

A Tribute to my Father, Jack Riepe

By Katherine Riepe Scheponik

Jack Riepe roared through life.

He pounced on adrenaline sources, captured their likeness with his keyboard, and set them free to start the game all over again.

Our storyteller gifted us with a curated legacy of glittering, immortal adventures, each in its own little jar. Whether on two wheels or four, instead of exhaust, Jack left a trail of laughs, loyalty and friendship. He never belonged to himself. Always you, the readers. Jack was never without a muse, as women were his favorite enigma.

However, Jack has given me an entirely different library of laughs and memories. I was the object of his protection—because I'm his girl.

Let me tell you about my Daddy.

Before he was the much-loved court jester of his moto family, Jack and Maryann brought me into the world in the mid-1980s. He masqueraded as a clean-shaven, suit-wearing corporate square for a while, escaping into nature with his little family whenever he could.

Jack faced challenging circumstances as a first-time father. My mother had a very rare and untreatable neurological disorder that appeared during her pregnancy. Life hurled him some responsibilities that most dads might not have had to tackle.

My parents split up around 1989 (at her insistence), so our father-daughter story was written on bimonthly, five-hour car rides to his idyllic mountain home in Jay, New York. Jack made that work. Most folks don't do parenting on the road, but for us, it was a gift.

His friends were my "uncles," and their significant others were my "aunts." With his crew of supportive friends, we went fishing, hiking, skiing, horseback riding, boating, ATV riding and camping. Sometimes, it was just us.

He held my hand 100% of the time in all parking lots, without exception.

He could make any New York State Thruway toll collector laugh.

Jack patiently chatted up my invisible friends when I didn't feel like answering basic human questions (as a parent myself now, this sounds maddening).

Some Friday nights we couldn't get to his cabin before he became too tired to keep driving safely. We'd "camp" in the back of the Suburban, equipped with emergency blankets and a hand-held TV that would broadcast Letterman if the antenna sat just right. On one of these occasions in the '90s, my father and I huddled under a blanket in the red Suburban watching a live car chase involving a white Ford Bronco in California. He shielded me from the precise circumstances of this particular historic event.

He read Tolkien aloud to me. If I was bad, he read *The Wall Street Journal*.

Jack spun original and ornate children's bedtime stories on the spot, always involving me as a main character. He created a social life for me during my weekends with him, always creating playdates with other kids in the area.

Jack hosted legendary Halloween parties. One year, his group of North Country friends all dressed as Jack for Halloween. They stuffed pillows in their shirts, powdered their hair gray and toted paper plane tickets and a cardboard fax machine throughout our raucous, happy home. (His corporate square alter ego was an easy target.)

Even as a child, I knew how rare it was to have such a warm, protective and imaginative adult as my daddy. Jack taught me the value of looking up at nature with my eyes wide-open. He loved quiet hikes in the fall. He duck-walked uphill on skis with his whiny toddler on his shoulders, my 30-inch pink skis dangling off my Fischer-Price cross-country boots.

My father described colors and sounds with such dimension that I believe he must have experienced them differently than most people. At times, I wonder if that felt burdensome to him. His emotions were never tepid; for better or for worse, his emotions were always high potency. For this reason, Jack was the same gifted storyteller in every life he lived. I'm the only person on Earth who knew the "Dad" version of Jack.

Jack's laugh was energizing, and now, his silence deafening. But not really. As I type this at his very keyboard, I'm smiling. He's hissing at me

to cut out all the "to-be" verbs and the oatmeal-flavored cliché phrases. He wants you to know that I really wasn't a pain in the ass, and that our car rides were always fun.

Dad and I had countless adventures as I got older, countless arguments, and pointless periods of silence that would go on for months at a time. But at some point, you have to just choose love. Some years ago, the fights ceased to matter. We chose love.

Jack's heart guided his choices. While that can be a tough way to live, it was the only life that made sense for him.

