

King of Chicago

By Kenn Hartmann

Got off the Metra train in dull roar of dark Union Station underbelly passenger platform and jogged up worn marble steps to Madison, dodged sparse traffic crossing street and hustled down steel staircase to board yellow Water Taxi on South Branch dock below Bridge. It's the day before Thanksgiving and a thick fog enveloped the boat, a few passengers sat aft on the open deck, I was alone inside. The holiday crowds had yet to materialize. I said to the steward, "weren't you headed out to Seattle to ride bikes and climb mountains?" Brandon took my 3 bucks and said, "yeah, end of season, next week, say, didn't you have a cast on your arm or something?" We had met two months earlier; our only meeting and was surprised he remembered me.



I disembarked at Rush Street and cut east on Hubbard into the subterranean depths of the lower drives briefly peeking through neon lit greasy window of Billy Goat Tavern to see a group of Bears fans, or Sox fans or maybe Streets and Sans clustered around a Formica table, some guy in a suit with his back to the window holding court. I thought maybe I'd stop back and break my "cheezburger" habit with a fried egg sandwich. I scooted up Michigan Avenue steps as sun broke through morning haze just as a Harley V-Rod roared up to red light. The rider looked at me and yelled, "hey Kenny! Happy Thanksgiving." It was Juba on a motorcycle I had sold him. "I'm headed to work," he said. "I'm headed to see the Doc," I replied.

As I walked, a construction worker shouted from his perch in a tangled web of scaffolding, "Hey Harley-Man!" A guy I recognized from his visits to the Harley shop on Old Route 66 waved; I waved and shouted, "hey, HEY." I felt synchronicity, the world harmonized, I felt like King of Chicago, like Fats Domino tickling the keys on a Lindy Hop or Suzy Q. I swaggered; brushed away the stiffness of old bones and painful wounds and strutted like I owned the Mag Mile, King of all Cool Shit in my black leather jacket and biker boots.

A young panhandler sat slouched under a ratty blanket on the cold pavement and stared into an empty paper cup and didn't look up as I approached and said, "here's a dollar; it's a special day." I ignored the cup and placed the bill in his palm and shook his hand. His eyes came to life; he grinned and said, "oh my oh my, it certainly is!" It cost me five bucks to walk the next block, almost like I announced "alms for the poor, alms for the poor" beggars miraculously appeared from every crevice, panhandlers surprised at my regal demeanor; like a politician glad-handing on his birthday. I had to ditch down Erie or I wouldn't have enough for train fare and that egg sandwich at Billy Goat. People say why encourage the bums? They'll spend it on booze. What am I? The corrupt government monitoring who can be free or not? If only for a day, I'm the King of all Cool Shit and don't give a fuck what they do with their dollar. Besides, the real bums are in City Hall and Congress.

Earlier, when I caught the train in B'ville to go downtown, the conductor admonished me for not buying a ticket before boarding; he asked, "didn't you see the Ticketmaster?" I explained that I was running late and could immediately see this was no excuse. I tried to soften his harsh response and offered, "I'm sure he's a very fine Ticketmaster, a gentleman to boot." But my plea was to no avail, he charged me extra and took my money with a solid frown. He wasn't happy. He got on the loudspeaker and announced to all passengers, "it would be wise to purchase your tickets at Union Station for your return trip or pay an additional 3 dollars." I guess he was using his time wisely, corporately efficient; why lecture one when he can lecture all? It impressed me immensely, I thought about it all day. In fact I thought about it like Schindler's List. Those 3 bucks from this morning could have resulted in three more homeless handshakes. You get the idea.

So the Doc was fine as usual, examining the scar on my shoulder, finding the stitches had healed nicely, expressing satisfaction as I demonstrated my range of motion. He has always found it hard to believe I ride motorcycles. I said, "I find it hard to believe you rides horses, Doc." He asked, "What do you mean?" Horses can think; my machine does what I tell it. He said, "how true, but did you ever stop to think other drivers don't think?" All the time, Doc, all the time.

I ordered an egg sandwich and sat at a back table in the VIP room at Billy Goat. The rabble that huddled around a Formica table earlier was still there and the handsome guy in the suit was Corey McPherrin, a news anchor at WFLD-TV. They were talking sports, Bears and Sox. A couple of tourists took turns posing in front of wall of fame hodgepodge and I offered to photograph them. "Be sure to get the goat!" the man pleaded. Yeah sure, I had never before noticed the mural. Perfect.

