

ARTS



the MEEHAN Team
 CONTACT US AT...
905-878-7777
 info@thomeehan.com
RE/MAX REAL ESTATE CENTRE
www.TheMeehanTeam.com

Writer retraces motorcycle journey

'Zen and Now: On the Trail of Robert Pirsig and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance' soon to be released

By **Stephanie Hounsell**
 CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

It was a motorcycle ride that would hopefully tell him if the grass was, indeed, greener on the other side. With a whole 12 days with no ties to home and no responsibilities to his young family, Mark Richardson was going to travel through rural America on his trusty Suzuki dirt bike to live the temporary existence of a bachelor.

But he wasn't following just any trail. The trip that was somewhat of a search for meaning was also a search to discover more about a man whose '70s bestseller had influenced him greatly.

It was author Robert Pirsig's motorcycle route that Richardson would retrace.

It was certainly a multi-faceted trip. Adventure, a search for meaning... and if a book came out of the journey, that wouldn't be so bad, either.

It did. Four years after that trip, Richardson — a Milton resident — is now preparing to embark on another motorcycle tour through the States. But this time, it's not a personal search, but a tour for the book that arose out of that search.

On Tuesday, Richardson's book *Zen and Now: On the Trail of Robert Pirsig and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* will be released by publisher Knopf Canada.

Already the book has garnered attention from major media outlets. The book tour will take Richardson to Boston, Denver and Los Angeles, among other major U.S. cities. He will leave Saturday.

Some might describe *Zen and Now: On the Trail of Robert Pirsig and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* as part motorcycle road trip and part biography, with some of Richardson's own experiences thrown in.

Pirsig is the author of the 1968 book *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, which sold millions of copies.

If Richardson's book is multi-layered, Pirsig's is all the more, with philosophical discussions woven in and out of travel stories.

Fittingly, *Zen and Now* is being published on the 40th anniversary of the trip that inspired Pirsig's book.

Richardson — who's editor for the Toronto Star's *Wheels* section — freely admits he has little expert insight into Pirsig's complex book, and has so far read it about 20 times, each time seeing something new.

On this particular Friday morning, Richardson looks quite at home seated at a table at Troy's Diner. And with good reason. He spent much of his time proof-reading his manuscript over Great Canadian breakfasts.

Outside the restaurant is Jackie New, the dirt bike from his book.

Richardson said he first picked up *Zen and the Art* when he was a teen, intrigued by the motorcycle aspect, but didn't get far. A decade later, he made it halfway through.

"It wasn't clicking with me," he said. When he turned 40, he took it to the cottage and read it cover to cover. This time, he found something in it. It finally clicked.

He could relate to it, because he'd done a similar road trip years earlier.

