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On Mass Mutations & Intoxication By Kenn Hartmann

'Carmel-by-the Sea ain't the same' the old-timer from San Jose laments. He remembers a quirky enclave of artisans long before the opulent corporate swank of Mayor Clint Eastwood. He straddles a vintage Matchless single cylinder racer so I'll take his word. I had visited Carmel as a teenager and few Bentleys, Hummers or tour buses vied for vehicular supremacy in Carmel 1970. Back then granola, hippie beads and hitchhikers littered the landscape. Today, I enjoy killer calamari in a trendy Vietnamese café wedged between Starbucks and an artsy wine gallery attended by overzealous sommeliers. I'm on a borrowed crotchrocket and twist the throttle of destiny. The old-timer suggests the sunset cruise down the coast to quaff intoxicating Pacific vistas.



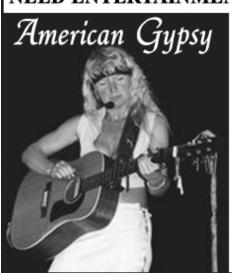
Every biker I see looks like Wild Hogs, the movie. They sport matching outfits, complimentary stock bikes, and parade in precise riding formations. Some weird west coast vortex ignites a mass mutation of helmeted movie extras on migration. I wear my usual raggedy shit, like a beach bum, tattered trousers cutoff below the knee, sleeveless t, and flip flops, which I discard after purchasing a cheap pair of Keds. The shifter was tough on my toes. My helmet is a full faced garage sale monstrosity with Sun Volt rocker graffiti plastered over abrasions, road dust and the aroma of mildewed cat. Just south of Carmel, I stop to sniff the salt stench of ocean kelp and dip my feet in icy surf only to dance away from the frigid breaking wave. On the road, I throttle, brake and lean. I cruise over the Bixby Creek Bridge, immortalized in 'Then Came Bronson' opening scenes.

It's impossible to catch more than a swift glimpse of sun and surf since the hard turns and deadly precipice presents a very real phenomenon. I stop at a scenic overlook only to discover the planetary invasion of Wild Hog mutants is real. Tourists from around the globe flock like gulls to California. They rent the biker dream, stateside Harley style. No wonder they look cloned, they rent from the same shop. I meet riders from Germany, Australia and England who slam down 3,000 miles through Utah, Arizona and California on rental bikes. It's dark by time I arrive at Big Sur, the redwoods, campfires and literary haunts of Jack Kerouac, Arthur Miller and Gary Snyder, a Zen sanctuary during the golden age of beatnik hippiedom. Well, for Kerouac it sucked; he couldn't get enough booze and drugs to ward off delirium. For me it's just a stop for gas and soon I'm the only vehicle creeping down the coast. No other headlights, no streetlights, engulfed in the vast universe surrounding my mortal insignificance.

Tied to a two wheeled speed machine, racing along the cosmic brink of Earth, Sea and Stars on a ribbon of asphalt known as California's Highway One, I embrace catastrophic visions of mortality and enjoy exhilarating grace. I worry about overshooting my headlights on a hairpin turn. Even a slight miscalculation could hurtle my carcass into the great abyss. I travel a hundred miles; the first real light is the Hearst Castle. In Morro Bay I stop at a juke joint and happen to catch the King of California Roadhouse Blues, Dave Alvin blast out American Roots music. His band is called the Guilty Men. I talk to him in the alley after the show; he's coming to Chicago in February. I jump on the bike and get a rickety oceanfront motel in Pismo Beach. In the morning, from the pier I see whales and dolphins on migration. I guess I can say 'been there, done that.' Anybody wishing to attend the mid-winter Dave Alvin show at Old Town SOFM can contact me. On November 9th, we're having the Iron Horse Ranch & Raunch party on North Avenue and Addison Rd in Villa Park. We'll be presenting the Best Damn Biker Bar Hopper trophy to winners Barb & Larry Burrows.

-Kenn Hartmann www.chicagobikerbars.com

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We all know that the riding community is a diverse group of people. I enjoy the time spent with all of the different groups, including my friends Al & Kathi of B.T.G.O.G (.www.ridefreeforever.org). You may have seen them at many of the bike events. They are dedicated to their beliefs and are always there for those that want to chat with some-

one. As with all the Christian riding groups, I say thanks for being there for us.



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