



FROM THE EDITOR: The life and times of African-American motorcycling pioneer

Bessie B. Stringfield seems like the stuff of which legends are made. Bessie has been written about in books, magazines and newspapers. She has been mentioned in television documentaries, and someday there may be a film dramatization based on her life story. In 1990, when the AMA opened the first Motorcycle Heritage Museum, Bessie was featured in its inaugural exhibit on



Women in Motorcycling. A decade later, the AMA instituted the Bessie Stringfield Award to honor women who are leaders in motorcycling. And in 2002, she was inducted into the Motorcycle Hall of Fame. Bessie – BB as she was known among friends – would probably be amused and yet proud of all the attention. Referring to her adventures and her 60-plus years of riding, she once quipped: "I was somethin'! What I did was fun and I loved it." In the 1930s and 1940s, Bessie took eight long-distance, solo rides across the United States. Speaking to a reporter, she dismissed the notion that "nice girls didn't go around riding motorcycles in those days." Further, she was apparently fearless at riding through the Deep South when racial prejudice was a tangible threat. Was Bessie consciously championing the rights of women and African-Americans? Bessie would most likely have said she was simply living her life in her own way. In interviews with author Ann Ferrar, Bessie revealed how she drew courage from two things: Her Catholic faith in Jesus Christ, whom she called "The Man Upstairs," and the values she learned from her adoptive mother. Early on, Bessie had to steel herself against life's disappointments. Born in Kingston, Jamaica in 1911, as a child she was brought to Boston but was orphaned by age 5.

"An Irish lady raised me," she recalled. "I'm not allowed to use her name. She gave me whatever I wanted. When I was in high school I wanted a motorcycle. And even though good girls didn't ride motorcycles, I got one." She was 16 when she climbed aboard her first bike, a 1928 Indian Scout. With no prior knowledge of how to operate the controls, Bessie proved to be a natural. She insisted that the Man Upstairs gave her the skills. "My [Irish] mother said if I wanted anything I had to ask Our Lord Jesus Christ, and so I did," she said. "He taught me and He's with me at all times, even now. When I get on the motorcycle I put the Man Upstairs on the front. I'm very happy on two wheels. "She was especially happy on Milwaukee iron. Her one Indian notwithstanding, Bessie said of the 27 Harleys she owned in her lifetime, "To me, a Harley is the only motorcycle ever made." At 19, she began tossing a penny over a map and riding to wherever it landed. Bessie covered the 48 lower states. Using her natural skills and can-do attitude, she did hill climbing and trick riding in carnival stunt shows. But it was her faith that got her through many nights. "If you had black skin you couldn't get a place to stay," she said. "I knew the Lord would take care of me and He did. If I found black folks, I'd stay with them. If not, I'd sleep at filling stations on my motorcycle." She laid her jacket on the handlebars as a pillow and rested her feet on the rear fender. In between her travels, Bessie wed and divorced six times, declaring, "If you kissed..." (Continued see Bessie)





Year Inducted: 2002

Achievements:

In the 1940s, "The Motorcycle Queen of Miami" broke down barriers for women and African American motorcyclists at the same time, completing eight solo cross-country tours and serving as a U.S. Army motorcycle dispatch rider.

BESSIE: you got married." After she and her first husband were deeply saddened by the loss of three babies, Bessie had no more children. Upon divorcing her third husband, Arthur Stringfield, she said, "He asked me to keep his name because I'd

