

A Jewish boys thoughts, motorcycle riding through the Christian world.

From Cross To Cross--The musings of a Jewish boy riding his motorcycle through the Christian world

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PROLOGUE

Why the hell would a Jewish kid ride a motorcycle anyway?"

It's a question I've been asked since 1965. It's as if it's not something a Jewish boy would do.

Ask a gentile and he'll just shrug his shoulders and wonder why you'd ask such a silly question. "Why wouldn't a Jew ride a motorcycle?" Ask a Jew and he'll look at you quizzically also wondering why you'd ask such a silly question. "Jews don't ride motorcycles, they're dangerous."

Buddy Hackett used to do a routine about when his wife asked him to go skiing.

"Jews don't ski," he said, "Jews play gin-rummy and say, Helen bring fruit."

"But you skied in the Catskills," she said.

"The Catskills?" he said, "those are little Jewish hills made out of sour cream. If you fall down they chop up a banana right where you land and you have lunch. You want to send me to gigantic Christian mountains that are shouting, c'mon Jew boy we're waiting for you."

I did plenty of things 'nice Jewish boys' didn't do. The running joke in my home was that I must have been adopted. I was paying to ride horses, drive a jeep, and shoot guns--(1) I definitely couldn't really be Jewish, (2) I could join the army and do it all and get paid at the same time.

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One of the reasons that I ride a motorcycle is Bob Schindler. A very large man, 6'5" tall and 265 lbs., Bob was a hard-hat diver in the Aleutian Islands during WWII. He was down more than a hundred feet when the Japanese sank his tender. Bob made his way to the surface, and despite orders from the United States Government not to pick up anybody in the water for fear it was a Japanese trap, some U.S. Navy ship picked him up. Sue got the telegram from the war department: "We regret to inform you..." while he was recuperating on some island in the Pacific.

Bob, who was a devout atheist, played chess with my dad, an observant Jew, all the time. They had some pretty interesting, and sometimes very heated conversations about G-D while they played.

He is the man who drove me to school for early morning prayers on the back of his Vespa. When we visited him in Florida, to my parents' chagrin and against my dad's wishes, he let me ride it. I was hooked.

It's been many years since I rode to elementary school on the back of that Vespa. More ironic is the fact that I rode to Yeshiva holding my skullcap tightly to my head (it was then that I truly understood the reason men should carry bobby pins with them). I was twelve then, and knew that I would own a scoot as soon as I could. Six years later, I did. No matter what people said, "Jews don't ride motorcycles," or "You're an embarrassment to yourself and to your people," I felt alive on my ride.

Fast-forward twenty eight years, to the National H.O.G. Rally in Asheville, North Carolina.

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Seven thousand bikers stood around before opening ceremonies when I arrived with a couple of members of my H.O.G. chapter. The others with me were not Jewish. I wore my Star of David Motorcycle Club T-shirt, the words encircling a large, blue six-pointed star.

People gawked, nudged each other, and pointed. One man asked me to bring him a beer and a Nazi helmet. I told him that I'd bring him the helmet, with the head of the guy who wore it, still inside.

These weren't locals or 1%ers; every biker there was a member of H.O.G.

Was my shirt offensive? I don't think so, but, like many of us who ride two wheels, I'm often horribly misunderstood.

The opening ceremonies ended, and as we headed out into the parking lot, I heard a woman screaming at her husband, "Look, look, look at that shirt!" I turned, anticipating an attack when she said, "C'mon Irving, look at the shirt!" I couldn't stop laughing, half out of relief that there wasn't going to be a brawl. She wanted to know where she could get the shirt, and she wasn't the only one who asked.

There are plenty of 'raisons d'etre' for a bike club, why not a Jewish club? My father rode a motorcycle in Vienna, until the day the Nazis marched in and took it away from him, and there was a Jewish bike club called Maccabee in Europe in the 30s. It, once again, recalls Shylock's speech in *The Merchant of Venice* ("hath not a Jew eyes ... if you tickle us do we not laugh...").

Suffice it to say that Jewish motorcycle clubs have all the same problems and go through all the same crap

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as every other motorcycle club. This includes what the press writes, and therefore the public's perception of us.

Unlike our ancestors who rode horses out of necessity, we ride because we love it. Not unlike many of these ancestors, we think of ourselves as noble knights, riding into some foray with sword in hand, or rescuing damsels in distress astride our mounts.

That isn't the way it is anymore and, to tell the truth, I haven't seen a dragon since 'Dragon' Goldfarb cruised Kings Highway back in the 60's (he was a guy we used to hang out with) and he was too much fun to be with to slay.

So, how do we, 'The Knights of the Iron Horse' continue doing the good work of the days of yore? We go on myriad runs that support myriad charities. In truth, these are mostly happenings, the charities secondary to the event. Now far be it for me to think that there is anything wrong with happenings. On the contrary, I love 'em, hell, I was at Woodstock. They're great, they're exciting, they bring lots of fun people together, and they raise substantial sums of money for wonderful causes. But, it's not enough!

In October 1999, the Chai (Hebrew for life) Riders—my club, which we jokingly refer to as Mel's Angels—was covered in an article published by *The Forward*, a 102-year old Yiddish newspaper. We rode up to New York's Catskill Mountains one Sunday in August. It was a back-roads ride, not unlike any other club ride, except that we had an unusual destination: a camp for children with either severe learning disabilities or Down's syndrome.

