

FATBOB

AND

THE



Blonde

GIRL TORQUE

MISS HEATHER WARD



Miss Heather Ward

Fat Bob and the Blonde Girl Torque
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Dedication

To Fat Bob: What a great motorcycle! Best buy of my life and best fun. Thanks for getting me safely to where I want to go, every single ride.

Mr T: My little home on wheels. Another good decision. Nothing beats a comfortable bed to crawl into under the stars after a day's riding.

To all the wonderful people I met on my road trip: Thank you from the bottom of my heart for your generous spirit, kindness, spoiling, support, encouragement, fun times, and laughter!

To my cyberspace friends: Thanks for coming along for the ride, reading my stories, and for your kind words, support, and encouragement.

To my Mum and Dad: Thank you for everything.

To Dean, Guy, and Shani: Well, you survived my parenting. May you continue to chase your dreams. Remember, if you fall down, pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and keep going! X

Mr P: Thanks for the 'You can do this girl!'

Mr Steve: RIP boss. There are days I hear your Harley rumbling through the heavens. Enjoy the ride! Perhaps you could take Miss Nicole for a spin. I think she would enjoy it.

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Introduction

Hi, I'm Miss Heather or Miss H for short. So who are Fat Bob and the Blonde? Well, Fat Bob is the Harley Davidson model I ride. And yes, you guessed it—I'm the peroxide-enhanced blonde. The *name* certainly creates interest.

To make things more interesting, I tow a camper trailer, Mr T, wrapped in matte black vinyl featuring my very cool logo.

The set-up is a people magnet! It didn't take long after pulling into a roadhouse or campsite for someone to wander over for a closer look and chat. On more than one occasion, I noticed them discreetly glancing around. Eventually, it gets the better of them and they ask, "So, who's Fat Bob?" I smile and point to my motorcycle.

After 17 years of being a single mum, I became an empty nester! My three fabulous kids grew up and went off chasing their dreams. They survived my parenting and I had survived motherhood.

I wanted to reconnect to my gypsy soul and pick up where I left off when I hit the pause button for marriage and family. I was craving freedom and adventure. With Fat Bob and my camper trailer Mr T 'locked and loaded,' I hit the road, combining my three passions—motorcycling, travel, and people.

I ran a Facebook page that gave me an opportunity to flirt with writing—a subject that's teased me for some time now. I published stories about my road trips, the places I went, and the people I met along the way—everyone has a story.

My nomadic adventures started on 7 May 2014 when I left Wagga Wagga, New South Wales (NSW) and rode across to Adelaide, South Australia (SA) Initially, I was housesitting there for five weeks, giving me plenty of time to explore the "City of Churches" and the beautiful surrounding region.

On 29 June 2014, I said goodbye to Adelaide and headed off on the Stuart Highway towards the Northern Territory (NT). I

loved, loved, loved the Big NT; its BIG landscapes, red dirt, sense of space and raw beauty were all amazing.

I made a quick detour across to Uluru. Magical! A right-hand turn onto the Barkley Highway took me towards Queensland (QLD). Dry country, big cattle, trucks, strong cross winds (no tuckshop arms for me), major road works, detours, and one lane roads *really* tested my towing skills.

I arrived at my next housesitting job in Cairns, QLD, on 31 July 2014. Hell of a long way in between jobs, LOL. Already, I had covered approximately 6,477 kilometres, including all the kilometres just riding and exploring around base camps along the way.

Needing to replenish funds, I lived and worked in Atherton Tablelands. I loved the Far North Queensland; it's a paradise for motorcycling, great roads, and weather. The scenery is stunning and green, while the lifestyle is laid back.

On 5 September 2015, I set off for the “Lap of the Map” on an epic journey. Too much to add in here, you'll have to keep reading. What I will say is we live in a BIG, fabulously amazing diverse country—so many highlights.

I met the most wonderful people along the way; their conversations, laughter, friendship, kindness, advice, generosity, and support, either face-to-face or via cyberspace were priceless.