made it famous!" During World War II, Bessie worked for the army as a civilian motorcycle dispatch rider. The only woman in her unit, she completed rigorous training maneuvers. She learned how to weave a makeshift bridge from rope and tree limbs to cross swamps, though she never had to do so in the line of duty. With a military crest on the front of her own blue Harley, a "61," she carried documents between domestic bases. Bessie encountered racial prejudice on the road. One time she was followed by a man in a pickup truck who ran her off the road, knocking her off her bike. She downplayed her courage in coping with such incidents. "I had my ups and downs," she shrugged. In the 1950s, Bessie bought a house in a Miami, Florida suburb. She became a licensed practical nurse and founded the Iron Horse Motorcycle Club. Disguised as a man, Bessie won a flat track race but was denied the prize money when she took off her helmet. Her other antics – such as riding while standing in the saddle of her Harley – attracted the local press. Reporters called her the "Negro Motorcycle Queen" and later the "Motorcycle Queen of Miami." In the absence of children, Bessie found joy in her pet dogs, some of whom paraded with her on her motorcycle. Late in life, Bessie suffered from symptoms caused by an enlarged heart. "Years ago the doctor wanted to stop me from riding," she recalled. "I told him if I don't ride, I won't live long. And so I never did quit." Before she died in 1993 at the age of 82, Bessie said, "They tell me my heart is three times the size it's supposed to be." An apt metaphor for this unconventional woman whose heart and spirited determination have touched so many lives. (Researched by Bo-dean).



ISMC ENJOYED HOLLISTER

Brothers take a ride to a highly populated and well organized biker event. A fantastic outing with family members that enjoyed a semi distant ride down the highway. The Hollister run is a shorter run than street vibrations and nice for a one day turnaround. The vending was a huge set up, anything for your biker needs and plenty of food. The **ISMC** did enjoy this event as always, we met wonderful people that carried nice conversation and showed respect to the Hollister community. (Article by Bo-dean)



SEPT 30TH BROTHERS RIDE IN SUPPORT OF A CURE FOR DIABETIES

Headed North with the Mt Diablo Hog Chapter from Walnut Creek, through the beautiful wine country of Napa Ca. The temperature was in the 70 degrees, sun was bright just right for a nice Iron Souls ride through the winding mountain roads. As we road up in Napa



county at the city Park we witnessed hundreds of motorcyclist in support of this very important fund raiser for diabetes. As Iron souls and our significant others we understand the nature of this deadly disease and the important need for a cure, for even our club members and families are affected as well as millions of Americans through out the United States. The Iron Souls truly wanted to be a part of this educational event and show our presence and commitment in helping find a cure. As we participated through the day enjoying good foods and beverages there were lots of outside venders in support of this day. And it will become an annual event in the years to come. (Article by Bo-dean and KC)



IRON SOULS; "DIVERSITY IS OUR STRENGTH"

And the existence of many unique individuals in the Iron Souls, this club of men from different nations, cultures, ethnic groups, generations, backgrounds, skills, abilities and all the other unique differences that make each of us who we are. Being an Iron Soul requires working together which can only

take place in an environment where people respect, value and support one another, That is what an Iron Soul is. We need to constantly remind ourselves that the most important thing we can do for our community is to build a healthy, vibrant motorcycle club that treats people with respect and creates opportunity. Everyone counts, and we have to remember that we all support one another. We strive to create a more inclusive environment that draws on and develops the best talent. We want individuals of any race, nationality, or physical ability to have the opportunity to excel based on their performance and contribution in spirit, family, work place, the Iron Souls and the community of Oakland Ca. (Article by Bo-dean)



^^^^^^^^^^Your Iron Souls elected E-board members of 2007 ^^^^^^^^^^^^



ISMV MALEMAN - BAY AREA BIKERS ASSOCIATION.

There are forty plus clubs in the Bay Area Bikers Association. Two clubs are in Fresno, the Soul Brothers and the Unknowns. Nine meetings are held in Sacramento, Stockton and the Bay Area and three are held in Fresno. The three in Fresno are held on the first full weekends in March, May and October. The Soul Brothers host the meeting on Saturday at 3:00 PM and the Unknowns host the meetings on Sunday at 10:00 AM. The clubs in the bay area host meeting on Sundays at 3:00 PM. The clubs with clubhouses host the meetings, and each month the meetings are

hosted at a different clubhouse. The Association's purpose is to represent the clubs in the Association to whom ever or where ever the clubs may need representing. At the meetings all problems and disputes the clubs may have with one another are resolved. The Association is structured just like the Iron Souls MC and it is run just about the same. The clubs in the Association is like the members in our club.