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There were only thirteen or fourteen of us who braved the pouring rain for half the trip upstate and we rode into camp with no idea what to expect. We were directed through the camp to the basketball court, where we parked our bikes.

En masse, the campers began to move toward us. We quickly warned them that the bike's engines were hot and they'd have to wait a while until they could get closer to them.

With these over-active kids bouncing around, we talked about bikes and riding. They drew closer and closer, until we were finally engulfed. What sheer delight! I'm still smiling. These kids were all over our bikes and all over us.

Their conditions prohibited actual riding, but they donned our helmets, in some cases our leathers, and mounted up. Most of the kids had to be lifted onto the bikes, and hundreds of pictures were taken.

Have you ever seen the look on the faces of children who see something for the first time, something that is foreign to them or their environment? Have you ever seen the smile that lights up a face or the glow that remains?

Now picture children with Down's Syndrome, sitting on big old Harleys, wearing helmets, the children's arms stretched forward grasping (or trying to grasp) the handlebars. Picture it!

Had we ridden in at night, the glow on the faces of these kids would've lit up the sky. We spent two or three hours at the camp. We left exhausted and exhilarated. The kids are still talking about it. You want to know something? So are we.

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What did the reporter say about the trip, after interviewing us? “They went to a camp for special children to show off their bikes.”

What did he miss? Did he think we were on a jaunt and just happened upon this camp? We never would have expected this sort of misunderstanding from one of our own. Maybe he should have actually come up to the camp with us and not do an after-the-fact report. He had ridden with us once before in an attempt to uncover the mystery of the Jewish biker, but it seemed to have done little; his words were undoubtedly based on his preconceived notions of bikers in general. In any case we’ll never know.

We have to try harder to make them see past the hooting and the hollering, past the screaming throttles and loud pipes and make them be a part of all the glorious things we do for these children. Make known the good work we do, and show that beyond our “Live To Ride, Ride To Live” motto (which we pronounce “Live To Ride, Ride To Eat”) we also live by the words of William Shakespeare from *Romeo and Juliet*, “...the more I give to thee, the more I have...”

Chapter 1

The Journey Begins heading to Gettysburg

June 2003 was full of rain in the New York area. It broke a hundred-year record, so we were ecstatic when our eight-day motorcycle trip down South began with beautiful sunshine.

My wife Shelly and I were heading to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, meeting old friends from Canada and riding the Blue Ridge Mountains through Southwestern North Carolina, Eastern Tennessee and Kentucky. It was a ride that would keep me thinking: bringing me back to my youth, my faith, my faith in my faith, my family and my beliefs.

You become one with everything around you when you're on a motorcycle; if it's raining, windy, sunny, hot or cold, you can't roll up the windows and escape—you either pull over or you just ride on. If your windshield is low, which ours is, some bugs miss it but don't miss you—trust me, getting whacked in the head by some bug at sixty-five miles an hour or so is not a joy. So there we were, boogying down the highway, bye, bye New Jersey, hello Pennsylvania, singing as we always do: it was a delight!

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It was early in our trip to Gettysburg when I saw the first billboard: “Do you have Christ in Your life?”

I have no idea how old I was when I first saw the sign: ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and Thou Shalt be Saved.’ The old BMT Brighton line went over the Manhattan Bridge and there was the sign, its letters as big as I’d ever seen. I turned to my mom and asked what it meant. “It has nothing to do with us, we don’t believe in Jesus Christ,” she said.

I saw that sign thousands of times, and when I went to High School I wondered about the grammar: Believe on? They must mean believe in! I wonder why no one’s corrected this after all these years? Hey, it was a thought.

The farther we rode into Pennsylvania the more signs and the more billboards there were, and there were crosses. Little crosses, big crosses, white crosses, black crosses, some with flowers around the bases; everywhere I looked there was a cross, or so it seemed. The most predominant was three crosses together; I assumed that they represented ‘The Father’, ‘The Son’ and one for ‘The Holy Spirit.’

The first morning of this year’s trip was mostly route 78, and at highway speeds everything goes by in a rush. Sights and smells all seem to blend into one big blur.

Finally we got off and headed into the town of Gettysburg. There were more churches, more crosses and more signs. I wasn’t afraid, I wasn’t annoyed, I was overwhelmed.

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We pulled into the visitor's center and waited for Bob and Nedda and ten minutes later they pulled into the lot. We bought tickets for the bus tour of Gettysburg and walked across the street to the National Cemetery; it is solemn and quiet, and rightfully so.

There are hundreds of graves marked only with numbered small stones. These are many of the unknown dead; there's no telling how many rotted on the battlefield in the sweltering heat July first, second and third of 1863. Each section is laid out in an arc with a large stone at the head of the arc with the name of the State and the number of men buried there written on it. In the middle is a huge monument on the spot where Abe Lincoln delivered The Gettysburg Address.

A few years before this Bob Lash and I were riding back roads and, just by coincidence, ended up at West Point; that trip made me see Abraham Lincoln in a completely different light. We all know where he stood regarding slavery, but I never read, nor did I ever hear, anything that connected him and the Jews.

