

The Spring of 1982

I was a Navy Corpsman, all of 21 years old. I was a bad ass. I had a 1972 Harley-Davidson Sportster with a huge front rake and a seat from hell. Padding? We don't need no stinking padding!

I'm not sure if it was the nickel plated Harley that drew me to a different crowd, or if the crowd found me. But I started hanging out with a different group - mostly people like me - wanna be "thugs", *pretending* that we were bad-asses.

We weren't. But we did start hanging out a lot together. First there were just three of us, then seven, then twelve. We met almost every weekend somewhere in the Florida panhandle and went for rides - sometimes short [poker runs](#) and sometimes longer trips - generally not longer than a long day.

Eventually someone suggested we do a longer ride. After a few weeks of planning and talking we finally decided to ride to Oregon. From Florida. We were idiots.

First, I never spent that much time on a bike before. Second, I didn't have a bike made for touring (and oddly enough, now that I do, I rarely take it for long rides!). My bike had one purpose (that's what the guy I bought it from told me anyway!). My bike was built to get me laid.

As it turns out, the bike was much better at long trips than anything else.

Anyway, so we got together over a few weeks and laid out this ambitious plan - we would ride East across Florida to I-95, up to Atlanta, then West to Oregon. Yep. That's about all the planning we did. (We went east to Atlanta to meet up with the brother of one of the riders - why he couldn't ride West to meet the rest of us, I can't remember).

So we figured it would take two weeks, and that we would average 500 miles a day. It took three weeks, and we averaged about 300 miles a day. If not for a very good friend, I would have been AWOL (I was in the Navy, remember?)

This might be a good time to admit that this story is not 100% accurate. It's taken from a 25 year old memory, and I've retold the story so many times I can't remember where I "fudged" things a bit. It is mostly true though - the trip, the gunplay, the calf, and the cops all did happen. Where, exactly, things happened, I can't be sure in every case. For a lot of reasons. I was young, reckless, and invincible. I didn't worry near as much about things as I do now :). I didn't have GPS, Google Maps, or a cell phone. This was *a long time ago* 😊

So we left on a brisk morning - gloves, jackets, leather chaps, no helmet (I was invincible, remember?). Huge goggles. Scarf around the head. On a 650 pound raked out Harley. Oh yeah, I looked like a bad-ass. All 140 pounds of me.

Probably 8 of us had Harley's (this would account for most of the extra week the trip took). A couple guys had Honda's or some other rice-burner bike. Nobody had a BMW (none of us could afford them then, and BMW wasn't much interested in financing anyone like us at the time - I know!)

But we were all bad-asses. We all wore the same black T-Shirt that read "Heading for trouble" on the front in large block letters, and "It wasn't me" on the back. Oh yeah - VERY cool.

We all carried basically the same things - a pup tent, sleeping bag, some food, extra clothes (not a lot of them though - we bought new underwear and shirts along the way - none of us had the room for a lot of "stuff"). We all carried beer. Just because you never know.

And most of us carried some type of weapon. These were the Wild West days in the US - back before computers kept all of the perverts in their mother's basements. In the old days, they actually went out into the sunlight. Some level of protection was deemed a good idea.

So off we go (finally, right?) into the dawn. Riding east. Into the sun. Brilliant. Five hours riding into the rising sun. So far, we are geniuses.

In Jacksonville, Florida we had the first bike die. Yes, a Harley - but bad 1980's Harley's really isn't what this post is about (though it will seem like it). We coasted into a Harley dealership and waited for the truck and trailer to bring in our friend's bike. It had a "wait three days for parts" problem. We discussed it and decided we needed to keep moving on. The guy with the dead bike was just left behind. He wasn't the last. He might be the luckiest.

But now it's almost midnight. And I have a big day tomorrow, and a huge weekend in front of me. Tomorrow is the Battle of Flowers parade. Third largest parade in the country. The city is basically closed. Saturday is the King William's parade and fair. I have friends coming over. I need to complete a code review of a LOT of code by Sunday.

So it may be a few days before you get part two. I seriously doubt part two will be the last part. This is a long ride - Pensacola, FL to Atlanta to Seattle (I know - Washington State wasn't in the plan) to Eugene, Oregon (where a cow was born). From there, all the way down the west coast to San Diego (where I had lived for some time before this trip). Then almost the entire length of Interstate 10 from the West coast all the way to the Florida panhandle. The US is large. Very large if you are on a ten year old Harley Chopper with no seat padding to speak of.

