

# travel

## Women want

# WOW!

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### Rhythm of the road calls motorcyclist

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Whenever I mentioned that I was heading off for two weeks on a camping tour of Arizona and New Mexico — on my motorcycle, alone — the usual response was "Aren't you afraid?"

The assumption seemed to be that as a woman, I would be attacked by a two-legged predator and mugged, raped or murdered. I wasn't naive enough to think those things couldn't happen, but I was more concerned about my vulnerability as a motorcyclist, dealing with bad roads, adverse weather or reckless drivers.

And while we do live in a world where bad things can happen to good people, I refuse to circumscribe my life out of fear of what could be. I prefer to be prepared, to take reasonable risks, to

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use my wit and common sense and to hope this approach will prevent most problems and see me through any difficulties.

There were advantages to traveling alone. I got to listen to my own rhythms and desires, go where I wanted, when I wanted, and stay as long as I wanted. Being alone helped me meet people, which added to the adventure of traveling.

One of my most delightful encounters was during my visit to the Gila National Forest in New Mexico. I had spent a wonderful time visiting the Gila Cliff Dwellings and decided to spend the night at the nearby campground, though I was concerned about going without dinner. I was traveling light on the bike and had only some snacks with me, and there were no stores in the vicinity.

But fortune provided. Soon after I had set up my camp, a delightful woman, Maureen, arrived with her foster child and set up next to me. We introduced ourselves, hit it off and she invited me to dinner!

But first we changed into our swimsuits and headed for the river. I found the water too cold, but the two of them were braver than I and body-surfed the current, giggling with the splendor of the ride. Before dinner, we took a walk and saw a small herd of mule deer by the river. Dinner was superb: chicken and steak grilled over the fire, raw carrots and s'mores for dessert, all spiced with fresh air, good conversation and more than a pinch of humor.

Another fortunate encounter came during my visit to the Grand Canyon. I had spent a long day on the road. The sky had been heavy, foreboding rain. When I got to the campground, I unloaded my

#### SAFETY TIPS

1. Be alert. Look around. If a place or situation doesn't feel OK, leave.
2. Introduce yourself to the camp host and to your neighbors. Ask the host about local hazards.
3. Follow basic camping precautions, such as not feeding wildlife.
4. Take along personal protection, such as a personal alarm or whistle. Call the tourism offices of the states you plan to visit to learn what protection is legal there.
5. Take self-defense training to increase your sense of security and self-reliance. Check with your local YWCA, parks and recreation department or community education center for a course. Your police department may also offer a program. The National Crime Prevention Council has a pamphlet called "Street Sense ... It's Common Sense." Order a free copy through McGruff Specialty at 1-518-842-4388, 8-5 weekdays.

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things, then wandered around and introduced myself to my neighbors, including Beth and Kerry, two young recent college graduates.

As I sat with them, chatting about our travels and life in general, I casually commented that I hoped it wouldn't rain, since I was without a tent. They very kindly offered to lend me their spare. I gladly accepted, set it up with their help, put my things inside and crawled in just in time to escape the cloudburst. I felt cozy, warm, safe and grateful for the

gifts of strangers.

All told, my life perspective seems to be on track. People were invariably kind. The biggest jolts of adrenaline came from a thunder and hail storm in eastern Arizona, when I felt incredibly naked on my bike, and from the frequent gusts of wind, one of which almost blew me into a pickup truck.

As far as living beasts of prey, I felt more threatened in Lake Havasu State Park, just across the Colorado River from California, than anywhere else. I had set up camp for the night, which meant a pad and sleeping bag on the ground, when the camp host drove by and stopped to chat. He suggested I move onto the picnic table since, if I were sleeping on the ground, I ran the risk of waking up cuddled to a rattlesnake or scorpion. Somehow, that bothered me much more than the thought of a roaming bear or a prowling man.