"HUA," (pronounced, HOO-aaaah), Rabbi Huerta said in a soft voice, "hua."

The Shul sits high on the side of a cliff, built into the rocks, overlooking the Hudson River. Strange place for the Shul, I thought. You can hardly see it. As a matter of fact if you didn't know that it was there, you'd miss it. It's a modern building with the Luchot HaBrit standing high and proud on its façade. That's what we spotted; that's what made us turn our bikes around and go up the hill to 'check it out.'

We walked in and headed toward the soulful sounds of a saxophone somewhere in the building.

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Immediately to our left was a picture of Abraham Lincoln. How do we know that Abe Lincoln was Jewish? He was shot in the temple (sorry, I couldn't resist)! Neither Bob nor I gave that picture a second thought--maybe we should have.

There were lithographs by Chagall on the wall, and many posters of Jewish women who had made stunning contributions to the world.

We walked down a corridor, hearing the sax getting louder, and at the end of the corridor there he was. The man playing the sax had to be six foot five and two hundred seventy five pounds. He was in the Synagogue, standing on the Bimah, his music resting on the shtender, playing the saxophone.

We stood in the doorway silently waiting for him to finish and when he did, he looked up and we all nodded hello. There was no way we'd have known who he was: Hispanic looking with dark features, salt and pepper hair peeking out from under a black beret perched on his head and his name--Huerta.

He extended his hand. "Huerta," he said, "Rabbi Carlos Huerta."

"You're the Rabbi here?" I asked.

"Hua," he said in a soft voice, and I was sure that he wasn't talking about a girl standing on the corner of Bay Parkway and 86th Street, in Brooklyn snapping her gum, "hua."

"Hi, I'm Cantor Lenny Mandel from Congregation B'nai Israel in Emerson New Jersey," I said, and then introduced my friend Bobby, a barrister from Toronto, Ontario.

"Hua," he said again.

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What began as a beautiful Friday morning with my old friend Bobby and I just going for a motorcycle ride through the back roads of Northern New Jersey and lower New York State ended up as a glorious learning experience.

Bobby and his wife Nedda, who ride with YOW (Yids on Wheels) up in Toronto, came down for a visit, and, as I have two bikes, he brought riding gear down with him and we boogied. The section of route 513 (a one lane road in each direction) we rode is 'light-free' for twelve miles and we continued past route 23, up Union Valley Road to West Milford, New Jersey. From there we rode around Greenwood Lake, New Jersey and then New York, up one of the 17's through Harriman State Park and through the Seven Lakes Road.

Bobby rode my BMW K1200RS, while I was on my Harley Davidson FLHS and we rode, whipping through those roads, ending up on Route 6 when I saw the signpost. We turned, as the sign directed, and continued on an eleven-mile jaunt through military encampments until we got to a concrete barricade. The guard, a ranger sergeant carrying a sub-machine gun, asked us for our licenses. Bob was a bit slow to find his.

"C'mon, c'mon," the now impatient soldier said, "show me your driver's license or a military I.D. card." He already had mine and he prodded Bob again. Bobby looked up at him, and screamed, "I'm a G-D damn ally. For G-D's sake, I'm a Canadian. Do you want to see my health card?" We thought that was pretty funny (sub-machine gun notwithstanding). He finally found his license and the sergeant let us on the base.

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We were at West Point, The United States Military Academy, and Rabbi Huerta stood on the Bimah of the Synagogue in camouflage fatigues, pants bloused into spit shined combat boots, a gold leaf on each lapel which signified his rank-major, and on his beret the insignia of a Jewish Chaplain--the Tablets that Moses brought down with him from Mount Sinai. It was splendiferous and what made it even more so was the fact that the symbol for each of the ten on his beret was done with the letters of the Aleph Bet.

You can see the Cadet Chapel (a West Point landmark building and the Christian House of Worship) the minute you ride in to 'The Point'; it has been in many movies, and stands overlooking the Hudson River. It's one heck of a view.

The interior of the chapel is, well, the interior of a chapel. Magnificent stained glass, huge pipes from the organ and, what looks like one hundred yards of pews. There was a small sign that asked all visitors to say a prayer to G-D and as we walked up the side aisle I said one of the early morning, opening, blessings that is chanted every day in traditional Synagogues. The acoustics are incredible and I suppressed an overwhelming desire to sing out a rousing 'hi ge diggy di,' or 'Etz Chayim He.'

I asked Bob where he thought the Jewish cadets prayed (not knowing that he was thinking the exact thoughts) and we looked in all the small side rooms, concurring that there must be some catacomb where they allow 'Members of the Tribe' to worship their G-D.

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We left the chapel, mounted our bikes and headed down toward the Hudson River when I saw the tablets. Perched on a hill above the Cadet Chapel were the Ten Commandments, written in Hebrew. We turned around, rode up the hill and we were at the Shul. The Shul. You can't imagine what we felt, and Rabbi Huerta was overjoyed to be able to show us around.

"I was born in Brooklyn," he said as we walked. "I'm sure that my name threw you off, but I am Sephardic. As a matter of fact I was ordained in Jerusalem and I'm an observant Jew in this setting of egalitarianism." I couldn't help but think how incredible that was.

