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Reading, Writing and Riding with my Bro By Kenn Hartmann

It's a hot Saturday night in July. My skin is sun burned, clammy and covered in road dust. The desk fan is blowing and legendary rocker Mike Tafoya is cranked on the boom-box. Even though the night is young, I'm drinking coffee to stay awake; each swallow is textured with the remnants of Joliet's Route 66 highway grit. I'm staring at a blank computer screen. I wanted to ride to the Rockford clubhouse where Tafoya's Lost Boyzz jam tonight but I need to write this story for Free Riders Press. It would be a nice gesture on your part to follow along.

There are two things I'd like to cover. The first can loosely be called literary influences. I'm not going to get into the whole hippy beatnik thing – Brautigan, Bukowski, Kerouac. Just accept that. Or even the classical connection to Chaucer, Willy the Shake and Midnight Blake. Right now I'm talking about "biker literature." There's plenty of stuff out there about the motorcycle riding experience I have yet to peruse. I'm counting on readers of FRP to help me out and let me know your favorite motorcycle books.

The reason this came up is that I just finished reading "Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance" by Robert Pirsig, who I met thirty odd years ago when he first published his book. At the time, he was old and I was young, so I was suspect of the academic BS surrounding his professor status, plus he had that literary madness of the mind thing going which I totally could not comprehend. Being I was tuned into a psychedelic Hendrix Castaneda Kesey frame of reference, I wanted to blurt out to Pirsig, "dude, drop some acid and get on with it."

However the parts of the book dealing with the actual ride experience, particularly the whole Zen philosophy of tuning a bike are profoundly exemplary. Pirsig spent time living in St. Paul and Bayfield, hence the Minnesota and Wisconsin connection. Another homegrown book, out of Chicago but covering Milwaukee is "The Bikeriders" by Danny Lyon, who as a young member of the Chicago Outlaws created a truly brilliant photo-journalistic work of art. If you happen to have a copy, please send it to me, the rare original edition is worth at least 200 bucks on ebay. I promise to take good care of it.

Published in the 60's about the same time as Hunter Thompson's rambling stereo typical fantasy about the Hells Angels, Danny Lyon's documentary glimpse into the local

motorcycle club scene is stark and poetic, there's actually a very unique shot of an Outlaw and a Hells Angel riding together on the same bike. The original edition of "The Bikeriders" was printed in black and white, however the reprint has added a few color photos not found in the earlier version. What Lyon's book achieves is a purity of vision unlike anything else that was being produced at the time. On the other hand, Thompson's gonzo style draws liberally from police blotters to utter fabrication. The general tone seems to mimic an earlier work by Frank Reynolds as told to beat poet Michael McClure called "Freewheelin Frank."

Okay, so I'm on to another cup of coffee, the flip side of Tafoya Lost Boyzz and here's the second thing I want to cover. I occasionally write "Pit Stop" stories for Preacher, partly to fill space in his rag, and more importantly so he can sell some advertising spots to keep his publishing venture alive and well. But Preacher doesn't tell me what to write. He just prints it. Which is incredibly cool.



So if I tell you a place is groovy, it's groovy because I think it is, not because some corporate entity is telling me what to say.

An intriguing fact about this whole process is that my brother Chuck is involved in planning some of these spontaneous rambles. Last week, we started off at JR's Broken Inn in Island Lake. Consider in Chuck's parlance, the so-called start is 35

miles away from my driveway. I had mentioned JR's a couple FRP issues back. I carry a hefty stack of Preacher's rags on my bike to pass out to the public. At JR's, the Wildfire Hog Chapter out of Villa Park rumbles through on a poker run and just cleans me out of papers. See, I don't leave a pile of newspapers at the bar, I hand them out individually as I cruise from joint to joint. Now, I'm ready to kick back and make myself comfortable, it's that kind of place. But Chuck keeps us moving – it's not unusual to turn a local spin into hundreds of miles.



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