So, I now extend you an invitation to ride pillion on my nomadic adventures throughout the pages of this book. My greatest wish is for you to gain inspiration and motivation to go out and do what makes you happy. Create your own journey and follow your own road map!

In motorcycle language—ignite your spark, grab hold of your own handlebars, kick into gear, listen to the roar of your own engine, and live life at full throttle!

My Motorcycling Love Affair

I was blessed growing up on a farm 30 kilometres out of Coonabarabran, a small town in central western NSW.

With almost 3000 acres of playground to run free in, I was encouraged to explore, challenge myself, take risks, pick myself up, dust myself off, and use my imagination. My mother's catch phrases, "go outside and play" or "use your imagination", still ring in my ears today. I believe those early farm days made me the adventurous spirit I am today.

I developed a love for motorcycles early. I don't know where it came from, as we didn't have motorcycles on the farm. I didn't know anyone who rode a motorcycle, but an intriguing love affair started in early childhood.

At age nine, my parents sold the family farm and we moved to Wagga Wagga in NSW. I was devastated. Becoming a townie took adjusting; I yearned for the big, wide-open space to run free in.

I was still motorcycle mad at 16-years old, when new neighbours arrived up the street. They were a motorcycling couple, Miss Talayah and Mr Leigh, along with their good friend and boarder, Mr Ian.

Miss Talayah was the first woman I met who rode motorcycles. She became my role model and confidant. Her Moto Morini 3 1/2 was parked next to her husband's Ducati Darmah 900 and Mr Ian's Kawasaki Z750. I thought I was in heaven, suddenly immersed in a world of motorcycling. My new biker friends fed my motorcycle addiction. I was often sneaking out of my house so my mum and dad wouldn't know I was headed up the street to be taken on a ride.

It wasn't until I left school and moved to Sydney, NSW at age 17 and got my motorcycle licence that I bought my first motorbike, a Yamaha DT 175. My parents wanted to kill me. Dad threatened

to cut it up with a chainsaw if I ever brought it home.

I didn't know how to ride it. I recruited help from male friends and neighbours at the time. They drove me to the pickup address in Marrickville in Sydney's inner west. Mr Andy rode it home for me and I spent the following weeks stalling, bunny hopping, and revving the hell out of the two-stroke engine as I went around the loop street where I was living in Turramurra. That street was a blessing, as I didn't have to come to a stop, which was a challenge at the time. I could keep going around and around as I taught myself to go up and down the gears. Not to mention, the neighbours must have been saints as there were no complaints. Determination and persistence paid off and before long I was venturing off on road trips outside the city limits.

Over the next four years, I changed my bikes as often as I changed my jobs and towns I lived in. I had a Yamaha SRX 250, Suzuki GS 750, and a Honda CB 900. Ohhh, I almost forgot, the Postie bike. While not my motorcycle, tearing around on it chasing sheep over limestone rocks and through four-wheel drive territory at Wee Jasper, NSW, really enhanced my riding skills.

I didn't own a car—I was a biker. Sunshine, rain, or hail I rode.

In 1988 I sold the Honda to travel overseas. I left Australia with a backpack, tent, and sleeping bag, not returning until 1998 with three children, four bags, and about \$400! I don't remember reading that chapter in *Lonely Planet*.

I spent the next 17 years as a single mother back in Wagga Wagga. My focus shifted to raising my children and building a career to support us. I forged a livelihood in Community/Cultural Development and Event Coordination. Quite by accident, I discovered I had a creative side. A wonderful manager, Mr Thomas (I always told him I'd acknowledge him when I was famous) believed in me and gave me opportunities, which I grabbed with both hands. We became a great team—he had the brains and I had the charm.

These roles gave me the opportunity to fulfil a passion of working with and empowering people and their communities. I wanted people to explore outside their local towns and personal comfort

zones. Through an array of events, festivals, exhibitions, and artist in residence programs, I brought individuals and communities opportunities to delve in and play with new experiences. Selfishly, it meant I could bring the world to me while I was temporarily grounded. I did, however, sneak in a couple of moves to give the kids a taste of the gypsy lifestyle.