"There are two refrigerators, sinks and microwaves--one each for dairy and the other for meat," he continued as we walked, and he gleefully showed us the back yard, cut out of the side of the cliff, where they build a Sukkah every year and will have their first wedding soon.

"There are forty one hundred cadets at West Point," he said, "and thirty five of them are Jewish."

"Forty one hundred?" Bob asked.

"It's the number mandated by Congress," he replied, "and there are about sixty five Cadre, staff and their families here as well."

The Shul was funded and built by some Jewish Cadets who graduated West Point in the 50s, became very successful, and wanted to make sure that there was a House of Worship for Jews to pray in while students at 'The Point.' They didn't want the Jewish cadets relegated to some room, and to their delight the Shul is 'Standing Room Only' on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

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It's a thrill to see the names, most of them famous, household names: Eisenhower Hall, The Patton and MacArthur monuments, Doubleday Field and, of course, the Lichtenberg Tennis Center (Herb (USMA '55) Lichtenberg and Alan (USMA '51) Lichtenberg). Unbeknownst to most, they also funded the floor and the new sound systems in the Catholic Church and 'The Cadet Chapel.'

It was a wonderful day but Rabbi Huerta had to go teach a Hebrew class, so we headed for the door. I told him that we'd like to come up one Erev Shabbat to daven with them.

"Hua," he said, 'hua," which means H-heard, U-understood, A-acknowledged.

Abe Lincoln's picture? Well, 'honest Abe' certainly was not a Member of the Tribe, no sireee. He was however, the President who abolished the military law that in order to be a Chaplain in the military one had to be of good Christian character.

Thanks Abe, you lived up to your namesake, our father Abraham.

As important as Abraham Lincoln was to the United States, he made a difference in equality on many levels: this one heretofore unknown to me.

As I stood looking up at Lincoln's monument in Gettysburg, I thought about the trip to 'The Point' and a smile crossed my lips. I wondered if any of the boys who died here had ever even seen a Jew. The fact that they hated Jews was automatic and probably for no real reason.

A song from Rodgers and Hammerstein's South Pacific played in my head. This song was written, deleted,

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put back in and deleted again. Mr. Rodgers and Mr. Hammerstein had to make a choice as to the offensive nature of the song although it wasn't offensive: it was pointed, truthful, and way ahead of its time. There was fear that it would cause riots and bad sentiment toward the play. They made the choice to keep it in and to hell with those who it pissed off. I sang under my breath:

You've got to be taught to hate and fear.
You've got to be taught from year to year.
It's got to be drummed in your dear little ear.
You've got to be carefully taught.

You've got to be taught to be afraid
Of people whose eyes are oddly made,
And people whose skin is a different shade.
You've got to be carefully taught.

You've got to be taught before it's too late,
before you are six or seven or eight,
to hate all the people your relatives hate.
You've got to be carefully taught.

It was time to take the tour of the battlefields.

I was never a big history buff; my teachers taught it without flair, without energy, and without excitement. Our guide here was great, and the battle came alive as he spoke: Cemetery Hill, Cemetery Ridge, Seminary Ridge, Little Round Top, The Peach Orchard, Pickett's charge. The feelings on the battlefield were palpable.

I thought of this insanity and an old folk song, Two Brothers, ran through my head.

The two brothers were us, brothers from the North

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in blue and brothers from the South in gray. They were young, and each marched under a gorgeous blue sky to, well they never knew where to. The soldiers had wives, girlfriends and mothers waiting for them to come home from the war. The colors they wore represented their feelings; they wore bright colors if their boys were coming back alive and if not they wore black.

That's the way I remember it and I hadn't thought of that song for more than thirty years, or the lines from Lee Hayes' *Wasn't That a Time*.

...Brave men who died at Gettysburg
Now lie in soldier's graves,
But there they stemmed the slavery tide...

We stood where the Confederate army began its charge, where they shelled the Bluecoats for hours and heard their cries. Most of these soldiers were kids--flag bearers and buglers as young as eight and ten. It was a crime, a great tragedy, a travesty, but most certainly a crime.

I don't remember where I saw it, heard it, or read it, but I thought about these words:

"It is the soldier, not the reporter, who has given us the freedom of the press. It is the soldier, not the poet, who has given us the freedom of speech. It is the soldier, not the campus organizer, who gives us the freedom to demonstrate. It is the soldier who salutes the flag, who serves beneath the flag, and whose coffin is draped by the flag, who allows the protester to burn the flag."
Freedom is NOT Free!

So where were the Jews during the Civil War?
Fighting along with everybody else!

CHAPTER 7

Swastikas throughout my life

These stories deviate from this ride, but not from the ride I took my whole life, neither from the ride my mind traveled riding these back roads.

I think about all the 'bikers' sporting all of that hate shit and it really pisses me off. Aside from the fact that I'm an old time-left wing-Jewish liberal who marched in Washington, was a member of the New York Sane Society, a 'peacenik' and all that goes with it was irrelevant. I hate, hate, I mean I really hate it. It angers me and scares me at the same time. What myth do these guys think they are perpetuating? True, some of them are truly scary characters--people to be feared--but some are accountants who go back to work on Monday after riding their Harleys fifty miles with the boys on Sunday.

