all the way to the Canyon, all of a sudden there it was, absolutely Breath taking, there were hundreds of people in all kinds of transport Campervans to cars to trucks, to caravans, to bicycles, and even saw people on a Tandem who we were going to become friends with for a few days at the Canyon. There was so much to see, and they told us they had ridden here all the way from bloody CANADA !

They left Vancouver 9 weeks ago about 6,000 Ks taking time to look around on the way down to thier goal, The "Mexican" border at San -Diego, about another 700Ks and were going sell there Tandem, and get a train (Amtrak) back to Vancouver. This Husband and Wife team were in there early 60s ! hats off to them. I asked them did they camp every night ? they said no, only when they were in the middle of nowhere like the desert, as they stopped in Motels and Hotels whenever they could, and was surprised at how many ordinary Americans offered their home for the night to get showered and eat with them when they told them what they were doing, and that it was for a charity back home in Vancouver so I put a \$20 bill in there collection box.

We both booked an all log cabin next to each other for the next 5 days and spent a lot of our time exploring. If you ever go to the Grand Canyon, be very aware of the Burrows, there like " Donkeys with a death wish" and to be avoided, If suffer from a nervous disposition but if you decide to hire a burrow as many older people do, beware the long and twisted and narrow track 2 Ks straight to the bottom of the Canyon, it will take less time, as they rarely stop. Here comes the scary bit, these stupid Burrows walk right on the very edge of the track not on the safe side like the mountainside and all there is between you, and the rest of your life depends on your Burrow being in a good mood, this track is only about 5-foot-wide at best and your left leg, and the Burrows belly are actually hanging over the sheer drop. Whichever mode you take they 'won't' let you go down to the "Indian Plateau" (half way) without enough water, very important, the further down you descend the hotter it gets and you will dehydrate very quickly, our friends took a burrow each, they decided to only do the "Indian Plateau", and we decided to go all the way.

If you decide to go further, then you have to tell main office what you're doing and they give you a numbered disc so they know who is still down there be prepared to stop overnight at a very big Lodge where there is nothing but dozens of camp beds a rustic water barrel with water to wash your face and hands, and a water tap, with water ?? I couldn't work out where this drinking water was coming from as the pipe just sticks out of the mountain side no plumbing anywhere ? tasted great and don't forget to refill all your drinking bottles, all for free, as you will have to have an early start the next morning to get back up to the top, it

will take you twice as long . These Burrows are quite remarkable, it takes them the same time to go down, as it does to go back up ?? we decided to go all the way down on foot and I fancied a paddle in the Colorado River, later we rested up as sun was setting very quickly 6 or 7 pm We left to go back up about 4.30am got back to the top about mid- afternoon went to our cabin to get showered and a change of clothing and noticed a message pinned to our door from our friends saying hope you had a safe trek back. they had gone on ahead with a coach trip further along the Canyon, and said we will see you in the restaurant about 6 ish to eat supper together, we did a bit of sightseeing locally and met up with our friends in the restaurant, I had a whopping juicy steak, really good, back home in the UK steak is very expensive.

We were informed about the beautiful sunrise reflecting off the other side of the Canyon but had to get up at about 3am to watch it so that's what we did and there were dozens of tourists with cameras stood in the dark waiting, and it was worth getting up for, took plenty of pics as every few minutes it was a different colour after 6 days we said farewell to our friends as they headed off with thier little carry cart behind them to San Diego, and complete thier trip, but not before a group photo. We left the next day for "Los Angeles California" Good Bye to my Favourite State, I'll be back. So off we went to L.A. it's about 400Ks from here.

While on our route we stopped off at a diner, still in Arizona, and got talking to this older guy early 60s well to me he was old I was 38 anyway he was talking about my Dodge camper and we talked about our trip he was well impressed he asked when will we be done traveling, I said no idea probably about a couple of months he said he would love to buy my Dodge when I'm done with it, I said well I'm off to Canada eventually along the Pacific highway, we talked for quite a while about different things and about the Dodge I showed him where all the spares I had were stowed, he so wanted to buy it.

So I came up with an idea, We would return to this same Diner exactly 2 months from now and do the deal which does mean us coming back 3,000+ Ks but looking at a map we could have a trip to Canada following the Pacific coast and coming back we would come back over and along the Rocky Mountains, and not be seeing the same places we saw going up.

Then we agreed on a price of \$1200 a good price for both of us the Dodge was over 10 years old, and he hasn't got to kit it out, it's all there. the next thing he did he wanted to pay us up front, the whole \$1200!!! Gob smacked as I was I said what's to stop me flying back to the UK with your money and selling my Dodge to someone else, he looked deeply into my eyes and after a moment he said, because I know you won't. with that we got into his really nice Lincoln Continental drove down town to his bank and drew out \$1200 and handed it to me.. like I have said many times I love America, and the Americans I have come across. it's been 30 years now, and I'm still in touch with those same friends to this day. "Las Angeles" here we come.

18 California

We took our time driving to L.A. taking in the Scenery, and parked alongside a lake very pretty with the odd expensive property dotted about the mountain side with lots of greenery, the odd thing was! these houses Didn't look out of place for some reason. ?? We made lunch and took a walk up the mountain and came across this couple walking there 3 dogs, (King Charles Spaniels) and I struck up a conversation by asking how far it was from here to downtown Los-Angeles, the guy told us about 80Ks and from that we struck up a conversation, starting off with him saying how much they loved the English, and I thought here we go again, I'm going to have to tell them about our road-trip, I didn't mind really , they were quite interested and taken back with what we have done, and living in our little Dodge for the last 6 / 7 months, they asked would we like to go back to the house and have some iced tea with them, yes please, about 10 min later we turned into this big driveway walking towards the house I couldn't believe the size of it, big yellow and white place with huge pillars each side of the doorway a couple of real fancy cars parked up, I said to Trace, bet he's worth a couple of Mil we sat outside by the pool and had tea and cake, Here is another thing I like about the Americans, they are not so class distinctive as we British, (snobs) rich people in the UK will avoid talking to the working Class.

I learned this guy was a retired Pilot for a private company. flying well known people, some from rock stars, to film stars and well- heeled Personnel we chatted for about a couple of hours, and I was hoping they would ask us if we would like to stop for the night ? like some of the people have done on our travels, but nope, didn't happen, would have loved to have stopped over, but not to worry, there hospitality was enough. Slept by the lake that nite, it was very quiet but very hot. Arrived in L.A. mid -afternoon 6 lanes in and 6 lanes out of town, bloody chocker blocked, and to our left, I noticed that huge sign we all know, "HOLLYWOOD" and had an instant thought, as I said to Trace, do you realise we have done it, the pipe dream, we Really have done it.

That sign just bought it into focus for us, We felt like we had been away from our homeland for years. we headed towards those famous beaches you see on the telly back home : Malibu, Coco cabana, Venice beach, Muscle beach, Ventura Highway, all very posh and pristine, every one showing off there wonderful , tanned, muscle- clad bodies, with their shiny white teeth and Plastic titties, I mean come on, who walks the promenade in skimpy shorts, and bikini in high heels, and that's just the guys lol, we grabbed a beer and just sat and watched, for a couple of hours mind you certainly eye candy. We hid the Dodge from view, she wasn't much to look at 2 tone brown with Illinois plates, (so sorry Dodge) there was a large car park with a sign saying no overnight Motor homes, but the Dodge didn't resemble a Motorhome one bit. so paid for a ticket and bedded down after a very boozy night in a posh bar and very expensive.

In the morning we went down town to Rodeo Drive and the Famous Chinese Theatre, and all those famous hand prints belonging to Film stars ,there are hundreds of them, and dozens of people having there photo taken while placing thier hands into them, There were a lot of kids trying to sell you a map of the homes, and who lives were up in Beverly hills, so got one and off we went these mansions must cost millions we were driving very slow and stopping to take a few pics, when I heard a siren sound just a blip it was the LA police, they got out and told us to get out of the vehicle which we did they were a bit caution of us he wanted to know what we were up to doooh we were looking at the stars homes, he said they had a couple of calls from someone saying they were concerned that there was a grubby old vehicle with "here we go" again "ILLINOIS PLATES" when they realised we were British they were ok, He said to me I could still write you a ticket, I said what for having ILLINOIS plates !! he had a chuckle and said, No for driving with bare feet ???

Its a driving violation in California, do you drive with bare feet in England ? I laughed and said not bloody likely mate, you would freeze to death, he wished us a safe journey and the "obligatory" Have a nice day, how many times have I heard that, some people say it here in the UK but not 30 odd years ago . We spent a few days and did all the touristy things, drove up the" Pan American Highway" One of my "Bucket to do list", I wanted to ride a Motor cycle the entire length from Prodo bay, Northern Alaska, all the way down to the bottom of Argentina, and down to cape Horn, the tip of Chile. I figured it out years ago it would take 12 to 14 months on a bike as you suffer more fatigue with the wind & cold on certain elevated areas, And in a small motorhome about 9 - 10 months it all depends on how much sightseeing you want to take in, and the Rockies has the most stunning scenery on earth. I'm Guttled, as I won't get to do it now due ill- health this Pacific highway is in the Guinness Book of Records as the Longest road on the Planet at 48.000 Ks - 30.000 Mi. Ok back to now. We spent about 3 weeks to get to San-Francisco as went sightseeing all around the Sierra Nevada and had a few days in San Francisco. Booked in a reasonably cheap Hotel in the seedy side of town. and stayed in the Hotels bar, We decided to not go any further North because we had to get back to Arizona to sell our Dodge to The guy who paid up front for it, can't remember his name now but we agreed a date late afternoon at the Diner we first met in to deliver our Dodge to him. we allowed 3 weeks to get back as we wanted to spend a few days in "Las Vegas"

19 Death Valley & "Las Vegas"

We set off quite early for Nevada, I think it took quite a while as we zigged and zagged over, and along the Rockies, what brilliant scenery, would love to have stayed around the Mount Jefferson area in the heart of it all, beautiful rivers, lakes just as you imagine a huge Mural would look on your lounge wall, I could quite happily spend more time here, but we were on a schedule to be somewhere, (first time in the 9 months we had to be anywhere,) as we drove over the next few days, we were now in a Huge Dessert, and its hot, but I had a plan for what was coming up next. I looked at a map and found a shaded area it was, " the last chance service, and Gas station" where we could eat and get some sleep, during the rest of the day, you may ask why did we want to sleep during the day, I will tell you why, about 550Ks ahead is "Death Valley" in the Mojave Dessert and if I'm right it's one of the hottest places on earth, so I decided we would sleep now and drive Death valley after sunset, as its obviously cooler, we pulled into the service station and checked we had plenty of water, weather we will need it or not, as its quite possible to breakdown overnight for any reason, and you could still be waiting for help when the sun decides to show itself and cook your ass.

We couldn't sleep, but we did relax and about 8pm it had cooled down so we set off arriving at Death Valley around 2am I'm not sure of its total length 70 maybe 80 Ks it took about a couple of hours as we kept stopping to look at abandoned vehicles, obviously blown engines, or something relating to overheating, and just left them there, as most of what we saw were wrecks anyway, and not worth the recovery fee. As we headed onto Vegas we were aware of a glow, many Ks ahead in the night sky, there's nothing around here but Dessert so we figured it had to be Las Vegas, Just wanted to mention, there was hardly any traffic on this dead straight road for 100s of Ks and it had an eeriness about it, with the Mountains Silhouetted in the night sky, by a full moon and Zillions of twinkling stars, and the odd comet or 2, we laid on our backs to just look up and absorb it all not a squeak, the only sound was our V8 engine cooling down scary.

Anyway time to move on, 10 mins later the glow was getting bigger, and bigger the closer we got, we never thought we were ever going to reach it, it took about 30mins to get to the source of the glow, Yup "Las Vegas" here we come, it must of been 4am, when we crossed the California/Nevada state line and there were still thousands of people milling around and all the Casino's, hotels, building, etc I have never seen so many lights in my life, we found somewhere to eat and sat there in awe, after a while you don't realise its night time until you look up. We drove up and down the Vegas strip and there is so much to see about 9pm we were pretty tired, so drove to the town of Las Vegas about 10 minutes from the end of the strip, and parked up behind a bar, had some supper and a few beers, then slept like a baby, Next Morning we visited loads of Casino's and shops bars and diners, after a few days doing lots of things, we were in Caesars Palace where I kept going over to the Poker tables,

to watch, I use to play a lot of poker for many years, when this guy, all suited, and booted and looking like a Penguin obviously working for the casino said, would Sir like a seat at the table, feeling kind of nervous but I said yes please. so I acknowledged the 6 other players and took my seat, sat next to me was a very big Black guy dripping gold everywhere, the anti was \$10 and a maximum of \$50. per raise (for the poor buggers like me) it was one of the lower staked tables, Some tables were maximum bid of \$ 1.000 and of course unlimited agreed by those on that table, and has nothing to do with the house Casino.

The very pretty dealer dealt me in, we were playing 5 card draw where you can exchange up to 3 of them to try and better your hand, I had a pair of 2s I drew 3 cards and ended up with 2 pair and won ! so felt a bit better now I told Trace to go look around as I was going to have a couple of hours at this table, I'm doing ok a bit later the waiter comes over and asked if we were ready to eat we both were, I didn't know that you can eat and drink as much as you like, its free for as long as you're at the table, gambling, the same goes for Tracey even though she wasn't playing, so I was on the JD and played for a few more hours and came away about \$300 down, but I was up about \$700/\$800 at one point, I know I should have quit while ahead, but I was enjoying it, and it was worth \$300 just to say to my buddies back home that I have played poker in "Caesars Palace".

These Casinos are not daft, they give you plenty of free alcohol and any food you fancy you can go sit in there Restaurant to eat and they will save your seat so you relax more, and gamble more money , still it was a good evening, We left the casino about 11pm and went to see this comedian. and show girls, the next evening there was a Magician and acrobats, you can have a lot of fun here, and you don't have to gamble. oh and all the Casinos have signs up outside advertising "Breakfast only 99 cents" After a week there we decided to head back to Arizona to our meeting with the guy buying our Dodge, On the way there, we did something we agreed we would never do, while driving around America, but we did it anyway, bad move :

20 Bye To The Old Girl (Dodge)

We headed south heading towards the "Hoover Dam" which is absolutely huge and supplies 3/4 states with their water supplies and also defines the state line between Nevada / Arizona when you cross over the Colorado River. we are now In my favourite State, again, Arizona, about a couple of hours driving we saw this guy Hitching, and as I slowed down, Tracy said you are not picking him up are you ?

I said, what harm can he do, he is on his own, she wasn't very happy but I pulled up and I said where you heading ? he replied Phoenix, I said were not going all the way into Phoenix but told him I can drop you at city limits, he kind of grunted, and got in the double doors on the side and sat on our bed that's permanently made up, he did look a bit untidy but I thought he may have been hitching for who knows how long, or just down on his luck ? I tried to make conversation and he wasn't responding ?

He didn't even question our accents, well mine, she wouldn't talk to him, after about 10 mins driving I looked in my interior mirror and he was laid out fully on our bed, and he had, wait for it he had got a pack of biscuits out of a cupboard and was munching away, I mean being unsociable was one thing, but stealing my biscuits well that's another thing, I kept on trying to talk to him nah I could feel Tracy scowling at me, and she went into the glove-box and got the map and a pen out and wrote on the map "lose him now" it's my fault, we said absolutely no hikers when we left the UK. but we had been and seen so much and everyone is nice well nearly every one I thought I was doing a good thing by picking him up, I was trying to work out how old he was ? probably late 30s early 40s he kept grunting quietly to himself and rocking backwards and forwards, and I was becoming a bit concerned !!! when a road sign came to our rescue, Gas station 50Ks, yes this is it. but I'm going to have to think quick here, I couldn't say anything to trace as he would hear, so talking normally and loud enough for him to hear, to say there is a gas station coming up in a bit and don't know about you, but I gotta take a pee and fill up, I said to him do you need to pee, and he said no, Bugger I said to myself.

I pulled into the Gas station and pulled alongside the stores door and I said to trace we will get gas after we have done with the toilets, so you and our friend go, while I wait with the Dodge, and when your both back I can leave you both here to keep an eye on things till I'm back, and he said I already told you man I don't need to piss, blimey that's the most he spoke in the last hour since we picked him up, anyway now I'm getting a tad angry I grabbed the keys got out and opened up the door and said to him I'm not pulling over for you to pee on the way its 2 hours from here, so if you want a lift to Phoenix then go take a pee, I think trace was on my level of thinking, with a few more grunts he walked over to the toilet block with Trace as hers was on the other end of the block she looked to see him go in and she looked at me and I'm beckoning her to come back don't go in, she looked over at him and he was out of sight , she quickly came back and we sped off, when he started to walk to the

bock I quickly grabbed my "Louisville Sluggers" baseball bat in case he turned back. Well that was an ordeal that could have turned nasty, why did this have to happen in my favourite State, it put a bit of a damper on it but I wasn't going to let that tosser put me off. that's it NO hitchers from now, mind you tomorrow will be the last time we will have "Dodge" it may sound a bit silly but I felt awful and even emotional at losing our Dodge !!! Man-up Clive what's the matter with you. It was late afternoon where we pulled up at the small town Glendale I think it was, where we could do the deal the next day at the Diner, which gave us plenty of time to get rid of stuff we didn't want and tidy her up a bit tomorrow, so we checked into a Motel for our last night with Dodge, oh bloody hell I'm off again!

That evening we went into town for a meal and a beer or two. woke up early and started bagging up what we didn't need. coz from this point we will be on foot . meant to mention I bought a Guitar when we were in Texas and couldn't make my mind up weather to keep it, or give it to a young kid, I thought I would keep it for now, and maybe bring it back with me to England, Well 4pm came and we were in the Diner but the guy wasn't there, 15 mins nothing mind you anything could have happened it's been a couple of months, then he walked into the Diner and all of us were really happy, the first thing he said was "I told you that , you would come back" didn't I he was there with his wife a lovely couple, we sat and talked over a coffee about our trip since we left him, and there was no issues with Dodge she has done us real proud and was very reliable apart from the odd silly stuff, I signed over the title to him, and he drove us to the nearest AMTRAK station where we bought 2 Rover tickets which you can go anywhere in United states and Canada with 4 layovers meaning you can get off at any station and spend a few days wherever you wanted \$250 each not bad eh !

We went back outside the Station to wave them off, and I'm not kidding I was deeply upset to see her drive away, we both felt the same. Our home and our means of transport was ours no more, sob sob all we had was a back-pack each oh, and my Guitar that I bought in Texas with our basic needs in like spare underwear toiletries a few t shirts not a lot. look out AMTRAK here we come

21 "Amtrak" Phoenix To Vancouver To UK

Well here we go onto another adventure, The old girl, Dodge, has gone, and to think we lived in the Dodge for about 9 months, and you couldn't even stand up in it, but she did thousands and thousands of Ks Can't say exactly as the Odometer stopped working months and months ago, if it was just the speedo cable then I would've fixed it, but it was more trouble than it was worth to replace the whole unit i would have to strip the whole dashboard out to get at it , but I roughly worked it out to be about 13,000 to 14,000 Ks (9,000mls) she was 100% reliable, apart from when she decided to blow up in Florida !! but has never left us stranded since, and I put that down to more than regular servicing . So now were at the mercy of "Public Transport".

As we wait on the platform for our Train from Phoenix, to Seattle, Washington State, we are amazed at the size of an Amtrak train as it pulled into the station they are huge, and double-decked, they are equipped with sleeper compartments, showers, Restaurant & bar viewing carriages with glass roofs, So later on when we leave Seattle for New York you can see all way up to the top of the mountain passes, as you go over the Rocky mountains, waterfalls , pine trees and Golden Eagles through the clear ceiling while fully reclined in your seat especially later when we leave Seattle, for New York Central station, through Oregon, Washington state, Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota. After South Dakota the terrain levels out so nothing really of any interest. Okay we have boarded Amtrak and have established where we want to sit, and off we went It was nice to put my feet up on these reclining seats and take in the scenery for a change, 1st stop from Phoenix is L.A. and these trains only stop for a few minutes at any stop, we didn't want to get off as we had already done L.A, so we stayed on for San- Francisco, which arrived at 1am next morning got in a taxi and got a cheap motel we spent a couple of days looking round and we intended to go and see the famous "Alcatraz" its nearer to the mainland than I thought ,But for some unknown reason we never went ??

We were missing the Dodge, it's not much fun sightseeing when carrying back pack and a Guitar and on, and off busses, and trams, San-Francisco is very pretty and an exciting place to stay for a week or more, but we were not able to do that as funds were really getting low, and we are now realising the fact that Amtrak, is our winding down part of our Epic journey we have just been on. Ok we board another train and we stayed on it for a day and a half the scenery was not going to disappoint as we sit in the viewing carriage for hours and hours through Oregon and stopping in Seattle Washington where we got off and booked a hotel for 5 nights as we wanted to look around and also go over the U.S. & Canadian Border into Vancouver. The next day we were having breakfast and got talking to a couple of British lads about 23/24 years old and they were visiting family in Seattle, we got on well with them, they were due to fly back to the UK in 4 days, so I suggested that we hire a car and go to Vancouver together, and split costs of the hire and fuel.

So now we are mobile and spent the day around Seattle and we drove up a few mountains to enjoy the views, and we could see Vancouver, and Vancouver Island, many Ks away and all surrounding areas looked very exciting, later we realised that we would prefer to stay in Vancouver, but we had already paid for 5 nights , and when we got back to the hotel we told them that we were only going to need a room for tonight and could they refund us 4 nights but the best they could offer was refund us only 2 nights well what could we do, it's better than no refund.

We met up with the 2 young lads at breakfast next and drove to the Canadian\ Vancouver Border we went down town and looked morning around the city it was amazing with Main street being an attraction on its own, as it's called China Town, as there are hundreds of Chinese restaurants and Chinese shops selling all wonderful things both sides of the very wide street, there were even outdoor Kitchens cooking in the open air so we sat at an outside one and the meal was excellent, and so so cheap \$3.00 each, we saw a bar that was packed with people trying to get in so we joined them, and inside hanging from roof beams were 6 cages with very attractive, and topless cage dancers oh! and one male cage dancer with his bits snuggled into a pair of "Budgie Smugglers" and there were topless bar girls walking around delivering drinks to tables and a few lap-dancers, and all this in the middle of the afternoon, later we got a hotel for the 4 of us. We did all the touristy things one place which is quite popular is "Stanley Park" a definite place to walk around, everywhere is perfectly manicured.

Well after a lot of touring around and much more it was time to travel back to the US we dropped off the lads and we took the car back to the hire shop, and they kindly offered to drop us at the Amtrak Station where we got on the High speed Cruiser which we would spend 3 days & 3 nights all the way to New York Grand Central Station about 5,500Ks 3,300 miles from the Pacific west coast to Atlantic East coast, the trip was unforgettable, the scenery through Washington, Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, & New York the further east we travelled the land flattens out, so not a lot to say, after Iowa it really flattens out, and Pennsylvania was nothing but collieries. Life on board was ok you spend a lot of time talking to strangers, and accommodation was acceptable.

