

# Red Badge of Honor

By Margie Goldsmith

**T**hey say there are only two kinds of cyclists: those who have fallen and those who will fall. It's not if you will fall—it's when.

Still, I figured falling was only for those who didn't look where they were going, the ones who ended up crashing over empty bottles or tumbling into potholes. You knew who they were because they had huge scarlet bruises and little maroon lines that looked like superficial knife wounds. Later, their skin turned purple and orange and green, followed by blotchy dark scabs. And they seemed to want to show off their injuries.

I think biking has cults, and one of those cults is the Road Rash Club. There's also a male leg-shaving cult. One guy I know said he shaved his legs because it made riding a bit more aerodynamic. Another admitted it made his tanned legs look better, but then an elite rider told me it's because road rash is easier to treat when there's no hair in the wound.

The only time I ever fell off a bike was as a kid right after my training wheels came off. I skidded on a gravel driveway, took a tumble and ended up with a band-aid or two. I had no intention of ever falling again, especially as an adult on my custom-made Titanium Seven from Conrad's Bike Shop where all the elites have their bikes made.

There's no reason I should fall because I don't take chances. I'm always on the alert for cars turning unexpectedly, broken glass on the road and especially potholes. I've heard so many stories about people falling into potholes ending up with broken limbs. Surely it wouldn't have happened if they'd looked where they were going.

Last week, with no advance warning, I joined the fallen. I was coming down a steep hill on the bike path past the George Washington Bridge, past

the Cloisters, just before the bike path becomes a long flight of stairs. Flying, racing, cruising down the hill, the wind on my face, so happy I could have screamed "YEEE HAWWW!" out of pure joy, when suddenly my wheel slipped out from under me. I fought for control. I slammed on my brakes. I was not going down. But then I did. A pothole the size of a cocktail table, which looked as though it had been jackhammered open, swallowed me up and sent me spilling to the ground. Cracckkk! I could feel my helmet hit the earth. My hand, elbow, shoulder, knee and thigh scraped across the jagged tar surface.

I pushed myself up to check the damage. At least I could stand. And walk. And move my arms and neck. My biking glove was torn. My little finger throbbed and I knew it had to be broken. I looked at my body. Bright red splotches and pieces of dirt covered my shoulder, upper thigh, middle thigh and knee. Road rash. This was it. Was there any place I was going in the next few days where I needed to wear a dress and look great? No. Fine. I looked at my bike—perfect not even a scratch. Thank you, Titanium. My helmet survived too, and probably saved me from a concussion.

They took an x-ray of my hand in the emergency room and slapped on a plaster cast up to my elbow. They dressed my abrasions in gauze bandages and sent me on my way. I went home and took a photograph of myself and emailed it to my friends looking for sympathy. They emailed and called with the proper words of consolation.

I went to get some groceries, dressed in shorts and a sleeveless top. As people stared at me in that "oh-poor-you" way I had to stop from smiling. I'd been elevated to the prestigious cult of eminent cyclists who had suffered a spill, brushed themselves off, and now had the red badge of honor—road rash—to prove it. I guess I just can't shake the need to compete.

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