



Ron and Rosie Keef – Motorcycles and Helping Neighbors

Tyler County Booster (12-15-2012), 9A.

Most know that Ron and Rosie Keef love to ride motorcycles and help others. They volunteer every chance they get. Most of all, they love doing it all together.

Ron grew up in Birmingham, Al., and got his first motorcycle in 1948 when he was 14 years old, a 125cc Harley Hummer. He has a restored Hummer on display in his garage and has had 35 motorcycles.

He returned to Alabama after four years in the Air Force. U.S. Steel had a majority of the employment in Birmingham, either directly or in the support industries, so when U.S. Steel began to ship jobs overseas, Ron headed for California. Stopping in Texas to see his uncle in 1963, who owned a frame shop, Ron was introduced to a Chrysler dealership who needed a good paint and body man.

“Back in Alabama,” said Ron, “I made \$75 a week. In Houston I made \$1,000 a week. I did that for several years.”

Rosie grew up in Woodville as part of the Mitcham family. Rosie married and moved to Houston. In Houston, after both divorced, Ron and Rosie tied the knot and have been together 32 years.

“We finally decided we liked each other,” said Ron with a grin. He proposed at a Nascar race in College Station. “Yeah, smelling the fumes from cars, my head got light. She said she was my friend, but then she said, ‘yes.’ Do friends marry friends?”

Ron jokes a bit. They have two sons each from their previous marriages, and all four live in Texas.

“All but one are bikers, too,” said Rosie.

Houston became a burden.

“Coming home from work one day, the traffic was heavy. Far ahead an 18-wheeler had



raised its bed on the overpass causing an accident. It took over four hours to travel 13 miles.” That did it for Ron.

When Ron came home near 10 pm, Rosie asked, “Where have you been?”

Ron retorted, “It’s not where I’ve been. It’s where we are going. I’m moving. You can stay if you want, but I am moving!”

Rosie said, “I’d like to go back to Woodville, back to where I came from.”

So in 1985, they opened East Tex Paint and Body in Woodville.

Rosie had not ridden a motorcycle, so Ron bought Rosie a scooter. That did not work. But she began to ride with Ron, and they have been riding ever since.

She loved it! Their first major trip was to Kentucky, 5,000 miles of scenic highway in July. It was hot as the blazes, but adventurous.

In 1994, they retired, and in 1995 they made their first trip to the world famous Sturgis Motorcycle Rally in Sturgis, Sd. (SturgisMotorcycleRally.com). They loved Sturgis so much that they bought a place up there, and they save a little by having all of their vehicles registered in South Dakota.

Last year, a deer hit them on the way to Deadwood, Sd. The accident banged them up a bit. Back in Woodville, all bandaged up, it seemed so apropos that, indeed, they did do everything together. When Ron and Rosie are not riding, Ron and Rosie’s son Peanut hit the road for five to seven days at a time. Rising at 4:30 am, Ron and Peanut eat breakfast and ride to dark.

Ron and Rosie have taken the scenic route through Nova Scotia, over 8,500 miles. Most of their rides are just the two of them, about two major trips a year, riding their bike through the mountains and valleys of God’s country.

Yet, they are going through a valley of their own right now, as Rosie is fighting cancer, going through it together, just as they have everything else.

What is one of the best parts about motorcycle riding?

“Meeting new people,” Rosie quickly responded. Ron and Rosie love people. People from all walks of life. Bikers share a love for the open road through scenic country.

“We have been to every state in the USA, some more than once,” said Ron.

Ron and Rosie belong to the Christian Motorcycle Association (CMA, CMAUSA.org), the Red Riders, and the Patriot Guard Motorcycle Club (PatriotGuard.org). Of course, they belong to the Harley Owner’s Group, “HOG” for short, and perhaps part of the marketing genius “HOG” has become the affectionate designation for a full-sized Harley and also the NYSE designation for Harley Davidson Inc. Ron has a Honda Goldwing 1800 and a Harley Ultra Classic.

Often connected to their local and cross-country riding, Ron and Rosie volunteer. Ron is in the VFW and Rosie in the VFW Ladies Auxiliary. They were instrumental in helping the local VFW get a new van and have helped drive vets to the VA Hospital in Houston.

During Ron’s years with the Woodville Lions Club, Rosie was awarded an Honorary Membership for her tireless efforts. Ron helped maintain the building in almost every aspect, electrical and carpentry. Rosie helped with the fish fry, organizing the collection of cakes and running the silent auction.

Every year at Sturgis, volunteering for the CMA, they help returning veterans make their rounds at the VA Hospital there, so the vets can be discharged without further delays.