Nowadays if someone mentions the word "Amtrak" it brings back a great memory, while on the train, there is a what they call a "music carriage", with a small Juke-box a few tables to play cards or whatever while we were exploring up and down this very long train, we came across this elderly black guy playing his saxophone in this music carriage and we chatted for a bit, and I told him I have a Guitar back in our carriage and he said go get it. I returned with Guitar in hand and within 10 mins we were churning out some good music and to top it all people started to gather, and Bugger me, they were leaving money on the table, we said we were not Busking, but it made no difference, if they were happy to pay then we were happy to accept, (be a shame not to) we started this about tea-time and by midnight after many

food and beer breaks, we had a count up and we had over \$400 we did the same thing the next evening and made nearly the same amount again !!! Now I'm thinking we don't really have to go home ? do we ??? Nah we were all travelled out, so had to agree we had to go home. This guys Name was "Bobby Dills" and he has a brother "Benny Dills" in Buffalo, New York, who he was catching up with after a year of not seeing each other, and he owns a wine bar in Buffalo, Called "Benny Dills Wine Bar" and said when this train pulls in to Buffalo we should go meet him, I looked at our time table and mentioned we pull into Buffalo at 2 am, tomorrow night but he said no problem, when we get there I will call him (no Mobiles in the mid 80s) and he will come pick us up, he is only 20 minutes from the station he said you don't have to be anywhere, at no particular time do you ? he was right.

When the train pulled in we got off and went to a payphone and he called Benny, 30mins later Benny pulled up and Blow me down they were "TWINS" 50 year old twins he never said he was a twin !! we all fell about laughing, anyway got to this bar and I was surprised to see a few people there at 4am we stopped up till 6am and we were all tired and we bedded down in Benny's place. Come morning, well 10am we were eating breakfast cooked by Benny's wife, a larger than life lady who never stops laughing ?? no matter what was said, lovely lady. Time has arrived to say our goodbye's to these great people, they dropped us at the Station, where after a hug, Bobby gave me a cassette tape of him playing his Saxaphone, and I said you have my address in the UK so if you come over it will be my turn to take care of you. We didn't get a train to New York that day.

As we had to see one last "Natural wonders of the earth", which was less than an hour away NIAGRA FALLS & HORSHOE FALLS we booked our last night accommodation next to the falls, It was brilliant we went on the boat they call "MAID OF THE MIST" and it actually goes behind the millions of gallons of water gushing over Niagra, everyone is given waterproofs or you would get soaked. We had to stop until dark as the falls are all illuminated at night when dark, there illuminated from the Canadian Side, there is a small foot- bridge you can cross over from the US side to the Canadian side, Toronto, to view the ever changing colours of the millions of gallons endlessly flowing, When you get exactly halfway across the bridge there are 2 white lines with a very narrow gap between them that people try and balance in to be in no-man's land, or you can have one foot in America and the other foot in Canada, so you can actually be in 2 different country's at the same time.

Oh well it's time to get our last train to Grand Central Station New York , where our epic journey of 9 months will finally finish, We will be leaving this beautiful, and diverse country behind. As we were taxiing down the runway, and lifting off, I couldn't help feeling very sad, as I looked out of the window to see America slowly becoming a fading place of adventure, that we can truly say we conquered, as we disappear into the clouds, and there it was, Gone ! ! I wasn't happy to be leaving, But I will be taking with me something I can't leave behind "MEMORIES"

22 Back to the UK

6 Hours after leaving New York we landed in London, UK, In a strange way I was thinking, I am pleased to be back, need a rest after continually driving for about 9/10 months, it would've been nice if Tracey drove some of it, but she never learnt to drive, well she was only 21 I know cradle snatcher but she was a grownup (21) me (38) I did try to get her to drive some of the dessert routs, where there is nothing around, so it's not like she could have an accident just a couple of 100Ks in a straight line, the only thing she could run into would be the huge Cacti's, the Dodge was auto so all she had to do would be to point the bloody thing !

It was quite weird moving back into my house, it seemed quite big, it's not it's a 2 up 2 down terrace, with no front garden and the front door opens straight onto the pavement the smallest house you could buy, and out the back is just enough room for my workshop After settling in after a couple of weeks, I went back to my old cabling company I used to work for before I took off for the states. Over the next few months, Tracey and me both wanted time out, from each other, it wasn't all red wine and roses on the trip, living in a very small space for all that time did take its toll on us both, so we agreed she went back home, but on the understanding we both wanted to stay very close friends and still be there for one another.

Over the next 12 months we both worked and still went on Bike trips, The first trip as friends, we rode down to the French 24 hour "Le'mans" bike race and shared the same tent for 3 nights as friends, well maybe (the odd cuddle) It was a brilliant 24 hours of non -stop racing Thousands of tents and Motorcycles all scattered throughout the French Forest with camp fires and BBQ;s, it look good in the dark at 2am. We did this trip with 6 other bikers including my Sister Avril and her husband John, my Sister has a full motorcycle licence and has ridden a big Suzuki GSX 1100 R Sports bike, and can stick with us guys on the road, you go Sis, On the second night about 3am we all decided to go back to our tents and get some shut-eye, but when we got to our tent we noticed a big pair of feet hanging out of it ?

I called the lads over and we had a laugh but he had to go we were shouting at him but he was as drunk as a skunk, so in the end we got him by the ankles and dragged him quite away from us, a big bugger, and very heavy, and he kept shouting obscenities at us in very loud German, he was face down when we were dragging him, and stayed face down when we left him he just went straight back to sleep. The race started at 3pm and finished 3pm next day there were quite a few accidents, mainly during the hours of darkness .

Later that same year I bought a Honda Gold Wing 1200cc, perfect touring bike, so Trace and I decided to meet up with some biker friends we met at a previous "Hells Angels" biker bash earlier in the year back in the UK. They mentioned about a big Bikers bash in Munich, Germany in August, they told us where they would be camped, and said hope you can make it. 3 months later we decided to go to Germany and meet up with them, so bike all packed

and loaded with all our camping gear, we boarded the French Ferry for Le'Havre, only 30 mins from where I live, Rode on to the car deck, and the workers strap the bike down in case it gets rough, it's a 6 hour crossing and is the busiest water crossing in the world. We are just pulling in to Le'Havre France, so we got our gear on and made our way down to the bike, unstrapped it, and went to ride off and thought the bike didn't feel right, so before I went any further and still on the ferry I got off the bike to see what was wrong and found that I had a very flat front tyre, 'Great' I thought now what shall I do, I couldn't decide whether to stay on the ferry and go back to Portsmouth, where I know a mate who can sort it in an hour from Docking back in the UK and board the next ferry but I would lose that whole day, and by the time we land in France it would mean riding 500ks (300mls) in the dark, and on unfamiliar roads and would be skirting Paris, and that's so busy 24 x 7 and keeping your eyes out for a campsite in the early hours of the morning, or do we land the bike in France, and try to source a mobile repair man, and not speaking French would be very difficult, especially as they don't like the English.

All of a sudden my problem is sorted, by a "French" ferry crew man he told me to land the bike and he went into the office and got a phone number for a mobile repair man so he helped me get it off the boat as trying to push a very heavy loaded bike with a flat front tyre is very difficult to steer, he called this guy and he was here in an hour, and had the wheel out in no time, he reluctantly repaired it, and said the puncture was on part of the sidewall and told me I should get a new tyre, asap, and I totally agreed, and he gave me the directions to a motorcycle tyre place 3ks away, so I settled up with him I thought wait for it mega bucks, but was surprised he was quite reasonable, I even gave him a bit more as it was well worth it. Ok new tyre fitted and were on our way to our overnight campsite near Stuttgart, the French/German border, it was a really well-equipped campsite small eatery, a bar, and hot showers. Had breakfast and went happily on our way.

Pulled into a service station for some Petrol and something to eat, I parked the bike up and went for lunch. after that we got all our gear on and went to start the bike Nothing !!! it wouldn't turn over I turned all lights off and it did try to start but ran out of battery power quickly, now I'm angry still got 80ks to go I thought the best thing I can do is get to Munich as it was the nearest city anyway so I disconnected the lights and also the stop lights switch to reduce the drain from the battery, got a couple of people to push-start us and we were off I'm going to make it, found a motorcycle shop and they put a Multi - meter across the battery leads and all it was chucking out was 11-12 volts which is not enough, it should be chucking out 14-14.5 so this means Alternator problem, I said can we get one today, no chance as the bike was quite old and he would have to phone around Honda dealers in the area, at last he located a second hand one but won't be here till tomorrow or day after, I told him we have come all the way from England and I'm meeting up with friends, he said if I wanted to pay for a Courier it would be here in about 2 hours, great so he called the courier and off he went (I had to pay up front) then I mentioned to the Mechanic I hope it works ok ? and he said it should be ok as the guy at the breakers yard said it is coming off a right-off

so that's promising , 5pm the Courier turned up with it, and we already got the faulty one off, fitted second hand one and we had the bike battery connected to a charger pressed the button and fired up no prob we tested the output and was 14 volts thank god, By 6pm we were on our way again Got to Campsite and met up with our friends.

Three days later we said goodbye to them and we set off towards the alps and Austria, through Southern Germany (Bavaria) is very pretty with snow-capped mountains, the Black Forrest and lakes, we only had a few days but saw a lot of things. Now it's time to head home, a good 2 days hard ride. Guess what everything was good, until the bloody clutch cable snapped!!!! Grrrr, I have had it with this bike now, its bloody jinxed, we managed to get it to a small town still in Germany by crunching through the Gearbox we parked the bike and hailed a Taxi down and told the driver(who spoke good English by the way) about our snapped clutch cable, and he took us to a Bicycle shop, as this guy could probably make one up using my old nipples which I still had, so he got on with that while I'm still spitting feathers, what is going to pack up next.

About an hour it was all sorted, paid the man and left, We made it to the ferry in a shorter time than expected, well I took my anger out on the bike, doing high speeds 150 - 170 kph (100 mph) most of the way and all that kept going through my mind was "go on you bastard blow up" I really wanted it to blow up, I didn't want it anymore, but it wouldn't blow up, I did all I could to destroy it but the harder I pushed the better it ran, which was a bitter sweet kind of feeling. We caught the 23.00 ferry an overnight crossing that takes 8 hours as these overnight crossings are done at a lot slower speed. By the next weekend I had sold the Honda, and felt so much better for it.

No more "Honda gold wings for me".

23 Late 80's Berlin

In 1988 I lost my Dad to the big C and missed him terribly, I learnt so much from him, he taught me to play Chess when I was 9-10 he taught me mechanics when I was 12, and at the age of 14 I could decoke, and grind in valves, and after re-building the cylinder head he showed me how to do valve clearances. He was always fixing other people's cars and he would never take a penny for it, he taught me how to ride, and drive, photography, and much, much more. He was a very clever man, and a very quiet person.

In 1960 he even built his own Stereo-gram, every piece of it. even down to the Electronics. His Main profession was as an electrician, and worked in that field for years in Southampton docks, back in the early 1960s He worked on the original "Queen Mary" the "Queen Elizabeth" when they docked in Southampton, very big liners back then, he even took me on deck of both when I was about 14 -15.

In 1989 Trace and I rode through Europe to Germany and we even managed to enter East Berlin by mistake, mind you I don't think they worried about people coming in, as it was an awful place, it was more important keeping East Berliners IN and as we all know 1962 they divided Berlin into East & West Berlin, and with the East becoming a communist run Country where over the last 27 years 100s of people have been shot trying to scale the "Berlin wall" the wall is over 100ks round (66 mls) to freedom in West Berlin.

We rode around and couldn't believe most of east Berlin and surrounding area are still the same BOMB DAMAGED houses, blocks of flats, roads with huge bomb craters everywhere, everything was like looking into the past, (1945) people were keen to talk to us as they have no idea what is happening in the western world, as the population were not permitted TVs News- papers telephones even books, while talking to some of them I learnt that it does not matter what profession you're in Dr, a Brain surgeon, or a garbage collector, you are all paid the same wage and every one drives around in those eastern built Trabants tiny little 2 stroke engine cars, our conversation ended quickly as these people spotted a couple of armed Military Guards heading this way, and they scarpered they are not permitted to talk to anyone outside East Berlin, them and you would be shot on the spot we stuck out like a sore thumb, with our modern looking Motorcycle, and modern motorcycle clothing They quickly approached us with their rifles drawn to fire if needed, they wanted to know what we were doing in East Berlin ?

We said we just rode in on an unmanned dirt road, my only guess is the guard must of gone to toilet for a minute, God they went on, and on, they took our Passports and Vehicle Docs, even my wallet by then there were half a dozen of them all with their rifles trained on us , I said to Tracey We could get shot here and no bugger would know, seriously, they could shoot us for being Western spies !! and they had that right to do just that. After a while they accepted that we were tourist and escorted us to border control, and the head honcho

wanted to know what we were talking about with the East Berliners, we just said nothing really as they never spoke any English (bit of a white lie there) anyway we got our passports back and they stamped them with an exit stamp, which today is collectable as the stamp is in a box shape done with barbed wire, associated with "Communism" quite unique, so I have always kept my well out of date passport. While on this subject about that stamp, it nearly stopped me entering America back in 1991 when I was about to go through the American border patrol based in Heathrow airport London, they took me aside and fired loads of Questions at me, like do I have connections with Germany , did I work for any German government, do I have any family there, do I have any association today with Germany and so on, I even had to give them an address where I would be staying in America !!

I was on my own at this time and was concerned about missing my Flight to Miami. After a while I was released to just make my flight... Ok back to 1989 We rode to the Berlin wall and there is 66 miles 100Ks of it and the West Berliners have built steps with a platform so you can look over the wall and see the desolation of it all, you can take pictures as the East Berlin can't do a thing about it . There are 4 border entries through the entirety of the wall that were individually manned by, The French, for one crossing, the Americans for one the Russians for one, and the British for one called (Check point Charlie). We were there in the JUNE of 89 and the wall was finally Demolished 2 months later in the august 89, I Have a photograph of us with the bike at the World Famous > "Brandenburg Gate" still with the wall built through it.

You can walk the whole perimeter of the wall but it's so long (66 miles 100ks) the wall is totally covered in Graffiti with mostly political issues like "If Communism works then why hide it behind a wall" and so on, Also there are these small concrete blocks lots & lots of them throughout the 66m 100ks about 10 inches High with a cross on the top of it, and they are there to mark the spot of East Berliners that have tried to scale the wall and was shot dead by the East Berlin guards, so near but so far. 100s tried and failed. There is no East Berlin any more, it's now a " United Democratic" country, Thank God. I Would like to go back to Berlin and see how the East has changed, now that there is no East, or West Berlin, and I would really like to talk to those group of people we met, all they wanted to know was what is happening in the world as they have no clue whatsoever, and we both wanted to know about what life was like behind the wall.

24 Turkey

After my trip to Berlin, I got myself a different Job, Tambrands were advertising for a Machine Maintenance fitter, Permanent nights 4 x 10 hour shifts, and the pay was excellent, Tambrands Make Tampons!! I felt a little sheepish when I told people, well someone has to make them, why not me. went for interview and got shown round all the machines, and amongst Wolf whistles and nice arse, etc

The Foreman who was showing me round said, I'm sure you can do the job, we are just worried about whether you can cope working with 80 woman on nites, the job is the easy part, its dealing with these woman, there worse than men !!! I started there the following Monday night and was speaking with another fitter who is also into bikes and he had a very nice Suzuki 400 he wanted to sell I had a look at it and bought it.

I worked there from November 89 to Feb 1990 over the Christmas period, the girls made a few jokes about them putting tinsel on the tampons for "Brighter Periods" and many more, goes to show what they were like. Anyway a friend of mine (Ralph) said he has just bought a 30 bed Hotel bang on the beach in Altinkum Turkey and would I go help him to run it for that year ? guess what, yup I agreed, so over the next few weeks we sorted out a ford transit 17 Seater mini-bus which we fitted a very sturdy wooden deck to the roof to carry all kinds of bulky stuff, including most of the seats, and inside was more stuff Including my Suzuki 400 which we would have to leave outside every night so we had room to sleep.

We couldn't plan how long this trip would take, as crossing all the alps Swiss, Italian, and Austrian at this time of year (Feb) skiing season, was deep snow, and some routes are totally closed, and some routes you had to follow Marker poles for days both sides of the invisible road that lay beneath 6 feet of compacted snow, if you got it wrong you would definitely plummet down these Mountains, no crash barriers as these were also buried under deep snow, this part of the trip was really the scariest, especially with snow Blizzards creating a near total white-out, I realised it was easier to drive when the sun had gone down as there isn't that strong glare you get in a White-out and you could switch off your main lights and just run on your side lights and reduce the reflection of your lights the clear Moonlight was plenty you just couldn't pull over for a break as there would be traffic coming up behind you so you had to carry on until there was a proper parking area or you came across a Ski resort that would have a restaurant and everything you may need "a shower came to mind".

We had to purchase snow chains as road officials on some routes would not let you through without them we had to get them to show us how to fit them, we didn't have a clue, My friend (Ralph) noticed I was getting tired and offered to drive, I said its ok I'm good coz I know he hates driving and if he drove I wouldn't rest for a minute, sorry mate.

We were way high up the Austrian alps and came across a ski resort We have taken a week to traverse the alps, you can't explain what it's like, to anyone who has never done it at this time of year! it's scary enough even when there is no snow, and you can see the crash barrier, I think I aged 10 years in that past week. As we dropped down through the Dolomites, North Italy we knew the worst was over.

We had been through France, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Italy, Just want to say here about when we were entering Italian border crossing , they had a mooch around our stuff and they came across our 12 big jars of Nescafe coffee, and told us we were not allowed to import Coffee, and they confiscated the whole bloody lot ??? guess they were low on Coffee eh ! I have learnt on my travels, there is no point arguing with Border officials, as they are a law unto themselves, and you have to accept it, Mind you they we not total bastards, they gave us one jar back ! hope they choke on it Yugoslavia, Croatia, Serbia, and had Greece, Hungary, and Bulgaria to go Until we reach The Black Sea ,and the Kanakali Ferry to Istanbul Turkey . we had no issues until we entered Bulgaria, and had no idea what was to come, We pulled into a service area and Ralph started to fill up, no sooner as he started the guy in the office shut the pump off and came running out shouting at us ?? what the bloody hell was up with him ?

We couldn't understand what he was on about until he altered the price per gallon on the pump, we worked out that he had noticed the UK number plate, and foreigners pay more for their fuel cheeky sod, it was triple what the locals would pay, mind you it was very cheap anyway, and stamping our feet and shouting at him wasn't going to change his mind, he knew we needed fuel, so we had to pay him.

We got under way when this small hatchback car pulled in front of us with his tailgate up, and in the back was this young lad about twelve showing off different food products, and was making us slow down to stop, I didn't have much choice coz I was worried about this kid falling out, so we pulled up, and in the end we bought this round of cheese, and a bag of Tomatoes which later when we had some of it, it was really nice. about two hours later we entered this small town everything around us was all very scruffy, and litter everywhere, it looked like a 3rd world existence, we decided to shop for some food and things, this shop was like a mini supermarket built of wood, and had an armed security guard stood next to the wooden till?

Anyway we picked up a couple of loafs, couple of tins of baked beans, some fish in a tin and so on, all these wooden shelves were filthy with dust and whatever, the wooden floors had never seen a broom, when we went to pay for it, this Guard took half of it out and muttered only 1 item per person, I showed him we had money but it wasn't about the money, everything was rationed, I thought is this because we are foreigners again, but no, it applied to locals also, I said to Ralph this country must be under a "Communist Government" that explains those people trying to sell us there produce, and the petrol, the food shop, and armed guard.

Two days later we arrived at the Bulgarian/Turkey border crossing, but as it was really late afternoon we decided to bed down this side, and cross the border in the morning. So, got the bike out and we went to kip. Ralph woke me and said there were a couple of people looking at the bike and were intent on stealing it for sure, when they heard us moving about they legged it so we parked the bike up against a wall and drove the bus up to it jamming it tight to the wall, so there was no way they could steal it. In the morning we had something to eat and pulled up to the Bulgarian border where they ushered us to a big tar-mac apron and told us to get everything out, and off the roof and spread it out on the ground, we were livid but we had to do what they wanted.

We are pissed right off with Bulgaria, a very beautiful country, with Granite mountains and black sandy beaches, but we thought chin-up we are nearly there, the Border guards went through everything we had, and were there 6 hours and they said ok go, don't know what they were looking for, but whatever it was, we didn't have any of it? so spent the next hour loading and tying all our stuff back onto the bus, we boarded the Kanakali ferry and crossed the Bosphorus strait and into Turkey.

At last we have made it to Turkey drove off the ferry, and the Turkish border guards told us to take everything off the bus and lay it all out again, couldn't believe it we had to do it all again I must point out Ralph has a very short fuse, and is very handy with his fists, if someone really upsets him he will knock them out. seen him in action many times, this time he went berserk shouting at them in their face, thumping the table and I thought this is not going to help, I said come on mate let's just do it, we are as good as home, so he calmed down and did what was asked, that wasn't all, they confiscated our brand new washing machine for the Hotel a telephone system, and a few other items and tried to take my bike, I told them I will be taking it back home at the end of the year, they think we were going to sell it in Turkey, (Not allowed) I managed to convince them I had no intention of selling it, so what they did next would be a safeguard that I couldn't sell it, by writing in my Passport all the details of the bike so when I come to leave Turkey they would see it, and know we hadn't sold it.

Anyway, they told us we would have to contact the customs in Istanbul about getting our stuff back, I'm pleased I was able to keep hold of the bike. This bike a few months later got me arrested and driven to the nearest police station and locked up. 8 pm before we got away" Istanbul "here we come.

25 Altinkum Turkey, Home For The Next Year

At last no more borders to cross, we are now Officially here in Turkey, it was now dark as we were dropping down to Istanbul it was a fantastic sight, Millions, and Millions of lights, it looked like the whole sky full of stars had dropped out of the sky and were laying on the ground, Istanbul is a very large city, we drove to the centre and parked up in a car-park, it's about 10pm and there were loads of markets stalls, and bazaar stalls still all busy with loads people everywhere, couldn't help but noticing all the woman's clothing were so colourful and most of the men were in drab grey smocks, That small stretch of water we crossed the (Bosporus strait) divided Europe from "Asia," and it so stood out, what a culture change We had a look around for a while and had a couple beers, 2 hours later we thought we had better go get some sleep, the evening air was warmish with a waft of different smells, mostly Spicey & flowery it was a little noisy but dropped of no prob.

No sooner as we dropped off about 3am, 5am comes with every one back again doing what they were doing a couple of hours early, ???, and noticed there were hardly any men mostly Woman ? we felt more tired now than when we got our heads down, Oh well went and had breakfast and some "Turkish Chi" which is a bit like sweet black tea it was ok but I have to have my Coffee in the morning so had a couple of them as well I know it's not Nescafe but bugger me Strong or what you could stand your t spoon up in it. We will take a couple of days to get to Altinkum the scenery was nice with Olive groves, orange groves, Cotton fields, and mountains in the background, the roads were nothing to write home about.

