

From: Karen Richards [bikerchick@karenrichards.com]  
Sent: Sunday, October 24, 2004 10:21 PM  
To: 'bikerchick@karenrichards.com'  
Subject: Changing Gears - The Adventure of a Lifetime! The Final Chapter (for this year anyway...)

Dear Friends,

It's been difficult trying to sum up my experience participating in Changing Gears, which is why it's 2 weeks past already, and I'm finally just sending this!

First of all I want to thank you all so much for your support. Thanks to you, I have raised over \$8,000 - well over my original goal of \$5000, and even surpassing my revised goal of \$7500. (It's also not too late if you still would like to donate...just follow the link at the bottom of this message.) I was overwhelmed by the way people responded to this event. For all of the donations, enthusiasm, support (and that amazing surprise party at work!) Thank you thank you thank you all.

From the beginning, it was obvious that this event would not be like anything else I'd ever done. Just learning to ride a motorcycle in itself was pretty amazing! Then starting to prepare for the event, promoting it, talking to everyone I met about it...it was so much fun I couldn't even imagine how much better the event itself could possibly be - but I was about to find out.

As a group, all of the participants had been corresponding via a Yahoo e-mail group where we could post pictures and e-mails and start to get to know each other for a couple of months before actually meeting. By the time the event rolled around, many of us felt like we already knew each other. The experience of actually meeting in person those first 2 pre-ride days alone was amazing - we already felt such a bond with each other.

We were all so excited (or terrified, depending on who you talked to... or when... ) to get going, and all had certain expectations about what it would be like, but I don't think a single one of us could have imagined that it would be as amazing and life-changing as it actually was.

It would have been easy to get caught up in the fact that we were doing something really cool - chicks on Harleys - you can't deny the "coolness" factor there... All decked out in leather - looking like a bunch of hoodlums! That part was very fun! But the reality was that in the beginning, it was not that fun at all. There were a number of fairly serious logistical problems - understandable to be sure, as it was a brand new event - but very worrisome. I actually had doubts after those first two pre-ride practice days that we'd be able to pull the event off!

What ended up happening, I think mirrored all of our breast cancer experiences. We stopped sweating the small stuff, and just figured out how we were going to get through it. Most importantly, we learned from our experience. Whenever there was a new challenge, we rose to it - and eventually rose above it. We didn't survive breast cancer just to be undone by some personal challenges! Every single one of us was at some time (or most times) operating outside our personal comfort zone. The riding itself was very challenging (Big Sur, fog, a group that had never ridden together before), people were operating in roles they had never performed before - such as our group leaders, and no one really knew the route!

The Yahoo group is still going strong, and I thought that I'd share some post-event quotes from my fellow riders, who really put the event in perspective:

*"I have never met a group of women who were more loving, supportive and beautiful in my entire life. Each one of you touched my life in your own special way and have changed me forever." - Jen*

*"I want to thank you all for the incredible gifts you brought to this ride and for what you made it become. It may have been our idea, but the adventure it became was created by every one of you." - Meredith (Amazon Heart co-founder)*

*"When I started this journey I had no idea the impact it would have on me. I am a very sentimental person but didn't dream I would bond with all of you the way I did... The emptiness I feel in my heart since we parted is deep. I want you all to know how very much you are a part of me now". - Jean*

*"I so admire the new riders ... I hope the experience keeps them in the wind forever and that each and every one now loves to ride as much as I do." - Stacy*

*"You are the craziest bunch of survivors I have ever been exposed to and it is SUCH a relief!!!!!! I am used to going to groups or events that seem to concentrate on the negative and there is lots of whining about what we've been through. That was never me. I never fit into that. We all talked about our experiences but it always ended in a positive - or a*

*boob flashing. HOW AWESOME IS THAT?! I am a warrior with an Amazon Heart and no one will ever take that away from me.” – Audra*