I truly understand why the early 1%ers wore swastikas. It wasn't to show anyone that they were anti-establishment, it wasn't a 'screw you,' the swastikas they wore were trophies.

The first motorcycle gang, the outlaw bikers as it were, were a group of disgruntled World War II veterans who felt totally out of sync with mainstream society. They wore denim vests with the name of their gang boldly

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displayed on its back, and the plethora of patches on the front of their vests stood for myriad things.

There might've been a '13' or an 'M' which stood for marijuana, a '1%' patch which means that 1% of all people who ride motorcycles are outlaws, or a big '1' which means the same. There are many patches worn by bikers today and most of them are laughable; the one that isn't is the swastika.

Don't think for a moment that I believe that those men, the soldiers back from WWII, were Nazis or Nazi sympathizers: not at all. They were American soldiers home from abroad, many of them heroes. They were the victors of a horrible war, and we all know that "...to the victors belong the spoils."

The swastikas and the iron crosses that they displayed proudly on their chests were just that: spoils of war, trophies, and medals that they themselves ripped from the uniforms of their defeated foes. Even the German helmets that they wore when riding were trophies. They didn't have to wear them; there were no helmet laws back then.

None of these trophies was any different from the scalps that the Indians shaved off of their enemies' heads and displayed proudly on their belts. These were badges of courage and of honor. They spoke silent volumes of the deeds of these warriors who rode into battle, stood face to face with the enemy and won. They were their Silver Star, their Navy Cross, and their Medal of Honor.

Well it's not the 1940s, and those 'trophies' from WW II, the swastika, the iron cross and the German army helmets are still vivid reminders of an horrific time. They

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remind us of an era where insanity reigned and where murder, torture and greed were the credo. It was a time when a megalomaniac, who fanned the flames of hate until that hate ravaged everything in its path, used the swastika as his symbol. The swastika adorned every Nazi flag and the uniform of every soldier. It was raised high in the air on the banners that led the armies as they marched, and was even worn as an armband by young children.

The 1%er's have always worn them and still do, but it's no longer a badge of honor, nor is it a trophy. No, now it is a 'screw you'. It's a way of showing the world that they don't care about anything, and it's as subtle as a brick thrown through a plate glass window. So what the hell is the non 1%er doing wearing a swastika? Does he think it's cool, that he looks tough, that it instills fear in people, or is he just stupid?

A bunch of guys from my H.O.G. chapter were at Americade a few years ago when I had a problem with my bike that needed more skill to fix than I possessed. There was a kid, nineteen or twenty years old, hanging out at the motorcycle shop and he sported a swastika on his 'brain-bucket.' When I asked him why it was there he told me that he thought it was 'cool.' Cool, wow! He had absolutely no understanding of what the swastika stood for, and we had a half of an hour conversation so that he could be enlightened.

For those of you who don't live on the East Coast, Americade takes place in Lake George, N.Y., which is a gorgeous resort town in the Adirondack Mountains about three and a half hours north of N.Y.C. We're not talking about the deep South where the Klan has many minions,

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the Klan in this area hasn't a bang; actually up there one can hardly hear a whimper. Yet there are vendors at this rally, and most other rallies as well, selling hate. These vendors aren't sanctioned by or even part of, the event, but set up shop on the outlying fringes of the rallies anyway. The problem is that plenty of bikers buy the crap that these people sell.

At one of these fringe vendor areas we walked into a booth where, among the helmet stickers that he was selling were swastikas. I asked him why and he said: "Hey, it's America." Yes, he is right, it is America, and he was free to sell swastikas, and I was free to walk away--which I did.

Not only was he a member of my H.O.G. chapter, he was also a part owner in the restaurant where we met. I inquired about having the meetings elsewhere. The director of the chapter told me to "stop grandstanding ...the members of the chapter were there to have fun, and if you bring up this swastika stuff..." Needless to say I never set foot in that restaurant again. That member wanted to go to Alaska with us--no shot!

There are many beautiful bikes up at Americade and a favorite pastime is to stand and watch them as they pass. One beautiful Harley Heritage, sporting a brand new paint job, stopped at a light. Both the rider and his passenger were wearing brand new leathers, his gold Rolex peeking out of the sleeve of his jacket, and the German helmet that didn't quite cover his longish gray hair had a swastika on it.

Why in G-D's name was he wearing a swastika? Why would any reasonably intelligent, rational person

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wear a swastika in this day and age? Hmmm, reasonably intelligent, yes, that's the key.

This is the guy you've gotta grab by the lapels (or the balls if you dare). This wasn't the young kid at the shop. This was a forty plus year old who knew what the swastika was and who was only one generation away from serving in WWII, fighting against everything that it stood for.

The problem is that he isn't alone; there are plenty of bikers still wearing swastikas and they all have to be made to understand that the swastika isn't a trophy anymore.

The people at Kuryakin hired a technician who brazenly wore a short sleeve shirt so that the swastika--tattooed on his forearm--was in plain sight.

What am I missing?

Do I sound pissed off? I hope so, because I am! I'm tired of hearing racial and ethnic slurs and seeing banners of hate. I'm tired of the apathy and I'm tired of watching so many of you turn away as if it doesn't exist or isn't there. Here's how I feel about it: if they can stand up displaying their symbols of hatred and bigotry unabashedly, why the hell are you still sitting?