We arrived at Ralph's Hotel mid-afternoon, it was all very Quiet with only a few people about and all the other Hotels still closed, as the holiday season doesn't start for 5/6 weeks, most of the people that are here are builders, or guys doing maintenance getting ready for the Holiday season, the resort looked kind of spooky as the Hotel was at the end of the beach which is Horseshoe shaped, and we had a good view looking from one end to the other for a about 3ks a beautiful beach not a single person on it, and hotels, shops, bars, nightclubs, all boarded up for winter. Ralph was here with his wife last year, and the year before on vacation, and stopped in this hotel twice when last year he was talking to the Turkish owners about their hotel, and were going to retire and were looking either to sell it, or lease it, Ralph was up for leasing it. well lots and lots of paperwork and a few flights to Turkey, they agreed a figure for the leasehold.

And now for the big clean up, he contacted all the previous staff to come back to work and help, well they were happy to come back as Ralph was going to pay them because when they are not there during winter they don't get paid. 5 weeks later start of the season we are up and running, His wife son and daughter flew out to help run it.

My main job was to help with maintenance which was ok but the cream on my cake was to use the mini bus to do sightseeing trips for the guests and anyone who wanted to come, and

that was my wages instead of Ralph having to pay me, we sorted all this out before we left the UK, Oh and to do airport runs a 4 hour round trip for people and friends who booked direct with Ralph, as people who booked through Travel agents had there transfers included.

Before we opened I spent a lot of time reading Turkish holiday brochures and finding out all the tourist attractions like the Onyx shops where they show you all the stuff they make and sell hide tanning, cotton processing from local fields to mill, Kusadasi a very cosmopolitan shopping area where Cruise Ships pull in, and a trip to the very famous ruins of " Ephesus" this place was my biggest earner of all, £20 per head, times 16 £320 Less fuel and entrance fees and I paid for all of them for lunch worked out £220 profit every day I went there, I must have gone there 4/5 a week Also did a run to Bodrum where they could experience a Proper Turkish bath in this huge 2,000 year old marble and onyx bath house, it's really huge gold laced marble pillars high ornate ceilings 40 feet you get washed and scrubbed all over and go into a sweat room and after that you had a full massage very intensive the Masseuse will crack nearly every bone you have from your feet to you head and even the bones in your ears (7of them) they put their forehead on the side of your temple above your ear and press against your head ,while pulling down on your earlobe, then when done you go get showered , you feel worn out but also very nimble, that was a good earner, also.

Pumakali is a range of grey & black mountains and bang smack in the middle of them is this pure white mountain of Calcium with oyster like shapes sticking out of the mountain and are full of warm water, Now here is where I claim a bit of fame, as I know that nobody has ever done this > I told all my tourist that i took there you have to put your hands in (about a foot deep) and scoop up all the calcium sludge and totally cover your entire body ,then lay in the very hot sun, on the travastine ledge and let it dry, as its excellent for all your bones and teeth, I didn't really know that, it was all a load bullshit, but guess what over the years its actually now in all the Turkish Brochures and have pictures of people doing what I invented years ago, nowadays I believe you have to pay to do what we did for free good eh Where are my Royalties ?? then after about 30 mins I would tell them okay every one back in the pool of water and wash yourself off coz if you stay to long your teeth will grow, ha ha more bullshit, but they all believed me and when these tourists went home and told there friends about "Pumakali" a lot of them were booking up and coming to our hotel and asking me to do the "calcium mountain" as their friends told them how well they felt when they got home, ??? Hey I don't know, maybe it does work, who cares everyone went home in a better frame of mind, and that's fine with me, I know I am responsible for the increase of Tourism in Turkey due to my "Calcium treatment plan" Go on book your flight. (Now where is that Commission).

As the Season gets underway I was pretty busy taking people on trips, and most people were quite pleased to find an English person doing trips, the most hectic trip I ever did, was five very Reserved, upmarket, 30-year-old Professional, Female Solicitors, only here for

5 days, thank god what a bloody nightmare they were!! they did 3 trips with me and the next 2 days getting a tan, and getting over bad hangovers. any way they wanted to go to Pumikali but they didn't want any other people on the bus they asked how much would I earn with a full bus I said £300 they offered me £200 for the day so I accepted as I don't always have a full bus, we left early next morning well supposed to leave early, half hour later we are on our way, 10am they pulled out bottles of vodka and some cups they borrowed from the hotel they were pretty merry time we got there and they did the "Calcium treatment" in there knickers and bras as they had no swimwear a few of them were quite fit we were there for a few of hours and late afternoon we headed out to a café to eat, and they bought vodka and we headed back to the hotel it was getting dark, and then it began, one of them threw up inside the bus and the rest of them are just laughing and falling about pissed, I pulled over to make sure she was ok when one of the ladies

came up to me and helped herself to a handful of my privates and started snogging my face off, "well" I had to do what a man has to do, I aim to please my passengers. Got under way and then they started mooning and showing there tits to passing vehicles and being a Muslim race they nearly caused a few pile ups, time we got back they were so pissed, 2 of them slept in my bus that night and 2 others came back to my room and slept with me, not a lot of sleeping went on ? I blame the noisy party goers the other lady went to her room, I couldn't believe these toffee nosed ladies turned out like rabid teenagers or like ally-cats and I was the only Tommer I had 2 more days of this and 4 of them managed to conquer me lucky them !! lol, the other lady I personally think she was a wilting violet working too hard to fit in with her raucous friends, where she was more of the housewife taking care of the home and dropping kids off at school kind of person nice, I just found it bloody hilarious coz on the day they had to fly back they were all Toffee nosed again like nothing was out of sorts, I bet they will not forget this holiday, I know I won't forget Them. As I dropped them off at the airport we all had a hug and when I gave the shrinking violet a hug I whispered in her ear and said out of all you lot you have my utmost respect, and your husband should be very proud of you, she gave me a kiss and started crying, ?? I never will understand woman ?? bet their husbands never knew this side of their wives. You go ladies, your secrets safe with me. it's the hubby's fault for trusting you.

I always like it when a plane lands coz I normally get a new girlfriend each time one does, I never fell in love with anyone (thank God) they were there for fun and a bit on the side and I am there to oblige, with no complications, just the way I like it.

26 Turkey & Cos Police Cell

Throughout the rest of season (7 months) quite a lot happened, but I will just mention the ones that stood out. My sightseeing trips out were doing very, very well, and I decided to do a special one which was to take tourist over to the Greek Island of "Cos" as it is close to Turkey you would think it was part of Turkey, but no, it belongs to Greece, so added "Cos" as one of my trips, for £30 per head, and did mention on the blackboard that I can only do this trip if I have at least 6 people, or I wouldn't earn enough to make it pay. Next morning before I left to take some tourist to Ephesus, I put my notice board outside of the Hotel and left for an all-day excursion, When I got back to the Hotel the receptionist had this silly huge grin on her face, I asked what the devils wrong with you??

Oh I know , you got a date, and got laid yeah, nope, she told me she had taken 11 bookings for the "Cos" trip and they have all paid up front, waving £330 I couldn't believe it, During the day I never paid much mind to it, doubt if I will get anyone interested, , and as I put the date of the trip would be the day after tomorrow, that gave me time to do a much needed service. Next morning I made sure everyone had their Passports as we will be entering another country, so off we went to Bodrum and the car ferry to beautiful "Cos" I pulled up and paid for everyone's ferry fee (quite cheap) and as they went through Passport control I was at the back to make sure they all get through ok but when the border guard looked at my passport they took me into an office and then it hit me Turkish customs wrote all the details about the bike in the back of my Passport, remember, I told my passengers to make their way to the on board coffee bar and I will catch up with them there, Now I have a very big problem they wanted to know where the Motorbike was!

I totally forgot about that, anyway I told them that I blew the engine up and was waiting for parts, this wasn't a lie I really did blow the engine up, and I was waiting for parts, and guess what, I also had broken there visa requirement as the visa was for 2 months and I had been there 3 months that's a big problem, they then handcuffed me and said your under arrest for illegal sale of the motorbike and being an illegal immigrant without a valid visa, the Turks are very strict here, they spoke a little English and I said the ferry is about to leave and I have 11 people on there waiting for me.

Made no difference I'm being taken to a police station and locked up Now picture this I'm on my way to a cell and I have 11 people on board a ferry heading off to "Cos" without there Guide, and the mini bus has been seized. I was taken to a room at the police station and questioned, they wanted to know why I overstayed and told them I was helping a friend run a hotel and my bike was in bits, a few hours later they brought me some food and I had to stay for the night I couldn't believe what was going on, in the morning I was again questioned and I asked to speak with the British Consulate in Istanbul, took hours to get to talk to him, I told him everything ,and after me talking, and the police talking to the Consulate, we finally had a plan.

I was to go back to the hotel and load up the bike and bits and take them out of the country for 24 hours and then they will let me back into Turkey so they find me £50 for the expired visa, they dropped me back to Bodrum and i picked up the mini bus and got back to the hotel where a few of my customers came back for a refund, which I of course refunded, and a big apology for what they went through they were ok with what happened. I only refunded 5 of the 11 as the other 6 never came back for a refund, the 5 that did said they all stayed as a group and spent the day in "Cos" looking around they got the ferry back and couple of busses back to Altinkum.

Next morning I loaded the bike and all bits and went back to Bodrum and signed off the bike, but I still had to get me and the bike out of the country, so I went to the ferry guy and said can you take my bike and me to Cos we have to be out of Turkey for 24 hours so what I did was tied the bike & bits to the side, and asked the ferry man could he just leave it there as he goes backwards and forwards and I will be back same time tomorrow and re-enter Turkey, I gave him £20 as a tip so there was my bike going backwards and forwards, and me, I spent most of the night clubbing it and the rest of the day traveling round "Cos" on a bus, about late afternoon I went back to the ferry and my bike was still strapped to the side of the boat and I returned to Turkey.

At the end of the day I still made about £150 Something I should have mentioned earlier, Soon after we opened for the season we got a visit from 3 nasty looking Turks, who wanted money from us on a weekly basis as protection money, to stop any trouble from some Turkish gangs that roam the streets, and terrorise nightclubs and bar owners , Ralph told them to eff off and don't come back.

That evening about 10pm a young lad came and told us there was trouble down stairs (we had an underground dance & disco room under the hotel) open to non-residents, we told him we get used to fights down there, it was par- for- the -coarse, and we would take care of it, but he said these Turkish guys have Bandana's covering their faces and got weapons a 3 foot long hosepipes, with a very heavy steel bolt cable-tied to one end, and were swinging it and hitting people, Ralph loved fighting and he was good at it, and I would go as far as to say, he looks forward to having a good scrap no matter how big they are, or how many there were, I watched his face change, and I knew 'here we go' and between us it was over in about a minute they legged it dripping blood everywhere, we never saw them again.

We have had death threats, and tyres slashed, and a scruffy note saying.... we will never leave Turkey alive Moving forward I must mention at this time when everybody was closing up for the end of season ,we were walking back in the dark from the only bar still open in town and nobody about, This big shiny black Mercedes, with blacked out windows was following us at walking pace, I said "this don't look good mate" he said nah there just trying to scare us, I said yeah, you're not wrong there mate, its friggin working.

Then they drove up to us and the blacked out window at the back opened and this big black guy with bloody "sunglasses" on, stuck his hand out and made like a gun shape, and went click, click the window went up and they pissed off, Ralph shouted some not so nice phrases in Turkish (he learnt to speak Turkish) I said Oi Pack it in will you, they may come back , what did he say while sticking his fingers up at them GOOD BRING IT ON, I don't know , what's he like eh.

Ok back to where we left off One of Ralph's friend a Policeman back in the UK came to stay, and was telling me that he was a police Diver, I told him i would love to learn to aqua dive but never got round to it, he asked if there were any sub-aqua- diving shops that you can hire all the gear from, and there was a place back in Bodrum so he said he would teach me after he's had a few days to relax. 4 days later we were in the shop, and I paid for 3 days hire for us both, and all the air refills we needed, and also as many sightseeing trips with me for free, Bargain or what, the worst bit of it all is the first time we got onto the edge of a jetty where the water was about 12 foot deep, he was putting these lead weights on me that weighed about 10 Kilo's plus my air tank it was heavy, he said ok in you go and I just couldn't I said I will go straight to the bottom with all this weight, but he kept on and I said take off some of the lead weights, he knew I wasn't too happy about all the weight so he said walk back to the beach and we will do it another way, he took all the lead off me and said ok now walk into the sea, and when you're at 4 feet depth try and dive under the water .

I couldn't, my air tank was keeping me afloat no matter how hard I tried I couldn't get beneath the surface, so I came back to the beach and he loaded all the weights back on me and said now go try, Brilliant it was so easy to dive down to 20 25 foot of water I loved it, it must of been very close to zero Gravity feeling and I spent 3 days diving, and running back to Bodrum 2, 3 times a day to get refills, What a great new hobby. expensive, but I was pretty well off so didn't have to worry about costs.

So if you're out there somewhere Dennis, a Million thanks to you mate. Clive.

27 Being Robbed

Since I have been here in Turkey, I have notice they don't throw stuff away that may be fixable, The Mini buss only just started this morning as the Battery has had it so I went to the local car repair garage, scruffy little workshop, as was most businesses in these kind of countries. I asked the mechanic do you have a new battery for this ford, he said no, but he could fix my old one, eh ?? I said you can't it's got 2 dead cells, and I have to replace the battery, but he insisted, I said 'what have I got to lose' go ahead, good luck, I thought, 'I got to see this,' never heard of repairing a battery before ? He started off by turning the battery upside down, and cutting the whole bottom off with a hack-saw, located the 2 buckled dead cells, and went over to his bench and cut them out, got some lead, and melted it down and used the dead cells as a rough template and built 2 new cells matching the good ones.

These cells didn't have to be exactly identical, so long as the top of the new cells were below the acid level line, and not touching any other cell The only thing to touch these new cells are the Positive + Negative - wires inside, the Battery that are connected to the + & - post that the main leads go on. and with a special glue stuck, and heat moulded them back together, left it for about an hour then grinded the welded areas flat and sealed it with some glue, went and got some acid and topped the battery up and put it on charge for an hour, fitted it back in the buss, and turned it over, and she fired up straight away, I couldn't believe it, never seen that before, or ever since. and only charged £10 I gave him £20 (mind you back in 1990 that's a lot of money and I never had a problem over the thousands of Ks and the long drive home. Brilliant.

I was in my room one afternoon having a count up of what I had earned for the last week when Ralph called me on the phone, as he needed me to give him a lift with these 2 heavy speakers down into the disco, I said ok I'm on my way, 20 minutes later I went back to my room and saw my door was half open (I have had trouble closing it) and maybe it swung open when I thought I had shut it and noticed the money I was counting was Gone ??? about £1,200 of it , it was on my bed, I Immediately looked in my wardrobe as the safe in there was open with about 14 grand sitting in it, Phew that was still there, I locked the door, and ran down to Ralph told him what had happened, we both thought straight away who it may be, There were these 2 Australian lads who were drinking in our outside bar last night and they were a bit loud and swearing a bit too much and Ralph told them to keep it down a little, apparently yesterday they asked our hotel receptionist if they could have a room for one night at a reduced rate Coz they said they were students, so she asked for their students cards, but they said they had lost them,, crap well they had to pay full rate.

We have had Students in before and gave them a discounted price and had students cards. These Aussies were Bumming their way to Britain, OK back to finding these low-life's Ralph said well they can't be far and they stuck out a bit, so He got on the motor bike (all fixed now) and went one direction, and got in the Mini-bus and I went the other, didn't see

them, we asked a few people and a bar owner said, he had seen them they looked like they were in a hurry, heading towards the bus and taxi ranks (It had to be them who stole my money) we asked a couple of bus drivers and Taxi drivers, but they didn't see them.

They could be anywhere, after about a couple of hours we gave up, they are probably still in the very hectic town or if they had any sense they would be long gone, we spent the evening asking in bars and nightclubs, I reckon there gone, and so is my Money. But deep down I felt it could've have been so much worse if they only took a second to look in the wardrobe safe that was open they could've been £15 grand up. I definitely learnt a lesson that day LOCK my door, even if I'm only gone for a minute. Under Turkish law they would chop your hand off for stealing and it's still Law, but not used nowadays, so the local police informed us. Good job Ralph didn't catch them he would've ripped their heads off. A few weeks ago we both went into town and bought a Shotgun each 12 Bore Double barrel (nothing to do with the Robbery) the gun shop said we have to go to the Police Station and apply for a gun licence, all we had to do was show our Passport, an address, where we were living here, and our address in the UK then take the Shotgun in to them so they could log the serial number on the gun, blimey that was easy.

We were told there are some big boars up there in the Mountains, and we could maybe shoot one, and serve up" wild boar" on the Menu. but you have to go during the night as they can't be found in daylight. So midnight we loaded up a load of water melons and parked up near there watering hole, so we are loaded and ready, While waiting, we were laying on our backs on the flat roof waiting for a Grunt or two, it was a really clear night and we just stared at the billions of stars and saw loads of shooting stars , it was a terrific sight to see, I have never seen so many shooting stars in my life.

Ok a couple hours went by and we heard a group of boars approaching and got ready, there 5 of them they were enjoying the Melons that we broke up, we decided we would both shoot at the same one, and we got one first time, we had to fire again to make sure he wasn't playing Possum. When dawn arrived we strung this very heavy boar 100 + kilo's up from a tree and spent hours skinning it and cutting it up into cook size portions, got it back to the hotel and it caused mayhem as we asked our Chef, Moratt to put it on the menu when he saw it he went Berserk , hollering, and shouting, all the Turkish staff turned up in the kitchen and they joined in as well ? bloody hell, then our Turkish manager explained we can't cook this, let alone eat it, as we are Muslims, 20 minutes later the Chef Moratt quit and walked out, so Ralph started to cook a bit and it stunk the bloody hotel out, The smell was really bad, not a nice cooking smell, it was like something had decomposed, so we got rid of it, no bacon butties today then, later on we did manage to find a bad Muslim Bucher who sold pork and bacon under the table, as there are quite a few bad Muslims that do eat Pork ??

Moving on now, I must point out that the Turks that drive are bloody mad, they are not just bad drivers there suicidal, they overtake no matter whether there is oncoming traffic, with

no hope of making a safe overtake because they believe" Allah" will protect them, well Allah didn't protect the fatalities I have seen, and that's quite lot throughout the year, the worst one I ever saw was 5 teenagers were killed instantly in an horrific head-on with a very big truck in which the driver, and his Passenger also died I came across this accident just after the Ambulances, and police got there, I was totally traumatised by what I saw, you couldn't recognise a few of them as people, due to the fragmented remains of their dismembered bodies, bit gruesome eh ! and soon after they realised there was no chance of treating these poor souls as it was obvious they were beyond it Police and Paramedics where everywhere, about a dozen of them.

Just one more I want to mention My Daughter Debbie and her partner came out to Turkey, I went to the airport to pick them up and we were Driving back to the Hotel and I was telling them about the Turkish drivers being such bad drivers, and on the way I said, we will pull over for a while, as we were at the most notorious Black spot for accidents, on this mountain pass, we had only been there about 5 minutes and 2 lorries hit each other head on 50 feet away and we saw the whole thing, and even saw the driver come flying through his windshield, I didn't hang around to see if I could help, there were plenty of people around, and I didn't want my Daughter seeing what I have seen many times, She was amazed at what just happened.

Perfect timing or what.

28 Fortnightly Bonus / Saving Lives / Me & Marriage

As I Mentioned earlier Ralph was a very fair man and looked after all the Turkish waiters, bar & restaurant staff etc, they all worked long hours, 14 / 15 hours a day, 7 days a week, and had to send most of their earnings back home to support their Families, they had free accommodation and food. We felt sorry for them, they were very loyal, and worked very hard, and Ralph came up with a good way to thank them. Every 2nd or 3rd weekend he would pay, and I would take, the 8 staff to the cities "Careharney", can't spell it but is pronounced as it looks, this is a "Brothel" they couldn't believe what was happening, some were very excited, some nervous, Also on board was our Turkish hotel Manager, who speaks perfect English and translated to the "Madam" this would be a regular thing, and we worked out an hourly discounted rate, and me, and manager would have first choice of any of the 12 or so gorgeous Working girls, all neatly lined up in front of us for FREE. this carried on Throughout the season about 6/7 months and we told all the lads they must never tell anyone, not even your best friend, as this kind of behaviour in a Muslim country is strictly frowned upon.

They already know this but had to be said Since then I must mention the staff worked even harder!! We got friendly with a Turkish family who's 15 year old Daughter Hilamah worked as cleaners in our hotel, after a while I was invited to the family home for an evening dinner, they spoke English quite well, after removing my shoes, we all sat on the floor rugs and ate off a 12 inch high table, the food was really amazing, colourful, and very tasty, while we were eating the conversation turned to their 15 year old Daughter Hilamar who want her to do well in life, (I have a good idea where this is going) and go to Europe, or to England. To cut short a very long story, They offered her to be my wife yeah 15 years old and to take her back to England, and with a clap of the hands in she came, boy, I was blown away, she had these very colourful garments on head to her sparkly shoes, make up and arm bangles, and she looked absolutely Gorgeous, like a miss world contestant, she was sat facing me and I'm still in shock at such beauty, she looked so much older like 23/24 The mother said we could get married in Turkey, and take her back with me when I leave, I am still in shock, I said to the parents she is only 15 they said what is wrong , and I replied she is too young, and Mother spoke up and said you can Marry at 14.

I am now feeling a bit awkward and I don't want to insult their Daughter, or insult the parents, as this is a very proud moment for all of them, I knew I had to be extremely diplomatic here even though, I had to decline and mentioned I would be breaking the law back home, they said again it would be ok if you Marry in Turkey and take her into England already your wife, I had to think quickly, and I said the minute I enter the UK the Marriage would not be recognised under British law, and I would be committing a very serious offence and go to prison, the father said you can come back next year take her, god I would be over the moon with such a stunningly, beautiful Wife. I said as much as I would love to

Marry Hिलamah But I have plans for next year, and i am extremely honoured for choosing me to be Hिलamah's Husband and I respect that very much, God what a beautiful Daughter they have, maybe things would be better if she was a bit older, who knows ? At the beginning of the season, Ralph got talking to the Hotel owner "Bakki" of the Hotel next to ours, he knew him quite well from previous holidays there, and asked Ralph if he could lend him a couple of grand to get his place ready for the season as he had financial problems last year due to ill health, and expensive Hospital bills, and would get it back with interest. Half way through the season, I told him not to, he is still the opposition, but he went ahead anyway, it's not a lot he said £3,000 and wouldn't affect his business.

Half way through the season He went over to collect his money, and Bakki kept saying he would pay him next month, as he had hospital bills to pay, and if he doesn't pay what he owes, they will not do any of the other operations he still needs, (so he says) and this went on to the end of the season Ralph was now very angry, and I thought this is going to get really ugly, really quick, I went over a couple of times and told Bakki he really needs to pay up, as I told him you do not want Ralph getting angry, a bit too late now, he told me he never got the bookings he expected this year, I believe that as we were the same and any money he made was sent to pay off what he Owes to the hospital, which I believed coz we never got the amount of rooms we thought either, and Ralph was desperate for the loan back as he is skint, nearly all the hotels were being shut down for winter, Ralph was now getting very drunk all day on Brandy, he stood up shouting, I'm going to f...ing kill him, his face was crimson, I have never seen him this bad before, he stormed out of the room, and I heard him unlocking the gun cupboard and loaded it with 2 cartridges oh god no, I followed him and watched him as he walked across the empty outside restaurant and put the shotgun behind the bar and crossed over the road to Bakki's Hotel, and went storming in shouting get my money now, or I will kill you.

