



TO LIFE, TO LIFE, CHAI RIDERS!

Text and photography by Nancy Resnick Hendrickson



If you grew up in a household that discouraged roller skating and bicycle riding as dangerous pursuits, your ema would be shocked to learn of any interest you might have in the Chai Riders' Motorcycle Club Inc., a group that describes itself as "a bunch of people who love riding motorcycles and are also interested in things Jewish." As an avid rider myself, I was thrilled to join them on June 3 as they rallied for one of their annual rides through the streets of New York City in the Celebrate Israel Parade. To the cheers of spectators waving the blue and white Israeli flag, Chai Riders revved, roared, rocked and rolled among the marchers and entertainers in the parade that has been touted as the new member magnet. In fact, the Club's recently elected vice-president Steven Gottesman first learned of the group when he saw them in action in a past Israel parade. Even now, after all the processions in which Steven has twisted the throttle, he still gets a big kick out of watching the crowds' surprised expressions when they noticed the Chai Riders' yarmulkes amid the leather, Hondas, Beemers and Harleys. Married with four daughters, Steve rides almost every Sunday and, although he has not been able to get his wife to ride with him yet, he lets his fel-



low riders know who wears the proverbial leathers in his family courtesy of his license plate. WHIPPED.

At the helm and steering the big wheel of the Club for a second term is President David Himber, an ordained rabbi who currently holds the position of Dean of Students at Yeshiva University. David was also introduced to Chai Riders at a Celebrate Israel Parade. He derived pure pleasure this year in sporting a tattoo sleeve shirt to stir the crowd and give them the illusion of seeing at least one

Jew showing off taboo tattoos. He also managed to get his wife to ride tandem with him at this very special event.

Chai Riders was established as a formal club almost 13 years ago when a small group of people defined by their longtime friendship, Jewish faith and passion for motorcycle riding joined together and, against all odds, incorporated. The group has evolved into a well-defined club of 62 members, from the unaffiliated to the Orthodox, and has included accountants, bookkeepers, producers, jewelry makers, photographers, doctors, dentists, salespersons, brokers, realtors and techies, all of whom have felt the need to answer the call of the road and a carefully adhered to set of by-laws.

The Club's established mission is to promote safety as well as tikkun olam. They meet, dine, ride and volunteer throughout the Tri-State Area. Their activities have promoted Jewish traditions and social events in the context of motorcycle enthusiasm. They have conducted benefit rides to raise money for Jewish organizations and temples, hosted parties for Purim and Chanukah and were instrumental in the founding and development of the umbrella group, the Jewish Motorcycle Alliance (JMA). When a fellow Jewish rider

was looking for volunteers to carry some extremely important "cargo" this past May, it was Chai Riders he reached out to. Belev Echad, a program developed to create golden memories for severely wounded IDF soldiers and victims of terror, and the Chabad Israel Center of the Upper East Side were working together to bring ten women who had suffered such trauma to experience the sights and sounds and pleasures of New York City. The women were treated to all the typical tourist activities during their 10-day stay in May with one notable extra. On their 8th day that they were taken by motorcycle by Chai Riders for a picnic at Bear Mountain Park and then a private tour of West Point Military Academy.

Queen Of The Road

Club Treasurer Lauren Secular, a large spoke in the wheel of Chai Riders, was on a roll from the beginning. It was she who pushed hard against the imposed barriers for women riders and prejudices held toward Jewish riders to advance the group of friends into an incorporated club. It was a rough ride, even with her many years of riding experience, because she wasn't being taken seriously by the men who generally rule the motorcycle riding roost. But Lauren refused to be discouraged. She revved up her Harley girl spirit, her Jewish faith and her good man friend and riding companion Scott Wynn, Club Secretary, to help with the pushing until there was no other choice but to acquiesce to the young motorcycle group's desire to incorporate.

Lauren lays claim to seven motorcycle titles and, although she considers herself a Harley girl at heart, she is about to turn



200,000 miles on her 1986 Honda VFR. She leads the Club's female members on an annual summer trek to Camp Simcha in upstate New York, where young girls faced with cancer and other life-threatening illnesses are afforded the same camp experience their healthy peers take for granted. Chai Riders bring the girls a special day of friendship and fun and short rides on the back of their bikes, giving them an opportunity to forget their trials and enjoy the freedom of the road.

For many summers Steven has participated in a similar event, with riders heading out to Camp HASC, an award winning summer program of the Hebrew Academy for Special Children. Located in the Catskill Mountains of New York, Camp HASC provides for over 300 mentally and physically challenged children and adults a sleep over camp experience. Although

these campers are not in a position to ride, they have a lot of fun with the visitors and are allowed to sit on the bikes, play and imagine.

The Club is engaged in so many activities that, while over half its members and two officers were attending the Celebrate Israel Parade, others, including Lauren, were taking part in a ride to Canada to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with other members of the JMA to proclaim "Never Again" and jointly declare Israel's right to stand equally among the nations of the world at the Declaration on Parliament Hill in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

Need To Know: Chai Riders is one of 48 Jewish riding clubs with over 600 members under the umbrella of the JMA and is proud to have secured membership in the American Motorcyclists Association (AMA). Applications for membership can be found online at www.Chairiders.org. By-laws state that new members must be recommended by two active members and must complete the Motorcycle Safety Foundations Experienced Rider Course within one year of joining and every three years thereafter. First year dues are \$54 and include some goodies like a Chai Rider T-shirt. Continued membership will run you \$36 a year. Out-of-area riders who are looking for a Jewish riding club can contact the JMA at www.jewishbiker-worldwide.com and click on JMA CLUBS.

Nancy is school psychologist turned photojournalist. She would like to give a big shout-out and a special thanks to Mario Skliar for the cheap hourly rate on the helmet, Gedalia Reiss for the free ride down Fifth Ave and all the friendly faces of the Chai Riders.