In 1985 my house was the target of what I thought was a 'mischief night' prank. Mischief night is the night before Halloween and in many neighborhoods there are kids who cover the trees with toilet paper, throw eggs, scatter garbage and other annoying but not harmful or hateful things. Despite the negligible nature of these acts we always left the outside lights on all around the house on mischief night.

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My family and I drove up the block that evening to grab a bite to eat and pick up a leather coat that Shelly had ordered. There were a dozen or so kids hanging out at the top of our street, and I thought about turning around and getting the coat the next day but didn't. The trees on the block next to ours were festooned with toilet paper when we returned, and I smiled, albeit with tongue in cheek, wondering what our street would look like. There was plenty of toilet paper there as well and as we drove down the street and approached our house I saw what looked like smearing on the windows.

"It was our turn," I thought, and it would have been the first time our house had been egged in the ten years that we lived here.

Throwing raw eggs at a house was a major mischief night prank as eggs stuck and were a real pain to wipe off after they dried. All six of the front windows were hit and both front doors, but as I got closer I saw that the white markings dripping down the windows and doors were not eggs: they were swastikas spray painted onto each surface. I was burning mad but my family was terrified.

As I walked around the back of the house, there was a swastika painted on my deck and, in letters three feet high on the sliding glass doors that led from our kitchen onto our deck, the word JEW. I called the police but before they arrived I grabbed a baseball bat and headed up the street. My neighbors were already out and, for the most part they were armed as well. I knocked on every door asking the kids if they heard or saw anything but they all said no. Most of them lied and most of them were Jewish.

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One can of spray paint was tossed into a sewer up the block and I rang the bell at the house and questioned the oldest sibling: he was sixteen. I knew he was lying by the way he averted his eyes when he answered me. I told him that he'd tell the truth to the police when they pulled him out of class when he was at school the next day.

His mom was pretty upset with me but I didn't care, I was seething. I walked out of his house and his mom asked me to come back; I did and he told me the truth.

To this day I hear my son crying himself to sleep that night, wondering when 'they' were going to come back and get us, and I hear myself praying that my parents wouldn't decide to take a drive out to visit us and see the horrors that they had fled forty six years earlier. I thanked G-D that I hadn't caught them in the act or after the fact as I would have been arrested and thrown in jail for, at least, assault with a deadly weapon.

The details aren't important anymore nor are the names of the kids who painted my house. Yes, the kids, neither of whom was Jewish, were caught (I knew who they were thirty minutes after I was home) and one of the parents came over to our house. He was completely embarrassed and at a loss for words. The other boy's mother called crying hysterically on the phone. She couldn't understand how her son who did so many good, charitable things could do such a thing. I tried to console her but Shelly wouldn't hear of it; "fuck them," she screamed.

"Fuck them, let them go to jail, let them suffer as we're suffering:" these words from a woman, my wife, who doesn't curse.

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So after living a vicarious hell through the eyes of my parents and their peers, we too felt the whips of hatred flaying our skin and burning our own eyes.

The swastika: may those who wear it and believe in it suffer a painful, tortuous death.

Looking out the window from our table in Hardee's we could see that this North Carolina storm wasn't going to go away, so we donned our rain suits, walked past the stares of the three old-timers, waved goodbye to our new friends and left.

It wasn't raining terribly hard as we left Hardee's and 221 opened up into a four lane highway. That's when the sky opened up, just as we hit that highway. I don't mean that the sun broke through; I mean it started to pour, the wind kicked up, and I couldn't see five feet in front of my bike. I slowed down hoping it would make it easier--no such luck.

They're getting me, I thought. It's a forced baptism. Could they actually do that to me? I laughed out loud.

It's the story of the man who, drunk, and stumbling through the woods comes upon a preacher baptizing people in the river. He walks into the water and bumps into the preacher who asks: "Are you ready to find Jesus?" The drunk answers: "Yes, I am." With that the preacher grabs him and dunks him. He pulls him up and asks: "Brother, have you found Jesus?" "No, I haven't," the drunk replies.

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Shocked, the preacher dunks him again, this time longer.

He pulls him out and repeats the question, "Have you found Jesus, my brother?"

Again the drunk answers no.

At his wits end, the Preacher throws the drunk down into the water, holding him there until his arms and legs are flailing.

The preacher asks: "tell me please, for the love of G-D tell me that you've found Jesus?"

The drunk, spitting water from his mouth while trying to dry his eyes, catches his breath and says "Are you sure this is where he fell in?"

It rained and rained and rained some more. Tropical storm Bill's leading edge, no doubt. Where was Noah's ark when we needed it?

When the waters overran the Mississippi a few years ago there were floods that wiped out entire communities. A Rabbi was standing in front of his Synagogue, water up to his waist when a rowboat pulled up.

"C'mon Rabbi, get in," the man in the boat hollered.

"No," the Rabbi replied, "I have been a devout Jew my entire life. G-D will save me."

About three hours later, the Rabbi was still standing in front of his Synagogue, with the water now up to his shoulders.

"Rabbi, get in, get in the boat" the man in the boat hollered again.