I quickly grabbed the gun and unloaded it and put it back, he came back grabbed the gun went back into the hotel, Bakki was screaming no no no Ralph screamed "last chance have you got my f...ing money, no he replied, then I heard a click from the trigger, I watched through a window as Bakki was now on his knees crying and begging Ralph not to kill him, again Ralph screamed f..it and then another click, and nothing, Ralph most definitely would've shot him dead, no doubt about that, what so ever, and at point blanc range too. Ralph came storming back to get some more cartridges which I had hidden, he guessed it was me who unloaded the gun, he came right up to my face pushed his nose quite hard onto my nose and screamed where are the effing cartridges?

I told him you're not getting them, and at that moment he was about a second from laying me out, and I shouted, Go on then f...ing hit me, hit me, and destroy 20 odd years of friendship, he backed off just as we heard lots of sirens Bakki must have called the Police, I said give the gun to me and you go back up to your room.

I had managed to calm him down by now I quickly ran back to the gun locker and put it back in its place with the Cartridges I went out the back of the hotel and found a piece of wood that was the size of a shotgun and put it on a wall near the side of our hotel, and told Ralph to say he didn't have a gun, it was a piece of timber, and just as I did that, there was about a dozen or more police vehicles fully armed surrounding our hotel and they all had Pistols and probably about 10 rifles, there were even machine guns trained on us, they were all screaming, get down on the floor, get down on the floor, they handcuffed us and wanted to know where the gun was ?

I said to the chief of police, he didn't have a gun, I will show you, and as I got up, and slowly walked with all these firearms trained on me was quite scary, I walked to the wall and showed him the piece of wood and said that's what he had, not a gun, by now Bakki was all brave now pointing at Ralph, and waving his fist about and said he had a shotgun and not a piece of wood The Chief police said one of the local police have informed him that we had guns and now we were licenced to own them , he demanded to see them, so we went up and showed them, all locked away properly, as enforced by license rules.

They said we are going to get a statement from Bakki but you 2 are coming to the police station, with us, So here I go again yet another police cell, Ralph made a statement and explained what this was all about. I refused to make a statement as I had nothing to do with it, they let me go like I said I had nothing to do with it apart from saving the life of "Bakki", and if Ralph had shot him dead he, as a non-Native of Turkey, would have been executed 100% so that's 2 lives I saved. (still nothing to do with me eh!! In the morning I went to the police station to see Ralph sitting down with the Chief of Police, having breakfast with him ?? you couldn't make this up believe me. Ralph said the police have discharged him as not enough evidence.

While walking back I said to him, don't you ever come that close to ruining our friendship again. he apologised quite a few times. Got back and noticed a couple of men boarding up Bakki's hotel and asked if he was still here, and they said no he got a taxi to the airport, and going back to Istanbul where he lives, Ralph asked do you have his address, he said no and he paid us up front to board up the Hotel, I said leave it Ralph, its only £3,000 I will give you the £3,000 just forget about it. I

Reminded him how close he came to an execution or spending the rest of his life behind bars, in a not so nice Turkish Prison, the next day we went back to the gun shop and sold back the 2 Shotguns, as we were getting ready for the long trip back to the UK. I didn't do too bad, I ended up with £22,000 (Not bad for 1990) and when we were leaving Altinkum . We stopped in at a bank to transfer our money to our UK Bank accounts, as it wouldn't be a good idea to travel all that way, through many countries with all our cash, I sent back £20,000 I told Ralph I would pay for everything from here, to home, i.e.: Petrol, food, accommodation, beer, nightclubs we are not rushing home we are going to take it easy and

have a relaxed drive home. (10 days) The best nightclubs were in Prague, and Germany, and Bucharest.

Ralph said he won't be going back to Turkey, But I was thinking about returning next season on my own, as I am a pretty good tour guide now, Thing is, where I was eating and living for free for 10 months, I would have to pay out a lot of money for a room, where as I was living in a hotel for free, and also 80% of my bookings came from our hotel, I wouldn't have that I would have to advertise my trips from a room in a hotel, and I would definitely have to pay a high commission about a 3rd to the owner of the hotel, plus I would have to buy a decent Mini-bus, the cost of fuel there and back.

The more I thought about it and working out all cost, it wouldn't earn me enough for me to make the money I made this last season, I'm still debating it would work if I leased 2x mini busses in Turkey and form a ltd Company, yes that would work, but maybe later in a couple of years' time So decided to go back to the States after Christmas and leave 1st January "Miami" here I come.

29 Me Married / Chris's Bike Wreck U.S.A

It was a good feeling being back home in the UK, after about 10 months away, the first thing that struck me was listening to people in the streets or pubs speaking English, sounds a bit daft but all I have heard for 10 months is Turkish. I didn't move back into my house, as I had tenants, so I stayed at a friend's place as I was flying out in a few weeks to Miami, I did pop in to make sure my house hadn't been trashed, as I have had tenants before that had done just that, but my present tenant was looking after it quite well, so was pleased with that. My friend and me popped into our local pub for a drink and got chatting with a very nice looking Bar maid (Suzie) and over the 3 weeks I was there we got on really well, I told her I was off to Miami soon, and she wanted to come with me,(I wasn't really looking for a relationship) but she was quite intelligent, played a guitar and was into motorcycles, and she ticked all the boxes, as well as being a looker !!

So I told her if your serious then write a few lines every day about yourself and post it weekly for the next 4 weeks, and if you still feel the same about me, then I will buy you a ticket and fly you out to Miami and see how we go, this must sound weird, it felt weird to me !! Well the time for me to leave was here, and Suzie took me to the airport, it was a very emotional experience for us both, I knew I had fallen for her big time. 10 hours later I landed in Miami and was met by my good friend Chris, he's the same Chris who helped me and Tracey when our engine blew up in Florida back in 1987 and he was putting me up at his place in Clewiston, until I got myself a job and a place to live. I managed to get work with a scrap dealer in town, it was very dirty, and hard work, especially cutting up huge steel plates with Oxy/acetylene in the baking hot Florida sun, but the money was good.

I found somewhere to rent in an RV resort called" The Crooked hook RV resort" just outside of Clewiston I called Suzie in the UK and told her that I had got her a ticket and the flight details to Miami , she was so worried that I may not be there to meet her, as she had no money, and she would be stranded, I will be there I promise. The day has come to pick up my (new) girlfriend, I felt a bit nervy, like a young teenager on his first date, she promised her Mum she would phone as soon as she landed as she was worried about her, so phoned her from the airport. After a few weeks this guy John, who owns this very big RV resort offered Suzie work in the office, and he took me on to work in the Maintenance of the site, the accommodation I was paying rent for would now be rent free, and a good monthly wage each.

About a year later Suzie was talking about getting Married, so we flew back to the UK and got wed, Our boss offered to pay our return flights as he wanted us to come back and carry on working for him, great !! we only came back for a week just to get wed, and catch up with family, and went back Mr & MRs We had a pretty good life out there and did many things, I Owned a Ford V8 Crown Victoria LTD. a Low rider Harley Davidson, And a Honda 900 and all at the same time.

My Boss, John (more of a friend now) also had bikes one of them was an old 1960s Triumph Bonneville a non-runner that needed a lot of work and he didn't know that much about them, and as I had these kind of bikes most of my life, and new them well, I said ok let's do this properly, so we stripped it down completely every nut and bolt to do a total rebuild of it with new engine parts and new paint and much more. About 3 months later and a lot of \$s it looked brand new and ran really well he loved it and he learned all about Triumphs. Now he is looking to find another that needs restoring and wants to try and do it on his own. My long-time friend Terry flew out from the UK to see me for 3 weeks, he suffers with Rheumatoid Arthritis quite bad, but all the 3 weeks he was here in the hot sun, it hardly bothered him. I have a friend here in Clewiston called TJ and owns 4 seater Piper Cherokee plane" and took us up for a fly down the west coast along the Gulf of Mexico to Miami. Oh, forgot to mention when we all met up at the airport with TJ and his friend Randy. they were carrying a 12 pack of Budweiser,???

I Just mentioned casually were not drinking up, there are we ?? well, we are, don't know about you" limeys"(American slang) for the British, there's enough for the 4 of us, O God help us, now my knees were knocking. Randy spoke up and said don't worry guys TJ wont drink any more than 4 or 5, shite, one would be better, I have never been in such a small plane all cramped in, Randy and TJ were big guys, Okay off we go trundling down the runway at 100 miles an hour/160Ks and so close to the ground, 'we're up' and I was listening to the little 4 cylinder petrol engine with spark plugs, screaming like it's got no more to give, but when we were up to cruising level the engine revs dropped along with my Blood Pressure, thank heavens for that, we flew for a couple hours and landed in West Palm Beach to refuel, on the way back we were flying over Crooked hook RV Resort where I lived when TJ said look left there's an accident involving a truck and a motorbike must of just happened as there are no emergency vehicles there yet, just a few people, as we were approaching the airport we saw all the emergency vehicles on their way, we touched down and parked the plane up and tied it down, went into the office and the guys there said there has been a wreck on highway 27 outside Crooked hook, TJ said yeah we just flew over it, and then the guy said to TJ you know Chris H don't you ?

Yeah, well its him, we heard it on the scanner he was riding his Motorcycle and he had pulled out in front of a Semi-Truck Oh my god it's my friend, so we got in our cars and went to the Clewiston county hospital, but he was so badly injured they had to fly him onto Fort Myers Hospital, about an hour's drive, so I went to his house (15 minutes away) to pick up Diana his wife to take her to Hospital, bugger, she is out, no mobiles back then, I asked a neighbour if she knew where she was she said she was up her daughters, so went there, and had to tell them what has happened.

I took them both to Fort Myers Hospital about an hour and a half away he was in a critical condition and was having surgery at the minute, couldn't get much info, we stayed there until he was awake after his ops and found out from the surgeon that he had broken 6 ribs

and they had punctured his left lung, his left leg was badly broken and his left ankle was a mess and would need a lot of surgery to save it, and a few other not so bad injuries. I think he was in 10 days by the time he was discharged he had a few rods in his leg and a huge metal cage round his lower leg and a weird contraption around his ankle with metal pins coming out of his leg with adjusters on them and he had to turn them a fraction every few days to try and get the two broken ends to meet. All us friends got together and built a wooden ramp so he could get himself in and out of the house, in a wheel chair, and done a few other modifications inside. after about 6 months he was walking around.

His friends totally rebuilt his bike and he rode it for the first time, a couple of months after he was discharged, we were all glad he wasn't put off riding.

30 The Bahama's & Motorhome

The next couple of years we did a lot of exciting things one of which we had to renew our American Visa's which your supposed to do every 2 years, unless you have dual Nationality, you have to be out of the Country for 24 hours.

We thought we are not far from Cuba, or the Bahama's less than an hour's flight for either, So we decided on the Bahama's for a week we booked a posh hotel in Paradise Island and flew out for about 6 days and thought we would hire something to get about the hotel we were in had 2 cars and a jeep he normally rents out, how much for the jeep for a week, sorry none of the vehicles are running, and it's very hard to find mechanics on the island, who only work when they have to and charge the earth, I said can I have a look and see if I can see what's wrong with them, Yes by all means, he said the clutch on the Jeep is worn out, one car is only running on 3 cylinders, and the other car had no brakes, right, I looked at the jeep first, fired it up and was running nice tried to put it in gear and it just groused but wouldn't engage a gear, so I thought I would turn it off, put it in gear and turned the key and the jeep lurched forward and started to drive I went a little way and still couldn't change gear with the clutch which made me look at something else.

I turned round and got back and the hotel owner came out you have fixed it, I told him no but let me check a few things out, I pulled the hood to check if there was any clutch fluid, in the Master Cylinder, but it wasn't an hydraulic clutch, I then knew exactly what was wrong, It had a Cable Clutch and there was loads of slack so undone the adjuster and took up a good couple of inches, locked it off, got in and went for a good run and it changed gear perfectly it was sorted, the guy was over the moon and it only took 20 mins, I had a look at one of the cars, it started up after a struggle, and notice No.3 cylinder wasn't working I swapped spark plugs & leads wasn't that, and checked a few other things and came to the conclusion the head gasket was blown, nothing I can do, so looked at the other car with no brakes got underneath to check for leaks all dry so I pumped the brake quite a lot and got a bit of a pedal but was going down to the floor with pressure I told the guy there is air in your system and would prob take about an hour.

He said you can have the Jeep for a week for free if you can fix the brakes, fair enough but I will need you to help by working the brake pedal, so we got in his car to buy some brake fluid and some clear tubing, I said to Suzie, why don't you go get yourself a beer and chill by the pool for a bit we will be all done in about an hour or 2, Got back and bled all the brakes, it took over 2 hours, there was loads of air in the whole system, the brakes were spot on now, he asked how much did he owe me I said nothing, I got the Jeep free for a week I'm fine with that, then he said what about a free hotel room if you come back here again. yup that's fine with me.

The hotel owner said come and live in the Bahama's as a Mechanic you would earn a fortune here? I did think about it, but decided nah, don't want to go back on the tools, dirty, hard work and boring, whereas in Florida, work is hard, and so diverse, and I never get bored. The 4th of July is "America's day of independence" and boy do they celebrate it well !! with BBQ's Beer horseshoes, Beer, music, Beer, and all kinds of guns being fired from hand Pistols to AK47s Oh did I mention beers, and when you go anywhere day or evening it's like there's a war going on loved it. Well fun was over, time to get back to work, but not forgetting a great time we had on this Beautiful Island. we returned the Jeep back and he gave me one of his business cards and told us please come back soon, I thought, if I did he will probably have half a dozen cars for me to fix. so maybe Cuba next time.

Suzie and I were thinking about taking a long brake 3 maybe 4 months out, and tour South America, we spoke with the boss John about it and he wasn't too pleased, well can't blame him really, but said ok so long as you both come back to work here, he said he will get some hired help, and Suzie's job will be covered by one of the ladies (snow bird) here in the Campground, she lives way up in the Northern states, very cold in winter but lives down here every 6 months during Florida's winter (still in the 80s) she is always helping out doing the Office work and she would be pleased to cover for Suzie. Okay we spent months planning the trip in a proper, but small Motorhome, and as I was thumbing through an ad-trader, I saw a photo advertising the same vehicle a Dodge Tradesman V8 5.3 ltr me and Trace bought in Chicago to do our tour back in 1987 even the same colour, only this one was a factory made Mini-motor home, and not a converted Mini-bus.

It had of course everything you would need with lots of stowage and a Chrome ladder on the back to get access to the storage box on the roof you didn't need to stoop inside, as it had a raised roof, the drivers and front passenger seats were what they call Captains seats as you can swivel 360 degrees and were well comfy. We took it out for a test drive and the only thing wrong with it was it smoked a bit, engine itself was very quiet and figured it probably just needed the heads off and a good de-coke, so after the test drive I pointed the smoke out to him and I used this to bargain with the price, I said I didn't know anything about Mechanics (white lie there) and it would probably cost me about a grand for me to get a garage to de-coke it, the asking price was \$4,000 very reasonable and I said I will offer £3,000 and I wasn't going to pay anymore, he tried to haggle and I said if you won't accept \$3,000 I will walk away and wait for something that didn't smoke, he gave in in the end \$3,000 it was, I would have paid the \$4,000 even with a smoky engine, wasn't going to tell him that though, or that I was Mechanically minded, and was going to do it myself.

Over the next couple of weeks I had both the heads off and it was really coked up so removed all the valves and carbon from top of the pistons, I took the heads to my mechanic friend Hippy Gary, he's the guy that got me another engine back in 1987 he was going to fit new valve guides and skim the head, never wanted anything for doing it, so all I had to pay was for was 32 new valve guides, (which took me nearly a day to grind them in, proper job)

and a head Gasket set, rebuilt it, done the valve clearances, and was ready to start her up, so fingers crossed, she coughed and spluttered for a bit, but she settled down and ran sweet as a nut, I was quite pleased as I have never done a V8 before, there was a bit of smoke but I know that will settle down, it's just where it's all been disturbed.

Must remember to tighten down the head in about 500 miles and do the valve clearances again.

31 3 Months In Miami Hospital

Our new motorhome was a brilliant buy , I changed and updated stuff inside, and out, and stored loads of spares that may be needed, including A .38 Revolver, as I have heard and read things that can be dangerous and deadly in certain countries, Well it's no good waving a stick at a man with a gun, !! I had it well hidden in a special clip under my seat, and accessible in seconds, Went to see a friend who owns a scrapyard with hundreds of wrecks in there, I could take stuff off for mine and take with me.

We decided to leave for our "S. American" trip about end of June, when the RV park was at its quietest, as all the people (snowbirds) that stayed here for their winter, now leave to go back to their Northern States, which are now warming up. Father's Day 19th June 1994 we decided to go and see our friends in Fort Lauderdale before we set off on our trip, Paul is British, and we were friends from years ago and lived in the same street as me in the UK, he Married an American girl, and came to live here a long time ago. Okay , I pulled into our local Petrol station and topped up with fuel and set off down through the Everglades....Filling up with fuel was the last thing I remembered.

I woke up in Hospital after 10 days in a coma ? this is where it gets very scary, My first awareness of anything, was this continued beeping sound, and people talking in the distance, I then opened my eyes and saw a ceiling and lights ?? I didn't have a clue what was going on, I tried to move but nothing happened all I could move was my eyes, I tried to speak and nothing came out, for a moment I thought I was asleep and dreaming, then I noticed people looking down at me and calling my name I was aware there were a lot of people here now and one lady Nurse said don't worry Clive you are in Hospital, but you're going to be ok, you have been involved in a car accident , and we have had to put you in an induced coma as you have some injuries to your neck, and it's to stop you moving, about as we didn't want you making things worse , now your awake we will reverse the procedure, but we want you to be calm and don't try to move as it will take several minutes to work I am going to give you some Morphine now your awake, she told me you're going to feel uncomfortable for a while as we have had to put tubes down your throat to help you breath, by now I'm thinking what the f*^%k are they going on about.

I have been conscious about a minute now and I'm still unaware of what is going on ? I'm starting to get my feelings back slowly , the Nurse asked me to take a deep breath as she was going to pull the breathing tube out, god that was bloody awful, but now that's out I could speak but that was a struggle, but I was speaking enough to be understood, I am now fully aware of what has happened, I have just realised, where is my wife, Suzie, she's not dead is she ? please tell me she's not dead, I'm panicking now, they said she is fine and she has had surgery and she was discharged a week ago, a week ago?

I just came here today didn't I they said no you have been in a coma for 10 days, and Suzie has come every day and sat by your side, then I asked am i still in America? of course you are, you're In Delray Hospital Miami. next hour or two they were doing stuff they have to do and a Nurse came in and told me they have phoned Suzie and she is on her way over from home in Clewiston your Boss is bringing her, it's about 30 miles 50Ks I guess she will be here within the hour, and for some unknown reason I started crying?? not like me, but the nurse said that's normal your still in shock.

Then they started telling me what injuries I had > ok head to toe, Fractured Skull, broken Nose facial cuts, Broke my neck in 2 places (C2 & C3) which they told me is what is known as a Hang man's fracture, and I was a very, very lucky guy not to be dead or paralysed from the neck down, another couple of mills and I would have been one or the other, >my throat had been crushed , broke both collar bones, six broken ribs, 2 of which punctured my lung, and I have a very big tube inserted into the side of my chest, a bit painful, Fractured Pelvis, broken arm, that now has a plate in it, couple of broken fingers, right leg broken, my knee cap removed as it was smashed to bits and a few superficial cuts and things.

I had a bit of a doze and was woken up by Suzie looking down at me, god I was so pleased to see her, I asked her what injuries she had, and apparently she had a head Fracture and some petrol burns, and she had been scalped by the impact of the car that hit us the metal roof ripped her scalp down to the skull, and basically all they did was to flop it back into place and stitch it back on, I said what happened, I don't remember a thing , was it my fault, no it wasn't, the driver that hit us was drunk, I said I hope he's in pain the bastard.

Suzie said we were going to tell you later and wait till your stronger as its quite horrific, I'm ok tell me, Well as we were driving through the Everglades on our way to our friends in Fort Lauderdale on a 2 lane highway the guy who was behind the car that hit us said he was all over the road, and watched him reach over to get a beer and lost control and ploughed head long into me doing about a 100Ks/ 60 mph and my motorhome went right through his small car Killing all 4 occupants, the driver aged 32, his wife 22 , there 3 and a half year old daughter, and, there 11 month old baby girl, Oh god no!!!

I was horrified, apparently the Trauma hawk Helicopter was first to arrive and by the time it landed the witness told them that I had stopped breathing, (5/6 minutes ago) and that I was dead, and Susie was unconscious but alive, they managed to revive me, only to die again 4 days later in Hospital, while in a coma. I had a few operations over the time in Hospital nearly 3 months Soon after my accident my Sister Avril, and my 2 daughters, Debbie and Cara flew out to see me that really lifted my spirit they were here for 2 weeks but I thought they were only there for a couple of days? mind you I was still quite ill, on a lot of Morphine and I was still very Traumatised I want to mention the Drs and Nurses were brilliant, but there was one young nurse that really stood out for me her name was Judy and she worked permanent nights and was there all the time I was in Hospital.

She would come and sit and read to me every night she even brought me a Walkman so I could listen to my own music and would comfort me when I was upset ,we had a special Nurse /Patient relationship, Later after I was discharged I met up with her and treated her to a slap up meal and evening on a Miami Cruise ship along the beautiful inland waterways of Miami and after the Cruise we went to see a movie stayed over for the night and thanked her from the bottom of my heart for everything she did for me. We stayed in touch after I went back to the UK.

Suzie was not coming daily as its quite a trek to do after work, so I said come when you feel up to it, She was not like her usual self and when she did come she would leave after about an hour, I felt I was losing her and I couldn't do anything about it, One day I was talking to the Hospitals phycologist who help people to deal with trauma, and I said about Suzie not being Suzie, and very cold towards me, he went and looked at her Medical record for her injuries and came back to me and said she had damage the part of her brain that deals with personality , he said it may be short lasting, and she may get back to her normal self but there is no telling, it may take months, a year, or may never return to her old self. The day had come to discharge me I was fitted with a "T" tube that was inserted into my throat, and sticking out at the front of my throat otherwise I wouldn't be able to Breath at all speech was difficult The following weeks were very strained for us both, she started to dress up a bit tarty low cut tops, short skirts, and her hair all curls make-up and would go off into town drinking with a friend of ours.

Just before Christmas she told me she was moving out and was stopping at a friend's, I was devastated and asked her why, she said she didn't have any feelings for me, and we were over, I could not believe she just said that We were both totally dedicated to each other for the last 3 years before the accident, I said the accident wasn't my fault, so why do I feel like it was, I spoke with her a few times as we both still worked in the same place and said to her, can't you remember how much we loved each other ? she just shrugged her shoulders, She was a totally different person. All of our friends tried to tell her how we were so happy but it didn't seem to bother her.

