

Age is not a limiting factor to be a biker babe

By Billie Greer

I'm a 77-year-old Biker Babe. When I first started riding Harleys about 10 years ago, my children and grandchildren shrugged and said: "Well, that's it. She's finally gone crazy."

What possessed me? I'm mild-mannered, wear Anne Klein's designs, and actually read the Los Angeles Times every day.

Here's how it began. As a member of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's staff, I gave a speech on the state budget at a downtown Los Angeles club. Afterward, up came a guy named Mike to ask if the governor still rode his motorcycle and to invite me on a ride with his group of friends. My response was: Not sure about the governor and no!

But he persisted and I got on my first Harley-Davidson—behind Mike—with a borrowed helmet to go to Santa Barbara for the day. My legs were shaking and eyes fixated on the speedometer. I wondered if I had truly lost my mind—even though it turned out to be a sparkling day at the beach.

It wasn't long before I was riding with Mike, wearing a smile on my face and full-on leathers, the best brand of helmets, and Harley glitter shirts.

I am the only woman who travels regularly with the group of 10 longtime friends. We bring wine and luggage and are grateful when friends and spouses, including Mike's wife, accompany us by car. Otherwise, it's just a few changes of clothes for me. Our group includes CEOs, attorneys, insurance brokers, and the like. Mike is a senior vice president at a major brokerage house.

There are some tattoos among the group—including a full upper body's work of art—but not many. I've learned motorcycle culture has its own traditions. One is determining nicknames for everyone. It's a group decision, but be wary. If you say you actually like the new name you've been given, you've blown it. No nickname for you. Mine? The First Lady—with the upmost respect given to Michelle Obama.

Riding has given me 10 brothers who look out for me, and I love them. Each ride provides a new adventure. The focus is on the moment, with daily distractions set aside. Mike and I are not "wired" for sound because talking to each other or blasting music gets in the way of what we are seeing and feeling.

I've never been scared, as Mike is one of the best on the road. However, the risks heighten the experience. Yes, we do lane split, but with intense concentration. And, I will not forget a Death Valley trip when Mike said, "Hold on." That was the first time I experienced traveling well over 100 mph. I feel pretty cool for a great-grandmother.

Harleys are people magnets. Whenever we pull up to a gas station, someone invariably comes over to ask where we are headed. At one motel we stayed in, a staff member was fascinated with our group. Before waving us off in the morning, she turned to me and whispered, "You are one badass." I had to verify with my grandchildren that this was a major compliment.

Motorcycling can even be good for your wardrobe. We rode through Madrid, a small community not far from Santa Fe. It's a former ghost town, full of artists, hippies, and bikers. And, what did I find there? A dress that cost next to nothing, which I wore two months later as I walked the Emmys' red carpet.

The *coup de grâce* for me was our trip this summer to Sturgis,

a small town in the Black Hills of South Dakota, for the 75th annual Harley-Davidson rally. There we were, along with 739,000 other bikers, to celebrate motorcycling. The noise was unbelievable. There were American flag pasties on breasts of all sizes. There were bars, bars, and more bars—some large enough to accommodate bikers riding in on their motorcycles.

I was asked once if I felt safe while in Sturgis. My answer was a strong yes. Good planning by the rally organizers carried the day. Bikers were respectful, as were the police, who were present in large numbers. DUIs were down this year, and no major incidents occurred. However, there were 13 fatal accidents in the Black Hills area related to the rally that saddened all of us.

What's next? More trips. Adventure. Fun. I can't wait to experience the magic of the open road again—and to tell my new great-grandson that yes, your great-grandmother is definitely one badass.

Billie Greer is the co-founder of Greer Dailey, a public affairs consulting firm in Southern California. She served as a member of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's senior staff and is now a consultant on public policy issues.