In 2009, my world was turned upside down. Yep, you guessed it by man—a dishonourable ‘bad apple’ at that. I lost everything and it cost my family dearly, but most of all, I lost myself. Not equipped with my usual resilience, I crumbled to the floor and lay there rocking in the foetal position.

Eventually, my early childhood training of picking myself up and dusting myself off kicked in and I began to rebuild. I immersed myself in personal development, devouring every book I could get my hands on and learned a valuable lesson—do not follow someone else’s dream or bullshit and always, always trust your gut instinct. In biker’s terms, don’t ride pillion on someone else’s ride!

In late 2010, twenty-three years after my butt last sat on a motorcycle, I brought a Suzuki GS500. My eldest son told me I was being very irresponsible. I said, “good!” It took me three cigarettes, as I was a smoker back then, before I was brave enough to get on it and ride. By the time I hit the 100 kilometre sign, I was back where I belonged—it was almost spiritual.

Towards the end of 2012, I bought my first and only Harley Davidson—an ‘08 Fat Bob. He belonged to a girlfriend of mine at the time, Miss Jo Jo. Fat Bob was the first Harley Davidson I rode.

That first ride on an unsealed road was exhilarating. It was a good long stretch, thank God, as it gave me time to work out how I was going to stop (*déjà vu* of my early riding days). It felt strange having my legs out on forward controls; having only ridden Japanese bikes, I was used to my legs and feet controls being underneath me.

By the time I was back on the main road, I’d worked it out. I pulled up alongside Miss Jo Jo loudly proclaiming, “Wow, what a ride.” I’d had my first Harley Davidson experience and was hooked—the love affair has continued ever since.

It wasn't an easy path owning my own Harley Davidson, as there were a few hurdles to overcome. At the time, I didn't realise I'd end up with Fat Bob.

I test rode other models, but kept coming back to Fat Bob—I just loved that bike. I began to search for one to buy along with finance. However, I incurred financial difficulties after my relationship break-up in 2009 with the “bad apple”, resulting in a bad credit rating.

My little inner spirit had truly been aroused and there was no way I was taking no for an answer—despite that being the only answer I got time and time again. When one door closed, I tried another and another. Though feeling defeated at times, I remained positive while visualising riding Fat Bob down the highways. I relived the feelings I got from that first ride over and over again. In the meantime, Miss Jo Jo often swapped bikes on our rides so I could get my Harley fix!

I should point out I will occasionally refer to Fat Bob as HOG (and not myself, in case you're wondering). For my non-motorcyclist friends, please find the following explanation by Ride Apart (rideapart.com) of why Harley Davidson motorcycles are known as HOGs.

The Harley Davidson factory race team began in 1914 in Dodge City. The team dominated the race until World War I halted production of racing for military contracts. After the war, a team of racers, including Ray Weishaar, were consistently winning races again. That is when Ray bought a pet piglet that became known as their mascot, Johnny. Following a win, the team would put the hog on the winning Harley and take a victory lap. Reporters started to remark how the team was “hogging” victories and the epithet hog became synonymous with Harleys.

Later in 1983, the Harley Davidson Motor Company formed a club for owners of its products, taking advantage of the long-standing nickname by turning “hog” into the acronym HOG, for Harley Owners Group.

Don't you just love trivia?

One day, out of the blue, Miss Jo Jo came to me and said, “I've

found another Harley I want to buy. Do you want to buy Fat Bob?" My response was—YOU HAVE TO ASK?

But there was still that little issue of finding finance. Nevertheless, as the old cliché says, where there is a will, there is a way.

Miss Jo Jo, her husband Mr John and I hatched a little plan. Don't worry—it was legal.

Eventually, I secured financing through my bank. I burst into tears when the loan officer gave me the approval. Not only did I get Fat Bob but that approval also restored my credit rating, putting an end to what had been a very difficult time in my life. It was all behind me and only open roads were ahead.

