

## Riding the Reservation Road

When I think of Bill Miller's journey from his boyhood home on the Stockbridge-Munsee Indian reservation in northern Wisconsin to winning a Grammy in Hollywood, my little jaunt on a motorcycle pales in significance. Although I envision my trip to be epic, unseen forces seemed destined to control my fate from the very beginning. When Cassie Mokentin from the Mohican Nation invited me to Bill Miller's tribal homecoming I was very interested but honestly didn't know what to expect. Then she told me she owns a Sporty and her dad rides a vintage Trumpet (that's Triumph for you non-musical types) and those pipes blow that sweet, soul sound. In England, mufflers are called silencers and when they're un-silenced they wail like a Satchmo riff unleashed. It was a miserable wet and cold 250 miles from Sweet Home to Gresham, just far enough to induce mild hypothermia and road wash trauma. But then I was on an epic quest.

Bill Miller is one of the coolest musical dudes in existence and one of the best rock and rollers on the planet, easily the most prolific musician from Wisconsin ever, or at least since Les Paul left Waukesha. Man, I wanted to be there when Bill returned home for the first time since "Cedar Dream Songs" was named top Traditional Native American music album at the Grammy Awards. He was coming back to see family, lifelong friends, and some fellows he first played music with at Shawano High.

To ride those reservation roads, smell that wood smoke off in the gray distance, the forests lovely, dark and deep, and paradise a ghostly shadow. To roll pass the Wolf River, ponderous, mystical in the twilight. To glimpse the spectral visage of white foam churned up below the dam on the Red River. I just didn't know it was going to be so tarnation cold. When I walked into the Many Trails Banquet Hall beyond Gresham on Hwy G, Cassie was there to greet me but I was still too numb to shiver. The festivities began with an honor song spiritually rendered by the drum group Smoky Town Singers. The oral tradition is kept alive at powwows and gatherings when ceremonial rituals of significance are explained to all in attendance, to understand the cultural legacy. If all you know about the Mohican tribe is from James

Fennimore Cooper, you might want to check out [www.mohican-nsn.gov](http://www.mohican-nsn.gov).

The tribe presented Bill Miller with a traditional rain dance blanket, and contrary to popular misconception, it is a celebration of rain, not a call to make it rain. Then a tribal elder solemnly bestowed upon him an eagle feather, a very rare and spiritual gift. It is significant almost universally in North American tribes because an eagle flies higher in the heavens than any other



Butch Moede on '73 Triumph



Bill and Clint



Jeremy on a Honda



Bill Miller and His Mom

creature. When Bill received his Grammy out in Hollywood, he was wedged between wild ovations for popsters Usher and Slipknot, while Bill received only a smattering of applause. However one woman cried out, "I love your music Bill! I have all your CDs." She ran up and gave him a hug; it was Bonnie Raitt.

Bill Miller got up on stage, gave the emotional speech he could not give in Hollywood. He then traded some enlightening guitar licks with his soulful younger brother Clint Miller, whose nimble fingers were rockafied in his own right. One by one Bill's musical friends joined the fray and the whole band began to play eventually jamming old tunes like Susie Q and Woolly Bully. Also playing were Mike

"Doc" Retzinger and John Welch. If you are not familiar with Bill Miller, it might be good to start your collection with "Raven in the Snow." If corporate radio clones didn't have their headsets so squarely up their hind ends, some of Bill's songs like "Reservation Road" could easily be rock anthems. Check out [www.billmiller.net](http://www.billmiller.net) for details.

I met a lot of folks at the party, including Jeff Vele, the editor and Lisa Martin, staff reporter for the Mohican News. Try as they might to sway me to come and write for them, I'm sticking with Free Riders Press. My editor, Preacher is more of a philanthropist than an employer, I mean that's how generous he is. Of course, if I hear that the Mohican News is paying real money or even casino chips, I'm jumping ship.

My original plan was to head back to Chicago after the show, but I was still wet and the temperature had dropped to three degrees below freezing. The bartender booked me a room down the road at Captain's Cove. The next morning I was up early, there were icicles on my bike. I had breakfast at the Whistle Stop Café and went fishing below the dam on the Red River (I always carry a rod and reel on my bike). I met Cassie and her family and we headed over to her see her dad, Butch Moede, in Bowler. Butch has a killer '73 Triumph plus a small collection of Harleys. Butch is a member of Big Iron Riders, MC.

I stopped at the North Star Casino and walked out with \$30 more than I had walking into the place. Outside I met Jim Breseman, from the Boldriders and he claimed to be a big Free Riders Press fan. The weather was warm, the sky clear, and I ripped up that highway to Sweet Home like I owned the road. I'd love to come back up and ride some of the back roads, maybe hang out around a campfire, do a little gambling, make a few casts and catch some fish, and listen to cool tribal blues rock by really talented local musicians..

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Jim from BoldRiders

