

Relationships

**How one motorcycle ride helped me come out of the closet**

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Perspective by Scott Gerace

That motorcycle ride along the sloping, tree-lined hills of my alma mater as I held tightly onto the waist of my college crush, Eric, was a dream come true.

He wasn't any great looker. He stood only at average height, a string bean compared with the freshman 15 I lugged around that year. But he had dark eyes accented with thick eyebrows and a sweet smile that made him a rock star in my eyes. He was straight while I was beginning to reveal to friends that my bisexuality was becoming more of a "strictly liking guys" sexuality.

Our motorcycle ride was one of the best "dates" of my life, even though it technically wasn't a date. This straight man offered me only a means of transportation. But unsuspectingly, he made me realize that two men could be affectionate in public, holding

each other on a motorcycle for all to witness. Before that night, I'd only had physical encounters with men, often behind closed doors. Eric brought me into the light.

That ride on the back of Eric's motorcycle scared me and woke me up. It made me realize that I could have an intimate relationship with another man in public. If not this one, then certainly someone else.

More than 25 years later, I'm middle-aged, comfortably out of the closet and unconstrained from those long-lost freshmen 15. I'm steadying my shaking hand to hit "send" on an email that took me an hour to craft: "Not sure if you remember me. It's Scott from college. You still in New York and interested in meeting?"

I'd found his name on a college alumni site. I spent hours scouring the alphabet for past hookups, reviled professors and that roommate I despised freshmen year who always slammed the door at 3 a.m.

The ride I'm still dreaming of began on the steps of the student union at Ohio University during my sophomore year.

"Do you want a ride?" Eric shouted back to me as we descended the stairs outside the student union after a meeting of our campus film club.

"Ummmm ... yes," I stuttered.

With me pressed against his back, he took the turns, sharply. First right, then left, then upright again. It was as if we were slow dancing on leather and chrome, and I didn't want to let go. I squeezed my eyes shut and felt the wind whizzing by my ears.

As we drove along the campus roads, I shouted over the roar of the engine — "I work there" — pointing to the building where I toiled away at my work-study job to pay my tuition.

I loved that night ... and in some unspoken way, I loved that man, Eric. He didn't need anything from me — not money, sex or returned affection. No, he did it simply to give me a ride to meet a friend.

He drove the bike up the steps of the looming brick and white-columned medical school building and dropped me off at the front door. He had no clue I've been dreaming of it still, over 25 years later.

DING!

After a month, my laptop signaled new mail in my inbox. His belated reply: "Scott, of course I remember you. Sorry it's taken me so long to respond. I don't check this email very often. We should grab lunch sometime."

We both worked in Midtown and agreed to meet at a deli. The minute the clock reached noon I raced the few blocks, stopping to walk slowly at times, in an effort to straddle being on time and fashionably late.

He was waiting for me when I burst in the door.

“Wow, you look great,” he said almost immediately. “You’ve really lost weight since college.”

We ordered hoagies at the counter as we struggled to recapture a connection that was decades away.

“What are you going to do about your job? I heard your company may be bought,” I asked him.

“Not sure yet,” he said. “How do you like New York so far?”

“I’m still getting used to it.”

Every time I attempted to turn the talk back to our college days, to the ride, standard interview questions instead sprung from my mouth. *How was his marriage? Oh, how many kids?*

He stuck to the same playbook and I to the same general answers. I was single. Love and a life partner continued to escape my grasp. Yes, I was stuck in a corporate communications job while dreaming of being a playwright.

We’d grown up. The days of idealistic college passions, of motorcycles and mad crushes, turned to present-day disappointments, minivans and love with lots of strings attached.

I couldn’t find a way to confess about the ride as we stood on that Midtown corner saying our goodbyes. He stared at me for a minute in silence. I wondered what he was thinking.

“Really great to see you, man,” he said, shaking my hand before he turned and walked away.

Only after he disappeared into the crowd, did the words finally escape my mind: *Thank you.*

Two serious relationships with men since college and suddenly on a busy Manhattan sidewalk with the embarrassing taste of onions stuck between my teeth from my lunchtime hoagie did I discover that I was finally telling the truth. I was finally living in the sunlight.



By Scott Gerace

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