

**Even Nowhereville is Somewhere**

By Kenn Hartmann

I was seventeen, two years older than my brother Ron. We walk down this gravel road for hours, not a house, barn or bucket of water in sight. Not a cloud in the North Dakota August sky. But a plume of mad dust on the horizon heads our way, a barreling late-40's pick-up damn near refuses to stop. Ronny tries to flag him down & barely leaps aside as the old-timer stiff legs his brakes to a loose gravelly halt. The driver shakes his grizzled beard from side to side. Hey pops, we 're trying to get to Beulah, I say. He looks at me with sad eyes, then stares at Ron, then grins at the horizon & leans forward, glances into the desperate blue sky & solemnly says, 'yuh cain't git thar fromear. ' Then starts to drive away. I leap onto the passenger floorboard & he skids in earnest. I holler, wait, wait, what the hell 's that supposed to mean, you can't get there from here? 'Well sonny, ' he drawls, Beulah 's yond that-a way, over them hills. ' He waits till I follow his finger, yeah so what? Well, this here road goes this-a way. Like I said, yuh cain't git thar fromear. ' He drives away scratching his head.



So Ron & I head that-a way, over them hills, turns out to be ten of them hills & one Medicine Butte. We shy away from rattlers; never see a coyote but plenty of buzzards circling lazily above the hot-baked expanse. They 'll be pecking the eyes from our bloated carcasses if we don't find water soon, ' muses Ron. We finally reach a two lane blacktop, catch a ride from an 18-wheeler into Beulah, head to the Keller Ranch to bale hay & one Friday night we find ourselves at a dance hall in the town of Zap, a band called Rubber Stamps takes the stage. Everyone in the county is there; all thirty people, mostly cowboys who don't like two city boys from Chicago eyeing their fillies. We go to an after-concert party in a clapboard shanty & play a drinking game called Indian. Aside from being racist, playing a game to drink beer seems stupid. Having been raised in the Germanic tradition that beer is the daily elixir of life.

Years pass, I 'm rolling Interstate 94 just east of Bismarck on my sickle. I pick up a hitchhiker from a little town near the Garrison Dam. He 's sick of life on the desolate prairie. He tells of a party at the University in Grand Forks with Ken Kesey, author of 'One Flew Over the Cuckoo 's Nest. ' First stop, a dormitory & a few farm boys play Indian. Ugh, me split. Later, I find a literati soiree & in the smoky haze of Ken Kesey, King of Merry Pranksters, star of Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test, friend of Neal Cassidy epic 'you 're either on the bus or off the bus ' I skip the beer-drinking ritual & head straight for vodka. I take a long toke from a juicy Esmeralda of Kesey 's personal stash.

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I meet a fresh young farm girl from them-thar lonesome hills on the Western Plains & she 's unafraid of a greasy biker-bum 's honorable intention of no commitments & no security. She 's young, passionate about life & takes what I say with a sideways glance & ever-so slight smile. After a few days, the bliss wears thin & I find myself in a Grand Forks alley in the rain, struggling to unchain my bike from a dumpster & hit the road.

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