So there you have it—with a little grace, a lot of grit, and a whole load of chutzpah along with help from a couple of wonderful friends, my dream came true. Every time I sit on Fat Bob's seat I am reminded of the powers of positive thinking.

It is my happy place.

Hooked Up

When I began to think about my nomadic adventures, I visualised packing a tent, a change of clothes, basic cooking equipment and riding up the highway old school biker style—a true free spirit.

When a suggestion was made to tow a trailer, I was mortified. I dismissed the idea immediately. “I’m not old enough to be a grey nomad biker,” I said. How uncool!

However, a seed had been sown. Over the next few months, I began to think about the length of time I would be away and the extra gear I might need. I began to explore the idea of a trailer—just a cargo one to carry stuff. Then practicality (I dislike that word most of the time) set in. I began to think of repeatedly setting up and packing up camp, leaky tents, wet gear, sleeping on the ground, and getting up off the ground! I weakened. Suddenly, I found myself Googling camper trailers.

I didn’t spend too much time reading the fine print on how-to-tow instructions; I figured I’d work it out as I went along. Nothing beats experience—right?

To cut a long story short, I ended up with a Cub Kamperoo Junior camper trailer, a bed on wheels and my mobile cubby house. I bought it unseen off a man in Tasmania (TAS) after seeing his ad on Gumtree. He gave me his word the trailer was in excellent condition—I believed him. The money (my parents helped out) was transferred into the owner’s bank account and he arranged to put it on the ferry in Devonport, TAS.

The owner also advised me to purchase a swivel hitch in order to tow the trailer safely; it was a must according to him. Thus, I placed an order with the Wangaratta Vintage Motorcycle Swap Shop, the sole distributor for Cub Kamperoo Trailers, and arranged to pick up the swivel hitch on the way down to Melbourne, Victoria (VIC).

I also purchased a tow bar off Classic Industries in Queensland.

It was the first time I was told Fat Bob was probably not the best model to tow with. “Too bad,” I thought and made a mental note to prove that theory wrong.

A friend of mine, Mr Robbie, fitted the tow bar to Fat Bob without too much difficulty or swearing. He also agreed to ride with me down to Melbourne to pick up the trailer. Just over the Victorian border, we detoured into Wangaratta.

As I rode into Vintage Motorcycle Swap Shop parking area, I couldn’t help but notice a camper trailer through the shop front window. It was huge! As I parked I thought, “Jeez, I hope that’s not like the one I bought!”

Undoing the strap on my helmet, I nervously asked Mr Robbie if that was the same model trailer I bought. “Yep,” he replied confidently. To say I was in shock is an understatement. It looked bigger—much bigger, than in photographs. I walked slowing towards the doorway hoping the display trailer would somehow miraculously become smaller once I got inside; it didn’t. I stood there looking at it in dismay thinking, what on earth have I done?

I’d been told the measurements, but clearly hadn’t comprehended them. I just heard “trailer” and “bed”, which all sounded perfect—until now. It’s not until you’re looking at the size of a king-sized single bed on wheels that you realise just how big it is!

As the namesake suggested, the Wangaratta Vintage Motorcycle Swap Shop was filled with antique motorcycles, parts, and accessories along with a collection of old photos, signs, and maps. But none of that mattered, as I couldn’t look past the enormity of the trailer. While Mr Robbie received instructions regarding fitting the swivel hitch, I walked over to and around the displayed trailer.

I was given a demonstration in setting up and folding up the trailer, which, surprisingly, was remarkably easy. I only had to unclip two front hinges and walk the hard top over the body of the trailer until it rested on the ground. The one-piece canvas unfolded like a piano accordion and I stepped inside onto a hard floor with a bed made-up ready to crawl into. My instructor reassured me it was easy to tow and I wouldn’t have any problems. “You won’t

even notice it's there," he said reassuringly. I wasn't so convinced.

On the way out the door, his wife gave me one last piece of advice—"Remember, you have a trailer on when you're pulling up to petrol bowsers!"

