

Message in a Bottle

By Kenn Hartmann

Looky here, dear FRP fans, lend me your ears - I've been writing for this rag for nigh on 10 years despite the futile protests of a few seriously misguided lost souls picketing outside our fearless editor's Plush Corporate Pad bent on banishing me from the un-blemished pages of this pristine paper as if yours truly could blemish anything. Do these few lost souls assume me to be such a mercenary? Do they believe me tempted by riches, like the only reason I write is to receive Preacher's steady stream of exorbitantly fat-cat royalty checks?

Nay, dear loyal fans, and nay I say; of course I accept them and cash them religiously, but that's only out of politeness, sheer courtesy. My true pleasure is in taking pen and paper (quill and scroll if you will) to taste the mainline thrill of writing addiction - you got your vice and I got mine, along with a gallon jug of homemade Dago Red wine fresh off the vine.

Granted, when on occasion I stumble in to conduct some official or even offbeat literary business at FRP's Plush Corporate Pad, it's necessary to punk-slap my way through the picket line but I do so without any rancor or enthusiasm, despite my mom's eternally maternal advice, "son, when you do a job do it well, especially when you have to bitch slap some whiny-ass punk." This sentiment was echoed and reinforced by my 8th grade writing teacher, Mr. Frederick Blow who'd backhand some hapless sap caught committing a tragic grammatical sin like dangling a participle and while frothing at the mouth and spitting venom Blow would spray, "when I slap you silly you'll not only take it but learn to like it." I don't know if it hurt worse to get spit on or slapped, since I always minded my p's and q's and never ended a sentence with a prepositional phrase anytime I can think of.

I'm only saying this because it didn't help that our Intrepid Editor paid me my exorbitantly fat-cat semi-annual bonus in front of a wild bunch of bikers and weekend warriors at Sheryl's Club 175 in Slinger. Or Ackerville. It's in Wisconsin anyway. What's worse a reporter from the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel was on hand to witness the transaction. It was embarrassing. Of course I had to accept it, I have a shipment of high end bourbon arriving this week and I got a kid in college, you know tuition, books, weed, whatever. OK, I don't have a kid in college, but if I did, you know, do-wacka-do or do-wah-diddy.

So there we are at Sheryl's Club 175 and Sheryl is holding court and the joint is jumping and the high noon aromas wafting from the kitchen are sumptuously enticing like Reuben Rolls and Chili Cheese Fries and Popeye's Spinach Artichoke Dip. I order a Bourbon Mushroom Burger with Sweet Potato Fries but my mind considers a Bellybuster Fish or Chipotle Chicken. You need an adjective? Fantastic. An adverb? Superbly. Actually, superbly looks like Super-Bly when I type it, but you know what I mean. Superb rhymes with suburb almost. Beer bottle caps pop left and right along the contours of the bar and excite the air.

One of the bikers, a guy named Cadillac who I met earlier at Ealy's on North Hopkins in Milwaukee buys a round. So what are you drinking Cadillac? Of course Cadillac is an alias and he claims none of his biker friends know his real name but he says, "I always try the Bloody Mary; I believe it to be an accurate testament to the true nature of any libation establishment." A fine idea, I agree, I'll have the same. Mike, the bartender extraordinaire bellies up behind the bar and lingers lovingly over the ingredients like the master mixologist that he is and voila! A very intriguing concoction, certainly a legendary Mary!

"Cadillac, I must admit, there's genius in your madness."

"Genius in my method," he corrects me.

Meeting Cadillac and conversing over a killer Bloody Mary made the trip up from Chicago worth it. But there was a lot happening. My brother Charlie and I rode up from Sweet home with Tommy and Doug. We met Kathy Flanigan at the Journal Sentinel on State Street. Pablo (from Pablo's Pork and Malort Ride) and Preacher (our fearless editor at FRP) met us there for a little pre-110th tour.

Harley's big party and since I work at Chicago Harley, I'm tied into it professionally. For the tour we picked Ealy's because it's located in the hood and because it's painted pink. I could call it ghetto pink but if it was on a beach in Florida, I'd call it flamingo pink. Behind the bar toward



"Tommy"

the alley under a shade tree, there was a pig roasting on an open spit, along with a smoker filled with ribs and chicken in expectation of a seriously cool Saturday night Biker soiree. At Ealy's we picked up Cadillac and Mister Phil. Hey Phil, what's your biker name? "It's Phil." What's your real name, "It's Phil." That's what I thought. We picked Sheryl's Club 175 because they advertise in Free Riders Press and they were in Charlie & Kenn's Milwaukee Biker Bar Book. We went there because as Charlie pointed out, "We're treated like royalty."

From there we blasted up to New Fane in Kettle Moraine country. Everyone was a little bewildered.



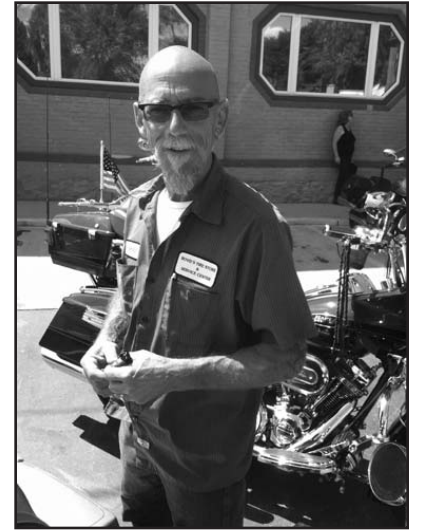
Kathy



"Cadillac & Phil"



"Itch & Cadillac"



"Pablo"

We were all surprised to be in New Fane when none of us had ever heard of Old Fane or even Fane for that matter. If it had a touch more exotic nature, it could have been called La Fane, but as it were, we were in the Rusty Spur Saloon and there were horseshoes nailed to the wall. The bar was over a hundred years old and once was a brothel. Pablo said, "You mean it was really a hewar house? For hewars?"

Itch, the laconic bartender said, "yup." When we asked him how to get to Rubicon, he replied in true farmer fashion, "You can't get there from here." I know, it's like the Twilight Zone, they said we couldn't get here and yet here we are. In fact no one knows we're here and we don't know where here is, except Kathy who's texting messages to her Facebook page. Like Hotel California, you can check out anytime you want but you can never leave.

In fact, I'm still here under the guise of writing my column, it's actually a plea, like a message in an Old Milwaukee beer bottle tossed into the North Branch or the West Branch or one of the branches of the Milwaukee River to drift out to Sea or Lake Michigan, whichever comes first. To whom it may concern, help! I'm trapped in one of the tiny "hewar's rooms" upstairs at the Rusty Spur Saloon in the New not the Old Fane. Bring some fresh sheets and fine bourbon or whatever it was that Ernest drank or Hunter drank. Bring a couple Cuban cigars if you got 'em. And tell Itch to crank of the jukebox; these damn crickets outside are driving me crazy. I might be here a while.

-Kenn Hartmann

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