

'The Pilgrim' - Harley Davidson Softail special

A tribute bike in memory of Robert Gill 1990 – 2007

On 27th Dec. 2007, in the early hours of the morning, we lost our dear son Robert. He was 17 and we had adopted him just before he was 9yrs old. He had a lovely open smile, he loved life, his family and friends, and he loved being out on the bike with me. As a family we are members of the Christian Motorcyclists Association and Rob used to ride pillion with me to many of our events. I was moved to tears when one of his teachers told me, after his death, that he used to arrive at school pretending he was riding a motorbike.

If I had realised he enjoyed riding so much I would have taken him out more often and we could have had even more fun that way.

As Christians we have so much to be thankful for. Robert had faith in Jesus. We know Jesus promised those around him that "I go to prepare a place for you", [John 14 v3] and that Robert has a place in heaven where we will meet him again one day. That knowledge comforts us continually.

After Rob had been missing for nearly a week, we learned that he had been murdered by a small group of youths. We knew we had to forgive and not allow ourselves to be overcome by hatred for his attackers. God gave us the strength to do that. Two young men are serving life sentences for murder while the other, younger one served time for his part. We were privileged to meet him through the restorative justice process. It wasn't easy but it was very helpful and he ended up taking a copy of the Bikers Bible. We pray for them when we remember what they did to Robert. Each day as we followed the trial we came away angry at what we heard but as we drove home and reflected, the anger somehow dissolved and we were able to keep that attitude of forgiveness and not become bitter about what took place, brutal as it was.

At the same time, ideas started to come. Robert had a mountain bike, which he loved and spent a lot of time riding. It is white with blue decals so that was my starting point. The ideas started to flow when I learned that the place where Rob had been thrown into the River Ouse in Bedford was just a short way downstream from where John Bunyan was baptised. This also linked in with a word from the Bible that came into Fran's head when Robert was missing, "Do not be afraid, for I will be with you, when you go through the waters I will be there". [Isaiah 43 v 1&2] Later, I found that this is the verse from the Bible that Christian – the pilgrim in Bunyan's 'The Pilgrim's Progress' – remembers and it encourages him to ford the final river to reach the Eternal City. This started a link for me with Bunyan's story and I still have a strong sense that God was with Robert in the water in his final moments. That is the inspiration behind the scene on the right of the tank, that the pilgrim becomes Robert, fording the River Ouse to reach the heavenly city, his new home with angels looking on, perhaps cheering.

I wanted this bike to be not only a memorial to Rob, but a testimony to the love and grace that God has shown to us so that we can reach out to bikers and others and tell them. There is nothing special about us;

He loves you too just the same. Amazing as it may sound He loves those who took Rob's life in just the same way and perhaps one day they may find that for themselves.

Over time the whole bike concept came together. I went to a number of shows looking for a builder then two good friends asked if I had thought of 'Lucky Buck'. He looked at my crude sketches and agreed to customise the bike.

He knew a first class artist who could achieve the detail needed for the paintwork and so Sam became involved. The seat was done by a lovely lady, Fenni who is a leader in a Viking re-enactment group who we met at a rally. She is skilled in many things including leather work.



The story on the left of the tank starts with a figure kneeling at the cross with the empty tomb of Jesus nearby because that is the heart of the Gospel; that Jesus gave his life for us on the cross, rose to life again and lives in Heaven where he looks down on us and is ready to meet with us in love if we will only look to Him. A path leads from the cross and there is a cross roads – we all have to choose which way we are going and that is up to us.

The road goes round to the top of the tank; a figure is riding a Hyabusa – Rob's favourite bike. Jesus is watching over him, partly hidden in cloud – He is always there but we don't always realise.

On the right side of the tank; the ride ends at the Engineers Bridge on the River Great Ouse in Bedford where Robert's life was ended.

Sam has skilfully worked everything together to reach the climax of this journey of life as I've described above.

It will always be difficult knowing what happened to our Rob but we will always have the assurance that he is in a much better place now and that one day, by God's grace we will be together again.

Fred and Fran Gill

Photos – Motorcycle Community

<http://www.motorcyclecommunity.co.uk/the-pilgrim-a-special-harley-with-a-special-story/>

