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The Sons of Anarchy and Being Nice

By Dean Bartosh/ ABATE of Wisconsin Public Relations

Whether you love the show or hate it, there's no denying that the "Sons of Anarchy" has taken the popular culture by storm. Yeah, I hear some of you screaming at me right now, "But it's so unrealistic!" or "It paints bikers in a bad light!" You bet it's unrealistic. Most of the characters do and say things that a real Club would never do. It's a soap opera that just happens to have motorcycles in it -- nothing more. It never claims to be a documentary about Motorcycle Club culture. And as far as the show making bikers look bad -- Who are we looking bad to? I highly doubt that there are a huge percentage of SOA watchers that are non-riders so it's primarily being viewed by other bikers -- not the general public.

So what's my point? My point is that the show uses several popular stereotypes that have been used for decades to portray bikers. Sure some of those stereotypes aren't very flattering. But where do stereotypes come from? Every stereotype originates with at least some small bit of the truth or a perception of the truth. So where did the "outlaw biker" image come from and why should we care about it today?

A lot of the biker culture originated in the 1940's when our young men were coming home from the war. A lot of them were so used to the constant adrenaline pump of being at war that when they came home, they couldn't cope with the quiet "Mayberry" streets of hometown America. They went seeking excitement and rebellion and found it on two wheels. Tearing around wildly on a motorcycle was exactly what the returning soldier needed but it didn't fit in with the proper society of the times. With roaring down the road on a motorcycle and not adhering to societal norms, I'm quite sure that a lot of these young men were looked down upon and thought of as "outlaws" by the Beaver Cleaver families of the 40's and 50's. And over the years with some motorcyclists being involved in highly publicized drug raids, violence and other criminal mischief, it just reinforced the perception that the general public had of us -- that all bikers are trouble.

So why should we care about it today? Because the public no longer runs and hides or turns a blind eye to perceived trouble in their neighborhoods. The general public has gotten pretty good at organizing, being vocal and using the laws and political process to outlaw certain things that they find bothersome. And the "loud-piped dirty biker" is one of those images that Mr. & Mrs. Suburbia would love to eliminate from their world. As long as we continue to feed into their perception of what they think a "biker" is, the longer and tougher road that we create for ourselves.

So, cut your hair, change the way you dress and alter your lifestyle, right?! No, that's not what I'm talking about. We as freedom loving individuals have to remember that the respect for everybody's freedom is a two way street. We can't really expect the general public to respect our right to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" if we act like our pursuit of happiness is more important than theirs. Learn to work with individuals over differences and not only will you generally get more done but you'll help change their perception of what a biker is.

This couldn't have been more evident than during the recent Quaker Steak & Lube "No Colors" issue. This summer, the Quaker Steak & Lube restaurant in Middleton, WI had a couple of issues with a few of the attendees at their regular Bike Nights. Because the attendees in question happened to be patched Motorcycle Club members, the Middleton Police Chief started to enforce a "No Colors" provision that was in Quaker Steak & Lube's permit to hold their Bike Nights. Anyone wearing any type of Motorcycle Club logo or insignia ("colors") was told that they either needed to remove the piece of clothing bearing the "colors" or they needed to leave. ABATE of Wisconsin found this action to be not only discriminatory but heavy-handed on the part of the police department.

Sure, we could have starting beating the war-drums and gone into battle. Instead, we set up a meeting with the Middleton Police Chief with the management from Quaker Steak & Lube invited as well. After delivering our well thought out points, the police chief agreed that lifting the ban was the right thing to do and stated that he'd like to work again with ABATE of Wisconsin on any future issues that the organization might be able to help with. Management from Quaker Steak & Lube was so happy with the outcome of the meeting that they even remarked how they "love

working with ABATE of Wisconsin!" A win-win for everyone and ABATE of Wisconsin came out of the negotiations looking like the go-to organization in Wisconsin for motorcycle issues.

Every encounter that we have like that with officials, business owners or the general public will help to paint a new picture of what it really is to be a "biker". And every encounter like that helps to build the reputation and respect others have for us and our great organization. Sure, there will still be those times when we'll need to sound the alarm and rally the troops for the big battles. But as Patrick Swayze's character in the movie Roadhouse says -- "Be nice until it's time to not be nice."



AN OVERREACHING FEDERAL GOVERNMENT ENTITY IS CALLING BIKERS A DISEASE OF THE ROADWAYS. THEY ARE WORKING TO TAKE AWAY OUR FREEDOMS OF THE ROAD AS MOTORCYCLISTS.

WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO ABOUT IT?

Are you just going to hand over your motorcycle keys when they come knocking?

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