

## The Solo Myth

**R**iding through the cornfields of Iowa, onto the wide-open plains of Nebraska and Wyoming and under the endless big blue sky, it was just me, my motorcycle, and my thoughts. Yet during an entire six-week solo trip, I never felt alone. Believing that traveling solo is something to fear is the same as believing a myth. Even an independent, adventuresome, free-spirited rider needs to work at being alone. Social networking has taken what was already a strong bond among riders and exponentially grown the sense and strength of community. It's a cliché, but I met no strangers on my journey, only friends I had yet to be introduced to.

Riders have always welcomed other two-wheeled travelers. Now forums, Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and the like have brought like-spirited people together from around the world. Any social network acts as a virtual hub built around a core interest with spokes, which radiate outward, connecting with other hubs and people we'd otherwise not know. Whereas we used to make friends primarily through real-time connections like local riding groups, rallies, and events, now we get to know people before we even meet them face-to-face. While there's no substitute for the richness of personal meetings, virtual connections have intensified that richness.

The raison d'être of this summer's trip to Nevada was the Carson Valley/Lake Tahoe Moto Adventure Rendezvous and Ride, which was being held 4,000 miles from my home. I originally met J Brandon, one of the organizers, through his role as host of #MotoChat, a weekly Twitter chat about all things moto. I quickly grew to know, like, and trust J while enjoying the camaraderie among motorcycle enthusiasts; strangers were brought together by a common interest, chatting like old friends.

As soon as my intentions for travel became known, invitations for accommodations, rides, and events appeared, many of which I wouldn't have been aware of were it not for virtual connections.

This summer's experience by Michelle Lamphere and Brian Clarke exemplifies virtual



*I met no strangers  
on my journey,  
only friends I  
had yet to be  
introduced to*

hubs in action. Three weeks after leaving Rapid City, South Dakota, for a one-year trip to ride the eastern coast of Canada, the US, Mexico, Central America, and South America, they ran into the unexpected when Michelle broke her leg in an accident on the

remote Trans-Labrador Highway. After being taken to a hospital in Goose Bay, Labrador, Michelle learned she'd have to be flown 520 miles south to St. John's, Newfoundland for surgery. That night, the duo sketched a plan on how to deal with this interruption, her wrecked bike, and his more than 1,000-mile ride to St. John's.

Even though they were familiar with using forums to make contacts for road suggestions, ride report research, and tips on gear and bikes, neither of them had encountered a situation like the one they now faced. Brian posted a request for information on bike transportation, storage, and places to rent in St. John's while Michelle recuperated. The virtual network went into action. Already world famous for helping strangers in times of need, the shower of Newfoundland generosity was overwhelming. In no time, they had a place to stay for several months and storage for Michelle's bike while Brian repaired it.

The resources available at our fingertips through a quick e-mail or online post are astounding. As solitary a pursuit as riding a motorcycle can be, it's also a vibrant example of our interconnectedness and the interdependence between rider, machine, and the community that it spawns. We are never alone.

**RB**

■ A veteran rider, solo traveler, and instructor, Liz draws symbolism from motorcycling to illustrate life lessons in her writing, workshops, and speaking engagements. Through interviews with 49 diverse women, her book *Women, Motorcycles and the Road to Empowerment* conveys a universal message of adventure and inspiration in any area of life.