

At right, Dickie and Linda Meeks relax at home among fishing and hunting trophies that they both have caught and shot. They met at a wedding in Gordonsville 43 years ago. Photo by Phil Audibert



Below, right, A good day of hunting for the Meeks family. All three bucks were taken the same day on the same Orange County farm. Dickie (right) and son Rickie (left) bagged theirs in the morning; Linda got hers that evening. Contributed photo

"I had cousins that lived down here and I came down to visit a cousin and she was getting married. I was her maid of honor, and he was my blind date, 43 years ago." Linda points to Dickie.

This young lady from Northern Virginia was now a wife and soon a mother in Gordonsville, living in a home not 100 feet away from where her husband was born and raised. But in this household, as well as neighboring Meeks-owned properties on both sides, when something needs to be repaired, particularly if it involves plumbing, it's Linda who fixes it, not Dickie.

"My dad was a plumber, and I was just very mechanically inclined," says Linda matter-of-factly. She learned much of what she knows "just listening to the guys." When she was working at Sedwick Distributors in Orange and later at Noland Company in Charlottesville, contractors would come up to the counter and ask to talk to a man. They didn't know that, in some cases, she was more knowledgeable than they about the subject. "It took me a long time to prove myself," she confirms. But once she did, those same contractors would now specifically ask for her. "I have a number of people tell me they wish I was still there," she says. She also had an uncanny knack for solving problems such as this typical customer question: "My commode is leaking; what do I need to do?"

Dickie remembers she would have arguments with a friend of theirs who is also a master electrician/plumber. She would try to talk him out of buying some-

thing he didn't need for a particular project. "They would argue back and forth," he laughs. "He would leave mad because she was right." That or he'd come back the next day to return the part.

Motorcycles, by the way, were Linda's idea, not his. "I'm just an accident waiting for a place to happen," says Dickie shaking his head ruefully. He's referring to



several accidents working on electrical transmission lines, including a scary fall and rescue from 120 feet "way up high." He has also had a run-in on a motorcycle, and for that reason, his bike only has 3,000 miles on it, while hers has 14,000.

She and Dickie had ridden dirt bikes when they went hunting together. And yes, Linda is also a lady hunter and fisherwoman of considerable skill. What's refreshing is that Dickie seems not the

least bit threatened by her abilities in these traditionally male-dominated activities. He encourages her.

Anyway, Linda knew people who had motorcycles, and she tried in vain to beg borrow or steal a ride. "No one would ever give me a ride," she snorts indignantly. "So I said 'Well I'll just get my license and ride myself.'" She started on a Honda Rebel

250 four years ago at the tender age of 58 years, "just to get used to being on the highway because I had never ridden a bike on the highway. I'd been back in the woods before but out on the road is totally different."

It was not long before she persuaded Dickie to get a bike too. Then she upgraded her own ride to the Honda 750. Currently the Meeks are working on a Department of Tourism Motorcycle Grand

From one equal to another

Tour of Virginia. They must fill up a passbook with stamps of 58 Virginia destinations they have visited on their motorcycles. So far they have collected 30 of the 58.

Linda does all her own maintenance work on her bike. She tells a wonderful story about a Motor Maid who had broken down "out west somewhere. Now this lady is probably in her 60s or 70s, and she was sitting there and she had a towel down and all these parts out, working on this bike. She said this young dude come by and said 'Bike broke down, huh?' And she said 'Honey, if I rode you as hard as this bike you'd be broke down too.'"

Big laugh all around. But, seriously, if you broke down on your motorcycle, and Linda Meeks came by, she could probably help you fix it.

You've probably noticed that motorcyclists always greet each other when they meet on the road. They hold out their left hand with two fingers extended. Sometimes they almost touch. Linda explains the origin of that signal: a closed hand means you have no spare parts; two fingers means you do have spare parts.

This coming Sunday, Linda plans to participate in a huge motorcycle rally, where the Dulles Airport Access Road and Interstate 66 will be shut down all the way to the Pentagon as a two wheeled 911 memorial passes by. And on that day, she will most likely give and receive that universal motorcyclist's greeting many times. But it's got little to do with parts and everything to do with a brotherly (sisterly?) greeting from one equal to another.



MOTORCYCLE (Great Brand) MAMA

The message on the answering machine went something like this: "How would you like to do a story about a little old lady who rode a motorcycle from Gordonsville to Nova Scotia and back?"

