

OUT OF OFFICE

Two Wheels Move This Urologist's Soul

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Standing on a rocky promontory on the northeast shore of James Bay in August 2021, I stared out into the vast expanse of Hudson Bay and reflected on how I got there: not by canoe, the traditional northern Canada mode of transport, but on my trusty V-Strom Adventure touring bike (fig. 1, *A* and *B*). During medical school my transportation through good and bad weather (and even snow) was a 2-wheeled motorized iron horse, a state of affairs that lasted until my firstborn. After completing my responsibilities as a father, with my last kid successfully off to college, I reentered the world of motorcycle adventure touring.

I needed this outlet from my busy academic career and urology practice. It is a wonderful experience to learn new operative techniques, improve and even sometimes cure the ailments of our suffering patients, or teach a new idea or surgical approach to a student or resident, but we all need something outside the field of urology to make life as full as possible. During the last 15 years, my vacation has been motorcycle adventures through every Canadian province, the northern reaches of our continent (Yukon and Alaska), 35 American states and many European countries. Dipping the front wheels of my motorcycle in the brackish waters of a major bay of the Arctic Ocean wiped out the disappointment of a previous attempt to do the same thing in Prudhoe Bay in Alaska, being thwarted by 1.5 feet of fresh snow in the last northern pass of the Dalton Highway (fig. 2, *A* and *B*). At least one of my motorcycles (9 sit in my stable) has tasted the salty water of not only the Arctic Ocean, but also the Pacific and Atlantic, as well as the Gulf of Mexico. Rented motorcycles introduced me to awesome mountains, plains and salty seas beyond North America.

My wife and I followed her grandfather's route as he fought his way from the beaches of Sicily through the mountains of southern

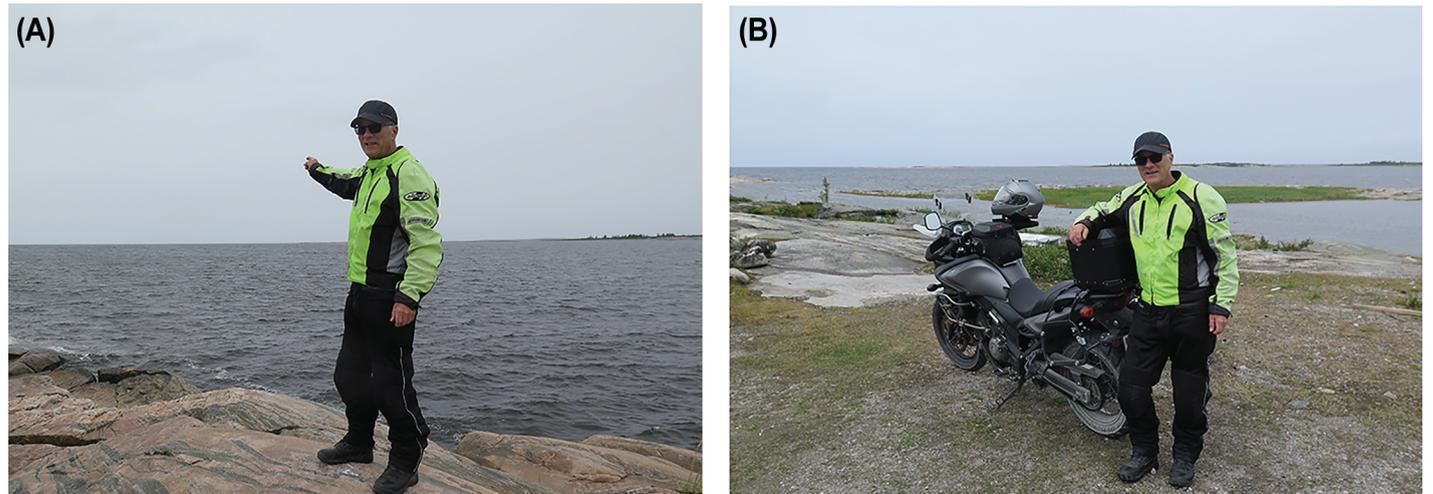


Figure 1. *A*, the author pointing to Hudson Bay. *B*, the stripped-down bike that got him through the last rough part of the ride to the coast.



Figure 2. *A*, the sleet and ice experienced at the Arctic Circle in Alaska turned to snow, which forced me back from my first attempt at dipping the front wheel of my motorcycle in the Arctic Ocean. *B*, Alaska provided other entertainment for a motorcyclist.



Figure 3. Some memories from the dozens of motorcycle adventures in North America and abroad. *A*, Italy. *B*, national park tour. *C*, historic Ontario Mill. *D*, Michigan Tunnel of Trees. *E*, Bosnia. *F*, Death Valley.



Figure 4. A, my home motorcycle shop. B, Koda riding my sidecar rig.

Italy to Rome in 1943–44 during World War II (fig. 3, A). Together we toured the midwest U.S., camping in 9 of the western national parks (fig. 3, B). Following backroads across Canada from St. John's, Newfoundland to Victoria, British Columbia led to discovery of countless little-known, out of the way gems (fig. 3, C). I followed Hemingway's journey though the U.S. to northern Michigan (fig. 3, D) and rode through the eerie hidden battlegrounds of the Bosnian War (fig. 3, E), experiencing life from a different perspective, all on 2 wheels. Renting a motorcycle following urology meetings led to journeys to the edge of both the south and north rims of the Grand Canyon, Highway 1 skirting the Pacific Ocean, the depths of Death Valley

(fig. 3, F) and tranquil rides through sacred grounds of American Civil War Battlefields. When my wife and I decided to really explore the American psyche, we spent parts of 12 months (spread over 2 years of vacation time) circumnavigating North America (18,000 km) 8 to 9 days at a time. We left the motorcycle and camping gear in various airport storage facilities until vacation allowed us an opportunity to fly back and pick them up for the next leg of an epic motorcycle adventure. Exploring the backroads of our southern neighbor on a motorcycle helped us understand what makes America tick.

At home, I spend out-of-office time in my renovated 1880s barn shop, maintaining my 4 modern motorcycles and restoring old vin-

tage British motorcycles to their former glory (working on 5 at the present time). Sitting side by side in the shop are a 1971 Norton Commando, 2 Matchless G15 MkIIs (very rare) and 2 restored Canadian military bikes (the 1944 Norton WD 16H seeing action in World War II; fig. 4, A). While my children do not share this passion (better at assessing risk), my grandkids and Koda (my Fox Red Labrador retriever) find touring the local country lanes in my sidecar rig a blast (fig. 4, B).

Urology was never left behind on these motorcycle adventures. The ride in the open air reinvigorated me, cleansed my mind and opened me to new possibilities, with ideas often leaping from the pages of my travelogue into urol-

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ogy journals. The stories of many of these trips have found their way into motorcycle magazines, and while they may not have the impact of the urology journals I publish in, I am proud that they encouraged others to find paths to adventure they might have missed.

So as I reflect back on my urology career and countless rewarding patient and teaching experiences in clinic and the operating room, I realize that inspiration can come from an activity outside the office. For some that might be a relaxing hobby, but I believe that a life lived is one where you do something that truly excites but also scares you. For me, that activity is the adventure, the thrill and perhaps even the danger of riding a motorcycle just to discover what is around the next corner or over the next hill. ■