I waited in line to purchase a ticket at Union Station. Oddly, it was exactly three panhandlers between Billy Goat and Union Station who benefitted. One homeless guy said, "nice jacket Harley Dude." Yeah, that's cool; I'm a Harley Dude. And when I'm not, I'm a Triumph Dude. On the train I proudly gave the conductor my ticket. It was at that moment I got a text from Preacher saying he was resurrecting Free Riders Press from the ashes of the apocalypse.

Impeccable timing, brothers and sisters of the open road, perfectly impeccable. I had contemplated writing for the Biking Life out of St. Louis or Thunder Roads out of Wisconsin as if those magazines would have me. Like Fats said, "I'm the king but you can wear my crown."

-Kenn Hartmann

www.chicagobikerbars.com

Venus
Gentleman's Club^{LLC}

Tuesday - Sunday 7pm-Close
Sunday's are amateur and
Open Dance night

132 2nd Avenue South Wisconsin Rapids, WI 54495
(715)423-0220

The Tailored Hide
Custom Leather

10% off Pro Pad Gel Pads
when installed at store
M-F 9-5:30 Thur 9-7 Sat 9-2

Motorcycle Apparel	services
JACKETS	REPAIRS
CHAPS	ALTERATIONS
VESTS	ZIPPERS & LININGS
SHIRTS	REPLACED
BELTS	R.I.P.
SADDLEBAGS	PATCHES & MORE!
SHEEP SKINS	

Re-upholstery of motorcycle seats
Authorized Dealer/installer Pro Pad Gel Seats
860 S. Commercial St. Neenah, WI
(920)729-6330 54956

PARTS GIRL PROMOTIONS
33rd ANNUAL
Motorcycle Parts Swapmeet for the Harley® Enthusiast

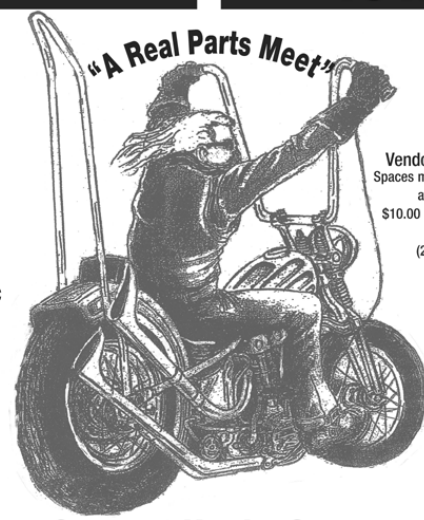
Sunday
February 3rd, 2013
QCCA Expo Center, 2621 4th Avenue

ROCK ISLAND ILLINOIS

Sunday
MARCH 3rd, 2013
Hawkeye Downs Fairgrounds, 6th Street Southwest

CEDAR RAPIDS IOWA

Returning again, the Midwest's #1 Announcing Host "Pipes"



Open to the Public
10am-3pm
Adults \$8.00
Under 12 Free with Adult
Early Bird \$15.00 (Before 10am)

Vendor Set Up - 6am to 9am
Spaces must be reserved & paid for in advance to avoid an additional \$10.00 per space charge at the door.
Spaces are 10'x10'
(2 people admitted per space / Maximum 4 passes)

USED PARTS: Center \$30.00, Wall or End \$35.00
NEW PARTS: Center \$45.00, Wall or End \$50.00
OTHER: Center \$55.00, Wall or End \$60.00
BIKE CORRAL: \$20.00 (1 Person admitted per BC space)

Over 150 Vendor Spots

Free Parking • Law enforcement on duty all day • No Carry-Ins • Food, pop & beer will be on sale
No dogs allowed • Not responsible for accidents or theft
Be sure to sign up for Door Prizes - This keeps our Mailing List current!
Please make checks payable to Joe Tracy
19300 SE Debora Drive • Damascus, Oregon 97089
Call Joe (563) 580-9147 or Kim (602) 513-0087 E-mail Joe at krazyjkt@yahoo.com

Jimmers Place

MON-THUR 2PM TO CLOSE
FRI-SUN 11AM TO CLOSE

ON THE STRIP
DOWNTOWN DALE, WI

920-779-6679