So look for part two in a few days. Once the story is complete, I'll combine it into one post. Right now I would rather just share a bit of it at a time. It brings back some of the memories that way, and it gives me time to reflect on what I might want to not share. I have no idea where any of my other riders are anymore. One of them could be a Governor or something. I don't want to embarrass anyone besides myself!

[The Spring of 1982 - Part Two](#)

This is Part Two. Part one can be found [here](#).

So we left off as we lost our first rider in Jacksonville.

We moved north, to Atlanta, where we met up with the brother of one of "our gang". This guy was a huge, furry, biker looking SOB. He was the only one of us that lived the role, instead of just acting it.

His name was "Tiny". That's all I can remember him being called. He was at least 300 pounds. He rode an odd bike - it was a Harley, somewhere underneath. But mostly it looked like someone spun you in circles for ten minutes then had you look through a kaleidoscope. It was bizarre. He had crap glued all over it. Peacock feathers, coins, and poker chips. The entire bike was covered in one of them.

And it would cause us trouble. There are just some places you are better off keeping a low profile.

We stayed in Atlanta that day, and slept in a house. On a floor. I would miss that floor soon enough.

The next morning we rose bright and early. We intended to hit the rode my 4-5AM and beat the horrid Atlanta traffic (even then). One bike wouldn't start. We waited while the Harley dealership picked it up and looked at it. It took several hours. We finally left Atlanta at about 11am. The bike had been fixed, so we were once again a team of twelve.

Twelve people riding bikes in 1982 were pretty much considered "bikers" or "a gang". We were treated like it. Sometime for the better (traffic seemed to melt out of our way) and sometimes for the worse (in west Georgia we were not allowed to eat inside a cafe - they made us eat at the tables out back). The phrase "motorcycle enthusiast" hadn't been invented yet, I don't think. Even though we had a lawyer, two doctors, a respiratory therapist (me) and a couple of cardio-pulmonary tech's in our "gang". I hardly fault people for not feeling comfortable around us - we were a very odd lot.

Anyway, I think we pushed to just east of St. Louis before we decided to pull over for the night. We stopped at a picnic area, pitched our pup tents, and had a couple (warm) beers. We were getting ready for bed. We had a rather large fire going (in a well-designed pit, I might add).

We were all beat. We probably were sleeping before 9PM. Sometime in the middle of the night we were aroused by a loudspeaker. The local cops had found us, and they weren't happy we were there. By three AM they had driven us back out onto the highway. At best we had 5 hours of sleep. Why they didn't want us in tents on the side of the road I don't know. We'll have the same experience again, and again. We were not hurting anything. We just were not welcome. But it would be another three days or so before we really got into trouble with the cops - and before the cops really saved our asses. Someone could have gone to jail. Hell, all of us pretty

much could have gone to jail. Discharging firearms to the tune of over 70 rounds total in just seconds is somewhat frowned upon.

We found out over the next few days that no matter how large this country was, there just wasn't enough room in it for a bunch of "bikers". Time and time again we were told to "keep moving". Time and time again we moved out after just a few hours sleep. You might think this would cause us to make good time. It didn't. We were tired. We were sore. We were even a bit bitter. We weren't having a lot of fun. Arguments started, people got edgy. Little things pissed people off.

By the time we got to Idaho, it was just a matter of time before we got into trouble. Trouble comes soon enough.

It is apparent to me now that truckers and bikers were not intended to utilize the same roadways. We would meet our trucker *friend* the next morning.

This concludes part two of what I am now just calling a "multi-part" post. It could be one more part, or three more parts. I'm not even sure. There is still a lot to tell - still nothing real significant about our serious involvement with the cops. You don't know what happens with the trucker. You don't know why 8-10 people, including a couple of cops, started firing wildly in what is best described as a melee. To this day I am not sure what caused it. I think it had something to do with "Tiny" and the trucker's girl (a big old thing). But it got really ugly really fast - and it ended just about as quickly. It's not really that significant, except it lends some suspense to the story. Honestly, I am surprised that with all the machismo we had we only had a firearms problem once on this trip.

Of course, the fact that we all left our firearms in Idaho probably had something to do with that.

Really now - part three will wait for a few days. One at least.