The week before Christmas she moved out of the Campground ,and I learnt she moved in with this 60 year old Harley rider who was twice her age, and lived on the coast, but I didn't know where, never saw her again. Christmas day arrived and I was alone in doors with all my family and friends thousands of miles away in the UK I felt I had nothing left to live for, and drank a whole bottle of Jack Daniels whisky throughout the day, I had photographs of my daughters and grandkids laid out on the floor with me sobbing my heart out over them, I went to a cupboard and got my 9mm semi-automatic pistol, loaded it, racked it so it's loaded, took the safety catch off, and put it to my head, my finger was on the trigger and I was sobbing like a baby....it felt like I was there for hours like this, the only thing that stopped me pulling the Trigger, was my Photo's, I couldn't do this to them, as I know they thought the world of me, and this isn't me.

I woke up about ten the next morning, and decided I'm not going to let this get to me like it did last night, I felt ready to accept that my Wife Suzie had also perished in the accident, and felt that was easier to explain than to tell people she had left me.

To round this awful chapter up I was entitled to a lot of compensation, over a million dollars for all the injuries as informed by lawyers, who were buzzing in and out of the Hospital, waiting for me to wake up from my Coma, there called "Ambulance chasers" but guess what this guy who caused the crash was from the Island of Haiti, and was living in America illegally, he had no green card no driving license, and above all, no Motor insurance , which meant, no compensation, the Lawyers disappeared , all I got was a bill for 10 of thousands of Dollars, and a really F*+%- ckeD up life to look forward to.

A Few months went by and my sister Avril was going to come out and see me, I had crawled into a bottle of JD at Christmas, time and never came out, I was working light duty, but still drunk half a bottle of JD every day, when she said she would be here in a couple of weeks I stopped the JD and never touch a drop after that.

I still have a JD now and again because I want to, and not because I have to. Cheers.

32 Gracelands /JD Distillery/Avril

My Sister Avril arrived from the UK for 3 weeks, and I told her I would show her a few states to how diverse America is state by state, Florida is lovely but take away the mouse house (Disney world) and the sunsets, there is not too much to shout about, as there is no scenery its flat as a pancake, and gazillions of Mosquito's. Got home and told her what I have planned out for her.

Remember back to MEMORIES 6 when I blew the V8 up back in 1987 in Florida and I mentioned about this big guy with 2 foot hair and beard on a Harley pulled over to help "Hippy Gary" the mechanic, well he Moved from Florida up to North Carolina in the Smokey Mountains as he had enough of the heat in Florida He lives in a huge 4 bed, all en-suite log Cabin he built himself, and a large workshop that he builds custom made Harleys for a living that are worth up \$30,000 and to customer high spec . He actually owns a large part of the mountain he lives on, with thousands of trees, a few large 'rich in fish' lakes, and plenty of deer. I told Avril that we will be going up to North Carolina to visit Hippy Gary and all the States that we will be traveling through and the Breath-taking mountain views. We left a couple of days later, as she was only here for 3 weeks and we had about 1.500 miles\ 2,500ks just to get to Hippy Gary We headed off to north Florida and now there are rolling hills and the landscape is becoming more interesting through Alabama, and Georgia into the Smokey Mountains of South Carolina and into North Carolina, and to Hippy Garys the scenery is unbelievable Looking down and across the Smokey mountains. we stopped at a few places like Chattanooga, and spent the whole next day in Lynchburg Tennessee and went round the JACK DANIELS DISTILERY .

A bit of information, the JD Distillery is located in the state of Tennessee which is a dry state and means you can't buy alcohol you have to go to the next state to buy it weird or what ?? That evening Gary had invited his biker friends over for a cook out (BBQ) and about 8/9 Harleys arrived and they were a great bunch of guys we had a huge fire going and the beer was flowing well, Gary went into the house and came back out with a gallon Demi-john of Moonshine, he makes his own, and boy is that strong, you can't drink it like you would normal whisky you have to have respect for it, and sip it, reminds me of my 1987 trip and if you have any dentures remove them as this stuff will probably melt them,!!! only kidding, I think, Next day Gary lent me a Harley and about 6 of us went out for very scenic ride and to a mountain top Restaurant where we had lunch while taking in a 360 * viewing point, out of this world scenery These Appalachian mountain Range must be the prettiest sights you can find in North America.

Next day we had to leave and went into west Virginia, Kentucky and Tennessee, where we went to Memphis and to the famous home of Elvis Presley's "Graceland's" We even got to meet and shake hands with Vernon Presley, Elvis Presley's Grandfather it felt good to think I have touched a real life Presley he must of been in his 80s Avril's a big fan of Elvis.

It was an amazing place, not just the house but loads of big buildings housing everything he owned his clothes, his costumes, a walk of fame adorned with all his gold and platinum l'ps lots of things there is even a Cinema you can spend all day in there watching all his private family movies not all seen by the general public, there is also his private plane called the "Lisa Marie" inside was like a posh front room with plush carpets on the floor, up the walls and across the ceiling The next place that stands out in Memphis is "Beale street" world famous for all types of Jazz, hundreds of music cafe's, bars, and bands playing out in the streets 24/7 definitely a party town fantastic, stayed in a motel in Memphis for that night and headed back towards Florida the next morning, still a 2 day drive to get home too far to go in one day so we stopped over in a place called Lake Wells, in north Florida where there is a very strange Phenomena, Which is world famous and is called "Spook hill" which is a very Quiet, straight road in the countryside, what happens here is you drive downhill to a white line that has been painted across the road from one side to the other, you stop at the white line, take the Handbrake off, select neutral and turn the ignition off, while you sit in the car, have someone at the roadside with a camcorder and your car will start rolling back up the hill ??

No matter how many times you do it, it's the same I even went into a field to get a distant view to see if it was in keeping with the surroundings and I even tried pouring water on to the road and it too went trickling up hill, ??? Since I have lived in Florida any friends that come out to see me I always take them there, and they too are amazed. there are a few beliefs that it has something to do with Indian legend over a 100 years ago, that an Indian Chief fought with a very large Alligator over the rights to own that piece of land, in the battle they both perished and the Alligators spirit claimed the southern part, and the Indian Chief's spirit the Northern part well something like that. you can google it "Spook hill Florida" it is kind of spooky.

Got back to my place and we were just sitting outside having a cold one and my sister said why don't you come home, it's been a year now since my accident and I'm still pretty messed up in my head and, I can't do a proper day's work and my boss John has still been paying me and just gives me light work bless him. Well I said to Avril yeah your probably right give me a few weeks to say goodbye to all my friends, as I can't see me coming back to the States to work, or any work, anywhere, Time has come for Avril to fly back to the UK and I took her to the airport and saw her off and driving back I gave it a lot of thought about leaving, I don't really want to leave I love it here and have so many friends, but after losing Suzie the happiness was gone too.

So, moving back it is then, I decided mid-August. Time to say goodbye to a lot of people, that's going to take a couple of weeks, as you can't just say bye, and leave, you have to go for a beer or come over for dinner.

I started to pack stuff that I may need, there was so much there that I called the local Goodwill Charity and told them come take what you want, some of it was worth selling, but

I couldn't be arsed to be honest, give it to someone who really needs it. One item that was worth over \$2,000 was my tool box collection with everything a Mechanic would need, and one tool box has lots of Power tools, and I gave all of these to my friends son, Bobby , who is training to be a motor mechanic, his mum is a single parent and really struggles to make ends meet, and her son doesn't drink, or smoke, and saves as much as he can to buy his tools, I didn't need them back in the UK as I already have an extensive kit back home in my workshop, and when I went round to their place and told them he could have the lot, Mum said we can't afford those, and I said I don't want anything for them, they both got a bit emotional, and I said to Bobby, all I want from you young man, is to study hard, learn business studies, and run your own business, you won't get rich working for someone else. always remember that, on saying that, after your apprenticeship, go work for someone for 3/4 years to gain more knowledge at their expense.

Since then he did all that I asked of him, he now and runs 2 small Garage Repair shops in 2 separate towns, we use to keep in touch, but not spoken with him in years, I Guess he's doing okay.

33 Goodbye U.S.A. Hello Blighty.

Well the dreaded day has arrived , I Have said all my Goodbye's, and my boss John is now running me to Miami airport, I checked in and we went for breakfast, and a good old chat, My flight was now boarding and we both made our way to departures lounge, where we had our last hand shake, and John reached into his inside pocket and handed me an envelope, and said open it when your inflight? So I placed it inside my flight bag, and boarded, About a couple of hours later I thought I would have a look, opened it and there was \$3,000 in \$100 bills, and 2 letters, the first letter was a about how sorry he was to see me go, and how much he enjoyed working alongside each other and if I ever wanted my old job back anytime, it's yours, the \$,3000 was just a little something to help me get settled when I got home, I know now why he said, open when I'm on the plane, coz he knew I wouldn't take it, he wrote, call it a bonus. how nice!! I opened up the other envelope and pulled out a brilliant 'Works Reference' for my future employer, I couldn't have written it any better. Thanks John.

My Brother-in-law John was at the airport to pick me up, and we drove to his place, as this is where I will be staying for a few weeks while I give my Tennant a months' notice to move out. When I got settled back into my house I contacted a top Throat consultant in London, to discuss the removal of the "T" tube that comes out at the front of my throat to enable me to breath. I can't look for employment until I have this tube taken out, as it restricts the amount of air I can take in, and I can't afford to get out of breath as I can't draw In enough air, so looking for work is a bit too soon. A scope was passed up through my nose, and down to the area of the 'T' tube where he could see the damaged Trachea that got crushed in my accident, he remarked that it was all still very raw, and needed more time to heal before he could attempt to do any surgery to remove it, he estimated a year at least, I went home and thought about it, and decided I didn't want to stay in the UK for the whole year, I thought I would rent it out for that year and go see My friend Chris in Georgia, and Hippy Gary, in North Carolina, maybe stay a few months with each of them.

My house is back on the market to let, one morning there was a knock at the door and there was this petite woman (Eve) wanting to look around the house, as it was just what she was looking for, and just recently got Divorced, She looked around and quite liked it. We sat down and talked for a while, and I said would you like to go for a drink and a chat, which she agreed to, we sat for quite a while talking and I thought she's a nice person, and over the next few days we were both attracted to each other and formed a relationship, and I decided not to go back to America, I took the House of the market. After about a month She moved in, and we became a couple since 1996 We have been together 22 years now, and she still hasn't "paid any rent", she says "she's still making her mind up" lol.

1998 I asked Eve if she would like to go to America and meet my friends that I have not seen in 2 years she was well up for it, so got a flight sorted and off we went.

Landing in Miami, picked up a hire car and over the 3 weeks we had visited a few of my old buddies, and took Eve round 9 different States, she loved it especially the beautiful, Blue Ridge mountains, in West Virginia, and further south, "New Orleans" Louisiana, the home of "Mardi-gras" I Have always preferred the Southern States, the scenery is beautiful, as are the people. I Had always wanted to spend my retirement here in "Arizona" but due to my medical problems I would have trouble getting Medical insurance cover and if I did, it would cost me a fortune. "Arizona "is my favourite State for many reasons, a couple are the Climate, it's quite hot, but as there is no humidity, the heat is not an issue, Arizona's nearest sea is the Pacific Ocean off the Californian coast a good day's drive 300ml/500ks you have the Mexican border on your doorstep, scenery, and the cities are very Cosmopolitan.

While we were in Florida I thought I would go see one of the Lawyers who tried to make an insurance claim for me for injuries due to the accident, went in and he remembers my accident and said because the guy who caused it had no insurance there is no one to sue, and as he died in the wreck along with his wife and two kiddies , I was entitled to all he owned including his house in Tampa, I went to look at his house not long after I got out of Hospital and it was in an all-black community (Harlem) as I was driving around to find the street where his house would be, when a State Trooper pulled me over and asked what I was up to, so I told him the story and he said well let me escort you, I don't think you would want to own his property, but I will show you anyway follow me, it's not safe for a white person to be in this area, it was awful there were upturned cars, old furniture, rubbish and drug addicts everywhere, and everyone was staring at me, his house well can't call it a house it was like an old tumbledown Prefab, and the smell all around this area was rank, I can't see me moving in anytime soon, and was worthless. I thanked him and made a hasty retreat.

Okay Back to the Lawyer he said he will review the case again and see if there anything that's been missed and will contact me back in the UK I said will this cost me he said not at all, I Did hear back from him a few weeks later saying there was nothing he could do and wished me luck, and that he was sorry that this accident was so horrific and to get no compensation was unjust.

Oh Well worth a try.

34 Other Trips Venice

Over the next few years we did many trips on a motorbike, one was a trip through France, Switzerland, Austria, over the Dolomite mountains, to lake Garda, and lake Como, what beautiful scenery, as we skirt round the snow-capped "Igor" where we took a cable car up to the base and had lunch, and I tried a bit of skiing, boy was that hard work, my 1st time.

Next day we headed on to Venice on the main motorway to Rome, as we wanted to go see Mount Vesuvius, and Mount Etna, both Volcano's, when all of a sudden someone ran into the back of us and damaged my panniers holding all our stuff, got the bike to the side of the motorway and inspected the damage, the guy who ran into us was very apologetic I had a look and saw that I could bodge it some way as I had a few tie-down straps, but didn't want to tell him that, it wasn't worth getting insurance involved, so I emptied his wallet of all his Lira, which was more than enough to cover a new rack systems, but I wouldn't be able to do that here, so strapped the pannier enough to be mobile and we found a campsite just outside of Venice, so we thought we would stay here for 4/5 days and visit Venice, we were going to Venice anyway, on our way back from the Volcano's. We hired an onsite caravan for 5 days instead of the tent, and I managed to make the damaged rack system safe enough to do the 2,000 miles/ 3,500ks return trip to the UK.

Venice is a place like no other, it's so beautiful I have been here before, years ago as mentioned earlier, in a motorhome I hired. This Italian city should be on every ones to-do-list I highly recommend it, go see it before it sinks and is lost forever, I don't know the rate of which it is sinking, but it is sinking. If one decides to go to Venice then you have to get a ferry to a small Island called, Marrano, which is world famous for its unique "Marrano Glass" and you can watch them blowing all different Shapes and colours, a must see. there were many more adventures on the bike.

We were down on the French Riviera and was overtaking a line of Trucks, when my bike engine blew as the chain had snapped, and made a hole in the engine cases and oil was pouring out, found a motorway telephone and called for local recovery and got the bike to the nearest big town where there was a big motorcycle business where I could store it for now. I have breakdown cover and the girl in the office spoke good English, and was very helpful, she let us use the phone to call my breakdown insurance in the UK, they told me to leave it there and they would sort out recovery in about a weeks' time, and get a taxi to a car hire place and get ourselves to the French port of Le'Harve 500 miles/800 Ks, we couldn't carry all our biking cloths and wet weather, gear gloves, and still try and carry 2 helmets, so left all the gear there with all the paniers, the office girl called for a taxi which drove us to a car hire Co, picked up a car and headed off, it's a 2 day drive to Le'Harve and got to the ferry terminal 10 o'clock the next nite, parked the hire car up, and put the keys in a certain drop box, as explained to us when we picked the car up.

We just manage to get on board the 11pm sailing which gets us in to Portsmouth 7am the next morning, and blow me down there was a taxi waiting for us to take us to a car hire place where we could hire a car to drive home, what brilliant service, but I told them I don't need a car as I only live about half hour away, but they said well you just as well take it as it's all been paid for by my Breakdown cover so I took it. Moving on a week I called the breakdown people and said when are you going to get my bike, it's been over a week, but they said we will have to wait for another week and we send a big truck to pick yours and anyone else's that have broken down ??

So what they're saying is they won't go and just pick mine up, I have to wait until some other poor person breaks down, bugger that, and I asked to speak with the manager, and we came to an agreement, I said I will hire a van here, and I will go get the bike, so long as you reimburse me, and I don't end up out of pocket, I also said I don't want you, and me, bickering over the expenditure when I get back, I promised I would be honest about cost and would keep every receipt, they were ok with that, and they will reimburse me. So next morning my brother in law John came with me, hired a van and got it back home, the breakdown people asked how much they owed me and they didn't question it and paid me the near £700 and that covered van hire for 4 days, 2 nights Hotel, all the fuel for a thousand mile return trip return ferry crossing, for 2 people, as I said I couldn't do this on my own, which they thought was ok. So all in all it was quite good fun.

Another bike trip I lead a group of 8 bikers on run to "Andorra" a small principality way up on the top of the "Pyrenees" Mountains, that divided southern France, and northern Spain, we stayed in a campsite for a week and having day trips from there, like a day trip to Barcelona northern Spain, on the way back it was getting late and it was getting dark and we got caught in a mountain storm that was so bad we had to take shelter just before reaching the top, we were stuck there for nearly 2 hours in torrential rain, it was that bad you couldn't see the road in front of you, plus there was thunder and lightning, When we finally arrived back at our campsite, our tents were half blown down, and full of rain, now with the storm gone we sorted out our tents and headed to the bar and Restaurant for a good meal and a few well-earned pints.

35 Castles & The Alps

All our trips have an eventful outcome, or have outstanding beauty, rather than the normalities, of most people's holidays, (like 2 weeks on the beach in Benidorm) "God forbid" another trip comes to mind and was another motorbike run, we took in all the Alps. French Alps, Austrian Alps, Swiss Alps, Italian Alps.

They all have their unique beauty In the Summer, and in the winter, I have done both the seasons, with snow, and without snow, so beautiful. On the way down through Southern Germany into Bavaria, and on the Austrian border is this most beautiful Castle Built by "King Ludwig the Second" and was the Inspiration for Walt Disney's, "Sleeping Beauties Castle" in Disneyland California, If you want to google it > "King Ludwig" the 2nd NEUSHWANSTEIN Castle.

It is built on top of a Mountain surrounded by Forests , and Lakes and more mountains, Breath taking. There are many wonderful Castles in these areas. You can book a week, or two weeks Castle tours, on luxurious air-con coaches with (on board loo !!!) visit Castles with period furniture and splendour that you won't find anywhere else on the Planet. We Camped up in this Village, HOHENSCHWANSTEIN, near FUSSUN BAVARIA. for the night so we could go round the Castle again tomorrow. The village is quaint with narrow winding Cobble- stone roads, and you can sit outside at a table, with a Parasol, and a nice glass of red, while taking in the beautiful scenery, Heaven, you won't want to move.

Woke up early due to hailstones beating down on the tent, what a racket, got dressed and we ran across the road to some cover, we thought the tent was going to get flattened, these Hailstones were the size of walnuts, without exaggerating, I went to get my camcorder and filmed it, you couldn't see much further than 30/40 meters, only lasted about 10. 15 minutes but everywhere was covered, and we were surprised as this was middle of summer, but this is due to the mountain weather, that can change quickly, and within half an hour of the sun coming out they had melted, I have never seen Hailstones that big.

Spent the rest of the day around the grounds of the Castle. Not far from the Castle there is a small arched wooden bridge that goes over a torrential river, and is the perfect spot for a photograph of the Castle, and surrounding scenery. We decided to take a slow trip home and explored all the Alps, and went to the small principality of "Liechtenstein" very pretty, it lies between Switzerland, and Austria, we spent a few hours looking around and decided to rent a room in an all log hotel, it was all polished, pinewood floor, walls, ceiling, tables, chairs, very nice.

That evening we got talking to these German Hikers and they told us about a particular castle that do B&B and they do theme evenings, where you dress up in period Costumes (supplied) and you're in this huge dining hall with 30 meter oak dining tables, and wooden

plates and all the décor is period, and loads of food and wine, and if you want to, you can eat your food without cutlery and just use your hands all around there are suits of armour, brightly coloured carpets hanging on the wall and Medieval music we got all this info from them, they told us where it was, its only about an hour's ride, back the way we came.

So had breakfast next morning and decided to check it out. got there and rode up a winding track to the Castle gate, and realised it was closed, there was a signboard that said they were shut until the season starts in another another six weeks, that was a shame would like to have a go at that. On Our way through France the bike suddenly went into a rear end wobble and was difficult to control it, it felt like the back wheel was loose, got the bike and us safely to the edge of the road and noticed the rear tyre was flat, I noticed a town up ahead and nursed the bike there very slowly, it was really difficult, the bike was very heavy and hard to handle, but we got to a garage and had a chat with a mechanic, who said he has never worked on motorbikes, I said I will take the wheel out and put it back, all I wanted was for him to get a tyre, so I wrote down the tyre details and he said he would go to the nearest motorcycle dealer and get one put on so I put the wheel in the back and I went along with him.

We got there the guy in the shop said it's a special tyre and he hasn't got one, and we would have to order it in, and will be there about tomorrow lunch time, so we left the wheel with him, and to call us when its fitted. went back to this guy's garage. Luckily his garage did B&B so booked in for the night and found a local bar and restaurant to have a meal and a pint. Next morning 11am we got a call from the tyre guy who said, all done come pick it up, paid for it, and got it all fitted back into the bike, great mobile again. That was a very expensive puncture, after paying for 2 trips to the Tyre shop, the cost of a tyre, and the B&B = £240 ouch considering I did all the work taking it out and fitting it back in, but I have learned in past experiences, don't think about the cost, what would I have done if they hadn't helped !! (exactly.)

36 Prague

A very good biker friend of mine called me up and told me about an "all in deal" Motorcycling holiday in Prague, Czech Republic, for a one price for 10 days which included Hotel, Motor bike hire, fuel, all meals, airport transfers, the only thing we had to pay for was our beers, so we decided to go for it, and left about 2 weeks later, Boarded the flight, and landed in Prague two and a half hours later, We were met by the organiser who picked us up in his car and took us to the hotel, and when we had checked in we sat and had a few beers while he explained our itinerary over the next 10 days, well 5 days actually as the first 5 days will be with him showing us all around the best places, and the next 5 days doing what we wanted to do, sounded great. Had a good time with him and even when we went off on our own.

We did have a few issues with the bikes Jawa 350 2x strokes, while visiting Prague city centre, there are trams on rails and learned quickly you have to give way to them, I spotted one of them heading towards me and pulled in the clutch to stop and nothing happened, I didn't even have time to jump off the bike and I collided with the tram sideways at about a 45 degree angle, next thing I know I'm slightly airborne, my friend who was following me only just managed to stop, there came a very loud screeching of the trams brakes, he stopped and came to see if I was ok, I was thank god, a bit of damage to the bike but nothing we couldn't bend back into shape. these Trams are quite big they must hold a 100 or more people.

We went to the Skoda car Factory, just outside of Prague and then on to their huge tank museum, I never knew Skoda made Armoured Military Tanks for WW1 & WW2 and massive Trucks, that was a whole day well spent. The next day we managed to get quite lost, and as we are way out in the mountains and countryside nobody speaks English, no signpost but realised the word Prague is Prague in any language and people would point to the road to Prague, it took a while, but sometimes getting lost is not always a bad thing, as we came across some stunning scenery, and hidden quaint village's among the mountains, and tried out the local brew.

We even came across an 'airplane Cemetery' where dozens of out of use planes of all sizes from small to airliners there was no one about, so we had a good look around, and got inside a few, most of them looked complete and could be in full working order, well they landed there I guess, some had been stripped for spares its amazing the work that goes into these things, felt good sitting in the Captains seat, well its not every day you can get to do this. Got back to hotel, got cleaned up and went down to the bar to find it very busy, much more than usual, It was some guys Birthday, this stripper turned up as a Police Woman, and arrested him and handcuffed him to a chair, then she did her routine and stripped off, very entertaining. Flew home the next day, quite an experience. and enjoyed it.

