

Rowdy Rudy

His given name was Rudolph, but his family and close friends called him Rudy. As he grew older, Rudy's actions earned him the nickname of "Rowdy." He was known as a fearless, fun-loving character, whether in work, sports, or whatever activity. On a dare, Rowdy stole a motorcycle and went on a weekend joy ride when he was 15. That's when he fell in love with the freedom of the road. As a young adult, Rowdy saved enough money to buy a '70's BMW that was the next thing to a basket case, fixed it up, and rode it for three decades. It gets him where he wants to go, and the members of his club respect his ability as a rider and mechanic. Rowdy also found himself a woman who would put up with him, and they have been together for many years. If you were to go by Rowdy's property out on old Route 66, it would be difficult to determine that he ran a printing business for a living. His place is literally filled with every kind of junk you can imagine, from motorcycle parts to old appliances, and kitchen cabinets to plumbing fixtures. All of it long since used beyond usefulness. He would have said he was a collector, and I never knew of him selling any of his collection, although he would often give stuff away to someone in need.

One day, Rowdy forgot his helmet, so we had to go by his house on the way out to Newberry. Being that it was in the desert, it wasn't surprising that there was not one blade of grass in his yard, nor was there a living tree, shrub, bush, or flower anywhere in his yard. His tract house hadn't been painted on the outside since its construction 20 years before, and there was a bare wooden fence separating his yard from his neighbor's. I followed Rowdy in the front door, which he kept unlocked "in case anybody needed a place to stay any hour of the day or night," and entered into the most bizarre scene ever. The floors were covered with black shag carpet, all the windows were covered with opaque black drapes, the walls and ceiling were painted flat black, and all the furniture was black. It was that day that I learned that Rowdy had dabbled in the black arts, including witchcraft and Satanism in his early years. He told me of all the things he thought the devil had done for him, including the provision of free unlimited cable television, and other questionable benefits. As we left Rowdy's house that day, I couldn't help but notice the black cable running under the fence, half buried, that connected his house to the cable box of his next door neighbor.

A small bunch of us bikers used to ride all over the Mojave Desert in those years, visiting and hanging around, just enjoying the biker lifestyle. One of Rowdy's favorite places was a bar and café out in Newberry Springs. I have forgotten the name of the place since its ancient sign had been scoured by dust-filled wind to the point of being unreadable, but it was sitting on the north side of old Highway 66. We spent lots of time in there exchanging stories with other bikers, desert rats still looking to strike pay dirt at old abandoned mine sites, and the few locals that had no other entertainment. It was Rowdy's claim that he had ridden his old Beemer the thirty-four and one-half miles home from that bar 5,000 times while so drunk that he couldn't remember a thing. He swore that the



Beemer had learned to make the trip without any help from him. I remember the annual pig roast and "Porker Run" that the club put on out at Newberry, where Rowdy always furnished the pig. Nobody ever had the nerve to ask him where he got the hog. Rowdy led the boys in the club to do a lot of charitable and community events through the years, that's just the way he was.

I remember the night he was arrested for "dumpster diving" behind the local grocery store in Barstow. He had been supplying outdated bread and bakery items to the church food pantry and soup kitchens for a long time when the store's management decided that they would no longer make the food available, choosing instead, to throw all the old stuff in the trash. Rowdy was appropriately outraged, and decided to rescue the food from the dumpster after hours. Of course, the police were notified, and caught Rowdy red-handed, as it were, with his hand in the cookie jar. Then there was the time he brought some brand-new food over to the food pantry, still in its original cases. I asked Rowdy where he got it, and he said, "Don't ask, and I won't tell." First time I ever heard that! Seems that those cases had "fallen off" of a couple of eighteen wheelers down at the local truck stop one night, just as Rowdy and his boys were riding by. Rowdy had a heart of gold and a handy crowbar.

Sometimes, really good people can be downright wrong. I got to know Rowdy and like him, over a fairly long space of time. I could see a lot of good intentions in Rowdy, and appreciated all the good he did for the poor and down and out, but there was just something about him that made you think he was trying too hard to be good. He had a good heart, but it was also a hard heart. He didn't seem to respect other people the way he wanted to be respected. He didn't seem to know that what motivates and controls us is just as important as the goals we hope to accomplish. Rowdy often made a mess of things while trying to do the right thing, and became angry at others, the world, and himself. Then, one day, Rowdy rode off into the desert by himself, to find himself. He wound up finding a fella named Jaysee, or should I say, Jaysee found him, Rudy realized that all good he had tried to do did not really fix what was wrong with him. He had a heart that was far from God, and a mind that was preoccupied and cursed by worldly and destructive thoughts. When he realized his lost, sinful condition, he called upon the crucified and risen Savior of the world, Jesus Christ, found forgiveness and eternal life in Him. His whole life was changed, from the inside out, and he became a follower of Christ. All the good things he had been doing took on new meaning, and he became a rider with the "Brotherhood of the Wind." The riding's never been better.

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