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*“No,” the Rabbi again replied, “I have been a devout Jew my entire life. G-D will save me.”
Another three hours passed, the water covered the entire Synagogue, and the Rabbi drowned.
The Rabbi stood in front of the Holy Tribunal, faced G-D and said: “I have been a devout Jew my entire life G-D, I followed every commandment, why didn’t You save me.”
G-D sat, looked straight at the Rabbi and said: “Shmuck, I sent the rowboat twice!”*

Although everybody wants to ride in the sunshine, Shelly is a real trooper, and knows what it means to get caught in the rain. The first couple of years that I had my ‘big’ bike she only took short rides with me, but since 1993 we’ve taken long trips every year. It helps that the new bike (I forsook Harley for a 2002 Honda Gold-Wing last year) is unbelievably comfortable and has a six CD changer in the trunk--yup, it’s got a trunk.

We take forty or fifty CDs with us and she humors me by ‘allowing’ me to listen to The Allman Brothers, The Grateful Dead or some of my more esoteric music along with her choices. I usually change the CDs every morning and I throw in a couple that I know she won’t love but at seventy five miles an hour what’s she gonna do, jump off?

The only CD she really hates is by Tom Waites. I love it but she might actually jump if she had to listen to him for forty five minutes--believe me Tom, you’re on my changer whenever she isn’t on the bike.

I know that you’re going to re-read the piece where you just read that I ride a ‘wing’ now. Don’t bother; it’s true. I sold my ‘89 FLHS and bought a new Harley Ultra in

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2002. I hated it. I was on the phone to Harley Davidson twice a week, to no avail. Here's the letter I sent them regarding their bike.

"In May of this year I bought a new (2002) Ultra from Liberty Harley in Rahway, New Jersey (I've been going there since they opened, their 'lead tech' is a very close friend of mine, and I've never had a problem with them). After a couple of days of riding I called to complain about the heat emanating from the engine and was told: "You'll get used to it."

That wasn't a good enough answer for me but they said that it would probably subside after 'break-in'; it didn't. I called Harley (Milwaukee) many times and got the same 'no-answer'. I removed the lowers but still the heat was unbearable.

In the two and one half months that we've owned this bike we've put on about 4700 miles, but I have never hated a motorcycle, in all my thirty seven years of riding, until now.

We pulled off the highway in the Green Mountains of Vermont and my legs were scalded. We rode into N.Y.C. for dinner one evening and, because we had to sit in the Holland Tunnel for five minutes, the heat was so intense that my wife couldn't bear it. It actually burned her legs.

This exquisitely beautiful machine is being sold as I write this letter and I, who have ridden nothing but Harley, BSA, Triumph or Norton since 1969 (when I got my first HD--a 1946 flathead with a tank shift and suicide clutch) am contemplating buying a Honda Gold Wing. I sold an FLHS that I bought brand new in 1989 so that I could buy this bike. The FL was a one hundred four cubic inch stroker and we rode her for more than sixty five thousand

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miles. My wife, who has been riding with me (two up) for 16 years wanted more comfort, a radio, etc so where else would I go? I bought the Ultra.

Don't think that the '89 FL was my only bike. Since 1989 I also owned a: '74 sporty, an '89 tricked out springer, a '94 FXDWG, a '70 Triumph Bonneville chopper and a '51 Panhead chopper.

I am amazed that you would market a bike like the Ultra; more so when the techs at HD in Milwaukee told me that they had myriad complaints about the heat it throws off. Has your own mystique rubbed off on your engineering staff to the point that you just don't care?

I must tell you that of the three major touring bikes, the Wing, the BMW K1200LT and the Ultra, yours is certainly the most beautiful and that's it. Out of those three bikes the Ultra comes in a distant ninth.

My '89 FL didn't emit ten percent of the heat that this new ultra does and the rhetoric about the engine being larger and there being one third more surface area doesn't mean much when you have to put up with that kind of heat.

My wife and I were in Naples, Florida this past April when we rented a 2002 Road King. In the heat of Florida, in four miles of bumper to bumper traffic going to Sanibel Island, and riding at ninety five mph through Alligator Alley we didn't feel anywhere near this kind of heat. We loved the bike, and it was this ride that forced me to buy the Ultra. I got off the bike and told the dealer that it had been the most expensive ride of my life.

He, visibly shaken, began walking around the bike looking for signs of damage.

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“No, no,” I said, “this is gonna cost me twenty three grand for a new Ultra.”

It's been a while since I began this letter and since then I bought a new Honda Gold-Wing, and it is fabulous. It is quicker, faster, smoother, better engineered, better finished and handles a zillion times better than the Ultra ever could—even in the dreams of your engineers the Ultra couldn't come up to snuff against the wing, and in the three weeks since I bought it my odometer reads twenty six hundred fifty miles.

If your concept of selling motorcycles is to cater to the crowd that is only interested in 'garage-candy', I think that you are doing very well.

It's time you looked at those of us who are 'bikers' yet part of the mainstream, and manufactured a product both beautiful and utile.

I've never pictured myself without a Harley in my garage, but the reality is that the three bikes I now own are a Wing, a BMW K1200RS and a sport bike for back-roads and the track.

Thank you for your ears (or in this case, eyes-- actually I have a chopper in my garage as well).”

