



Dust My Broom

By Kenn Hartmann

Benny astride his 883 Sporty looks like Harry Potter on a Nimbus 2000. Sure, there were better Quidditch sticks, but Harry flew the f'n hell out of that broom. Of course, Harry's fiction, just a fantasy. Benny's real, as real as the convoy of trucks that roll beside him balls out buffeting Southbound Interstate 55 through a warm night in Illinois. Dodging birds in the afternoon, bashed by bugs all night, wary of impending weather & the danger of striking a deer, Benny rides methodically. He obeys the speed limit, just not the posted one. He rides the highway, factors all conditions in his head – the sky, the traffic, the cops. Not about fast or slow, he just lets it rip like the Blessed Hellride. Another rider cramps his style, hampers his flow. Another rider wants to stop at the forsaken taverns that dot old Route 66 just off I55, little neon lit gin-mills like CJs Bar in Livingston, IL. Benny wants to blow straight to Arkansas. This ain't sight-seeing. This ain't lollygagging. This is preparation for the Hoka-Hey challenge; Benny could ride from Key West to Alaska on his 883 sickle in search of Yukon Gold. All those posers who think a Sportster is a chick bike should be bitch-slapped by their old ladies. They never rode a Sporty & they sure the hell never rode with Benny. It's not the bike you fucking punk-asses – it's the man or woman who twists the throttle. On his return north, Benny grabbed the tail end of a deadly storm, the one that caused floods & killed 20 people in his home state that weekend. Benny hung on tight through Missouri & Illinois, magically avoiding the hail, the lightning,

the tornadoes that loomed on every horizon. Harry Potter never did that, not even in J. K. Rowlings' imaginative head. But Benny did it – his screaming 883 in tune with Dean Moriarty's Eternity, blasting Rancid on his speakers, like taking Aladdin's dark carpet & making it fly, Benny is the wind.

The kinfolk gather on the banks of Spring River in Arkansas to scatter Uncle Dan's ashes in his favorite fishing hole just below the rapids & modest falls upstream. He liked to fish for trout but there's bass, walleye & pan fish aplenty. Of course there's snakes & small alligators too. Earlier, Benny & his brother Charlie waded above the falls until the water swept them away. City folk prefer to use a canoe or a kayak. Country kids might use a raft or inner tube. But Charlie & Benny went feet first into the roiling abyss with a whoop & a shout "don't hit the boulders!" The water carried them swirling past log-jammed jagged rocks & swept them down below the falls to where the family gathers. Uncle Dan's widow, Cheryl softly offers a eulogy & plays a song "Going Up to the Spirit in the Sky." The ashes are placed into a rice paper boat & Charlie wades into the stream & releases Uncle Dan's earthly remains into the current. The funeral boat drifts momentarily & slips silently beneath the surface & fantails into the depths. The family shares stories, vittles & memorial spirits. Uncle Dan's brother Tim hands out a few of Dan's fishing lures as tribute. "Well hell," drawls Tim, "I'd expect they'd be for using & not sitting on a shelf." The family retreats to their individual camps on a thin strip of land between the river & the swamp below the railroad tracks where freight trains carrying coal switch tracks to let oncoming trains pass. When the trains stop or start, the couplers crash in sequence like the thunder of giant dominoes tumbling into the distance. In the backwater swamp are bullfrogs & snappers. The bullfrogs raise a ruckus. Crickets join the chorus. A blue heron skims the water & a vulture rests in a dead tree. Night falls & the stars are as bright as the hundreds of fireflies blinking in the clear sky. Dozens of campfires dot the riverbank & the smoke permeates through shadows among the tents & trailers. Uncle Dan's spirit is at rest.

Benny & Charlie got motorcycling DNA in their blood. Their father, Tim asks "why walk when you've got a motorsickle?" Their sister Jackie got her license & rode her motorcycle to high school. Charlie rode his '73 beater Honda CV550 to New York City the week before Benny went to Arkansas. New Yawk City!? The mom, Kathy is a big fan of Tom Laughlin movies like "Billy Jack" & "Born Losers." Real old school stuff. Their homestead is 12 miles off the paved road. The loose gravel & rocks wreak havoc on the belt drive rotor of Tim's Harley. He's thinking of converting it to a chain drive. Charlie carries the sofa out of the house & creates a bonfire. Benny blasts off a few rounds with his .38 caliber pistol. The roosters crow; the rabbits remain quiet. Just another day in the life – some seriously down home stuff.

-Kenn Hartmann

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