MY LIFE ON THE ROAD

GLORIA STEINEM
board a plane for Rapid City, South Dakota, and see a lot of people in black leather, chains, and tattoos. Airline passengers usually look like where they're going—business suits to Washington, D.C., jeans to L.A.—but I can't imagine a convention of such unconventional visitors in Rapid City. It's the kind of town where people still angle-park their cars in front of the movie palace. My bearded seatmate is asleep in his studded jacket and nose ring, so I just accept one more mystery of the road.

At the airport, I meet five friends from different parts of the country. We are a diverse group of women—a Cherokee activist and her grown-up daughter, two African American writers and one musician, and me. We've been invited to a Lakota Sioux powwow celebrating the powerful place that women held before patriarchy arrived from Europe, and efforts now to restore that place.

As we drive toward the Badlands, we see an acre of motorcycles around each isolated diner and motel. This solves the mystery of the leather and chains, but creates another. When we stop for coffee, our waitress can't believe we don't know. Every August since 1938, bikers from all over the world have come here for a rally named after Sturgis, a town that's just a wide place in the road. They are drawn by this sparsely populated space of forests, mountains, and a grid of highways so straight that it is recognizable from outer space. Right now about 250,000 bikers are filling every motel and campground within five hundred miles.

Our band of six strong women takes note. The truth is we are a little
Gloria Steinem is often at a loss for words. She's a political leader—candid about the seemingly endless wars, the death of a catalytic leader of her generation, and the lessons she learned from the war.

But when she talks about her experiences traveling to the road, her stories are always fresh. She describes the way that the land and the people have changed over time, and how they've been shaped by the violence and the politics of the past.

"The land is a living thing," she says, "it remembers everything." She talks about the Native American reservations she's visited, and the struggles and triumphs of the people who live there.

But her writing goes beyond the physical landscape. She talks about the struggles of women, the injustices they've faced, and the ways in which they've overcome them. She's a voice for change, a voice for those who are often forgotten.

"We must remember," she says, "that we are all connected. We are all part of the land, and the land is part of us."