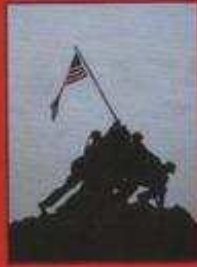


Rolling Thunder XX

photos/story:

KAREN MILLER



N For the past five years my friends Jim and Joyce McLeod have been putting on events to raise money for charities and helping those who come to the Washington D.C. area for the Rolling Thunder demonstration ride. I'm proud of my friends and all that they do for others, and am happy to say that from the last two year's events, they were able to raise enough funds for a local organization to be able to get a truck from Feed the Children and escorted that to it's destination and helped over 400 families in need. This year, they raised enough money to contribute to the charity and USO, and again helped to bring a Feed the Children truck to town help 500 needy families. Woohoo!!

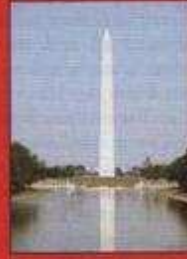
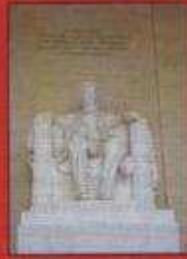
I've always had a tremendous respect for our military, but I had absolutely no idea how visiting

Arlington Cemetery and the other Memorials would affect me. Or, how the people standing on the sidelines cheering on the many riders during the demonstration ride for more than six hours, or the many people visiting the VA homes, or visiting a school for a presentation, or doing a rendering of a name off the wall for a friend, or standing in silence and feeling the chills run up my body as we watched one of the many funerals that day or hearing Taps being played and the 21 gun salute. To this day, whenever I look at a picture of the Wall or talk about my trip, I still get chills. I hate to use the word awesome. But, my trip was just that.

Flying into D.C., I was thankfully met by Jim and Joyce. If you've never visited a D.C airport, you are in for a treat. Then it was off to see the

beautiful Virginia countryside and see some of the sights around the D.C area and their very cool and relaxing home and friends.

Right off the bat, Joyce takes me to a place called the Kiss and Ride, although I didn't see much kissing going on, and is where you jump onto one of the many Metro trains which will take you to various places in D.C. As we arrived at Arlington Cemetery, we quickly tried to find where the latest Patriot Guard Riders procession was to be as Jim was riding in with others for the service and caught one of the tours. As you stand among the many headstones, in silence, it comes to mind that there are so many of them and they go on forever. Sadly, Arlington Cemetery is but one of many around the world. While there, we watched the changing of the guard



Rolling

at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and witnessed one of the 35 funerals being done daily. It was so impressive, yet sad, to watch everyone in that whole area stop walking and give respect to a man or woman none of us knew. I really cannot explain the feelings that I had as it is something that you really have to experience yourself.

Looking at the map I had this idea that we would visit Arlington Cemetery, check out the Memorials, go to the Smithsonian, the Holocaust building, climb to the top of the Washington Monument, as it's all right there together. I was so wrong. We spent most of the day in Arlington alone. I wanted to see it all, the Lincoln, Korean, and World War Two Memorials, and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, aka the Wall. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial will just tear you to pieces as you walk along and see all the names. I'd been asked to copy a name off the Wall for a friend who lost her brother when she was only seven months old. The ladies with the yellow hats are volunteers and were so helpful, they directed us to the name and provided the paper and pencil and offered to do it for me if I couldn't. Having never met this man I thought a rendering would be an easy thing to do, but the tears fell. This is just an emotional place.

One of the places that sticks in my mind that Joyce and I also visited was the Faces of the Fallen. Here, drawings and paintings are displayed of the many that have fallen and visitors have left notes and pins. Again, very emotional...

We caught the Metro back later that day and headed home to a houseful of their chapter members and friends from Connecticut. Hanging out and having fun was the order of the night.

On Friday morning, we gathered and met up with their chapter, the Capital Cruisers (Cruiser Club USA Chapter 11), and headed for a school that had been collecting donations for the children in Iraq to provide necessities such as school supplies. Upon arriving, we had fun joining the



Left Top: Tom and Deanna Neal with Joyce McLeod at the BBQ.



Left Below: Capital Cruiser and Rusty Cricket Chapter members along with USO members at the BBQ.



Right Top: Jim McLeod and the kids at the school presentation.



Right Below: Karen overlooking the Pentagon parking lot at 8:30 a.m.

munchkins as they played leapfrog until the other students arrived. The Cruisers then talked to the kids and rode around for them out in the parking lot. It was so cool watching the kids and the older big kids running down the line slapping hands or watching them gather around Jim and Lisa as if they were celebrities.

We hit the road for the host hotel and to do the registrations for the Meet 'N Greet later that night. It was fun meeting people and putting faces to the e-mails I've been doing for awhile now. Then off we were to the Meet 'N Greet at the Hard Times Café where we had a great time meeting new friends, eating, and playing pool all night.