37 Egypt

June 2004 is eve's 50th Birthday, Well 6/7 months before that, her son Lee, and i decided to surprise Eve, and lee's wife Mell, and do something special, well 50 is special , and Eve was always on about Egypt, so without the girls having a clue what's going on, Lee and me organised it through a Travel Agent, We booked 1 week on a Nile cruise, and 1 week in the Hilton Hotel to do our own things daily, which was absolutely perfect ,We even booked a hot air balloon ride over the valley of the kings, also booked the girls to an on board professional Massage on eve's birthday, they knew we were plotting something, but had no idea.

We kept it a secret until 2 weeks before we left they were both so excited. today's the day we are on the plane, Egypt here we come, The taxi picked us up and took us directly to the docks to board our ship, I couldn't believe the size of it, it was huge ship like an Ocean going liner, with swimming pool on top deck, there were 5 different decks, food was in abundance, and dishes from many countries on offer, and entertainment every evening.

We set sail from Luxor all the way down to the Aswan Dam, A very high Military Presence here because of ongoing border disputes with Jordan and you were not allowed to take photos, but we managed to take a few crafty ones, the Cruise ship stopped at many temples and tombs like Valley of the Kings, Valley of the Queens, the ruins of Idfu, Karnack , Unfinished Obelisk, Temple of Philae, and many more. We wanted to go to Abu symbol but that was extra, so when we got back to Luxor a week later after having the most wonderful 7 days

That was the end of our cruise, But the second week we booked into the Hilton Hotel and did what we wanted. So we boarded a plane to get to Abu symbol, flying or the Nile is the only way to get there, well you could walk if you want, its only about 600ks/360ml across the Sahara desert, I looked out of the planes window across the dessert, and spotted where the airport is that we would be landing at !!!

Couldn't believe it, not much of an airport, more like a garden shed, and one strip of concrete for a runway, and 2 guys waiting to greet us, and they were our tour guides who would walk you round and tell you all about the Temple and take you deep inside, it's only a short walk from the plane. There is absolutely nothing around here, no people, no animals no buildings Nothing as far as the eye can see in any direction, Just sand and more sand, and then you come upon "Abu Symbol" and the Nile, awesome or what, well worth the 2 hours flight spent the day there as you can go inside and it goes on for-ever.

As we were in Luxor and wanted to see the Pyramids, Cairo, it's about 500ml/800ks, you can take the cheapest form of transport, but this involves 1 day and 1 night on a train, or you can be really posh and fly 2 hours, I really would not have minded the train journey.

In fact if we had more time I would have rode the train which follows the Nile, it would have been a bit closer to their culture. The Nile in daylight is so beautiful, and is also beautiful at night as we experienced on the week long Cruise. The next day we were up at 5am to get our flight to Cairo, and Pyramids, 2 hours later we spotted the pyramids from above, and I was surprised at how close to this huge city they are, but there again Cairo was built because of the Pyramids, about a couple of miles. away. Right outside the airport are all these beat-up old taxis, there was one big old Mercedes with no windows and a door missing, honest !! so we opted for the Merc, it's like my one at home but mines got 4 doors and windows.

We were told by the Hilton manager the night before, that never pay your taxi fare at the end of your taxi ride, make sure you agree a price up front, We managed to hire the merc taxi for the whole day for £12 good eh, so first thing was to sort out 4 camels, but because June is out of season, as this is the hottest time of year 45-50c and most tourist to Egypt go there when its coolest 35 and the camels are not used, nothing to do with the heat, that doesn't not bother them, it's the lack of tourist, and the owners have them busy doing other stuff to earn their keep so we ended up on Horses, oh well beats walking.

Spent a few hours round the pyramids and the Sphinx, the largest Pyramid is Geyser and you can go in and there is a narrow tunnel that takes you way down to a large room with old Egyptian writing " Hieroglyphics " and paintings done in sandstone, it was really cold down there and was twice as hot when come back outside under the baking Sahara sun, Eves son Lee, was really unwell and was dehydrating and wasn't drinking his water as he said the water was way too hot to drink, but I insisted you have to drink or you're going to pass out any minute, he finally gave in and drank about a pint and within minutes he was felling a lot better I told him to keep sipping water hot or even boiling hot, it's hard to explain to people that have never experienced Dessert heat, and how quick you can become Dehydrated and die. later we got the taxi driver who had kept his word about being there all day, no matter where we went, he then took us to the Cairo Museum where we spent 3 hours looking at all Egypt stuff and went upstairs to see the Gold Sarcophagus of Tutun kamoon ?

You really need 3/4 days in here as there is so much to see. Went outside and got our taxi to a down town Restaurant, and we ordered all types of food, and we also took a meal out for our taxi driver, he was well pleased. While we were waiting for our food the waiter wheeled up a hubbly bubbly with 4 pipes in it they then let you choose what you want to smoke in it its normally herbs, oak bark, Hashese, Marijuana, and you breath in the smoke through water, food was very good , got back into our taxi and he drove us around Cairo, this city is the biggest I have ever seen outside "Mexico City" the main street going through Cairo is ever so big and wide if you want to cross over to the other side of the road you will have get a taxi as its not advisable to try and walk across, unless you have a death wish.

There are dozens of taxis both sides of the street bumper to bumper and that's what their main fares are, it still takes about 3 minutes by the time he filtered over loads of lanes going

north then turn right going south, and then filter back to the curb ?? that's about the best way I can explain it. We had a good look around Cairo, and at the end of the day got the Taxi back to the airport and gave the driver his £12 plus another £10 he was well made up, shaking our hands and bowing to each of us, in turn, well it was cheap even with the extra Tenner and flew back to Luxor and got back to the Hilton and had dinner by the swimming pool.

Next day we spent a very interesting day looking around the Millions of market stalls, all very interesting and colourful, the down side to all these stalls is they pester you nonstop to come and see there wares, and they will follow you for quite a way, in fact if they left people alone, they would go in and look around, that's what we did with this Egyptian Jewellery shop, there was no one out front to herd you in, so we went in and told the owner we were looking to buy a silver necklace for myself, and the only reason we chose your place is there wasn't anyone trying to push us in.

He spoke excellent English and said that if they are hussled in they never buy anything anyway, where as you were looking to buy Jewellery you came in, I found an ideal neckless I wanted and it was marked up for £95 and haggled him down to £75 well chuffed, we all bought something at bartered prices, so we all had a good day, even the owner, Coz he came out with tea and cakes, while we were looking around to buy, and we all bought something, now that's the way to shop.

In the evening we walked to an Indian Restaurant we spotted earlier in the day, and turned out to be very busy, which is a good sign, so went in and turned out a really good meal, and cheap as chips. We didn't stop out too late as we all had to be up at 4am tomorrow to be picked up at 5am and go to Our Hot air Balloon ride, they do there Balloon flights very early before the sun gets too hot, this flight is a first for all of us, we couldn't believe how big it is and the basket holds 12 /13 people plus the Pilot, who explains what we have to do, as it's all a highly synchronised procedure. getting in, and getting out when you land, the landing bit is the scariest. Ok all (12) of us are in (in a fashion)and its up up and away with a bit of a jolt, as the pilot switches the Burners to max, guess where I'm standing ...right under the burners , hot or what, the Balloon is now climbing as we pass over a small village, and surprised to see all the upstairs bedrooms on all the houses do not have roofs, and you can look down and see people still fast asleep in bed 6am, I asked the Pilot why ? and he said it never, ever rains here, so what's the point, and it also works as an alarm clock when the sun wakes them up, then it's time to get up !!

We were quite high now and travelling over different ruins, and over the Nile, it was great, but only up for about an hour and a half, and while you're up, there are 3 jeeps 10 guys following the directions of the Balloon, and they help you all land by grabbing hold of some long ropes dangling over the sides of the Basket, they can only predict where you are going to land, we all had to brace and keep low to the floor, thump, thump and we were down, a

few of us got tipped out, but all in all a good experience, those guys in the jeeps had the balloon all gathered up in a few minutes, I Guess they've done this a few times.

This was our last night in Egypt so had our last meal in the Hilton. and got an early night had to be up stupid-o'clock for our early flight back to the UK.

As we were heading home on the plane, we reflected on our experience in Egypt. and we all agreed it was a wonderful experience, We would love to come back, and do a longer Nile cruise, No need to see all tombs, and valleys, got the 'T' shirts for all of them now, so Just a 2/3 week Nile Cruise Please. that will do nicely.

We met, and spoke to many Foreign Nationals over the 2 weeks we were here, and they all said, there is definitely something about Egypt that seems to take a hold on you, we met one middle aged Lady who came here on her own for a 2 week holiday 17 Years ago and never went back home, and she said this place is still as Magical as her 1st visit all that time ago.

38 Athens Greece My 60th

Coming up November 2008 is my 60th Birthday, Eve and myself were wondering what to do, and where to go, and decided to go to Athens, even though I have been through Greece a few times I have never been to the Capital city, so went and booked it up for 2 weeks, I also asked my Sister Avril to come along with us, but she couldn't afford to, so we offered to pay for her, she was well pleased, as were we.

Approaching the Airport we looked down at Athens, its huge, and all the buildings for miles around are all white everywhere you look, and all up the mountains, it looked very Biblical Got a taxi to our hotel, Oh my god what a dump, there were druggies everywhere, and one of them had passed out in the doorway of our Hotel, still with a needle hanging from his leg, they were staring at us, and this is right outside our scabby hotels front door, we went and checked in, went up to our rooms, we had 3 beds in ours and my sister had 2 beds, the rooms and bedding were filthy and smelt awful, this place is worse than a Doss house for drunks, and druggies, and over my time traveling I have had to check in a few on my travels, Only to escape really bad weather or hard rain, and not because I'm a drugged up, alcoholic.

But never seen one so filthy, and as we looked out of our window you could see how bad this area is, to each side of our place we noticed a few hotels are all boarded up and are all derelict, and this is where they all sleep, presume ? and out the back was dozens of properties demolished, It looks like Beirut.

Decided to go get something to eat, as we had not eaten since on the plane, as we were walking a few of these druggies were following us, and it was getting dark, so after we had eaten we didn't want to risk getting jumped so got a taxi for the short 5 minute ride, the taxi driver said were lucky I'm taking you, as most taxi drivers won't go down there, too dangerous, he also said go into town tomorrow and get another hotel, or your bags and cameras will be gone, they don't care if you wake up while there robbing you in the middle of the night !!! as they have weapons like a baseball bat and if you try and stop them they will beat you till you don't get up, this area is really bad at nite, and they prey on tourist.

We got back to our fleapit of a hotel. and laid on the beds fully clothed, about half an hour later I heard knocking on our door, it was Avril, she said she couldn't stay in her room as someone tried to come in, and she was shaking with fear, I said when, just now, I told her to get in there with Eve, and lock the door i ran off after them down the stairs, got to reception there was quite a few of them just lying on the reception floor, sleeping or off their heads, I didn't let them see that I was in any way intimidated by them, and I'm trying to shout as loud as I can and I stood there Shouting "Come on then, Come on" while I was beckoning them, and me doing my "King Kong" impression by thumping my chest, they just stood there with a look of shock on their faces, they were in no fit state to fight anyway, those that were upright buggered off, I was ready for anything now my adrenalin was kicking in.

I went back up and we got all of Avril's stuff and she slept in with us for the night. We all did eventually drop off amongst the shouting and screaming all night. Next morning went up to this guy behind a one man counter in reception and gave him a big peace of my mind, far short of me wanting to thump him, but what is the point, only makes a bad situation worse. Anyway we are now down- town Athens, and we found a beautiful 3 star hotel and i explained to the receptionist there what had happened, and would they mind me calling our travel agent in the UK, and okaying this hotel for us to book in here for the remaining 12 nights.

Got through to them and explained our situation, they said go ahead and book it, they had many complaints about the hotel we were booked into from many other people, and were no longer on their books, so I said so why wasn't I told in the weeks leading up to my booking, I could have booked another hotel before we flew out, anyway we will discuss this matter when we get back, the travel agent then spoke with hotel manager and a payment was sent electronically, We went up to our rooms and they were spot on, and the breakfasts every morning was excellent.

We went and checked out there public transport, they have a very good underground system, (Keep hold of your purse and wallet) when we were on the underground, Eve had her handbag dipped, and I had my wallet lifted, but they couldn't take it, as most of my life I have always had a metal chain fixed to my wallet and jeans, Biker fashion, and they couldn't pass it back to an accomplice. Pick-pockets rarely work on their own as the minute they have your purse, wallet phone it is passed back to a second party and then onto a third party in under 2 seconds of it being first lifted. I never felt a thing, and I made a conscious effort every day to be on my guard, first I knew of it is when I went to get off the underground, and felt it was hanging down touching my leg. that was close.

Anyway, you can buy a weekly pass that allows you unlimited transport on the underground, and buss's anywhere in Athens. First place to visit is the Acropolis very impressive and we spent a lot of time visiting all the ruins and there are plenty of them, apart from all the sights here, there is not much else to see or do, and to be quite honest, one week here would have been enough, so if you're planning a visit to Athens bear this in mind, I'm not putting Athens down one bit, but unless you are well into Archaeology, one week is plenty. Mind you we saw a lot of places on the train, and even considered getting a ferry to one of the many Greek islands, but would have cost quite a bit for the last week, I know from past experience, if you just turn up at a hotel, you will probably pay a premium rate, so we decided against it.

While we were down town we went into a bar for a couple of beers and there was this guy playing a Bouzouki, not my kind of music but stayed for the experience, When we were heading back to the hotel we heard a lot of people making a hell of a racket, and saw there was a riot going on, there were hundreds of people smashing shop windows, and loads of large industrial bins all on fire, in the middle of the street.

There was also cars on fire, and most of them had their faces covered, it was like a war zone, I asked one lad what was going on, Eve and Avril tried to stop me asking them but did anyway, he said we are protesting against the Greek Government for letting in foreigners and giving them work and accommodation, when there are so many of us Greek people out of work, and homeless, he told us to go or you could get hurt, and he said to stop taking photographs, i took a couple anyway, It was a very scary situation, there were dozens of police, fire engines with hoses forcing back the Protesters and there were groups of men fighting, the girls just wanted to leave the area and get back to the hotel, so I told them to carry on as I wanted to video it, well the local TV reporters were there so I hung around with them for a while, and shot my own Video. The next day we left for the Airport, as our 2 weeks were up, thank god for that.

Between the fleapit hotel, and Avril having someone trying to break into her bedroom while she was sleeping, me trying to pick a fight with half a dozen low lifes in the reception, all the druggies outside our hotel, having to find another hotel, being followed nearly every day, Pick-pockets, and Riots, I don't think I will be booking in to Athens anytime soon.

OH WELL, "HAPPY BIRTHDAY" CLIVE!

39 Ride To China And Back

2007 I was talking with my biker friend Jim, who lives across the road from me, and his Dad Charlie, who is also an avid biker, and they asked me if I have ever done a big trip on a bike, and I said well the longest trip was when Eve and I road down through France, over the Pyrenees, and down through Spain, onto the vehicle ferry, across the Straights of Gibraltar, to Tangiers, morocco, North Africa and down past the Atlas mountains visiting the Capital of Morocco, Rabat, Casablanca, and Marrakech that took us 3 weeks, that was the furthest, and longest i have done on a motorcycle, What have you in mind ? they said somewhere different, away from any tourist haunts, and have 3 months away and camp everywhere, So we looked at a world atlas, and after a short while we chose to ride to China and into India/Pakistan, and go see where I was born in Karachi.

They asked me if I wouldn't mind planning the route, as they had not done anything on this scale, so I agreed. The first thing I did was to buy a brand new bike that was going to be suitable for the trip, I Test road quite a few, and t was a tossup between a BMW GS 800 and a Honda Transalp 650 twin, I chose the Honda, I put my order in for delivery on November 2007 as we planned to leave for our trip around mid may 2008 and I needed to do at least 6,000 miles on it so it was ready for its 1st major service, as I wanted this done before we leave, valve clearances, all fluids replaced I had a heavy duty chain fitted, knobbly tyre etc so everything was as it should be. The planning of the route took me about 4/5 months and planning what we needed to take like bike spares, brake pads, clutch & brake levers for when you come off which did happen to us all. It was a challenge knowing what to pack when your living on a bike, and living in a tent for 3 months.

Applying for various visa's for all the Countries we would be traveling through was a bloody nightmare, I was up and down to London in and out of Embassies, the worst one was getting our Visas for Russia, we only got our Russian Visa a week before we were due to leave, I kept phoning every morning, and finally they were there at the Embassy, and they said they would post them today, I said not to post them, I will come up and pick them up, I didn't want to risk any delays, and if they hadn't turned up before we left, it would be a big detour that would cost us a few days as we had to go through Russia to go east into Kazakhstan, and on.

Okay it's the 14 May 2008 and its raining, the bike is loaded to the hilt, and I am saying goodbye to Eve, and my 15 year old Granddaughter who lives with us, and I'm off to meet up with Jim and his Dad at the Chanel Tunnel Dover to France, about 140 miles from me, there coming down from up north as this is where Jims Dad lives, Jim went up to help him pack their bikes. We met in the last petrol station in England and filled up before boarding the train To France (Dunkirk) and rode into Belgium and our first campsite, still raining Next day left for our 2nd campsite in Belgium.

We rode through terrible storms all day, and put the tents up when it eased off, went to get something to eat and when I got back to my tent it leaked like a sieve, and my sleeping bag was soaked as were my clothes, now I'm thinking why didn't I buy a new tent ? I didn't realise mine was worn out, so I went back to the café and asked a lady where I could buy a tent, she spoke good English and told me to come with her, and she drove me to an aldi store and they had only one type of it was a 3 man tent, way to big for me but I had no choice so I bought it, it was fun and games trying to put up a tent that you don't even know what it looks like, in the dark, and in the rain.

Next day still raining as we head off through Germany, rode all day (rain) 4pm found a nice campsite outside of Berlin and put tents up, went to eat and found a onsite laundry room, what a gods send, where we dried out our wet gear. 1,300 mls\2,000ks so far. Next day we set off for Poland/ yes in the rain, found a nice site just outside of Warsaw and the polish/Ukraine border about 30 mls away so camped up before leaving Poland, and Europe, life outside of Europe will be a whole lot different to European Countries, as we are just about to find out.

We queued up for over an hour, there were dozens, of lorries and cars all waiting to cross from Poland into Ukraine, well I went through border control no problem, and Jim and Charlie got pulled over and were refused entry, I couldn't talk with them to find out what the problem was ? as I am now in Ukraine, even though they were only 30 meters away I was not allowed to walk back into Poland to find out what there problem was, so I called Charlie on his mobile, what's up ? he said they wont let the bikes in, !! why not, he said we didn't have the original vehicle log books, and they don't accept Photo copies, shit I couldn't believe it,,, Okay i'll cross back.

I told them ages ago to make sure you bring your vehicle docs, never dreamed for a minute they would only bring Photo copies, What I did say was, to' make a couple of Photo copies' as well, just in case, I meant for them to still bring Original log books, Oh well what is done, is done, and we have to deal with it, I went to walk back though Ukraine/Polish border and the border Guards told me you will have to join the Ukraine to Poland Queue, "what" your kidding right, nope, I said there only there 30 meters away, but they wouldn't have it, against border control law, so I went to the back of the Queue, minutes later I thought bugger this, I'm not sitting here for an hour so I pulled out from the long line of traffic and went to the very front As I went passed all the people waiting, I heard them shouting and hollering at me, sounding there horn, shaking their fists, My guess was I think there all a tad pissed off with me, I got to the front and pulled in front of this car that was next to go through and he got out and was shouting something at me.

I just pulled my black visor down and totally ignored him, he couldn't see my face, at all, this made things a bit worse, and was waving his finger in my face he can't see, anyway border guard beckoned me to come forward, so I did, and he asked for my passport, and my vehicle docs I gave them to him and I said 'problem' ? pointing to this guy still ranting and raving,

and the border guard said no, not at all, nothing to do with me, if you want to jump the queue. I got back into Poland and now I have to go to the end of the Queue for Poland / Ukraine nah so I did the same, went straight to the front and pissed off more people, well I was there first.

Found Jim and Charlie in a room, they were so sorry, as they thought the copies would be ok, don't worry these things happen, I said to Jim and Charlie does someone have a key to your house and the same for Charlie, both said they did, Jims sister who lives 80ks from his place and Charlie's neighbour has his key. Good what we need to do now is find a reasonable hotel to stay in for a few days, so we have a mailing address for the log books to be sent too.

Found a nice place not far from the border, so we checked in for 4 nights Jim called his sister and told her our dilemma, and where to find his log book and gave her this hotels address and to try and get it overnighted if possible and the same goes for Charlie, but as its the end of the day I doubt if they can do it that quick so every things in order now, just got to chill out and wait, It was nice having a few days off from riding and rain, While we had nothing to do but eat and have a few beers we checked the bikes over and my new chain had stretched and had too much slack in it, so tightened it to where it should be. everything else was all ok .

On the fourth day one of the log books turned up, and the second one turned up next day. Ok we now went back to the border and crossed into Ukraine, a very dismal place and run down dirty grey flats, scruffy or what, we didn't want to stop over here but as Ukraine is nearly a thousand miles across we had little choice, first night we stayed in a hotel in Kiev, We went passed Chornobyl the site of that nuclear explosion back in the 1980s the whole area around the entire town is all fenced off and signs warning you not to enter as there is a high risk of Radiation, all buildings are covered in foliage and looks quite eerie.

The condition of the main roads are in a terrible state, potholes everywhere, The worst potholes are when it's raining as you have no idea how deep they are and you can easily misjudge it, and will have you off your bike, By the way after leaving Poland there will be no more Campsites from here on, campsites are non-existent, until we reach Europe on our return part of our trip back. Second night we got a hotel in Kharkov not too far from the Russian border, we checked in and went into the town to buy some provisions and stuff, as from now we will be eating on the move, and finding suitable fields to pitch the tents, and build a fire.

We hope to cross the Ukraine/Russian border at Krasnodar tomorrow around 6pm and into Russia but depends on this weather as its still pouring, I'm beginning to think this rain cloud has been following us since we left UK 10 days ago, and the forecast is more to come, I'm sure I have now got webbed feet.

We were not making much headway today as its pouring down and we can't run at a decent pace, as the pot holes won't let us it was getting late and we spotted a hotel and we pulled in, bit of a weird place is this, but not complaining, as the next may be a hundred miles away you don't know, there is very little traffic don't know why ? it must be a bit of a rough place as we waited for the huge iron gates to open and a guy came running out with padlocks and chains for our bikes and wheeled them into a kind of covered area, we all looked at each other with eyebrows raised. It was 8.30 pm and we ordered something to eat while we went up to our rooms and get changed, came down and ate, had a couple of beers and the barmaid tried to make conversation, but her English was not good.

About 11.30 we went to bed I had a piece of grit in my eye all day and it's so sore but I managed to drop off at last, 01.30 there's a knock at my door I shouted come in, thinking it was Jim or Charlie knocked again. and annoyed, I got up and there were these 3 beautiful ladies with hardly any clothing on, just a "G" string and stockings, and they all said hello, and one of them said which one of us do you want? I was not feeling good, I was cold, in pain and very, tired, and I was a bit blunt to them and told them to piss off, and knock the others doors, I did put my hand up and said "sorry girls" and shut my door I wouldn't normally speak to any one like ,but they were in the wrong place, at the wrong time, I know from traveling, these poor countries worldwide have to sell themselves in order to live, and feed their families.