“At Sturgis, they meet some of the ‘1% bikers,’ like the Hells Angels and Banditos,” Ron said. “We try to be friendly. When you get one of them by themselves, they are as nice as anyone. They have needs too. Though they can get rowdy when together.” At Sturgis, a more sedate business man and his wife riding through might stay at one of the more tame

campgrounds, and the Hells Angels rally at their own place, as the various groups often honor the customs of one another. Usually.

“Every Wednesday we went to a Bible Study in Rapid City. They had some really good people explaining the Bible,” said Ron. “One day we had a table there, about 10 of us. They welcome anyone who wants to come. I was late, and someone got my seat. So I sat by myself at another table. A guy asked me, ‘What do you do?’ I said, ‘Nothing.’”

The man was perturbed and said, “You’ve got do something. Besides, I didn’t think a guy could be a Christian and ride a bike.”

Ron asked, “What do you do?”

“I’m a lawyer,” the fellow replied.

Ron said, “I didn’t think a lawyer could be a Christian.”

“You got me,” the man chuckled.

On Saturday Dec. 8, 2012, after a rain and as the sun squeezed through the clouds – right on time – Ron and Rosie’s fourth annual Christmas at Sinclair Children’s Center was about to start (MaryLeeFoundation.org). The local police with lights blazing escorted a pack of about 70 motorcycles into the parking lot of the Woodville Church of Christ, led by a specially decorated yellow trike-with-trailer driven by Santa Claus and his chief elf, aka Bob and Byrdie Mosur. The bikers came to raise money and help present gifts to the 35 children.

The kids had their faces painted and were ecstatic and swarmed around the bikers. After all were rallied into the church’s family life center, Woodville Mayor Ben Bythewood proclaimed the day “Ron and Rosie Keef Day” for their extraordinarily selfless service to others over many years.

Ron and Rosie gave each of the 35 Sinclair children a toy catalog from WalMart so the kids could choose up to \$100 of toys. In addition to the \$100 of toys, a suit of clothes, a pair of shoes, and a Bible with the child’s name imprinted on the cover were bought. Among the pack of motorcycles, most came from several motorcycle clubs, including the CMA Trinity Travelers, Woodville Gypsies, San Jacinto High Rollers, American Legion Riders, and Harley Owner’s Group.

Woodville Church of Christ Pastor Dr. Keith Bellamy said, “Rosie and Ron are unique. They give of themselves. There is no telling how much time they put into various projects to make someone else’s life better.”

Ron reflected when he came to Woodville how he was known for many years as “Rosie’s husband.” Sharon Fuller reflected what many have said, “You talk about someone who would literally give you the shirt off her back.” Sadie Evans Greer said Rosie was her best friend, and their parents were the best of friends. Sadie reflected what so many people in Tyler County



remember, “You have to ask Rosie about her Mama’s Homemade Award Winning Championship Coconut Cake... Yummmmy!”

Rosie’s younger brother, Johnny Mitcham, waxed poetic, “Most of all, I remember Rosie always being there. When I was a young boy, she married early, and I wondered what it would be like without her. In a short time, she called and I became a fixture at her new home. Rosie was there. As time flew by, and no matter how much our lives were rearranged, my sister Rosie came through. Not one birthday goes by without a phone call, ‘Happy birthday John George.’ In my darkest hours, Rosie and Ron saved the day by teaching me a new trade. When the dark days came, and Daddy and Mom passed away, Rosie held fast and pulled us all through. Rosie was there. Then last January came and I lay in a bed, not sure of my future, thinking I might soon be dead. I opened my eyes and beside my wife, once again, there was Rosie with a pat and a kiss as she assured me all would be well – oh, she was there.... We all know the sound of her voice, for she is loud and happy and sweet. With a heart made for giving, I know Mom and Daddy would be proud to see all that she does for those who are unable to get around. She is a Lioness with a roar to be feared, and even Saint Nick knows he count on her each year. My sister so fair, Rosie I love you and am glad you’re always there.”

Since 1948, Ron has loved riding and passed that love of the open road to Rosie. “I cannot imagine getting tired of riding,” said Ron, “just love the travel.”

If you would like to know one definition of “faith,” ask the passenger on the back of a motorcycle after 5,000 miles. That is trust and confidence. Now think about decades together and hundreds of thousands of miles of hugging one’s spouse through some of the most beautiful pieces of God’s good earth in the old U.S.A. – hugging and trusting the driver through a million turns, thousands of valleys, emotional as well as territorial, and over thousands of mountains. That is true love.