[The Spring of 1982 - Addendum \(not part three - call it 2.5\)](#)

This is part 2.5 of a multi part post. Part one is [here](#). Part two is [here](#).

I was asked about the diner incident. This is already going to be a long story, so I'll try not to give you examples of things that happened unless I also am going to provide details (read that as, "I wish I would not have mentioned the diner").

In any case, we were on the Interstate, and needed gas. We had some basic rules - if anyone needs gas, everyone gets gas. If any needs a potty break, we all take a potty break. So we pulled off into a two gas station town.

It was two hours since breakfast. Tiny was hungry the (rules were modified after we realized Tiny would eat every two hours). After we gassed up and used the restrooms, Tiny pulled across the street to a small local diner. Our bikes were all across the street - in the gas station parking lot. (Here's another thing - gas stations don't like a bunch of motorcycles pulling up either. They don't buy much gas, they generally hang around a lot longer than a car (so people can stretch) and unlike someone in a car, they can't take a bunch of crap with them to munch on).

There was a sign on the diner. It said something like, "Bikers are not welcome". I am not sure Tiny could read.

We followed him in and there was an older couple seated that were without a doubt in charge - but there were a couple of younger people actually cooking and serving.

"Alice!" the old man suddenly shouted. He was sitting at a table by the kitchen, smoking a pipe.

The girl from behind the counter came running (almost literally). The old man said something to her and she came over to us and said she was sorry, but that they were closed.

Did I mention Tiny was hungry? This looked like a one-diner town, and Tiny wasn't listening to "no".

Tiny had a menu in his hand, and he ordered. The girl looked from him to the older man. Finally the older man gave a motion with his head toward the back. The girl led us to some tables outside (hard wooden picnic tables - great - the chairs inside were at least padded). She said she was sorry, but they were going to "mop up" inside.

The food ended up being good, although I wonder now if they had spit in it. Since then, I've never eaten where someone doesn't want me.

And that's pretty much the diner story. Nothing amazing, which is why I didn't go into a lot of detail before.

Part three on Monday (with any luck).

[The Spring of 1983 - Part 3](#)

(Sorry for all the typos in the initial post of this part - I was watching the Spurs win against the Denver Nuggets, and posted before I edited. Bummer !)

This is part 3 of a multi part post. Part one is [here](#). Part two is [here](#). Part 2.5 is [here](#).

OK, I want to get the gunplay out of the way now, since it's kind of a loss-leader -hey - I warned you of that earlier!

Anyway, yes, the cops really found over 70 rounds, and yes, the police were involved. Police and State Trooper, in fact.

We pulled off a dirt/gravel road in Idaho, looking to get far enough away from the highway that we wouldn't get kicked out again by the police. We were dead-tired, and were looking for a place we could camp for an entire day. Two nights in the same place is *exactly* what we all needed. Time to buy ice, and have a cold beer, and have some fun for a change, instead of arguing and getting pushed around.

We road about a mile up the road when we saw a huge windmill towering over a dilapidated RV. NOT a mobile home - but one of those little rounded silver travel trailers that were popular back in the 60's and 70's.

There was the skinniest man I had ever seen sitting in the middle of the "yard" on a folding steel chair. He had a tall boy in his hand, and a dog lying in the shadow his chair caused. When we pulled up he smiled a huge smile, which was proof enough that he had no teeth, or he had left them inside the trailer.

He was so tanned that I could not tell at first if he was white, black, Indian, Hispanic, or just *dirty*.

Tiny (who somehow had appointed himself as the Alpha-Biker) was first to turn his bike off, dismount and approach the man. The man was still smiling ear to ear. In the back of my mind I heard banjo music (*Deliverance* popped into my mind).

Tiny and another guy talked to the old man for a few minutes and Tiny came back to us and explained that the old man would let us camp in his "yard" for a couple days in exchange for some bottled water, and a half-dozen Tall Boy's each day.

It seemed like a good deal. As some of us started making our camp, a few others rode back to town to get beer, ice, water, and food. They were going to get *some kind of meat* we could cook over a campfire.

While they were gone, the rest of us put up a circle of pup tents around the spot that would become our campfire - our *city center*. We were about 200 feet from the trailer, and about 50 feet

from where the old guy sat. He didn't move for the hour or so we spent pitching tents and building a fire pit. We dug a separate hole a dozen feet away or so for the ice, and beer.

