

In Providence: The Sheriff

If you know who she is, then you call her The Sheriff.



“That was a cute name they came up with for me. I’d come back this time of year and pull up to a party or something and they’d go ‘Here she is. The Sheriff is here.’”

She was born in Providence in the late ‘60s, but she claims she can’t remember the exact year. It doesn’t seem to me that she’s being coy about her age. It just appears that she cares about the things she cares about and whatever she doesn’t care about falls to the wayside without a lot of fuss.

“My father and mother were divorced, and Daddy lived in California, and I would go stay with him every summer on the land he had there. Not a farm, but a patch of land where kids would come and do- There were camps, but they were day camps or camps where kids would come and do Christian retreats, do some company retreats, that kind of thing. I would help Daddy out cleaning the place, there were some cabins there and a mess hall kind of place. You’d meet all kinds of people. I learned to love people when I was young. Even the nutty ones. Especially them. Come September, come fall, I’d be back on the way to Providence. That’s where my mom was at, and I’d come here, go to school here, and turn up a lot of trouble here. I was a good girl when I was with my daddy, because he didn’t stand for nothing, and he paid me an allowance if I kept my nose clean, but when I came home, I was one of the bad girls, and my mother would ask me, ‘Why are you good for your father but not me?’ Because my mother couldn’t discipline me. She was a bad girl, too. A reformed bad girl, but she didn’t want to be the bad cop. That wasn’t her. She let me do my own thing. Too much of my own thing, but she was cool with it. My mom was cool, cool, cool.”

When she got older, she stayed in the habit of heading west when the weather got hot and coming back for Labor Day weekend.

"I did it all backwards! You should go to the hot places in the winter and be here for the Rhode Island summers. People would tell me 'Don't you know how nice it is in the summer?' I didn't know. I was out in California sweating and going all up and all down and all everywhere. I had my bike. I got it when I was- What was I? I was 24 when I got it. Daddy taught me how to ride it. My mother had a heart attack when she saw me on it coming into town. That was when- She was dating a piece of- You know what he was. He was a piece of that. I came into town on that bike, and when I tell you, I chased him out of town. That's what I did. That was when The Sheriff really showed up. That was the first time. After that, I don't know why people act up all summer and then come the end of it, it's time to pay the piper, but I was happy to be the piper. Everybody knew when they heard that bike, you better get right. Get right with the Lord or you were getting right with The Sheriff."

When her father passed, she sold off his house and the land on it. Her mother was around for much longer, so when she'd come home, she'd stay with her. Pretty soon, she was staying later into the summer, and coming home a lot sooner.

"You couldn't leave my mother alone. Her mind went. That was the sad part. She had- My stepfather. The guy she wound up with — thank God for him, because he was good to her. She had all this bad luck with men. Even my daddy wasn't a good man, and I regret saying that to you, but that's how it is. He was not good to women, except for me. For me, he was a good man, but not to the women he was with, and not to my mother. But my stepfather was, but he got older too. He needed me, and I would stay longer, but I would get away when I could. When she passed, I left and I almost didn't come back. That's the truth I'm telling you. I almost left for good. But you know, I got that feeling. I couldn't stay away. Got on the bike and came back. I'd ask around to friends, get a job, hole up somewhere, but it was different after Mom was gone. That didn't mean I didn't like it here. I always liked it here, but it was a different life for me after that. I was on my own. It's different being on your own. You stay out later. You get that extra drink when you shouldn't. You go home with people you shouldn't. You asked me, I'm telling you all the truth. I don't tell half of it. I'm going to tell you all of what I did and who I did and what I got. Nothing left to hide."

She never doubted coming back again — until this year.

"I tell you when all this went down I was in — I'll you the truth — I was in Maine with a friend of mine. A gentleman friend, who I was having a good time with, and I had no reason. I had no reason to come back to Rhode Island. To Providence. We were up by ourselves, nobody around, like how it was back in California back when I was a kid, but this time it was Maine, and it was beautiful. But it's in my blood now. I feel like- You want me to tell you? I feel like I need to be here to help in some way. Because you know I still go around and crack some heads when I need to. Just because I'm old now, I can still do what I need to do. I got god-neices and god-nephews and friends and kids of friends and everybody needs somebody looking out for them, so I'm back and I'll be back until I get the feeling I need to leave again."

I suggest to her that we might need her here year-round from now on, regardless of when the feeling strikes. She laughs at the suggestion, and nods her head.

“This is where my mother was, and that means, you know, when I’m here I’m with her. That’s why I like being here so much. My father, for some reason, I could think on him no matter where I was, but I never really feel my mother with me as much as when I’m here, so yeah, maybe I will stick around for good this time. You never know. That’s the thing about life — you never know where you’re going. You think you’re in charge of where you’re going, but you’re not. You get in the car or on the bike and you go. You get on the plane, and you go. But something else is taking you where you’re going. You’re just along for the ride. That’s how it is.”

She tells me that after we hang up, she’s going to take a ride down to the beach to grab a lobster roll and from there, it’s anybody’s guess.

“Just go with it. Wherever you’re going, go there.”

If you see a woman riding through Providence on a bike, be sure you wave to The Sheriff. Let her know you’re happy she’s home.