

The Ride Home

By Kenn Hartmann

All I did was duck out (luck out you might say) and took a day off of work. It wasn't my decision; the decision belonged to my bike, a rare breed with a mind of its own, a motorcycle animated with foibles, quirks and idiosyncrasies hungry for adventure and legend. Some say legends are born not made, saintly and heroic, that only time will tell. Yeah well, occasionally my peculiar machine springs to life with an existence all its own and like many roving, wandering, nomadic creatures of the earth, begins the migration home. Home being Milwaukee, birthplace of Harley Davidson 110 years ago. It's an Electra Glide and I'm just along for the ride.

Now Milwaukee may lack the exotic allure of foreign lands such as Mazatlan or Mendocino, but damned if there isn't a place 20 miles south of the city right off 94 that sells artificial palm trees and assorted fake front yard flora and fauna. I only noticed the strange garden just as the first ray of dawn yawned across the Kenosha County farmland because the lone non-Harley in the pack (an old 70's Triumph) sputtered and blew a puff of smoke as it coasted haplessly to the shoulder amidst honking construction zone rush-hour traffic. A breakdown in traffic sucks, but that's when I noticed the delusory palms for sale. One kick and the Trumpet sprang to life. Not bad. Merging into the stop and go bumper to bumper parking lot was a little dicey and I flipped-off an irate motorist but decided to keep my cool since I knew several riders in the pack were packing heat. I had just met these thugs at the Lake Forest Oasis on the Illinois toll. They weren't really thugs, they looked more like ex-hippies but were actually retired Chicago cops. I casually noted to one rider, "hey nice pistol. Ain't that a Smith & Wesson twenty-two?" The guy looked embarrassed, all that was showing was the wooden handle and he tucked his shirt over it and sheepishly said, "you're not supposed to see that." Another guy was more than happy to show his concealed piece. Personally, I don't believe in concealed carry laws; I'm for holsters and bandoliers. Let it all hang out. I rode with them to the H-D Museum where we picked up our free 30-year anniversary Hog pins, a free gift that I tucked into my watch pocket. Thousands of riders rumbled in.

In the Museum's member lounge I had a couple shots of fine whiskey and the legendary "Willie G" Davidson autographed my "Doolang-Doolang" colors. To return the courtesy, I autographed my "Message in a Bottle" article in Free Riders Press and gave it to Willie G and had another shot. Later, while admiring the Captain America bike, I met a fellow rider named Wayne who sold me an authentic 1970 June Issue #135 Mad Magazine parody of Easy Rider and Then Came Bronson (Sleazy Rider and Then Came Bombsome respectively). My collection of Easy Rider paraphernalia now rivals the museum display, except I don't have the Billy bike or the Captain America bike. But I have the comic book, a poster and a DVD of the movie.

My editor assigned me to cover a little shin-dig in Big Bend at the Road Guardian's Compound, with promises of extreme biker bacchanalia and a plethora of local luminaries. Actually, he might not have promised bacchanalia; perhaps he said, "bevy of quail." Plethora might not be the right word either, but I once used it in my high school English class and it seemed to impress one young literary minded lass with a fairly voluptuous ass, let me put it this way, she definitely wasn't one of those skinny anorexic waifs favored by high fashion twigs. My philosophy has never wavered; as long as my editor pays top dollar, I'll cover any event. Dave Zien, the Million Mile Motorcycle Man was there, apparently willing to cover the event for a lot less. Dave actually hit me up for a cut of the action and even enlisted the help of Charlie Brechtel, a biker troubadour and one of the apparent luminaries, who serenaded me with hardcore highway tunes as I stuffed my face from a tin plate of maple-syrup soaked baked beans while waiting in line for a patch of shade. But I held firm despite Zien's much bally-hoed charismatic charm and senatorial wit. I can't control Preacher's desire to dole out another 10 percent raise, but Dave took it rather well and held out his hand and said, "Take one." In his palm were what looked to be candy-covered pralines, but were actually translucent, black Obsidian Volcanic glass stones. "They're called Apache Tears, a spiritual gift." I put one in my watch pocket with the HOG pin.

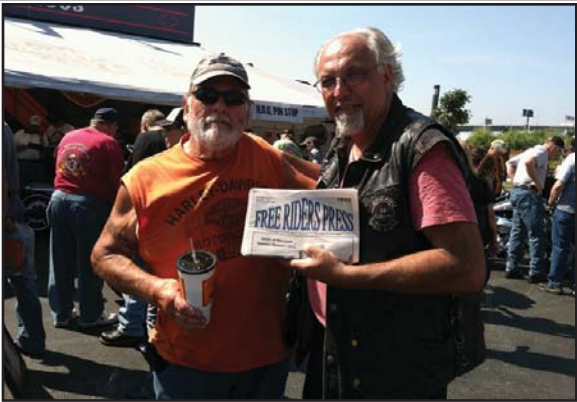
Since I mentioned "Then Came Bronson" earlier in this story, there was one episode where Bronson goes to work on an oil rig in the desert and signs up for a piece of the action. The episode was called "Two Percent of Nothing." I only mention this because as Dave Zien was hitting me up for a cut of my FRP windfall, I heard him casually say to Brechtel, "Ten percent of nothing is nothing."

Preacher had some business downtown so I followed to the festivities at the fairgrounds, the epicenter of Harley's Clambake on the Lake, the Dairy State Dustup, Milwaukee's Wingding. Then we hit the Hood. We had our own "Then Came Bronson" moment at a red-light on Fond Du Lac. At the beginning of each episode, Bronson tells this idle dreamer to "hang in there." Ours went like this: a lady driving a late model station wagon leans out and says, "I hope you guys have a good time!" I assume by "you guys" she means Harley homecoming bikers and not white guys. So I say, "we plan to...we're headed to ARJ's on Capital and 92nd...come on let's go!" Her eyes light up, "I know that place, maybe I will!"

ARJ's was cool, the air-conditioner cranked, lights dimmed, it felt good on my eyes and good on my skin, a relief from the harsh broiling August swelter. The place was rocking. Preacher and I were guests of the Double Eagles. The club president, Cadillac, ordered a heaping plate of killer chicken wings. Cadillac looked at me and ordered two plates. He looked at Preacher and ordered a bushel basket. Looked at Preacher again and ordered two bushel baskets and three buckets. Cadillac said to the cook, "just pile 'em on the table and keep 'em coming." Cadillac gave Preacher and I each a National Bikers Roundup patch from Tunica, Mississippi. I put mine in my watch pocket with the HOG pin and the Apache Tears. What a day!

-Kenn Hartmann

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Terry Craig



Cadillac



Arliiss- Owner of Arj's



Pacman



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Brown Sugar



Dave Zien & Charlie Brechtel