A few hours later, Mr Robbie and I arrived in Melbourne and located the transport depot where the trailer I had bought was being warehoused. True to the original owner's words, the trailer looked to be in perfect condition, but still huge.

We pulled the trailer into a nearby car park and opened it up. The interior and canvas were also in excellent condition. Phew! Mr Robbie set about attaching the swivel hitch. I walked in, out, and around the cubby house on wheels. It still didn't get any smaller!

An hour or so later, the big moment came—the trailer was hooked up to Fat Bob. I hit Fat Bob's starter switch, tapped the gear lever down, took a deep breath, and rolled on the throttle. There was a slight lag as the bike took up the trailer weight and then we were off.

I was very conscious of the trailer. Like a stalker, it was there in the mirrors following me everywhere. I made sure I kept the bike in the middle of the traffic lane so the trailer wouldn't hang over the centre line and constantly checked my mirrors. The awareness of traffic heightened as I ensured there was extra space between any vehicles in front of me and Fat Bob, just in case I needed to pull up quick. Though nervous, I just kept saying to myself, "You can handle this." Surprisingly, it went quite well.

It didn't take long to weave through the traffic of Melbourne's outer suburbs and onto the freeway towards Daylesford, VIC, our planned overnight stop an hour and a half away.

With more space and faster traffic, I relaxed in the seat. Further down the highway I began to take in the scenery, almost forgetting the trailer behind me. Fat Bob rumbled louder than usual with the torque under tow; the pipes seemed to amplify the sound of the big V twin engine, perhaps echoing off the trailer—I loved it.

It was late afternoon when we arrived at the caravan park in Daylesford. We were issued a mud map up to the bush camp. A bush site it was!

It was a couple of hundred metres up a narrow, well-worn dirt track enclosed with permanent van sites and trees. The surface was scattered with sticks and stones, not to mention the crevices, ditches, and potholes. It was a biker's nightmare at the best of times let alone towing a trailer for the first time. To this day, I have no idea how I made it. Just sheer guts and determination.

Now I had to remember what I was told about setting up the trailer. First step, trailer legs down. Then, unclip the front latches, walk over the hard floor, step inside, push up the internal framework to extend the height of the canvas, and secure with butterfly nuts. Outside again, I had to walk around and secure the canvas to the trailer with press-studs and roll up the flaps over the gauze windows and done! It was certainly easy.

When bedtime came, I took off my boots, crawled across the thick mattress, and into bed. For the first night, I brought a sleeping bag. Mr Robbie also slept in the trailer, which made it cosy with two, but not too uncomfortable.

As I lay there cocooned in what would be my little home on wheels, I felt so excited about my impending road trip and confident I made the right decision by buying Mr T.

Crash and Burn

Two words for the departure the following morning—epic fail. I woke feeling remarkably refreshed after a good night's sleep. When I was ready to head out, I reversed Mr T's set-up procedure and got ready to roll out.

I'll admit, I felt a little nervous sitting on Fat Bob as I looked down the fifty or so metres of rough dirt track and tight, right-hand bend at the bottom.

"You'll be all right, just take it steady," Mr Robbie reassured me.

As I slowly made my way down, I could feel the weight of the trailer begin to push me. Despite being in low gear with the rear brake, the rear tyre couldn't get traction on the sticks and stones. The pace quickened. About halfway down, I was in panic mode, like I was riding an out-of-control freight train. Lack of towing experience reared its ugly head.

Through the bend ahead of me was a permanent van site. I knew I had no way in hell of making that bend. With the vision of Fat Bob and Mr T crashing through the caravan and into an annex, I grabbed a handful of front brake. Big mistake. Huge mistake.

Fat Bob's front wheel locked and twisted sharply to the right. Down we went. I hit the compact ground hard, as my right knee took the full brunt of the fall. Ohh, the pain sucked my breath away!

The engine was still running when Mr Robbie reached me. He hit the kill switch before checking on me. He attempted to help me up, but I was withering on the ground in a world of pain. I didn't want to be touched or moved.