Next morning we met at breakfast and I said who was a lucky boy last night , they asked what I was on about, I said ok you can keep it to yourselves, if it makes you feel better, I said I turned them away as I wasn't too good, the girl that was serving in the bar last night is the same girl serving our breakfast, and I said to her, you sent some visitors up didn't you ,while tapping the side of my nose in that kind of " I know what you did last night " she just smiled .

40 Ukraine & Russian Borders

Today we covered just over 400ml /700ks and were well pleased with that, in the rain, we made the Ukraine/Russian border by 8pm cold, tired, hungry, and very wet. But felt good until we tried to cross, they were demanding \$600 American dollars \$200 each for vehicle insurance, I said you're having a laugh, why should we pay You for Russian insurance, its nothing to do with Ukraine and he said you have to pay as you can't arrive in Russia without it, I said to Jim & Charlie don't pay it it's a border scam.

What happens is the guards notice a foreign number plate and they run it through their laptop, not the official governments computer, and because they are Government Border Guard, they have a secret code they can type in and they can find if you have ever crossed a Ukrainian Border before, and if you have, then they can't scam you, as they know your familiar with their laws, and before you even give them your passport they have your name, your UK address, and all from your vehicle registration, it was gone midnight and no traffic, very quiet and this guard could see we were not going to pay and he just shot himself in the foot by saying, ok I will only charge you half \$100 each.

I said to Charlie and Jim, there you go, if it was a legal border transaction why would he reduce the fee, it's a scam, so we got our wet gear out and built a fire right on the border and boiled a kettle and had a well-earned cuppa and something to eat, I said he will let us go before the next shift takes over from him. in case there honest border Guards, not trying to scam people. Its 2 am now and we have dried a lot of our stuff the border guard sauntered over and told us in a very angry tone to go, go !!

So we packed all our gear up and he gave us back our passports. I wonder how many people actually pay what there told to, well I'm not one of them, We are now at the Russian border, the Russian border guard came out of his little office and beckoned us to follow him, we went into an office and he checked all our documents and all was ok until he asked for vehicle insurance, I thought oh no not again, so we argued and went and sat buy our bikes, never thought to ask how much they want, it's now 4am and Charlie went into the office and said how much would the insurance be each?

He said £30 each is that all, yup so we thought that's more like it, so we paid up, good job we did, for what happened later, I told him about Ukrainian guys wanted \$200 each, he laughed and said good job you didn't pay it as there insurance would not have any validity here, its 5am now so packed up our gear and set off we couldn't find anywhere to camp, no hotels, and on the road we saw this little bus stop shelter and decided to squeeze in there out of the rain and try and get some kip, I have never been so tired, it will do for a couple of hours to get our energy back. we all fitted on the floor, and as uncomfortable as it was, we all managed to get some well needed sleep, we were awakened by the bus at 6am, and we were totally unaware that there were quite a few people waiting for the bus and having to

stand in the rain, because of some "ignorant foreign bikers" had taken over there bus shelter, Welcome to Russia, I cannot believe its still raining. we rode to the first town, and Charlie pulled over as there was something wrong with his bike, and realised his rear wheel bearing was shot, so we had to find a hotel soon, we came across one in a not so good area, but that didn't matter, we checked in 1,500 Rubels per night for the 3 of us about £30 each, bargain, we hung all our wet gear up to dry.

Oh guess what the rain has actually stopped and the sun was out, and was quite warm. This hotel was having an extension built, and they let us put our bikes in there, the first thing was to get the rear wheel out, which was done in no time but had a lot of trouble getting what was left of the bearing out, we eventually got it out.

Ok we needed to find somewhere we could buy one, so Charlie got on the back of Jim's bike to go with him and see if they can get one somewhere. This is a good place to service our bikes, as we are in from the elements, and secure, so after they went off, I did a good service on mine. several hours later they came back, but with no bearing. That evening in our hotel bar we got talking to this Russian guy, and he told us of a market, not too far from here, in fact walking distance, this market is a good one and there are all sorts of things for sale, and we should go, most auto parts are sold out of shipping containers you will be surprised what you can buy there.

So will give it a look tomorrow, we had dinner and sat in the hotels bar for a few pints it was getting late and Charlie said he was off to bed, and me and Jim had a couple more beers, when 3 Army guys in uniform came in and sat down and were pointing and laughing at us? after a while Jim was getting pissed off with them, he only wanted to go over and start a fight, I said don't worry about them, ignore them, Jim said I'm not going to sit here and have the piss taken out of us, come on Clive lets show them not to pick on the British, he stood up to go over and I grabbed his arm and said, come on, bedtime. Next morning at breakfast he still going on about we could've whipped there ass. Hmmm ?

Okay off to the market, I have never seen the likes of it before, it was like stepping back in time to the Russian depression there was an ex shipping container with all sorts of auto stuff, run by this old lady, red head -scarf and baggy woollen cardigan with holes in, para-boots, and a smelly Russian fag hanging out of the corner of her mouth, I guess you got the picture by now, we handed her the old bearing and she disappeared to the back, 20 minutes later came back with the exact bearing, it was new and wrapped in grease paper, but she didn't have the oil seal, not too important so we used the old one and only cost a couple of quid, bargain. went back to hotel and fitted the wheel bearing and checked their bikes over. Forgot to mention earlier, that when the bearing went, Charlie phoned a BMW dealership in the UK and ordered one and will be picked up by DHL, who brag about 24 hour delivery anywhere in the world, so paid by card for bearing and called DHL told them where to pick it up and gave them the hotels delivery address.

Here in Russia, then they said we can't guarantee 24 hours as you're in a very remote area and will probably be 2 or 3 days, so much for next day delivery, anyway paid them and prepared to wait a few days, well as I said earlier we got one from the market, we waited 3 days and nothing so next day we left. as we didn't want to waste any more time, I guess the bearing is probably still in the hotel, oh well. The day we left all the staff came out to see us off, and wished us well.

So now we are on a Motorway to Volgograd when I heard a crash and looked behind me and saw Jims bike about to slide into mine, I managed to avoid it, and saw Jim bounce off the bonnet of a car, I parked my bike in the middle lane and ran back Charlie heard it as well, I asked Jim if he was ok and he said he was, apart from his shoulder hurt a bit, what had happened he was hit by a bus that caught his side pannier and knocked him into this car, and the bloody bus just carried on.

We got all the vehicle's to the side of the road and the guy in the car spoke very good English and was well dressed in a suit, we looked at the damage done, the driver's door was all caved in and so was his front wing, and a huge dent in the bonnet, he asked Jim if he had insurance OH YES and showed him it, he read it and said one moment please, he called a number on it and was talking away to someone, we thought we probably got a Mickey Mouse insurance, and not worth a light, but after he finished he took some details from Jim and said that all is ok, and the insurance will take care of it, he said they told him to stay where he is and they will bring him a loan car, an pick up yours good service or what, and he gave us his card with his phone Number and said if you have any problems in Russia call me, and I will help if I can, What a great guy he even paid for the coffee's we had in a café right opposite the crash, I said I hope all the Russian people we meet are as helpful as you, Which he quickly told me I am not Russian, I am Chechnian (ooooops) .

We noticed Jim's whole rack system holding his panniers and top box was moving around and when we took all his gear off the main bracket had snapped in 2 different places we think that was from the accident so we tied it up so we could get to the next town or village, about an hour later we came across this small village and found a couple of young lads working out of this rusty old garage and they said they can weld it stronger than what it was so we let them get on with it, and to their credit they did a blinding job for a couple of 15/16 year old lads, and when asked how much they said a certain amount which was so cheap Jim gave them double, they were well happy.

We were now heading towards the Russian / Kazakhstan border there was this dead straight desert road for about 170 miles and we looked at our map and thought we had better fill our tanks and both Gerry cans up at the next petrol station as there are no more petrol stations after we leave here. There was some good parts of the road, but also some very bad sections, it took us the best part of the day to get to the border.

41 Kazakhstan Border

We were on our way through the dessert, and the going was tough, the road was not at all good it looked like it had been bombed, and hard to make out an easterly rout, we came across 2 different ways to go, and our map was no help it didn't have these tracks on it, we pulled over for a break and to decide which way to go, when all of a sudden, God sent down an (Angel) in the shape of German biker, on a very nice KTM we heard the sound of a motorbike up ahead of us, he pulled over to make sure we were ok, he had coffee with us, and told us which track to take as he had just came from the place we were heading, and mentioned that it is hard going and whenever you come to a fork always take the right hand, even if the left looks better, he said he made that mistake and had to backtrack half a day's riding, he wasn't wrong it was very difficult but got to the Kazakhstan border after a very long, and tiring ride on the foot pegs.

It took us over 4 hours to get through the border as they wanted all the luggage taken off the bikes and taken upstairs ?? they emptied everything, then we had to fill out forms for us? and a form for the bikes, after that we went to another office customs, and then onto another office Police, who wanted to check the bikes, and bugger me they wanted us to unpack the paniers by this time we are at our wits end, and thousands of mosquito's all buzzing around our faces, we were dripping with sweat, and not feeling in a very hospitable mood, I just wanted to sound off at them, but like I said before you can't argue with border crossing guards, anywhere out here, at last we are now in Kazakhstan, where we were pestered by a dozen or so Kazakhstan people all dressed in tatty clothing, they looked like farmers, and the moment your through the border they swamp you and all trying to sell some Kazakhstan money, we needed some anyway but only changed \$50 get more from inner city.

We are now riding through the dessert looking to get our heads down, after 100 odd miles we stopped by the side of the road, and noticed, some huge rocks where we could put our tents up behind them, so can't be seen by traffic, we were told about there being a lot of bandits that will rob you, and to be out of sight when possible, at last somewhere we could get some rest, and sleep that we so badly needed. Next morning after a really good sleep, packed all our stuff away and headed east towards the first big city , about 900ks 550 mls right on the edge of the dessert the German said it is about 2/3 days ride, were not sure when we'll get there as its all desert, and the German guy said its very modern, with nice cars and well-dressed people walking around all smart, was quite a culture shock he said.

The next few days was all riding but not all day as its hard going when you have to navigate through pot holes and soft sand. Where we are now you can look, and turn in a full 360 degrees and not see a thing, but desert, no buildings, and to the right of us are a huge range of snow-capped mountains about 5/6 miles away, it did feel kind of weird your soaking wet with sweat in 45 degrees heat and looking at snow.

You do see a few cars and 4x4s and quite a few Kazak trucks called Kamaz's and they look like there left over from the war, the guys that drive them always carry extra gallons of diesel / petrol/water as there are always people like us that run out of fuel, especially motorbikes as they have small petrol tanks, we did flag down one truck the next day as we all had about a pint of fuel left in our tanks, and they charge you the earth, about 5 times the normal costs, but they know you need it, and you will pay whatever, and they also sell drinking water by the gallons, which you must have at any cost, so we filled our tanks, filled up our Gerry cans and our 4 gallon water carriers, 2 days later we arrived at Actobe, and looked for a cheapie hotel, we all seriously needed a shower after such a long ride soaked in sweat for days.

The German guy was right what is such a brand new city doing right out here in the desert, it was out of character to say the least, we found somewhere and we booked in, and I must of spent a good 40 minutes laying down in the shower and just letting the cool water embalm me, boy that was heaven. Everything was good, food, beds, and the beer, Next day we rode to the Caspian sea about 10 miles from here and is the largest inland body of water on Earth, we also went to the Aral sea the deepest, lake on the planet where there are loads of ships all stranded and rusty as the lake slowly disappears over the last 50 years where people have dug irrigation canals it is a graveyard for rusting ships of all sizes and is shared by Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan, we stopped a couple of nights here, as tomorrow we are heading to Toshkent, at the base of the Pamier mountains and look to be riding 800mls/1400ks of desert through Kazakhstan and along Uzbekistan to Kyrgyzstan to the beautiful Tien Shan mountains, that come off the Western Himalayas. this took us 5/6 days, it was very hot and very tiring and bloody cold at night.

After 2 days we needed to fuel up and we pulled into this very tiny community/village we stopped by a group of kids all wanting a ride on our motorbikes and taking our pictures, we asked them where can we get petrol, and this one kid said they have petrol for sale at his house, so we followed him and the guy came out and was well pleased to see us and in broken English was saying about a couple of years ago he sold petrol to 2 film stars Charlie Borman, and Ewan Mc Gregor on bikes who did this same trip and was on telly for 10 weeks only they went further as they were doing a round the world trip, maybe next time I will try that?

He had a few 50 gallon drums of petrol raised above the ground and it all looked a bit grubby, don't know what the cleanliness of the petrol would be what with rusty bits and god know whatever so to be safe we got a clean piece of cotton material and put it in the funnel and there were bits, glad we thought about it, we could have very easily broken down with blocked carbs not a 5 minute repair, we are now ready for this long ride, petrol and water will be a problem, but we will deal with it when it arises, there was not much to write about when all you see is desert day in and day out.

One place stands out, in the distance we saw a gathering of trucks, and cars when we reached them it was a fuel depot where all that is there is the massive above the ground diesel and petrol containers and a fortified brick built square building with steel doors and no windows and 2 guys with hand guns yes real guns filling up vehicles and you pay at the only opening which is only big enough to put your hands in with your money, it was quite surreal, you couldn't even see the person inside taking your money all you see is his hand come out and take your money and you see the hand again with your change, talk about security eh !!

They must make a fortune they charge near 10 times the normal rate, there is a queue of trucks, cars oh and us on a motorbike this place does not sell anything else but fuel, you can't go in the building, you can't blame them for being over the top with security, if you got held up there is no point calling the police it would take them about 2 days to get to you, coz after you have done about 400mls/700ks you're in the middle of a desert with another 400mls to go, we filled up our tanks and jerry cans and had no idea where the next fuel depot was, but was ok there were quite a few thank god our tanks hold about 3 gallons and the jerry cans hold a gallon each, so 5 gallons will get us about 240 miles back home on good roads, but here you can half that as your up, and down the gearbox in low gears mainly 2nd 3rd heavily loaded and in a lot of loose sand. night time was hard to find cover off the road to put up the tents, so we took chances and put them up about 50 yards from the road you could see us from miles away, and with clear skies, and a full moon, it was still light. there must be some kind of life here? coz in the very, very , silent nights I can hear them skittling about, and funny noises, I even quietly unzipped my tent and poked my head out but still couldn't see or hear anything.

I guessed there probably lizards maybe even snakes I even felt like I was being watched by something coz as I popped my head back into the tent and zipped it back up I could hear all the noise's again? weird. 5 days later and a few things happened, like falling off, which is par for the course, a nasty sandstorm, nearly lost tents, run out of water, fuel was not too much of a panic, but still a worry, but we knew we will be able to get water and fuel, tomorrow.

The desert is now behind us, as we are now at the base of the mountains and heading for Toshkent and the first thing was to find some cheap hotel to crash out in, but not before having some really cold beers, some grub and had 10 hours sleep that night, best nights kip since we left home.

42 Chinese Border A Few Clicks Away

The desert trip totally destroyed Jim's chain and sprockets so we had to order them and a few other bits and pieces from the UK so we now have to wait for them to be delivered to this hotel in Toshkent so for the next 4/5 days we went touring round these beautiful mountains very slowly or the sprockets won't have any teeth left on them, mind you all our luggage and stuff is back at the hotel so the bikes feel really light, only carrying a tent.

We came across this old wooden bridge over water and it was about 200 yards across there was bits of it missing not too bad for cars with 4 wheels, we only got 2, and we had to manoeuvre around the holes that would swallow your front wheel, so we crossed it very gingerly, Well 5 days later we had seen some great sights just going where we like and not have to follow a route, we rode up to the Tarugart pass, and on the other side of it is the "Chinese" Border" I still call it My ride to "China" even though we never crossed over the border just a few kms away, this is as close to "China" as we got our bike bits and pieces have turned up at the hotel, so got on and fixed the bikes.

Next day we spent over a week heading to the Kyrgyzstan border, and on to the capital Bishkek, about 250 miles/400kms of rugged terrain and dodgy mountain passes some of the route took us way up the mountains and snow, so had a snowball fight for a laugh, we were experiencing altitude sickness and headaches as we were way up high, and the bikes wouldn't run smoothly as there is not a lot of air up here, and because of that the bikes were running rich, not enough air to petrol ratio but we chugged on regardless, came across one tunnel through the mountain where they only let so many through at a time because of exhaust fumes as there is no ventilation fans so while we were waiting to go, people and their kids were getting out of their cars to look at our bikes and putting their kids on the seat to have their photos taken, and even the parents wanted their pics done as well.

When you come out the other end there is a huge mountain lake way up here and also the road was half decent, we decided we would camp up along the lake and take our time in this stunning scenery a couple of days later we were dropping down quite steeply and when we were on a near level ground there was a very fast river to cross but we couldn't see how deep it was so we waited a few minutes for a car to go through and it was only about 18 inches deep so we crossed one at a time very carefully as on a bike if your front wheel hits a large stone or rock it would tip you over, it was a bit hairy but we got over without any problem.

Next day we had another bad road to the next small town about 50 miles/80kms and took all day to get there, this was done in 1st & 2nd gears which drinks the petrol, up ahead we could see the town and as we approached there was a well needed petrol station, I mean a proper one with real petrol pumps and an air conditioned shop, we filled up here and just

spent a couple of hours chilling out in the shade eating and having a couple of cold beers when this big guy parked up in a smart car (don't see many of those) he saw the 3 bikes all loaded and walked over towards them, so we walked over to him and started talking and he is only the Sheriff of this town, I said don't they give you a marked vehicle, he laughed and said it's his day off, but yes I do have a marked vehicle. He invited us to come to his house and have some dinner, and meet his family, to which we replied yes, thank you.

We followed him out of town and pulled up outside and waved us into his garage to keep the bikes safe, we all got showered and cleaned up, his wife was out in the back yard milking a few cows and a goat and later watched her make butter and cheese out of the milk, oh and watched her kill a chicken for dinner tonight, which we all enjoyed later.

The guy's name was Buket, and he called his niece to come over for dinner as she is studying English and would be so happy to speak with real English people, she arrived about an hour later and we all sat on big colourful rugs on the floor, and in a circle, we sat there for a few hours talking and eating, Bukets wife put on a really good spread, and had made up 3 beds for us, well there is no bed just loads of soft bedding on the floor, and a blanket we slept really well.

In the morning Bukets wife was already out in the yard dealing with all the livestock she must get tired as she was still up at midnight clearing up after we went to bed, and she then cooked breakfast for all of us, there niece also stopped over as Buket wanted to take us and the girl to see Kazakhstan's very important Mausoleum about an hour and a half drive away on very bumpy roads, when we got there it was very impressive, something to do with Genghis Khan we spent an hour there, then headed back to his, half way back the rear shock absorber fell to bits, and he called a friend who bought a replacement and fixed it on, 20 minutes later the front tyre blew out, luckily he had spare, fitted that and carried on, when we got back and had something to eat we said we were going to carry on our journey.

So, he called his brother who lives on part of our route about 30 miles away, and he said that he will look out for us as he also wanted to put us up for the night, oh well why not. we said goodbye to Buket and they wished us a safe journey, I think Jim exchanged address's, the next 30 miles was slow going but after about the 30 miles we saw a guy at the roadside waving us down and flashing his headlights it was just starting to get dark, we introduced ourselves and he got in his car and we followed him for 5 minutes to his place wow !! what a really nice place, we found out later he was a business man, something to do with an oil company ,we parked our bikes up and got all our motorcycle gear off and he took us in his car to a sauna in town spent an hour there and when we got back there was this very nice diner all set out on a regular dining table, and proper chairs, we sat and ate well into the late evening he spoke very good English and so did his young son 14 he was asking all about England, as he hopes to go there for University.

He was a bright lad, we went to bed about midnight again and in the morning a very nice breakfast was waiting, some of the cooked food we had eaten was good, but we had no idea what we were eating, and that goes the same at his brothers, we didn't like to ask so we just got on and tucked in. Ok we set off for another long ride full of potholes up to a couple of feet deep one after the other, we rode all day 10 hours and pulled off into the desert a bit and put up tents, our next target is, Shymkent about 250mls/400ks there were some half decent roads popping up here and there, which was better and we could relax and also pick up the speed.

While enjoying the nice paved roads believe it or not we got pulled over for speeding by the Kazakhstan police they had radar speed guns and showed us our speed, we argued that we couldn't do those kind of speeds with all this luggage, in the end they let us go, they know that after you have just spent the day crawling over rough ground to get to this nice tarmac people are going to put there foot down, and is an ideal spot to trap people, sneaky or what.

We are now on our way to Shymkent after a couple of hours we are out in the desert again and before we got too deep into the desert we camped up and a old goat herder joined us for a couple of hours, couldn't understand each other but you seem to get the main drift of things, In the morning we set off for quizzzy-lorda on a good road, when we were pulled over by what looked like a border crossing ?? they told us to park our bikes up and to follow him into the office where they wanted to see our paperwork, he kept shouting Big problem Big problem and was issuing us a fine for \$2100 each for not reporting to the nearest police station when entering Kazakhstan, we said when we crossed into Kaz the police there never mentioned anything like that, they said if you don't pay we will confiscate the vehicles, Charlie went up to the head honcho and demanded to speak with the Chief of police, and in the end they took Charlie off in a police car and were gone for quite a while, they wouldn't take us, me and Jim sat outside in the shade wondering what was going on, about an hour later Charlie turned up and said ok chaps load up were on our way?

Jim asked his dad what was the problem, he said don't worry just a miss understanding, I still have no idea to this day, maybe he paid some kind of fine ?? Later we covered quite a few miles on good roads, it was starting to get dark so pulled over and camped about 50 yards from railway tracks, bad idea, there were these noisy bloody diesel trains all night every hour and being cold I found it hard to get much kip at all, just as you are about to drop off along comes another train.

We were coming up to a small town where there are kids all sat on the side of the road selling all kinds of stuff like clear glass bottles of petrol, smoked fish, further up, then another kid selling fruit, sweets, bread, no stalls just sat on the ground with just a few items these kids were aged between 5 to 12 even engine oil don't forget these places are not tourist destinations they don't get too many people like us and they all crowd you and try to get you to buy something, we did get some fruit and I tried these smoked filleted fish hanging in the baking hot sun, I only had a mouthful as I thought I wouldn't risk getting sick,

their stomachs are used to it mines not, as we were riding at walking pace with our legs off the pegs giving them a good stretch, a bloody cow waked out from the front of a parked truck, and I had no time to move or brake and I clouted him on the nose, which caused my bike to fish-tail, and I only just managed to keep the bike upright.

We stopped as we got to the busy part of the village well about 30 40 people going about their daily routine and some of them came over to look at us and the bikes didn't find anyone who spoke any English, and there were a few road side sheds that were tiny little shops about 8 feet square we sat down and had a ciggy and saw a bigger shed that had an electric lead running down the side of the shop and they had a fridge !!

Yeah a fridge, with ice lollies and coca-cola had a few of both, nearly as good as a cold beer, well nearly. We carried on towards ki we were on pretty good roads now, we saw a river and decided to follow it we are now on wild grass and we were about 20 mins from the road really quiet and we pulled over to pitch the tents, so much better than sand.