The smell of fresh cut grass brought me back to the moment at hand, riding down route 221. That aroma is one of my favorites and it was that smell, interspersed with honeysuckle and jasmine that enticed my olfactory senses along 221. I always associated the sweet smell of freshly cut grass with my summers in the 50s, away from the city, when I was in camp. That's where I met my Canadian pal Bobby some fifty years earlier.

CHAPTER 10

The 2001 Ride To Montreal

Since Shelly and I did a ride to Nova Scotia in 1999, and I couldn't come up with a really good reason for doing another Maritime ride, I started to look elsewhere for this ride in 2001.

Lancaster County, Pennsylvania sounded like a nice ride. Go to Gettysburg, see the battlegrounds of the Civil War, spend some time in Amish country, ride down to the Smokeys, or up to Cleveland to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame (c'mon now, is there any other reason to go to Cleveland--just kidding--no, wait, doesn't John Rocker pitch for the Indians now? Maybe he's got some things to say about the folks there!). It seemed that I couldn't decide on a destination that excited me.

"What about Montreal," I thought. I'd spent eight to ten weeks a year for eleven summers in a camp about seventy five miles north of Montreal in the Laurentian Mountains, and a week or two every winter in Montreal. Forty years, hmmm, forty years since I'd been back. It was a done deal; we were going to go to Montreal.

We planned a seven-day trip. Montreal, up to the Laurentians, back roads through Southwestern Quebec to Ottawa, Toronto, Niagara Falls, upstate New York and home. It was a bit optimistic for so short a trip but we

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decided to go for it. So at nine in the morning, Saturday June 30th, we packed the bike and headed north.

We decided to boogie up to Montreal, stopping as little as possible, so that we could spend most of our time riding in Canada.

Saturday June 30, 2001 was a gorgeous day: eighty-plus degrees, bright sunshine and, for a while, very little humidity. We rode onto the New York State Thruway, with huge smiles on both of our faces as the wheels rolled over the pavement, singing I'm on the road again by Canned Heat. A few minutes passed and we felt a raindrop and then another; what a way to start a trip. I've been riding for many years and although I ride in the rain, I don't love it.

I looked up at the sky and all I saw was blue. I'm still wondering where the drops came from because that was all the rain there was, so I smiled, set the thumbscrew and purred along. Actually my 'Thunder-Headers' don't purr, they growl, a low, throaty growl, but that's purring to me, no kitten sitting on my lap could sound sweeter (no pun intended--although knowing bikers like I do, I'm sure most of you have huge grins on your faces).

A three mile backup on the Thruway didn't help the ride but the exit sign, Bethel, New York, had me singing again.

I came upon a child of God
He was walking along the road
and I asked him where are you going?
And this he told me.

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I'm going on down to Yasgur's farm
I'm gonna join in a rock and roll band,
I'm gonna camp out on the land
and try and get my soul free.

Then can I walk beside you
I have come here to lose the smog.
And I feel to be a cog
in something turning.

Well maybe it is just the time of year,
or maybe it's the time of man,
And I don't know who I am
but you know life is for learning.

By the time we got to Woodstock
we were half a million strong,
and everywhere there was song and celebration.
And I dreamed I saw the bombers
riding shotgun in the sky,
And they were turning into butterflies
above our nation ...

**We are stardust, we are golden and we've got to get
ourselves back to the garden

I sang the whole song, twice. It was a different
world and I realized, at that moment, that our trip to
Canada was going to take me back many, many years to
a much simpler time.

Summer camp in the 50s was a time of folk
singing, a time of swimming in the lake, of ingenuity (or

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is that ingenuousness?), of raising the flags each morning (both Canadian and American), of sing-downs, of childhood friendships that you swore would never end, of kick the can, and ring-a-leevio, of run-sheep-run, Johnny on the pony and hide and go seek. There were socials and talent shows, canoe trips, bonfires, raids on the girl's side of the camp...hmmm I could go on and on and on.

We took a 40 minute pit stop at the top of the Thruway, were rejuvenated, mounted up and headed north.

I've been to Americade many times but hadn't ridden north of Lake George since 1969, so the ride brought waves of nostalgia as I recalled the places my parents took me as we drove up to Canada every summer in the 1950s (don't get the idea that I was this "rich little kid" who was sent to camp every summer. On the contrary, my mom saw an ad in a local paper for a kiddie-land director in a camp in Canada, applied and got the job. I went for free).

We got to the border, were asked some fairly innocuous questions by the Canadian customs agent and rode off into Quebec. My heart was pounding as we rode over the Champlain Bridge into downtown Montreal.

We rode around for about 15 minutes and pulled up to the door of the hotel. Sounds like the norm? Not in this case. It was the evening of Canada Day, and the week of the Montreal Jazz Festival. Hotel rooms were non-existent. My guardian angel intervened and we got lucky: a room for two nights in a wonderful hotel that even had an indoor garage.

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The face on the doorman was priceless as we pulled up and unloaded the bike (he thought we'd stopped to ask directions). It's not that there aren't plenty of bikes there, there are. There just aren't many fat, old, colorful, noisy Harleys, ridden by an old hippie and his wife. What made this even funnier was that the front door of the hotel we pulled up to was that of The Ritz Carlton.

A Jewish boys thoughts, motorcycle riding through the Christian world.

From Cross To Cross--The musings of a Jewish boy riding his motorcycle through the Christian world

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