As we were finally getting comfortable the other guys came back - completely overburdened with supplies. They had bags of ice, a couple dozen bottles of water, and at least six cases of beer. They had stuff tied all over their bikes. They had a bottle of Wild Turkey. That would be a problem later.

As we were unloading we finally found a huge slab of butcher-paper wrapped meat. The guys score about 25 pounds of fresh venison steaks - more than enough for all of us. We paid our "rent" to the old man, who sat the ice and water on the ground next to him, downed a Tall Boy in one or two sips, and opened another - in about a minute.

We were icing down our beer and gathering firewood - it would be dark in an hour. Someone asked the old man if he had a frying pan (we didn't) and explained we wanted to cook some food. He walked into an old shed and came out with an old grill screen. We stacked rocks up and balanced the screen. We had a wonderful fire going, and the beer was getting nice and cold. We were relaxing for the first time in days, and the guys all started to laugh and tell jokes - the first in days.

The entire time the old man had not moved, except to get the grill screen, and to open another 2 or 3 Tall Boys.

When the venison was unwrapped, the old man stood up, and walked closer. We hadn't even started cooking it yet when he asked what we were eating with it. We didn't have anything else, and told him that. He said, "'taters', and headed off to the trailer.

He came back in about ten minutes with two dozen huge potatoes and a roll of aluminum foil. He pulled a nasty looking pocket knife out of his back pocket, poked a bunch of holes in the potatoes and proceeded to wrap them in foil - with a funnel on the top of them.

He motioned to us more than he talked (I assume because with no teeth, he had trouble talking). But he got his point across - he wanted a few beers, and he was pointing at the potatoes.

He placed the potatoes on the outer ring of the fire pit and proceeded to open beers and pour them into each "funnel" until the potatoes were swimming in beer. He motioned for more wood on the fire, and we obliged.

The old man walked over to the venison, and opened it, looking at it, and then at us. Finally (it is VERY dark at this point) he asked if we had enough food. With the potatoes we had more than enough.

He pointed at the trailer and asked, "Share?" Of course we would feed the old man, so we agreed. Moving more quickly than we had ever seen - he damn near skipped across the yard to the trailer, disappearing in the darkness. In just seconds he returned - but he wasn't alone. He had a woman and three 6-10 year old kids with him. All of them were as dark and/or dirty as the

old man. The woman was extremely shy, and kept her distance. The kids were immediately drinking the bottled water, and whispering off to the side.

This lasted for what seemed like a long time - we were all talking to each other, the old man and the woman were talking, and the kids were sitting at the fringes of the fire, whispering quietly among themselves - like a pack of wolves, kind of.

It was a pretty surreal scene, but none of it bothered us much - we were drinking beer, and more importantly, *relaxing* for the first time in days.

Finally the old man stands up, pops his knife open again, and stabs it into a potato. "Meat now", he said.

Someone got the venison steaks and started to unwrap them when the man and woman seemed to get into a small argument. Finally the woman heads off to the trailer, returning just a moment later. She had a tin of salt, and some kind of spice mix. The old man indicated that she would cook. She didn't seem upset by it at all - and since she had the spices, we were happy to oblige.

She placed the steaks on the ground (on the butcher paper) and sprinkled salt and spices on each side. Then she reaches in her pocket and takes out her own knife - and starts making shallow slices, cross-pattern, into the steaks. As she does this, she rubs the spices into the slices. She does this for both sides of the steaks - all but one of the steaks. One steak she leaves untouched by salt, or spice, or the impressively sharp knife.

She quickly rolls out enough tin-foil and covers the grill grate, then doubles up on it. Without any notice of the heat of the fire she also pokes several holes in the foil. She did all of this without much motion at all - she has done this before.

Finally she places all the steaks, save the unseasoned one, on the grill. Then she grabs another beer, and slowly pours it onto the steaks - from a height of about two feet. The beer hits the steaks, and foams up.

The smell is amazing, and instant. I have no idea what the spices were, or if it was just the fact that I was relaxed and hungry, but it is a smell I will never forget. The overwhelming smell of pepper, and other spices, and of beer boiling. The smell of the meat starting to boil a bit in the froth. It was amazing.

