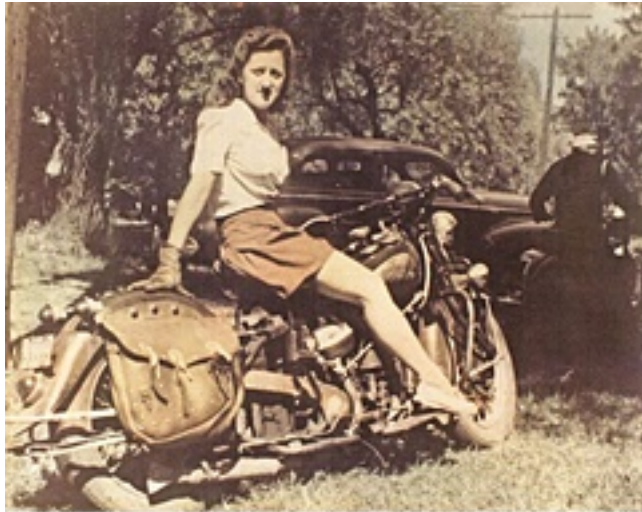


## The Lawsuit

by Ira Briggs

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Dorothy Briggs of Hemlock NY circa 1944.

At the age of eight years, I recall my father bartering in his shop (Briggs Garage/Salvage Yard) with a mellowed, aged Hells Angel biker who frequented South Lima's Bucket of Blood Tavern. The biker's graying beard, long hair, gaunt look and intimidating tattoos provided a window into his sordid, but self-fulfilled past. The road map of deep lines on his face showed navigated miles of adventure that couldn't be put into print. Like a well-worn sprocket, the biker was ready to hang up his leathers. It was time to swap his 1938 Harley Davidson and 1936 Indian Scout motorcycles for a damaged, but re-buildable late model 1959 Cadillac Eldorado convertible that my father had acquired.

My father Larry and mother Dorothy often rode these bikes on Sunday afternoons while my brother, sister and I were content with our own activities. As time prevailed, it was more often my

mother who would take an occasional Sunday drive on the Scout.

On one such occasion, while driving east on Routes 5&20 to Canandaigua to meet other biker enthusiasts for coffee, Mother was run off the road into a ditch by a passing motorist that came in contact with her left handlebar grip. My mother had minor abrasions and was somewhat disoriented. Fortunately, the Scout was cushioned by tall weeds and only suffered superficial scratches and a bent mirror. The motorist apologized profusely for his reckless act, taking full responsibility, and offering to pay for any damage. He handed her his insurance information after helping her get the Scout back to the edge of the road's shoulder.

My father, opportunist that he was, envisioned a guaranteed windfall and a lawyer was promptly secured on my mother's behalf. My mother's overly confident attorney didn't feel it necessary to elaborate as to how we children were well fed after church, before her afternoon ride. Instead, he focused on my mother's injuries and her inability to fulfill my father's personal desires due to her convalescence. Being a good Christian, with honesty as one of her outstanding virtues, this was too much for Mother to endure. With a disgusted look she whispered loudly to my Father in the hushed courtroom, "Why that's not true Larry, I've always been accommodating to your needs!"

My mother's attorney may well have been guilty of a minimal amount of embellishment, but he did present to the jury undeniable facts. The driver of the car, without question, had admitted to performing an unsafe pass, causing my mother's injuries and minor damage to the Scout. The attorney's closing statement to the jury was that Mrs. Briggs was taking a relaxing drive on a Sunday afternoon when she was maliciously run into a ditch by a speeding motorist.

The well-seasoned attorney representing the defendant on behalf of State Farm Insurance reconstructed an entirely different scenario. Mind you, this was an era when women motorcyclists were quite uncommon. The lawyer stated; "What kind of women races off to her favorite hangout to meet up with her unsavory biker compadres, while her three children anguish over her return?"

Following the defense's argument, the once sympathetic jury no longer envisioned the wife and mother of three preparing lunch for her children, before taking a Sunday afternoon drive after church. Instead my mother was stereotyped as Marlon Brando in the movie "The Wild Ones."

The verdict was for the defendant; my mother received no monetary award, and my father was out fifty dollars for attorney fees, a large sum for that time.

On Sunday afternoons when I hear a motorcycle driving by my house, I envision my mother, one of "The Wild Ones," on her Scout and smile.

*Editor's Note: Ira Briggs is a well digger, writer and ARC Living Skills Assistant and a University of Rochester employee who hails from Hemlock. He writes short stories from his memories of the people and events of Hemlock NY.*