What self-respecting feature writer could resist rising to that bait, much as those lunker bass did that are hanging on the wall of Dickie and Linda Meeks' home in Gordonsville. But let's get one thing straight from the get-go. Linda Meeks is not little and she's not particularly old at age 62. But she is a mother, and a grandmother, and a great-grandmother to boot, and yes, she did ride a motorcycle from Gordonsville to Nova Scotia and back.

She pores over a map as we chat at the kitchen counter in their modest Gordonsville home. "I went 3,786 miles. I rode from here through Maine and up to Canada, here in New Brunswick and then we followed this road all the way over to Nova Scotia." Her finger traces the



Above, great grandmother, Linda Meeks routinely cruises up and down Main Street Gordonsville. Her biggest fears are clueless drivers who pull out in front of her or cut her off. At left, Meeks describes herself as being "mechanically inclined." Not only does she work on her own bike, she's worked for years behind the counter of male-dominated plumbing supply companies.

Photos by Phil Audibert



Linda Meeks was one of 231 Motor Maids from all over the country who rode to Lewiston Maine for a parade and convention of lady bikers this summer. Next year they will gather in Cody, Wyoming.

route. She glances at Dickie and says, "I called him every day... twice."

And what was Dickie doing all this time? He looks sheepish. "I, uh, set here with the great grandchildren watching Spongebob. They kept me company in here waiting for her to call me." Wasn't he worried? "I was worried the whole time she was gone," he protests, "but I knew she'd be alright. She's a good rider." Besides he adds, "the whole family was wanting her to do this trip." It's just that when it came time for her to leave "nobody wanted her to go."

But go she did. And so bright and early the morning of July 3, Linda donned her chartreuse padded summer weight motorcycle jacket, cranked up her Honda 750 Shadow, and rode off into the sunrise. At the rendezvous point in Fauquier County, she met up with five other Virginia women motorcyclists.

And with Dickie furiously waving them goodbye, they pointed their bikes north and roared off into the summer haze.

Wisely avoiding Washington, D.C., New York City and Boston, this mini convoy of "little old ladies" on motorcycles rode up into central Pennsylvania, across New York State, visiting Orange County Choppers in Newburgh, and continuing up the scenic Taconic Parkway, parallel to

The scariest part of riding a motorcycle... is clueless drivers, "people pulling out in front of you or coming over into your lane."

the Hudson River, into Vermont where they visited, aptly enough, Montpelier. And then this party of seven riders (one lady rider brought along her hapless husband) crossed New Hampshire and descended upon Lewiston, ME, along with, count 'em, 225 other lady bikers!

The occasion was the annual convention of Motor Maids Inc., the largest and longest running all-women motorcycle association in the country, if not the world. Started in 1940 by two pioneer female bikers, the organization has grown from 51 charter members to more than 1,200 today.

According to its website, co-founder Dot Robinson "paved the way for women to ride motorcycles," while still maintaining her femininity, and proving "that you can be a lady, still compete with the men and not be a man-hater."

So there they were in Lewiston, ME 231 Motor Maids. Can you imagine? "We have ladies from 20 to 90," says Linda. Take Gloria from New Jersey, for example; she's 83 years old, "and she still rides her bike to convention, and she's been all the way across the United States."

A year ago, Linda rode out to the Motor Maid convention in Indiana. A bunch of young bucks, all tats and testosterone, pulled up in a car raving about the "biker's convention," when Linda set

them straight. "Yeah, we're the bikers," she said. The rad dudes stood there flat-footed and slack jawed in amazement. Lady bikers?

"They kind of look at us funny," continues Linda of the general reaction of the public to groups of women riding motorcycles. "We pull in a lot of places like service stations; five, six, seven, eight of us pull in getting gas, and we all pull our helmets off, and they look. 'But ya'll are women.'" How observant. Linda raises her eyebrows and cocks her head to one side and says "Like 'Yeah.'"

Of course, one of Motor Maids' major goals is to promote safety and motorcycle awareness. The Virginia chapter, consisting of some 65 lady riders, goes on group rides at least once a month.

wasn't due to stupidity, but it still hurt.

The scariest part of riding a motorcycle, no matter what sex you are, is clueless drivers, "people pulling out in front of you or coming over into your lane." Another scary thing is riding over a preferably closed draw bridge or anything with a metal grate, which our merry band had to do several times on its way to Nova Scotia.