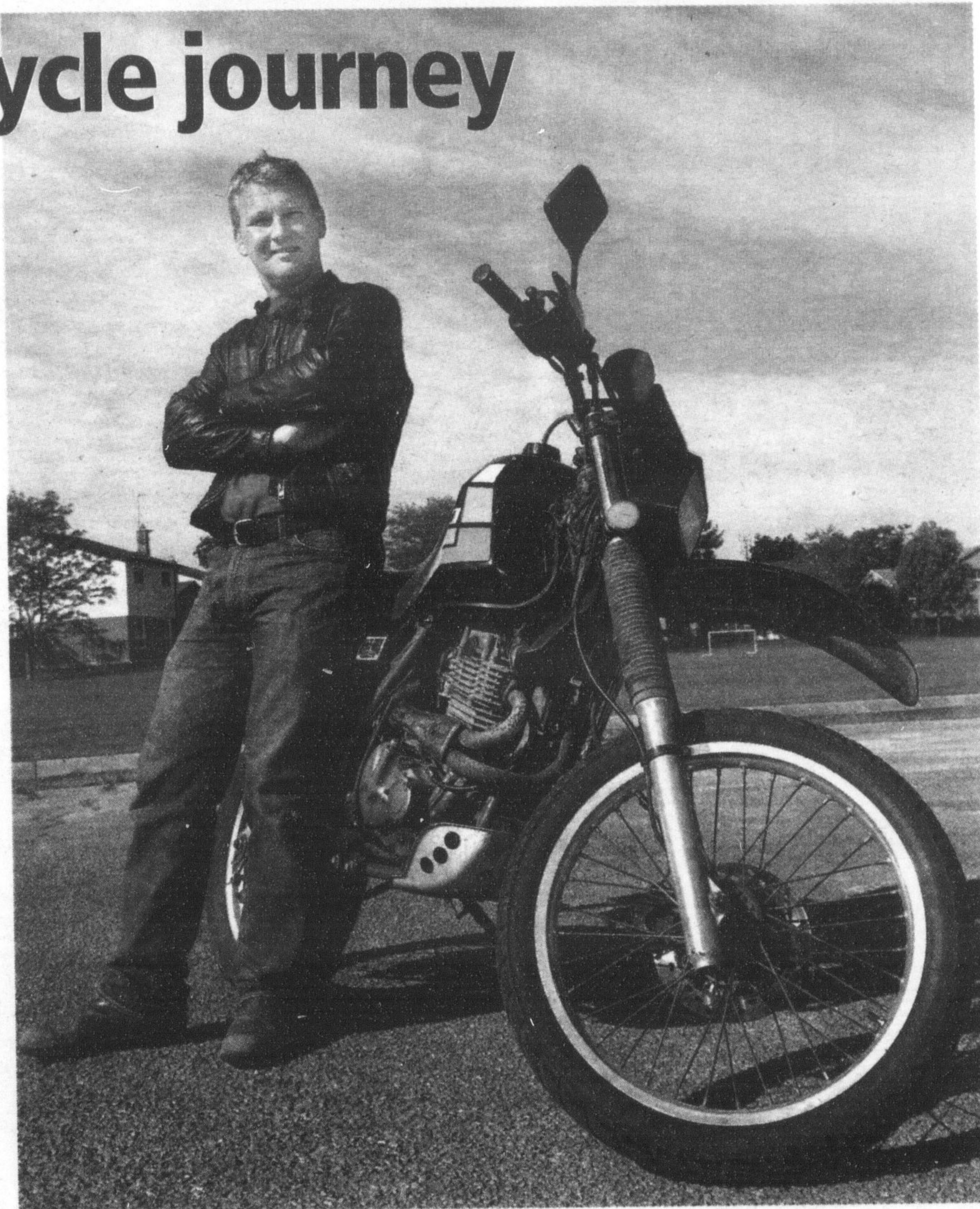
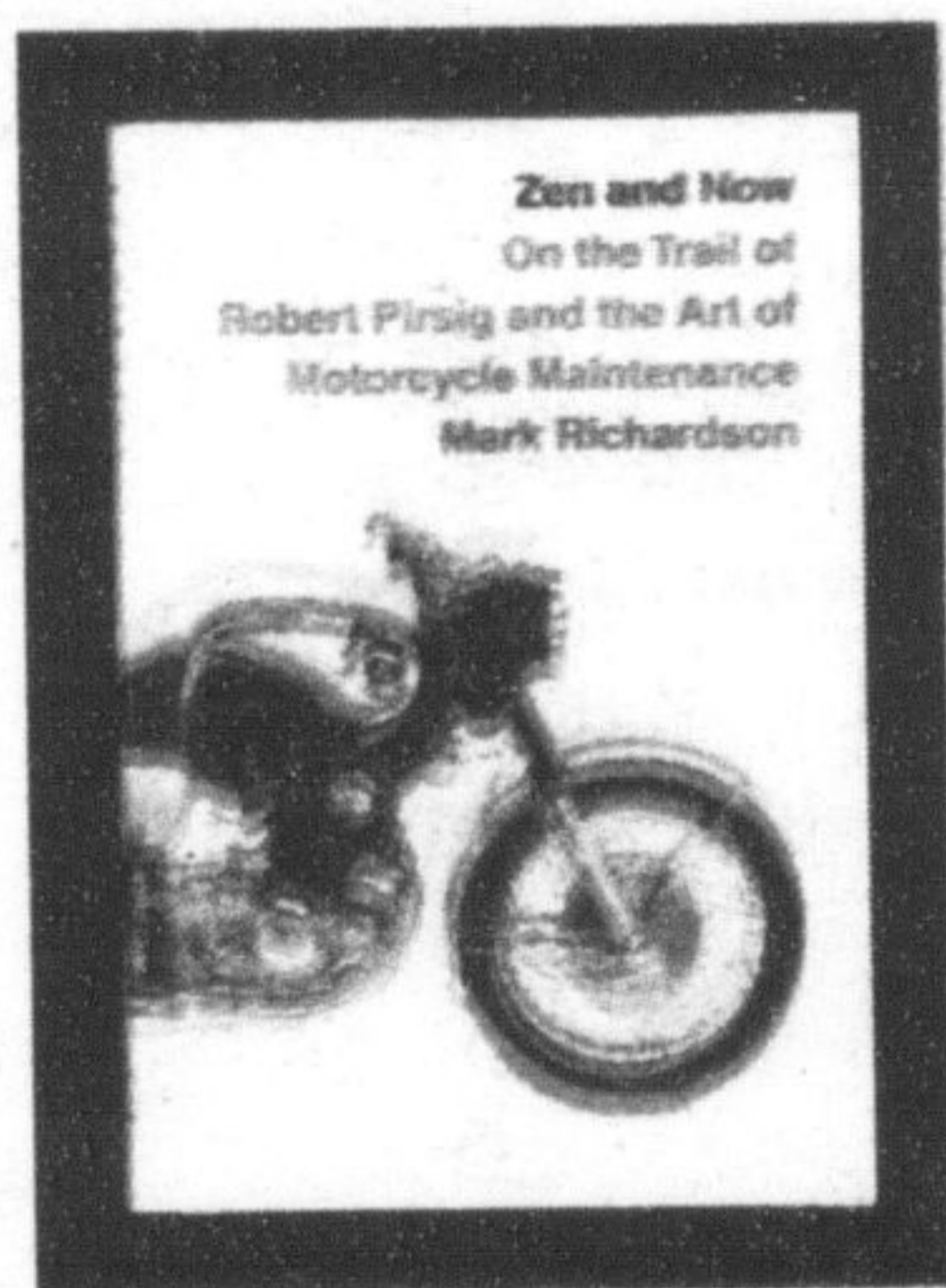
It was soon after that Richardson decided to retrace the trip Pirsig made with his 11-year-old son, Chris.