Choose adventure. Get the gear that doesn't break. Dance at the wedding. Stroll right into that tourist trap. Learn people's names. Figure out what makes people smile. Choose love.

John Patrick "Jack" Riepe, age 69, formerly of Jersey City, New Jersey and Jay, New York, passed away Wednesday, October 18, 2023, in Toms River, New Jersey.

Jack, whose career in public relations spanned more than 40 years, was a member of the Pennsylvania MAC-PAC BMW motorcycle club, an active motorcycle journalist for BMW Owners News magazine and the author of the popular "Conversations with a Motorcycle" book series.

Jack was always a crowd favorite as a featured speaker at many BMW MOA rallies and other motorcycle events across the country.

*Jack was a beloved son, brother, father, and grandfather. **ON***





GODSPEED, JACK RIEPE!

It was 2016, and my wife and I were driving west on I-72 out of Champaign, Illinois, heading to a destination I can't remember. The corn and soybeans filling the fields we passed were beginning to change from green to brown as fall was making its oncoming presence known. Just then, Tom Petty's "Running Down a Dream" was interrupted as the phone rang. Being the safety-conscious driver I am, I pushed the hands-free button on the steering wheel and took the call.

"Bill," the caller said abruptly, "I'm sorry you've not received my November article yet, but I guarantee it's a good one. I'll have it to you first thing in the morning, as I'm about to go into witness protection."

"That would be perfect," I replied, "Thank you for letting me know."

With that the call ended.

"Who the hell was that?" Judy asked.

"That," I said, "Was Jack Riepe, one of *Owners News'* most popular contributors. As she rolled her eyes, Tom Petty returned to the radio, and our drive west continued.

Though he never complained, not everyone knew Jack's health had been declining over the last few years. Always positive, he was determined not to let his condition get the best of him, and the only prescription he needed was a Negroni and a keyboard.

Jack left this world on October 18 and will be missed by all he touched over the years. We'll all cherish our own memories of Jack. Here are a few more...

"Jack was a good friend, but also a bit of a mentor for me. Over the last few years, he was always encouraging and generously helped me on some of my own writing, particularly the final chapter of my second book. Though readers might think of him as a kind of freewheeling, no rules writer, he actually was quite a craftsman with his columns, and the depth of his experience and expertise with writing style and publishing was amazing. We had

quite a few long phone conversations (well, a lot of listening on my part), and he could always get me laughing! I will miss Jack a lot." –Ron Davis

"At the 2016 BMW MOA National Rally, I was fortunate enough to spend an afternoon with Jack Riepe. We sat around, drinking on a bottle of bourbon I'd brought him from Kentucky. Sitting there listening to Jack tell stories was a highlight of my BMW life. Sadly, Jack passed away today and the world, especially the BMW MOA community, has lost a master storyteller and statesman of the BMW world." –Daryl B. Casey

"I have surprisingly few pictures on my phone of Jack. I think because, too often when I was in his presence, cameras and other distractions would have taken away what little time I would have with him, and I was stingy with my time with him. I had some great conversations with Jack, in person and over the phone over the past 10 years.

*"Jack's book *Conversations with a Motorcycle* was the first book I read after coming back from Iraq, and the only thing that made me belly-laugh at that time. That laugh, at that moment began my healing journey post-Army, and I'll always be thankful to Jack for that... always. His family is now and will remain in my prayers. The BMW MOA has lost its princely brother today. Rest easy, my friend."* –Reece Mullins

With Jack's passing, I'm reminded of a personal favorite quote from the movie *Shawshank Redemption*:

I have to remind myself that some birds aren't meant to be caged. Their feathers are just too bright. And when they fly away, the part of you that knows it was a sin to lock them up does rejoice. Still, the place you live in is that much more drab and empty now that they're gone.

Godspeed, Jack Riepe. Until we meet again. **ON**

Bill

Bill Wiegand #180584
Managing Editor