We stayed a couple of days there and did some washing of clothes, and a good swim with a bar of soap, got to grab the moment.

43 Bishkek Kyrgyzstan Visa's

We had a good couple of days riding even though we got stopped yet again by the police, but got it sorted our way again, we headed up to the Otmot pass, the mountain roads are pretty good, the locals drive like lunatics, even overtaking on bends that you can't see round, and sheer drops on the other side, about a thousand feet or more with no crash barriers, we came upon a wide open area so we pulled over and noticed a nice grassy area to camp, and there was a local family living there in a Yurt, these are quite large (tents?) totally round with a pointed roof the Yurts are made of large sections of straw filled material that are water proof and keep you cool inside, they probably measure 20 feet across, these people are nomadic.

While we made camp we noticed a couple of people on horseback coming towards us, it was a man and his son coming to help us he helped us build a fire, he and his son went off to get some wood, well that's what we thought, they came back with loads of dried cowpats a dozen or so, this was a new one on me we started laughing you can't put that on thier it will stink the place out, anyway we have to cook our food on it, why cowpats ? he laughed and said these cowpats are the best fuel there is but they have to be dry, where in this heat won't take long, so when you have the fire going pile on 2 or 3 pats he said there is no smell as the odour is part of the fuel, he was right, and these cowpats were glowing for ages, like when you get the BBQ coals glowing, so we did this when we were in a cow field a few times.

Next morning they came down with some various peeled fruit and a couple of bottles of Mares milk (horses milk) I took a swig and that must have been the worst thing I have ever tasted, but swallowed it in one out of politeness and passed the bottle to Charlie who had a sip and did the same thing, he handed it to Jim who said no thanks, coward, he saw our faces when we tried it, apparently its drunk everywhere here, as it's supposed to have all the nutrition you need, we accepted it along with the fruit and bread, what a nice gesture though.

We saw some amazing scenery over the next few days as we pass over several mountain passes and we came across this lake "ISSY-KOL" = hot lake, created by deep thermal activity, and never freezes, even in the fierce central Asian winters, it is 100miles/170ks round, and it's the second highest lake on the planet, next to Lake Titicaca in Peru S.A. we decided to spend a few days here as it was so peaceful just the sound of birds, just after we had the tents up, this Kyrgyzstan family turned up about a dozen of them, they laid out these coloured blankets and got stuff out of their cars (parked about 100 yards away,) as cars can't get this close, we struggled on the bikes, anyway the woman laid out all plates and cutlery and things you would see on the dinner table back home, and a portable stove.

The men were out in the water up to their knees fishing, no fishing rods just a 3 foot hoop covered with mesh and they scoop out the small fish about 3-4 inch tiddlers, about 20 at a time they were interested in our traveling and invited us to eat with them, Language barrier was a struggle but as I have said before, you don't have to speak any foreign language, you both get the point of what's being said by facial expression, hand gestures, eye movement, tone of voice etc.

Cooking the fish was quite an eye opener, the men come over and tip the fish into a bowl of flour, where the flip and flop about covering themselves in flour, then they are scooped out and straight in to a batter mix, then straight into boiling hot pan of oil, and at no time ever were they touched by hand, straight into the mouth Hmmm tasty, we had fish-Nan-Chi-and Schnapps, they were a really nice family, after about 3 hours they had to leave, they come here every other week for the day as they love this warm lake even in the harshest winter.

The next day this big guy dressed in his native coloured clothing in his late 80s 90s with a well-worn well-tanned face came up to us and invited us to his Yurt for Chi (tea) and went inside and is amazing the whole floor area is covered in these thick colourful, Kyrgyzstan rugs, and all round the edges are some soft armchairs, then a bathing area, water provided by an elevated water tank, the outside toilet is a large hole in the ground and is treated with proper chemicals and covered by a board, back inside the Yurt they cook in the centre where smoke goes out through the hole in the pointed roof, and beds are set in a circle around the middle, with oil lamps or a small petrol generator, even they are nomadic, this guy has been here more than 5 years, he can't remember as he has no need to know, and has never worn a wristwatch, or owned a clock, and he is not sure how old he is but thinks he is about 70 or 80 I would say 90s but he does believes he is too old to move, and he has no one in his family that want to live in a yurt, or carry on their old traditions, you can't blame them, this is the 21st century, and this way of life is hard, and they all have apartments, and jobs in the big cities.

They do come and visit and stock him up on provisions, he earns money (not much) as he has a tractor, that farmers hire him and his tractor to do work here and there for them, and to be honest, as its only him, he is quite content with his life style, and his Yurt is 50 feet away from the very warm lake and in the winter he spends a lot of time naked in the lake, the only people who come up here, if the roads are not blocked, because of deep snow are other Yurt dwellers, they come for the winter which can be 3 severe months and warm lake that is full of fish that is ISSY-KOL.

Next day we relaxed and Charlie went off to get some beers and a bottle of vodka nearest place to get this is about 20 miles away he came back with the booze and also some snacks bread rolls no idea what the fillings were ? crisps chocolate bars had a lay about and soaked up the sun most of the day and didn't realise how hot this sun was as later in the evening I realised how sunburnt I had got, I went and got my head down about 7 pm and was in quite a bit of pain I was hot but shivering I finally dropped off when about 2am there was this

storm and was awakened by thunder and lightning and then the wind it flattened my tent and it was only my weight and stuff inside that stopped my tent from becoming airborne I knew I had to get out and sort it but I could hardly move as my legs and ankles were so swollen I actually crawled out and struggled to pull my tent back down I finally managed to replace all the tent pegs and had extra pegs in the pannier that was on the bike I managed to crawl towards the bike and got the extra pegs and crawl back.

I could not stand up never knew sunburn could do this, in the morning Charlie & Jim said did you hear that storm last night I said you are joking I was out in it to stop my tent from blowing away with me in it they said you should have told us we could of helped I couldn't walk or shout you coz of my legs were so swollen and I couldn't shout above the noise of the wind . We were hoping to leave here today and get to Bishkek the Capital city of Kyrgyzstan and sits high up the mountains but I couldn't get my bike boots over my ankles they were so swollen so we decided to leave tomorrow and stood in the coolest part of the lake and elevated my legs until I could get my boots back on ouch.

Headed towards Bishkek took a nice slow comfy ride pulled over after a few hours by another river and cooked up some grub and this smart 4x4 pulled in and parked there 4x4 smack in the middle of this mountain stream and washed there vehicle !! oh well new one on me anyway they came over to us and we all had a good chat, apparently they went to university in England so no language problem here then they got up and headed over to the truck and lifted the tail gate and came out with a live chicken in a small cage and he said they were going to thier mothers in Bishkek and the chicken is for dinner but we have to kill it in a non-stressed state (Halal) and here was the perfect surroundings open country, mountains, and rivers i said would you mind if we see this he said not at all they both squatted on the ground with the chicken cradled in his lap and spent 5 minutes praying aloud and gently stroking the chicken he had this very sharp knife and while still stroking it he gently nicked the main artery in the neck just a very small cut and the chicken didn't even flinch until maybe a couple of moments after but this is a nerve reaction the animal has already passed they never stopped praying aloud all through this ritual his friend collected all the blood, all through this ordeal he said now do you see the Chicken was under no stress and passed away calmly we couldn't eat any animal that is stressed!!

You come and cut my throat and I'm pretty dam sure I would be well stressed but he was right he said we find the main artery in the neck and with a very sharp blade the chicken does not feel anything as the artery drains it just drifts away, I can see his point I asked before he carried out his ritual if I could film it yes that's fine why don't you pray with us Hmmm give that a miss. Next day we headed off to Bishkek arrived at the outskirts mid-afternoon and we pulled over and had a rest when along came a taxi and asked were we ok and could he help we asked him does he know any reasonable hotels in the city and he said he did his brother owns a nice place just outside the city follow me.

We were so surprised at the size of Bishkek very smart and cosmopolitan and a very busy commercial city, we all pulled up at this place and we had a look round and asked how much £12 a night great we will take it we will book for three nights as we are not sure how long we will be staying he said no problem you can extend it when you do know.

The taxi driver gave us each a card and said I will be your taxi for however long you need me and I will give you a good discount just call me day or night and I will be straight there I can drop you anywhere and pick you up whenever so we asked him if he could come back in 3 hours as we need to go into town and eat but before that we need to clean up and grab a couple of hours kip he turned up soon after we called him and said where do you want to eat ?

No idea take us to where you think is a good eatery he mentioned there is a very good Pizza parlour and there Pizzas are great so that was good enough for us, after eating we walked around the area and found a place to have a few beers after a couple of hours we called our driver and told him where we were and he picked us up and went back to our hotel and a real bed was a welcome mind you Charlie and Jim slept on some bedding they let me have the only double bed are you sure ?

They said well you are the oldest, lol not going to argue with that.

Looking forward to checking out this vibrant city tomorrow Nighty night .

44 Stuck In Kyrgyzstan

We went into Bishkek and there is lots to see here there is even an art gallery, I still cant believe the size of this city way up in the mountains, so we spent the day looking round, there is everything a big city has even a multi-story shopping centre.

I got my mobile phone fixed in there as its one of those you slide up to open but somewhere along the line sand had got in and it wouldn't switch on he told me to leave it with him and come back in a couple of hours, so we did what tourist do and spent all day walking around, anyway went back to get my phone and it was all done and only cost about £8 bargain!!

The next day I was looking through my passport and realised our Kazakhstan Visa had run out several days ago as it took us longer to get through Kazakhstan as planned , when you apply for a Visa for another Country you have to give entry date and leaving date, and because of terrain and waiting around for bike spares here and there we were delayed, so we called our cabbie and got him to take us to the Kazakhstan Embassy, and here is when the fun starts as we pulled into the car park there was a sign saying in many language's closed on Wednesday, and guess what day it is today !

Yeah you got it Wednesday !! so went back and told the cabbie to pick us up tomorrow 10am. half hour later when we went to pull in the carpark it was full and there must of been 20 people of all nationalities queueing up to get into the Embassy for their visa's, 1pm and the queue was still there may be about 10 people now they have closed the doors for lunch, 1 whole hour later the doors open and the pushing and shoving started and tempers flew then a couple of security guards came out and counted off about 5 people in front of us and told them to remain and the rest of us were told to come back tomorrow, shite 3 hours standing around in the baking hot son as what little shade there was, was taken, Ok told the cabbie to come pick us up 8am tomorrow (opening times are 10am - 4pm) got there 30 mins and there was still a queue but only about a dozen people.

By 1pm the doors were locked for lunch 2pm open again the queue now was building but the 3 of us stood fast against the shoving, when from the side of me I was pushed so hard I nearly fell over, it was a female quite large in stature I think she was Russian while she was shouting at me and waving lots of paperwork in my face I pushed her so hard the 2 people behind her stopped her from falling and I shouted as loud as I could right in her face and told her to f^%k off she never pushed me again. 3pm and we are now inside the Embassy half an hour later we are now at the desk, where he said one at a time so I went up he asked can I help, yes please the 3 of us need a Kazakhstan visa before we try to leave here and enter Kyrgyzstan he asked for passport and paperwork??

What paperwork? He wanted the application forms I said we don't have any he then told us to go to an internet café and down load the forms and fill them in.

You are kidding, why can't we fill them in here, we don't supply the forms, "Jesus" !! 3 days wasted, went and found an internet café ordered some grub, and filled in our forms, it's too late now to go back as they close at 4pm, so now we have to wait over the week-end and come back Monday, so for the next few days we enjoyed ourselves eating in some nice restaurants and checking out all the bars, and riding through the mountains and enjoying the fantastic scenery

Monday morning has come and we are now outside a bank waiting for it to open as we have to pay in \$30 into an account number that was on the form for the Kazakhstan embassy (Visa fee) by the time we got to the Embassy was 09.30 and another friggin queue all day we waited finally got in about 3pm and were told to (wait for it) come back tomorrow I lost it with him and asked why you have everything ? he said they have not received them back, I know !! it's unbelievable so again we arrive at 8am got back in the office and he saw us and looked up and said 'Mr Sullivan come back tomorrow' I was about to give him both barrels when he smiled it's okay we have them glad he thinks it's funny a whole 7 days this took and during that time our Kyrgyzstan visa has run out so we were not legally here for 2 days, and we couldn't leave they have our passports and we need our Kazakhstan visa's, so we CAN leave!!!!

I know you couldn't make this up. Well we loaded up the bikes and headed north/east towards the Kazakhstan / Russian border a week's ride in these beautiful mountains passing Lake Balkhash and riding along near the Mongolian border and heading towards Siberian part of Russia a week's ride away yet. Well after a week of riding north, we have had all types of terrain and a lot of it was good done about 600ks/340mls approaching Astana which is the Capital of Kazakhstan, over time Kazakhstan has had a few different capital cities ?? and is a very large city we didn't bother to go into the centre as it looked very busy and miles of traffic jams so we camped just outside the city and at this point we decided not to go much further east as we must think about our trip home which is a bit deflating but we won't be going back the same way as we came that would be soul destroying to say the least.

We are now leaving the very high mountains and the ground now is starting to level out quite a bit but still we have the odd bad roads but we managed 290ml / 500ks and some of it was desert One thing about riding deserts and sand dunes is learning how to regain control once the front steps out and you're doing 25 30 mls an hour natural instinct is to shut the throttle WRONG you have to go against the grain here, the moment you feel the front stepping out open the throttle lifting the front wheel slightly and you can power out of it, god willing.

Well now our main aim is the Kaz/Russian/ Siberian border and we know it's not going to be a five minute crossing so we just rode & rode for about 4/5 days with not much to do, see, or talk about, but get to the border crossing, 600mls/1000ks Kazakhstan has been very interesting and demanding country everything you can imagine thrown at us.

And the Kazakhstan people are really the best "except the border guards" that we have met during our ride through this part of Asia and I will take a lot of really good memories back with me.

45 Kaz/Russ/Siberian Border

Well after about a 4 days of riding our last desert we are now on much flatter roads and the scenery is becoming greener with more gentle flowing mountains, we are only about an hour or so from the border crossing but as its about 7pm we decided to not cross as it was a bit late so we got more beers and some food from a small village and set up camp, and its still hot. Next day, we realise this was the point at which we are now on the homeward bound trip once we cross the Kaz/Russian border Arrived at the queue at 10am and it took 4 hours from the queue to getting through the first part, while in the queue this Russian guy asked if he could put his 3 year old daughter on my bike to take some photo's so I said go ahead and he gave me a bottle of brandy, which we drank later that night . Next morning, we woke about 10am feeling a tad worse for wear after an evening on vodka brandy and a few beers.

We pulled up to the customs they told us we had to take all our luggage including camp beds sleeping bags tents pots pans absolutely everything off the bikes and go UP stairs with them to be scanned? we tried to reason with them that they were very heavy and all packed properly, no not interested so spent next few hours at customs, it took us over an hour to re-pack the bikes luggage once we lugged it all down stairs, oh we had to buy Russian bike insurance which we didn't mind as it helped us out last time. then came the Kaz/Russian police check, and they wanted us to open all the luggage and we were mortified but they settled for a quick rummage that was ok, 9 bloody hours what a waste of our time and there's rode across 100yards of no-man's land at this point we are in no country at all. Kazakhstan is now behind us as we approach the Russian border crossing and they also asked us to take our gear out !!!

Oh well let's just get on with it, I think once we do this border crossing and the next which is (Russia/Belarus) it should be straight forward from there on fingers crossed. Okay we are now in Russia, and are heading to Moscow which is about 2,000mls \3,500ks from here.

When I think of Siberia I picture thousands of miles of 10 foot snow drifts, and freezing temperatures but this is July so I guess they get some summer and the scenery is stunning, there are green fields, loads of lakes and Pine trees, willow trees and in amongst a thousand miles of lush forests there are these lakes with snow-capped Ural mountains in the background a campers paradise we were not in a hurry to get home so we took our time and enjoyed this wonderful part of Russia which is covered in deep snow for 4 months of the year, after a few days we are now crossing the URAL mountains.

The roads are not that clever with numerous large pot-holes for a few hundred miles, towards Moscow and beyond but so long as you pay attention to the road conditions you can move ahead quite quickly while on tarmac.

On the way to Moscow we met a biker with a Siberian Back patch and he spoke English well and we had a good ole chat, carried on and covered about 300 mls/500ks today, so we looked for a suitable field to camp in (spoilt for choice) found an ideal spot and built a fire ate some grub and had a few beers and a bottle of vodka it was quite a pleasant evening, next day we met some Australian bikers who have ridden from Australia and are on their way to Holland and then the UK, they were going a different way to us as they have places en-route they want to spend time at.

Next day Jim's bike was miss-firing again fiddled with this and that and got it running? Must of touched the right spot not sure what it was but seems fine now. Next day we got on the Moscow ring road, I so wanted to spend a bit of time in the city, but I think Charlie was more interested in getting on the road to home?? It has been a very tiring 10 weeks and I think deep down we all wanted to get back it's not as much fun going home.

After a few days riding we are coming up to the Russian/Belarus border and we camped just outside the border, we had no idea what was about to occur the next day !!, had a really good nights kip and we headed off to the Russian/Belarus Border crossing and joined the queue and only took a couple of hours for us to get to the front, they asked for our Passports opened them and gave them straight back to us and said you do not have any Belarus Visa's...

Bugger we never gave it a thought of course we need a visa, so we had to back track to the nearest city and find the Belarus Embassy that could give us the visa we needed we filled out all the paperwork then we had to go to the nearest bank and deposit 3,500 (£20) Rubbles into the embassies account, that took a few hours so with visa's now in hand we rode back to the same border crossing queued up and still they wouldn't let us cross as this particular crossing was only for commercial vehicles only, so we ask why they didn't tell us when we were here before ?? he just shrugged his shoulders and walked away.

So we spent another night in Russia In the morning we set off for the Russian/Belarus border about 120ks/70mls queued up about an hour and all of a sudden were through no more problems, (that made a change) riding through Belarus was very nice, the roads were all good and houses no longer look like oversized garden sheds, nice people, nice cars, it was getting to look more European, and as you travel further West peoples features are changing from say Mongolian to European looking through Minsk and on to Belarus/Poland border 700ks/400mls we took our time as this country is very pleasant we camped a couple of nights and ate in good restaurants.

Next day got to Belarus/Poland border and went through into Poland no problems, we are now in Europe where we don't need any more visa's, not long after entering Poland we noticed this big wooden built hotel and campground set back a bit in the forest so we pulled in and I suggested we all get a room rather than camp but they both wanted to camp ??

I said I will catch up with you both in the bar and I went off to my room I got cleaned up and went down to the bar about 7pm 2 hours later still no sign of them so I went ahead and ordered a meal Charlie turned up a bit later and had a pint with me and I asked him where was Jim and he said he didn't know he pitched his tent the other side of the hotel ?

I asked why? and he just said no idea after his pint he said goodnight and left, I was feeling a bit uneasy don't know why but he wasn't his self, anyway next morning about 9am I'm sitting in the restaurant having my breakfast and as I looked out the window I saw Charlie pull up with his bike all loaded I said your keen come get some breakfast, no thanks I'm off??

What do you mean your off he just repeated im off and handed me a \$100 bill and said give this to Jim to get home and I said he won't get far on that, he said that's his problem, (I will point out that Jim didn't have any money as his dad, Charlie was paying for everything on this entire trip for him) what is going on mate ? he just said I have had enough got on his bike and rode off, I didn't know where Jim had pitched his tent so I went back in and waited for him, he came in about an hour later I got him a coffee and gave him the \$100 bill I said your dad has already left, what is going on ?

I don't know we had words last nite, I said how does he expect you to get home on \$100 s we are still over 2,000 mls/3,500ks to get home that won't even get you out of Poland what you going to do, can you get money wired to you from your bank he said no he hasn't got much in there, so I said well I will pay for you and sort it out after we get back. I was a bit pissed off in the fact that Charlie could leave his son abandoned with no money and a dodgy bike and taken it for granted that I will have to pay all the fuel, food, accommodation, French ferry to the UK, etc, Jim said no mate it's not down to you, I said well I can't leave you here can I go get yourself some breakfast and we can get going.

From here on we just rode and rode stopping in hotels on the way. I noticed the blocks on my rear tyre were basically hanging off from those Kazakhstan roads, I had to find a Motorcycle garage so as we were approaching Dortmund, Germany we came off the Autobahn and went into the city centre and found somewhere but the guy said he will have to order a set of tyres in as he didn't have them in stock, I pleaded with him about the importance of getting back asap he said well come back in a couple of hours and I will have it done but you will have to pay extra for the tyres to be delivered by a courier if you want your bike done today , I said not a problem thanks, The bike felt really good on new tyres, we rode long and hard to get to the French / UK ferry port about 11pm got the overnight crossing about 2 hours we rolled off the ferry and into Dover, there is only 2 hours of riding left, got home 2.30 am Eve was waiting up for me as I phoned her from Dover to tell her we were back on British soil, I had a few glasses of JD and went to bed.

This was one memorable, exciting, & tough 3 months on a motorcycle, & 12,500 mile - 21,000 Kilometre Adventure.

So glad to have done it.

46 Summing Up

After our epic bike trip I traded in my trust worthy Trans-alp for a BMW GS 800, nice bike after a few months I decided I wanted another sports bike like I had a few years back a HONDA VFR 800 "V4" A very quick bike 180 mph 300ks I never got the 180 mph best I did was 160ish, fast enough though, had several trips out on it we went and toured Wales and got the mountain train to save walking up Mt Snowdon where on a clear day you can see the Republic of Ireland and the Isle of Man, another trip we went to Cornwall which has some of the most spectacular coastlines in the UK and is the most chosen by tourists, Wales is also very pretty with lots of mountains and valleys.

Unfortunately 4 years ago through progression of a debilitating illness I have had to give up riding motorcycles, That broke my heart, I have been riding bikes since I was 15 that's over 50 years but at least I have had some amazing times on bikes so I accept it knowing I couldn't have done any more, I also had to sell my 1966 Triumph 650 that I have had for over 40 years and always looked as good as new, Its Now in New Zealand I am still able to drive a car at the moment so thank goodness for that I would be lost without transport, but I have always got my buss pass.

Since I had more time on my hands now I thought I know I have always wanted to do a family tree and see if I could find out if I had any family else where all I had to go on was a name and a country my Father was known to have gone to live in Perth Australia shortly after I was born, and after a year of research I found out I had 2 brothers Don & Adrian and 2 sisters Monica & (Erina, Now deceased) Erina was the eldest by 9 years over me then Don, younger than me then Monica and the youngest being Adrian, who inspired me to write all I have done so he could get more familiar with his UK brother and an extended family more than I have here in the UK and what's more one of my sisters Erina lived less than 2 hours' drive from where I live and eventually got to meet up with her several times sadly 2 years after meeting her she died, but at least I had 2 years talking with her, she was in very poor health for many years and was totally house bound.

In 2017 my sister Monica her husband Neville flew out from Australia to UK to meet me we got on very well without any awkwardness, we chatted like we have known each other for years they were here 3 weeks and hired a car and drove to Scotland , I think they really enjoyed themselves, I am hoping to go to Australia this year or next year and meet all my family, but depends on my health status I know already I have more family over there than I do here.

Clive.