

Don't Forget Winona – Get Your Fun on Highway 61

By Kenn Hartmann

If I didn't ride a motorcycle, I'd hitchhike or hop freights. Like bad habits & addiction, sometimes predicaments look familiar, a dreaded deja vu. Stranded at midnight in Southeastern Minnesota where Interstate 90 cuts west & Highway 61 goes north between the west bluffs & the Mississippi River, I begin to hike north, seriously hoping for a ride that doesn't show. Maybe three cars during the two hour hike to Winona. They were headed south. This was the mid seventies. It had been my custom to sleep out after traffic vanishes late night out in the country. Chances of a ride are slim. But this night, I'm not thinking, just walking. Past a few farms, some trailer homes, some shingle sided edifice, each lit by a big light on a pole over a garage, shed or barn. All darkness & shadows, a barge out on the river casts a ghostlike beam in search of navigational aids. I half-jog, occasionally glance over my shoulder for a vain glimmer of headlights. Not to be. In Winona, I toss my backpack into an unlocked pickup camper in a used car lot & scramble inside. I shiver most of the night but still sleep an hour or two. Some workers arrive at the bakery across the street. There's light in the back room & the aroma of fresh bread arouses me. I cross the street & sneak inside the front door & warm up in the darkened foyer. A light from the road attracts me out to the signal. A small box truck rolls to a halt & the driver motions me over & asks 'where you going?' St. Paul. 'Hop in.' He had a reefer on back, so I ask, what are you hauling? 'Fruit,' he answers. You picked me up a year or so ago, coming the other way. After a long pause, he draws, 'No...nope. Wasn't me. No. I've only picked up one other hitchhiker in my life.' Yeah, me. You picked me up by the Capital. Coming down then, but now I'm headed up. He thought for a while & asked, 'what does your father do?' He's a steamfitter. 'That was you!'

This one's for Winona Bob, an FRP writer who's as prone to quote Melville with the same passion he may discuss the merits of shifting a 45 HD flathead. That's 'four-five' in old biker parlance. Four-five riders are a sub-culture within a sub-culture. Swap meets are their milieu. Where the un-initiated might see a pile of junk, the four-five rider spots gold. An old 4-5 rider named Nates, indigenous to the Red Lake Rez in Northern Minnesota reminisces about being at a swap meet & buying every clutch push-rod throw-out bearing in sight, occasionally finding a box with parts still in the original military wax paper and oil. Of course with ebay & JP Cycle catalog, it's not as dire finding parts as in days past. Preacher says Winona Bob looks forward to my stories because 'you never know what Hartmann's going to say next.' Makes me curious too. You never know for sure until you take that road to the horizon.



Official Announcement:

The government today announced that it is changing its emblem from an Eagle to a CONDOM because it more accurately reflects the government's political stance. A condom allows for inflation, halts production, destroys the next generation, protects a bunch of pricks, and gives you a sense of security while you're actually being screwed.

Damn, it just doesn't get more accurate than that!

The Chicago Tribune reported a story about a La Crosse radio DJ who can recall every day of his life. Mine's a blur, punctuated by strange encounters & offbeat fascinations. I can tell you how I felt in meticulous detail but have no recollection for days of week, nor months & barely the year.

When my brother Chuck bought a 96 Fatboy, we decided to break it in on the Great River Road. Just south of Winona, a white-tail deer skittered across the highway. For a moment I thought the deer lost traction, its hooves slid as if on ice. We stopped in Winona for suntan lotion & gas. When young, I imagined hanging out in Winona; perhaps meet a fine young coed from the college & go climb up Sugar Loaf. But these days I'd be happy to fish Gilmore Creek & meet a fine trout. Afterwards go hit a cool Winona biker joint, slam down a few beers & talk endless four-five talk beneath the starry dynamo on the banks of the mighty Mississippi.

-Kenn Hartmann

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April 27 - Marshall, MI
 Swap Meet
 8am - 3pm
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May 4 - Monroe, MI
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