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## Heading home: Grand Canyon, riding horses, lifelong friends

By Rachel Sloan

Special to the Chronicle

**Editor's note:** Rachel Sloan of Glens Falls, fulfilling a dream, is traveling cross-country by motorcycle, along with Mike Archambault of Hudson Falls and Rich Robinson from North Carolina. She has been reporting to us along the way.

There is something magical about riding a motorcycle.

We made it to Yosemite National Park and took the Tioga Pass. Rich's brother Robert was right — it was spectacular. I learned the following from a plaque that we found on the way, it said, "The Tioga Pass Road today is the most scenic mountain road in all of California and one of the most beautiful park roads in the entire National Park system." I must concur, it was beautiful.

And Yosemite is another place I would like to come back to. It is a great place to hike and there was a beautiful camping spot called Tioga Lake Campground, situated on a gorgeous lake.

We made our way over to the Grand Canyon area and settled into Williams, Arizona, for three nights. We have been on the road a lot and to be in one place for that long was kind of luxurious (yes, it's all relative).

We wanted time at the Grand Canyon as it was a first for the guys and my second. It is truly G R A N D and one of the most incredible places I have been. (The guys agreed. They loved it too.) We spent the day walking the South Rim pathway and stopped at Mather Point, which is a cement platform that allows you to "step out" into the canyon and take in the view. We simply loved the time we spent there.

The next day we rode horses through the Kaibab National Forest. The horseback ride was on my to-do list and since we didn't get a chance in Montana, Mike made the suggestion and I immediately agreed. It was not Rich's thing, but if you look at the picture, I know he really enjoyed it, too.

Afterwards, we walked the town, which



From left, Rachel Sloan, Mike Archambault of Hudson Falls, and Rich Robinson, on the south rim of the Grand Canyon. Mike and Rich had never been, so they stayed three days!

was located right on historic Route 66. Fortunately, there was a laundromat, too, as we had lots of clothes to clean to prepare us for our ride back east. The trip home is five days minimum, all interstates, which are not my favorite. We did have plenty of time for exploring and now it was time to hightail it home.

Originally, I had hoped we'd make it to the North Rim of the Grand Canyon, but there were road closures everywhere due to massive rain. Like most places across the country, flooding is rampant and roads have been completely washed out. Going to the South Rim allowed easy access to Route 40, our route back east, so it all worked out in the end.

Last night (Sunday), we were in Oklahoma. We had just passed through New Mexico and Texas. Tonight (Monday) we are just outside of Nashville. Tomorrow, when we arrive in Knoxville, Tennessee, we will say goodbye to Rich as he continues on Route 40 to his home in North Carolina. Mike and I will catch Route 81 north.

We talked about a little detour on the Blue Ridge Mountain Parkway, which we hear is gorgeous. By the time you are reading the *Chronicle* on Thursday, we should be home. If not, then we decided to take one last detour, the last hurrah.

### What I learned

It's true, our country is gorgeous. With as much time as we had, it still wasn't enough. We just scratched the surface.

she asked me, "Were you really going to take this trip alone?" I told her I never really thought about it like that. I was only concerned with getting it on my calendar because if it wasn't there, it would never happen. And then because it was there, I started to talk about it.

Even though some people would shake their head and say "that's dangerous" and "crazy," there were some people who were excited and wanted to share their experiences of going across country. And that's how Rich and Mike became a part of the trip. At the time, I figured if it didn't happen, not a big deal...at least I tried. Perspective is everything.

I also learned that I've hit the lottery jackpot and Rich and Mike were it. The company you keep along the way truly makes the experience. We have shared a lot and I'm certain we will all be lifelong friends. How could we not after all we have seen and done together?

Am I the same as before I started the trip? We are a result of our experiences and I am a much better motorcyclist. I am really proud of that. I am also living life exactly the way I was meant to — authentically, who I am meant to be. There is a lot of freedom in that.

By the time we get home, we should have close to 9,500 miles under our belts. It has been a trip of a lifetime. It is amazing how fast it has gone. And there is way more to this trip than I can ever capture in these words.

Yes, I was born to ride. It also seems I was born to LIVE.

I have traveled many places, but there is so much to the US of A. I must take more trips and be more concentrated in my future visits.

I also learned that my Mom has been inspired by me. What an honor. She made me smile as she emailed along my journey and wanted to know the details of our trip so that she and my Dad can effortlessly plan their trip across country, via car. I have a lot to share with them.

When I first met Mike's wife Arlene,



Horseback riding through the Kaibab National Forest in Arizona. Rachel says they didn't get to ride horses in Montana, so she was glad they did it here.