On Saturday morning, Jim led others to visit a local nursing home that has many veterans, and veteran's family members in residence and on staff. I went with Joyce to help set up for the Oscar "Woody" Wood Barbeque later that morning. Their Chapter has got it together and had it all ready to go in no time. All we had to do was wait until the caterer (Dixie Bones) showed up and the guests arrived. Also in attendance were representatives from the USO and the charity they have helped before, the New Life Community Development Corporation. The guests started arriving and Dixie Bones had great bbq pork and chicken for us. Awards were soon given out and we had a special appearance by Nikki Mendicino.

Nikki is an enthusiastic 18 year old whose story started when she started visiting with a WWII Veteran at his VA home. She has since been very active about trying to bring all our POW's home and has met many of our top world leaders and is a regular speaker at many events including Rolling Thunder. Nikki is known as every soldier or vets kid-sister. I had the pleasure of talking with Nikki and was very impressed with her knowledge and passion for our POW's. I see nothing but a bright future for this remarkable young lady.

After the barbeque, we were off to see the Iwo Jima Memorial and Arlington Cemetery at night. It was very eerie looking at the names that are etched into the Korean War Memorial, but worth it. By now, Thunder Alley and D.C. are alive and rumbling with all the anticipation for the next day's ride and events.

Sunday morning came and we are stoked. At first, I was just going to

Below: PK at the Meet 'N Greet.

Right Top: Handslapping with the kids.

Right Middle: Vietnam Veterans Memorial (The Wall).

Right Below: Making hot dogs while waiting for the start of the ride.



take photos of my friends during the ride, but I am so glad that I chose to jump on the back on Jim's bike and be a participant. We met at 6:30 that morning at the host hotel and Jim led a huge group to the Pentagon parking lot, which by 8:30 was full. Amazing and awesome were the only words I could think of watching everyone rolling in. From 7:00 a.m. until 12:30 we just hung out, read, slept, played football, and waited. Even had the honor of meeting with Art Mueller, the founder and main force behind this demonstration ride who is a very cool guy with a passion for bringing the POW's home.

Then it began...you cannot even imagine the thrill one gets to hear that many bikes rumbling and heading onto the road for the demonstration ride. It's such an exhilarating rush as you watch the procession wind its way around the hill and even more enjoyable was watching the Gold Star Moms being escorted by the many PGR and various other groups. These ladies have sacrificed the ultimate, their children, and deserve so much respect and unfortunately are often overlooked. But, thanks to people like Katie Kmetz of Rolling Thunder, Harvey Wasserman, Jim and Joyce McLeod, Joe Baum, Neil Cotter, and Mickey Harler, they've been getting a little of the respect due them.

As it came to our row to depart I

was so stoked. Even more as we made our way up the hill and it just blew me away to see all the people gathered, holding flags, some saluting, and just showing their support as we made the turn onto the Memorial Bridge. It was just so exciting, and a pure rush as we made our way thru the streets of D.C. Many would stand in the street and it was so inspiring to watch the hand slaps and listen to the many Vets standing in the street thanking the riders. As we rounded another corner, we came upon a Marine saluting all the riders as he has done for the past few years. This Marine stands and salutes for the entire ride although this may take six hours or more...so very impressive. This is really something you have to see and do for yourself as pics do not even do this ride justice.

After the ride and events of the day we headed back to Virginia and home to celebrate Renee's birthday and have their annual Decompression Party. It started to rain but it did not detract us from having fun that night.

Morning came and as excited as I

was to be seeing my husband again I was saddened that I was leaving my friends. I hate to say it, I cried. I had so much fun with these people and I wish they were closer. They are so cool. Many of the chapter members joined us

for breakfast and then escorted us back into D.C. to Thunder Alley for some last minute shopping, and then to the airport. I hated to say goodbye as I can't just hop on my bike and be at their homes in 15 minutes or four hours. Yeah, I cried again.

Being a participant of Rolling Thunder was such an experience for me, along with visiting Arlington Cemetery and all the other things we did that weekend. It's a very emotional time, but one that I think needs to be experienced by everyone, leaves you with a new awareness and renewed respect for our Servicemen, be they fallen, Vets, or serving now.

Jim and Joyce and the Capital Cruisers will be putting on another great weekend during Rolling Thunder 21 in May, 2008, and if you are visiting the D.C area at this time, I urge you to attend their events. You'll have a great time and make new and lifelong friends...I guarantee that. And, should you need info such as where to stay or how to get somewhere, or just need people to ride with, they are more than willing to help you out. Please check out their website at www.capital-cruisers.org or <http://forums.delphiforums.com/MDWDC/start>.

A local motorcyclist was killed this week...

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