*“Back when I finished my treatment I was offered counseling but apart from not having time, I thought I’m fine I can get over this myself and continued along with great support from family and friends (peeps). Guess what, I think I made a mistake. I believe being with all of you strong women and spending time chatting and telling our stories has been the counseling I truly needed.” - Melbourne Donna*

*“I told a friend that it was like going to the edge afraid to jump off but when I did I discovered I could Fly! All of you were flying with me!! My spirit has been changed forever because of all of you”. – Cathy*

*“No matter what we looked like, where we came from, etc, we were so incredibly accepting and supportive of each other. No matter the mistake, we forgave it. No matter the tragedy or trauma, we supported it. We, together, were the most beautiful example of unconditional love I've experienced in a long, long time. Thank you all for honoring me with your friendship”! – Laurie*

*“I thank each of you for opening your hearts to me and allowing me to pick up the pieces of my life and journey forward in a new and better way. Each one of you is incredibly courageous and I am proud to call you friends.” – Wendy*

*“Leads, sweeps, in-betweens, Mama ducks and the like, Amazon warriors were all, steadfast on our bikes.*

*There has never been a span in all of my years,  
As precious and extraordinary as my time Changing Gears.” – Linda*

And a very special quote from one of our fellow survivors who we met along the way:

*“I have shared with all my family and friends and they agree everything happens for a reason and I have to say all of you were such a confirmation that everything is going to be just fine!*

*I have had many divine appointments but nothing like what I experienced with all you ladies, I will be having my surgery tomorrow so if you get this by then pray for me that all goes well.” – Veronica*

That to me is what this event was all about. I'll close by sharing some of what I wrote to my fellow riders after the event. It really sums up what this event meant to me:

*“This was the most incredible journey of my life.*

*Something very special happened to us last week as we came together as a community of women united by a common thread of experience. I was struck by how different we all were, but how we ended up fitting together like the pieces of a puzzle. At first it was hard trying to figure out where all the pieces belonged, but after a while it all came together and felt right. While we may never be the same whole again, I know that whenever any of us see each other again, we will fit as seamlessly as we did at the end of this journey.*

*I will never forget the image from the back of the group of all you riders ahead of me moving as one along the freeways and back roads. By the end you all moved so synchronously it was like watching a graceful, well rehearsed dance. It gives me chills even now to think of it (and made me cry in my helmet watching it...).*

*We all had very different personal issues to contend with before and during the event which resulted in each of our individual growth experiences. Nothing happens without a reason, and I know each one of us has grown as a result of what we brought to and experienced during this amazing event. I think we have all learned that our comfort zones are nice places to visit and hang out in, but we can't live there and expect to learn, grow and thrive.*

*There are no words adequate to tell each of you what you meant to me. To the mama ducks and sweeps (including drivers and helpers), my fellow newbies, you old pros, the fabulous aussies (including my very special roomie) and in particular, the amazing and inspiring M&M, you have touched my life in a way that has left me forever changed. For this I am so grateful. I am also so grateful to have had the chance to be a part of the inspiration and hope that we provided to our sisters along the way. That was the epitome of the event for me.*

*Thank you all for your caring, support, hugs, kisses, laughter, tears, sharing, prodding, teaching, nurturing and love (and for Scooby!)"*

We had an extremely talented photojournalist, Jill Karnicki, with us on the trip. Some of her amazing pictures are posted here: <http://oak.cats.ohiou.edu/~jk953703/gears/>. She has truly captured the essence of the event with these pictures.

While my photos pale in comparison, there is a link to my Ofoto album (it consists of about 10% of the total pictures I took) at the end of this message.

I have posted pictures, links to the articles, and some daily notes from my journal which highlight each day's activities on my web site. The link is <http://www.neiu.edu/~klrchar/>. I'm also attaching an article in a local paper that came out while we were on the ride.

Thank you all again for helping truly make this the Adventure of a Lifetime!

Karen

## Karen Richards

*"It's not the destination, it's the journey"*

*"Four wheels move the body, two wheels move the soul!"*

[Click here to find out about my Changing Gears adventure!](#)



### Karen's album Changing Gears



1 of 52 photos



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