Any club can become a member, but unfortunately the calendar dates to give dances are full. A club can be in the Association, but is not able to give a dance because they don't have the benefit of a calendar date. Our calendar date is the third Saturday in December. Each year the Association has two dances to raise money to operate, and a picnic which is free to the clubs in the association. Each club must provide three members to work each dance and the picnic, or they will be fined \$300.00 dollars. In the last few years many new clubs have been started, but because there is no benefit in them joining the Association, they can not be represented or controlled by the Association. The new clubs are able to do what ever they want, when ever they want. For years the motorcycle community has

been able to get along with the public and Law enforcement, but lately all of that has changed. The public complains about motorcycles racing up and down the streets and making a lot of noise; therefore Law enforcement has to take disciplinary actions. Clubs have a difficult time getting permits for motorcycle events. Even worst clubhouses are being closed down. The future of the motorcycle community is dark and cloudy, and it is hard to imagine what is going to happen to it. I do not like change when it is not for the better. It makes me sad to think that things will never be the way they use to be. I guess all we can do now is pray that things will get better. Brotherhood, Respect and Unity. (Article by MaleMan)

These are just a few of the many members in the Biker Association



ISMV JUMP START, I DON'T LIKE CARS

Riding is about beauty. Every motorcycle is a work of art, some breath-taking in their sheer elegance. Riding is about fashion - the lean look of a biker in full leather, the rebellious look of a Harley rider all dressed in black. It's about a crafted stylishness that's casual and formal. Riders form their own tribes; identified by their dress code how you look is part of why we ride. If you don't understand, I can't explain it in any more words. Sit in your car and try to tell me that your heart beats a little faster when you turn the engine on. Pull into a parking lot full of so many urban-warrior-SUVS - and try to tell me you feel a thrill about coming together with them all.

Drive through the countryside with your windows rolled up, air conditioning on and music cranked up and try to express the experience of motion through the fresh air, that smell of new hay and cows. If you've never ridden, you can't comprehend. But once you try it, you're hooked for life.

(Article by Bo-dean)



NEGOTIATOR AND WIFE VISIT AFRICA.

There are no words to describe what we saw, how we felt and how wonderful we were treated on our trip to Africa but this is our condensed version. After many years of talking about visiting the Motherland, we decided to celebrate our **25th wedding anniversary** in Kenya. We spent 2 weeks on the Indian Ocean near Mombasa. It's the second largest city after Nairobi and mostly Muslim. It took a few days to adjust to the chaos of people, bikes, goats and cars (driving on the wrong side of the road) but we quickly got into it. The poverty is overwhelming but the spirit and determination of the people to make it through each day is what impressed us most. People were friendly, so eager to share ideas and information. One thing that everyone voiced was how happy they were with their current President (who's up for re-election in December) because he had made education free to everyone. This is a first for Kenya; before that, only those with money could afford to send their kids to school. We visited villages where they still held classes under trees, but there were many schools in the towns.



We then flew to Nairobi where we met our guide, Matthew and drove to Samburu Game Reserve. What an incredible feeling to see lions, elephants, giraffes, monkeys, African buffalo, impalas, gazelles, zebras, hippos, crocodiles, cheetahs and various birds...all in their natural habits like God intended. We visited a Samburu village where people are still living like they did hundreds of years ago. Huts made of sticks and dry cow dung, no electricity, no water but once again we were greeted with friendly, smiling faces of people who wanted to exchange information.

We spent 3 days there and then took a small plane to the Masai Mara & were met by another guide, Simon. This is the famous reserve where each year hundreds of thousands of wildebeests migrate from Tanzania. We were lucky they were still there. Can't describe how awesome a sight it was! We had 3 more days of safari, seeing animals and visiting the Masai villages. The warriors are unforgettable! Their diet consists of milk, cow's blood and meat. They look great and not an ounce of fat on them. They enjoy their way of life and the only change they want is to be able to send their kids to school. It was the trip of a lifetime! It will change how you look at life and make you grateful for every single thing you have.

(Article by Negotiator and Gypsy Soul).