He left behind his wife, Wendy, and two boys, aged seven and four.

"I make no bones about the fact I was in the middle of a mid-life crisis," he said, adding he hoped a book would result. "I wouldn't die happy until I'd written a book."

From July 18 to 30, 2004, Richardson travelled the open road, taking the less-beaten path. He met up with some of the very people Pirsig rode with and visited on his trip.

One of the reasons he thinks his book is



GRAHAM PAINE / CANADIAN CHAMPION

EASY RIDER: Looking right at home in front of his dirt bike, Jackie New, Mark Richardson eagerly awaits the release of his new book.

causing people to take notice is the new information it contains about the life of Pirsig, Richardson said. Through talking with Pirsig's ex-wife, child, some friends and others, Richardson reveals much about Pirsig including his struggle with mental illness and the murder of his son, Chris.

It's information Richardson couldn't get directly from Pirsig; although he corresponded a handful of times with the author about *Zen and Now*, the 79-year-old didn't want to be part of the book.

Richardson said he hopes his book will inspire readers to take journeys of their own.

"My hope is that people will read my book and then read *Zen and the Art* and have a context and they'll be able to appreciate *Zen and the Art* in a way I didn't before," he said.

As for Richardson's initial question, it wasn't — greener on the other side, that is. The grass was just fine where he was, in Milton with his wife and sons.

"I set off and by the end of the trip, I found I wanted to be home again — or at least be with my wife and kids."

Stephanie Hounsell can be reached at sthiessen@miltoncanadianchampion.com.

CORE FLOORING

Why people should choose **CORE FLOORING**
Knowledgeable Advice • Brand Name Products
Expert Installation • Special Orders

FREE IN-HOME NO OBLIGATION QUOTE

Financing - Our no interest, no payments for 6 months financing program. On OAC.

890 Main Street East, Unit 3,
 Milton ON L9T 0J4
 (Southwest Corner of Main and Thompson)

905-864-9901

www.coreflooring.com

Carpet



STARTING FROM 99¢/SQ FT.

Ceramic tiles/Vinyl



STARTING FROM \$1.29/SQ FT.

Hardwood



STARTING FROM \$2.99/SQ FT.

Laminate/Cork



STARTING FROM 99¢/SQ FT.