

This is so very difficult. Having a close friend leave you - always is. It's more so when you sit to offer some highlights of your times together because you look back at all the good times and situations you became involved in with your friend, which you cherish so dearly, and find yourself so aware they can't be repeated because your friend has left.

Rob Lentini and I were friends. The separation of mere miles, from Tucson to Clovis, NM was no barrier to our friendship. We spoke fairly often on the phone and would try to visit on my trips there, and his trips through Clovis. When we spoke, it was about our common love of our country, our military, and our families and of course, our motorcycles. We had much in common.

There are so many things I'd like to share with everyone about Rob, but if I were to pick one or two "special" things to share, the first would be our Iron Butt Association sanctioned ride, the 50 CC that we shared in October 2000. We co-authored [Rob really wrote most of it, and I added some comments] a ride report published in the BMW Owners News in February of 2001. What made that ride special to me wasn't the ride - it was the ride with Rob and a few things that happened on the ride, that haven't been reported before.

We rode from San Diego to Jacksonville Beach Florida, 2373 miles in 48 hours, 9 minutes. It was a difficult ride because of the unexpected, horrid weather - over 1000 miles of cold, pounding rains and high winds - but it was fun and we had previously agreed to treat ourselves to crawfish pie and a night on the town in New Orleans, if we made it successfully. Rob had never been to New Orleans before. We made it and headed straight to The Big Easy, after a days rest in Florida.

I told him I'd make us reservations - that time of year, they're pretty hard to come by - and we'd have a ball. I got us a room at the Holiday Inn Superdome using my Priority Gold Membership, in downtown New Orleans. When we arrived, the reservation was lost. As a "consolation", we were offered a room in the Holiday Inn's premier New Orleans property, the CHATEAU LE MOYNE, one block off of Bourbon Street in the French Quarter. At the time, minimum rate for two - \$400 a night - and it was ours that night for \$49.!!! We pulled up to the front door where the Concierge offered services to get us checked in, and watched our motorcycles until we were settled and could park them. We were both awed at the opulence of the hotel, how perfect everything was - all the French European decorations and gilded gold! We felt like kings as we were escorted through the lobby to the front desk, treated like royalty - in our matching red Aerostitch riding suits and helmets. Boy, we were something! We were thrilled to be treated to such finery. We were told we had "one of our finest rooms on the top floor, with a marvelous balcony view of New Orleans and of course, Bourbon Street."

I think we were both so impressed with how our misfortune of the lost room downtown turned to gold, we were starting to strut just a little as we passed the open doors of the unbelievable rooms on our floor. Then the door opened to our "suite". We stepped into a crowded little room with two beds a chair and small table and a door to the balcony. Behind the open door, was a bathroom so small that you bumped into yourself trying to

get in or out. We laughed so hard we were crying, but it WAS a room in the French Quarter.

We shared a wonderful time together that night – roaming the French Quarter, trying all the great Cajun foods. Leaving completely satisfied with our visit to the Cajun city, we gassed in Natchitoches, LA, traded bikes for 5 miles when Rob's engine went south – with me on Rob's bike, but that's another story.

The other time I would like to share briefly was our 3 Flags ride in 2002, from Mexico, through the US to Canada. It was a great ride, twisting in and around the mountains, following the Rockies north. It turned out that in northern South Dakota, Rob discovered a tire had worn much faster than anticipated and he was on a pretty thin rear tire.

Realizing we were ahead of schedule, in the middle of nowhere and now only some 450 or so miles from Regina, CA – our destination and a good size city – Rob decided he could make it and get a tire in Regina. Rob had his first flat just outside Bow Bells North Dakota. We got it fixed and entered Saskatchewan at North Portal. The road was gravel and under construction - and true to most of our rides, it was raining again. In the short 150 miles from North Portal to Regina, Rob and I repaired his rear tire 4 more times.

His comment when we finally made it to our hotel room - "Well, that was certainly a lot of fun. You think I have a chance of finding a tire here or am I leaving the bike and riding home on the back of yours?".

That was the consummate good nature I always saw in my friend. Rob Lentini was the most positive person I have ever known. He met every challenge thrown in his path with an almost casual attitude as he simply took the challenge to task successfully.

My father always told me – “no matter how dark things may seem to you, even the darkest of clouds will have a silver lining.”. Rob's passing has been one of my darkest clouds – having the chance to know him, and share so much with him over the years will always be – my silver lining.

Steve Aikens