In true biker style, I murmured to him, "How's my bike?"

Mr Robbie turned his attention onto Fat Bob, lifting him back

onto two wheels. After a quick inspection, he reassured me there was no real damage done. A ding on the exhaust was about it.

A few minutes later, Mr Robbie helped me to my feet. The pain was still intense and I was unable to ride. To be honest, the last thing I wanted to do was get back on Fat Bob. My confidence, along with my knee, was shattered.

Mr Robbie rode Fat Bob and the trailer down to the office area before walking back up to get his Harley Road King. In the meantime, I limped my way down to the office and bought a bag of ice, as the swelling set in.

“What the hell have I done?” I cried to Mr Robbie as he joined me at an outdoor table setting. The tears flowed. So did the negative talk, not to mention the embarrassment and shame. I couldn’t believe I towed so well on my first effort and crashed and burned the next.

“I’m not going to be able to do this,” I told him as I glanced over towards the bike and that HUGE trailer.

“Yes, you are,” he replied in a calm, positive voice. “Stop beating yourself up,” he added sympathetically.

“I’d better get this ice onto my knee,” I said. I limped over to Fat Bob, returning with a t-shirt from my bike bag. While I pulled my jeans down (luckily I was wearing nice underwear), Mr Robbie broke the ice up before placing some in the t-shirt and handing it to me. It was soothing.

We sat there going over what went wrong. I began to relax a little. I had no choice but to get back on the bike and ride. An hour and a half later, we were on the road heading to Wagga Wagga—again.

However, it wasn’t our day—the worse was still to come.

An unexpected heatwave hit the region; it was sweltering above the forties—energy-sucking hot. Our late departure didn’t help.

Long-sleeve shirts soon replaced leather jackets. We pulled over and wet down at service stations or local parks in every small town we passed through. The hot air hitting the soaking wet clothing

gave us about 10 kilometres of relief before drying out. We drank litres of water, as staying hydrated was the name of the game. Lucky for me, I have an exceptional bladder!

It was slow going. My knee swelled like a football and was aching. To make matters worse, we took a detour, which I think may have been my fault. I was delusional by that point, which added extra road miles and time onto the original 467-kilometre trip. Welcome to Hell!

In the NSW township of Jerilderie, we pulled into a park by a lake. The lure of the cool water was too much and respectability went out the window. I took off my boots and socks before stripping down to my underwear and waddling into the lake. Absolute bliss! First time I'd been cool all day, plus, the water soothed my aching knee.

Shortly afterwards, an elderly couple walked by and stopped for a chat about the bikes and trailer. I kept my modesty and stayed in the lake with just my head above the water. They must have chatted for well over half an hour as my skin began to shrivel like a prune. Eventually, they said they'd better let us get going. I laughed and said, "I can't get out of here until you leave. I'm in my bra and knickers." They laughed, said goodbye, and hurried off, probably at the thought of seeing me half-naked.

I felt refreshed after my dip. The last 165 kilometres was better, as the temperature began to fall in the late afternoon. I have never been so grateful to see the lights of Wagga Wagga.

After parking, a great sense of achievement washed over my tired and sore body. It had been one hell of a challenging day, but I handled it. Mr Robbie's compliments of my achievement gave me a confidence boost also.

I had redeemed myself from the early morning mishap. More importantly, I'd built resilience; I was strong and could handle hard things. What I didn't realise at the time was that the fall, hot ride, and overall experience would serve me well on my road trip later.

I had one more challenge for the day though—not letting my parents and children (not to mention friends and workmates who had no idea of my plans at this stage) know that I stacked Fat Bob.

It had nothing to do with my ego; I just knew they would be mortified to learn I crashed towing for the first time and start questioning my ability to go on a solo trip around Australia.

Of course, they noticed the limp. I told them I fell over on loose gravel and twisted my knee at the campsite. I covered up visible signs of swelling and bruising so I didn't have to confess to my mishap.

Well, they know now!