

Fernando's Magic Weave

By Kenn Hartmann

www.chicagobikerbars.com

Fernando suggests I begin the interview with "once upon a time in Chicago, there was a diminutive tailor named Big Al who catered to pimps, hustlers and other Southside gangster high rollers." And like the original Brothers Grimm, fairy tales aren't for children or feint of heart, so gather round my little "boogie chil-lens" and let's delve into the heart of Sweet Home's impresario of fashionable Biker regalia. Fernando says, "in 1969 my dad, Senior Fernando Alva, a.k.a. 'Big Al' opened his tailor shop in a basement on 18th and Ashland." It didn't take long for Big Al's talents to attract local street life luminaries.



Names like notorious pimp Don 'Magic' Juan, Charlie Smith from Cabrini Green projects, Big Red, Scorpio and heroin kingpin and coldblooded killer Flukey Stokes of Chicago's Southside Black Stone Rangers (the Cadillac coffin funeral of Flukey's murdered son, Willie the Wimp inspired Stevie Ray Vaughn's song of the same name). Fernando says, "it was dangerous at times to walk into my dad's shop and see these guys since they all were known Gangsters back in the day." Senior Big Al is mentioned in a book called "From Pimp to Pulpit" the story of Don 'Magic' Juan. Of course, Senior Big Al's talents attracted anyone who had a special taste in Chicago's dramatic Southside haute couture, especially illustrious members of the blues scene, musicians like legendary soul singer and R & B artist Tyrone Davis and Chicago Blues Festival headliner Artie "Blues Boy" White oft times frequented the subterranean shop.

"I was 17 when I first picked up a needle and started working for my dad," says Fernando. Being a petulant teenager, Fernando stormed out of his dad's shop on a few occasions, however later, when Senior Big Al moved to a new location and Fernando matured he worked for his dad for ten years doing alterations, convertible tops, leather "virtually anything I could get my hands into. My father was my nemesis as a child and now my mentor and role model." Eventually, Fernando took over and managed the shop for another ten years until fate and circumstance conspired to force him to sell and matriculate to Fashion Design School to get his degree. That's where he met fellow student and soul-mate and now wife, Niki, who shares a love of sewing have together opened a shop at 2246 North Clark in Chicago, fittingly perhaps, the shop is located a few doors north of the infamous location of the gangland style Saint Valentine's Day massacre, where the deadly prohibition era imbroglio between crime bosses Al Capone and Bugs Moran played out. The shop, Alva Graciano Tailors, 773-698-8758 (alva.graciano@gmail.com) features alterations, leather and linings repaired, zippers replaced, patches sewn and custom designs made into reality. On Saturdays, Fernando sets up a sewing machine at Illinois Harley-Davidson in Berwyn and works his magic.

By magic, I mean real magic, not the ordinary legerdemain of TV and stage charlatans who use trickery and deceit to fool the audience. Now I'm not saying he's like Rumpelstiltskin, the diabolical imp who spun straw into gold in exchange for the



Fernando Alva

Queen's first born prince, as we all know, no good ever came from that, at least no good according to legend, but Fernando can transform the ordinary into sublime, the very thread woven into the fabric of life that creates identity out of the tabula rasa (blank slate) of existence. Everyone must wear some sort of threads, as Mark Twain said about clothes not making the man, naked people generally don't get taken seriously. Except maybe racer Rollie Free breaking the land speed record wearing only a Speedo while cranking his Vincent HRD to 150 mph at Bonneville Salt Flats, most folks adorn their nakedness with denim and leather, the intricate and durable regalia of the motorcycle sub-culture. The other exception may be the throngs of scantily clad biker babes at any and all cycle-mania orientated shindigs, or should I say thongs? So whatever you got brothers and sisters of the open road that needs affixing? Homeland Security emblem needs emblazing? No problem. Rock and roll swag? A bandana rag or biker tag? Police patch attached, natch. One per-center? Harry Potter Dementor? A breath of splendor? Betty Boop, woop woop, fly the coop? Every Saturday while yours truly, your dedicated writer of prolific verse and monthly FRP columnist, is hard at work selling motorcycles at Illinois Harley-Davidson, Fernando's also in the showroom, stitching up dreams, making creative visions come true.

Kenn Hartmann
bikerbars@yahoo.com

The Tailored Hide

Custom Leather

END OF SEASON SALE!! 25% OFF ANY MOTORCYCLE JACKET IN THE STORE!!

M-F 9-5:30 Thur 9-7 Sat 9-2

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

Re-upholstery of motorcycle seats

Authorized Dealer/installer Pro Pad Gel Seats

860 S. Commercial St. Neenah, WI (920)729-6330 54956

"WALNECK'S" MOTORCYCLE SWAP MEETS & SHOWS

October 23 - Springfield, OH
 Swap Meet 8am-3pm
 Clark County Fairgrounds/OH exit 59 off I70
 Admission: \$6.00

November 6 - Shepardsville, KY
 Swap Meet 8am-3pm
 Bullitt County Fairgrounds/165 & Rt. 245 at exit 112
 Admission: \$6.00

December 18 - St. Charles, IL
 Swap Meet 8am-3pm
 Kane County Fairgrounds/525 S. Randall Rd.
 Admission: \$6.00

Do your last minute Christmas Shopping

American • British • Japanese
 Bikes & Parts • Dirt Bikes • Leather
 Novelties • Toys and Much More!!

Sell something old... Buy something new!
 Reserve your space early for indoors

Walneck's Inc.
 7923 Janes Ave., Woodridge, IL 60514
630-985-2097
 www.walneckswan.com

GG CHAINGANG GEARCOMPANY

P.O. BOX 274 • DOUSMAN, WI 53118

JOHN S. BRILEY (414) 254-8019

HANCOCK HOTEL BAR

113 S. Main Street
 Hancock, Wisconsin 54943
 Owners: Terry & Dick Werner
 Phone: 715-249-DICK (3425)

\$2.25 off for members of ABATE, HOG and all veterans

Veterans always welcome

BONER AGAIN
 Home of the Ride for Wishes and Mosquito Fest

Noon til close
 Tuesday thru Sunday
 Closed Mondays

Free Pool Wednesdays
Adult Entertainment on weekends
 (715) 886-4366
 4 miles south of Rainbow Casino
 Nekeosa, WI
 General Weirdness Free of Charge