

She Rode a Harley: A Memoir of Love and Motorcycles

Mary Jane Black

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She Rode a Harley is a vibrant memoir about love, loss, and second chances.

Mary Jane Black's honest, brave memoir *She Rode a Harley* details a fresh start and finding new love after an abusive marriage.

Black begins her story at age forty-one, on the day that she left her first husband. Despite her fear, she moved out with her teenage daughter. A blind date led her to Dwayne, a Texan divorcee.

Black recounts her early relationship with Dwayne; their marriage and move across states; the challenge of blending two families; job changes; and Dwayne's death from pancreatic cancer. Amid the pivotal events of her midlife, the book also celebrates Black's relationships close to home and those she formed in the biking community. An elegiac ending sees Black turning away from the Harleys that once defined her but leaves room for a possible return.

Dwayne is depicted as a bighearted, restless Vietnam veteran with an unconventional work life that required a few moves. With his encouragement, Black learned to brave obstacles and defy expectations. She chose a Road King Harley that most women were dissuaded from riding because of its size. Accounts of the couple's motorcycle outings range from exhilarating to frightening, including an accident.

Unadorned, lean descriptions of specific bike models, Black earning her license, and large motorcycle events make Black's devotion to Harley Davidsons clear without delving too far into specialist language. Tactile portraits of California's scenic byways and Dwayne's rural hometown bring their road trips to life.

When Black details how she joined an all-women riding group, the resultant chapter, "Biker Chick," is an entertaining, inspiring departure that highlights how far she came from her earlier marriage. Camaraderie and the pleasure of navigating turns are captured with descriptions that hum. The pace in such sections echoes the rhythms of the ride. Sentences sometimes stretch into sinuous lengths, and at other times are sharp.

Many passages in the book are plainspoken and marked by compassion, and difficult moments are relayed without blame or regret. Compressed timelines sometimes make peripheral details seem too sudden; the years clip by.

Narrated in the present tense, there's warmth and immediacy in Black's story. Her self-reflection is limited, and the finer implications of incidents and emotions aren't teased out. Events function as chronological markers in an almost fifteen-year adventure. As much as Harleys became a lifestyle for Black and her husband, the book makes no parallels between their passionate hobby and the changes happening within Black herself. Growth is implicit in this tender story of her marriage's highs and lows.

She Rode a Harley is a memoir about second chances, featuring an understated transformation and a vibrant story of love and loss.

KAREN RIGBY (July 23, 2019)

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