Once done with the Motor Maid Convention, five of the group of seven continued north. Their longest day was 432 miles from the Maine-Canada border to Inverness on Cape Breton Island. They toured the breathtaking Cabot Trail, which is "like Skyline Drive but you had the ocean all around you." Her favorite place was the Bay of



Taking a break on the Cabot Trail on Cape Breton Island and/or sailing from Yarmouth to Portland by high speed ferry, Diane Gardner, Joan Jennings, Linda Meeks and Bev Williamson rode motorcycles 3,700+ miles from Virginia to Nova Scotia and back.

Last year, Linda who has been riding on the road for only four years now, went on 17 of these excursions. And she has never had an accident, although on this recent trip, "I did drop the bike one time. We were getting ready to take off and I didn't do the clutch right." Otherwise the trip was incident free for all participants.

Maybe that's because on her helmet is a sticker that says "Stupid Hurts." She tells a horror story of an Ohio Motor Maid who was riding to an American Motorcycle Association convention recently. She was going down an unfamiliar road in the rain "and she went off the road into 10 inches of mud. It threw her off her bike and broke both her legs, some ribs, one of her arms. She's in the hospital, but she's doing better." That certainly

if her back hurt from all those hours in the saddle she responds wearily, "It's not your back, it's your bottom." Besides, anyone who has driven in Nova Scotia in summertime, be it a motorcycle or a car, has a new appreciation for what freezing and thawing can do to pavement. Potholes there are the size of Volkswagens.

"You just maneuver around," shrugs Linda. "One girl asked me one evening she said, 'Linda are you all right. You were all over the road today.' I'm like, 'did you see all of those holes? That's why.'" Also, consider the fact that road construction season at that latitude lasts only three months of the year.

Suffice it say, when you're not dodging pot holes in Nova Scotia, you're idling through construction zones kicking up fresh tar and chips.

So what's it like riding with a bunch of wild and crazy motorcycle women? "Oh we had a blast," exclaims Linda. But acting like a bunch of wild women? Not really. "We're a pretty good group," she says soberly. "If we're parked for the night, some of the women might drink a beer or a glass of wine but as for drinking while we're riding, no way. We have a good time but we don't raise too much Cain." And then she adds with an eye roll, at night it was mostly "a bunch of women running

Fundi with its 23-foot elevation difference between high and low tides. "When the tide goes out the boats are just sitting on the ground." In, Digby, the scallop capital of the world, this lady from the fried chicken capital of the world, "had some wonderful seafood, lobster, scallops and clams." And on the way home, they rode a high-speed ferry called the Cat, from Yarmouth to Portland, ME.

The weather was perfect the entire trip, which is a good thing because "I hate riding in the rain," she shudders. And decisions on where to stay or eat or both were pretty much made on the spot. "We didn't have reservations; we just rode until we were ready to stop and found a hotel."

The trip was also quite tiring. They usually stopped every two hours for rest and fuel. Asked

their mouths. We...can... talk." And what do they talk about? Well, next year's trip, naturally. That's how this trip was hatched, when they were in Indiana. She and her riding buddies planned "for a whole year. I just kept thinkin' it's a loooooonnnnnng way," shudders Linda. "But I said I'm going to do it." Linda, who drives a school bus for Gordon-Barbour Elementary students, figured, "Man I'm going to be off all summer, I can take another week and go to Nova Scotia."

Next year the Motor Maid Inc. convention is in Cody, WY. Club rules state, if you come, you must ride your motorcycle the whole way. Is Linda Meeks going? "I don't know yet," she hedges. "That's 2,100 miles one way." But then ask her what is it about riding a motorcycle and she'll get a faraway look to her eyes and say what all motorcyclists say, both men and women. "It's just the freedom and seeing the beautiful scenery. It's different than riding a car or riding behind somebody. It's just control of where you're going and seeing the world."

So, next summer, it's a safe bet Dickie will be watching a whole lot more Spongebob with the great grandkids.

Linda Meeks spent 15 days riding this motorcycle from Gordonsville to Maine to Nova Scotia and back, a total of 3,786 miles.



Linda Meeks spent 15 days riding this motorcycle from Gordonsville to Maine to Nova Scotia and back, a total of 3,786 miles.