Now for a short side note - to this day I make baked potatoes on the grill in the same fashion as the old man. Everyone who tastes them loves them. I call them "Beer boiled baked potatoes". You can vary the taste a lot by changing the beer you use. I also season and prepare my steaks in the same way as the woman (although I don't know what spices she used). But whatever spices I choose, I make the shallow cuts, and work the spices in. I pour the beer on the steaks from a sufficient height that it foams up (otherwise most of it just runs off). Even a very good cook friend of mine admits I make the best steaks he ever ate. Try it.

Back to the story. The steaks cook, and the beer burns off. As soon as the first steaks are taken off the fire the lady puts the last steak in their place. No spices. No beer. This one is being cooked as is.

All of this took at least an hour - maybe more. The potatoes themselves probably cooked an hour before the steaks went on. As the lady took each steak off she wrapped it in foil, and threw it back onto the edge of the fire, on top of the potatoes.

Finally the naked steak was done, and she nodded to the old man, who told us to eat. We ate the steaks using the foil as a wrapper, and we did the same with the baked potatoes. We were so intent on finally eating that I almost didn't notice the woman cutting the naked steak in half, and then cutting one half in thirds. Each kid got a third of the half, and a potato. The other half disappeared into the trailer with the woman - who emerged again a minute later and rejoined us, eating her seasoned steak, and her potato. She never took a sip of beer, or indicated an interest in the beer, other than for cooking.

The food, the experience, the relaxation - it was amazing. It was honestly one of the most memorable meals I have ever eaten.

As we finished eating we also re-stoked the fire, got fresh beers, and invited this somewhat odd family to move closer to the fire. It was getting just a bit chilly, but nothing we couldn't tolerate. The old man finally started to smile again, and laugh. He slapped his knee and yelled, "Music", which caused all three children to run into the trailer. They returned moments later with a beat up six string guitar with four strings on it, a four string banjo, and something I had never seen before, or since. It looked like a small drum, but it had three strings across it - like a banjo or guitar. It had no neck, or frets, or anything. It was a drum with strings.

The taller of the boys kept the banjo he had retrieved, the old man got the guitar, and the woman kept the "banjo-drum" for lack of a real name for it.

Now I was really thinking "Deliverance", but the young boy started to play first, barely touching the strings. In the still of the night the sound was amazing. He played slowly, and with purpose. He never looked at his hands - he looked at each of us, eye to eye, one by one. Though no smile was apparent on his face, his eyes were laughing.

Although the pace started soft and slow it quickly accelerated into a fast moving powerful piece of music that I had never heard. Suddenly the old man chimed in with the guitar and the "banjo-drum" kicked in. It took about 15 seconds to realize they were now playing "This Land is Your Land" but to a much quicker beat - much more energy.

They played 8-10 songs, never singing, just playing. The banjo-drum was played with one hand on the strings and on hand patting the drum. She held the device between her knees, and her eyes never opened while she played.

At some point during this, someone opened the bottle of Wild Turkey, and it was being passed around. We did not have cups. Everyone was drinking from the bottle. Although the woman

had not touched the beer (except for cooking) she DID drink the Wild Turkey. A LOT of it. Most of us were still drinking beer, so she ended up keeping the bottle most of the time - somehow managing to drink when she had a free hand to not play.

Suddenly they began playing "Oh Danny Boy", which I had never heard played on a guitar, much less a guitar, banjo and "banjo-drum".

One of the Doctors with us, a surgeon who was a bastard in the Operating Room, suddenly began to sing. In an amazing voice. A voice that seemed to make nature quiet down, and listen. The instruments played on, but they were very soft now. The singing was amazing, even considering that we had all had enough to drink that we could feel it. I had no clue this man could sing. And he damned near brought tears to your eyes. To this day, this is the best rendition of "Oh Danny Boy" I have ever heard - never before or since have I heard so much honest emotion put into the song.

I was not the only one moved by it - the old man had tears in his eyes, and the woman had tears on her cheeks. I was looking away from the fire to hide my own tears, but I am pretty sure others in our group were tearing up as well.

As the song ended, Tiny asked for them to play an Elvis tune ("Hound Dog", I think it was). This big guy stood up and moved as much like Elvis as his body would let him. He sang well. It wasn't the moving performance of "Oh Danny Boy" - it was fast, and loud, and his singing was just as fast, and just as loud. We all enjoyed it immensely. Somehow we started "karaoke by the fire". Three or four of the guys could sing fairly well. I couldn't, and didn't. But I enjoyed watching them, and listening to them, and seeing everyone finally having fun.

At some point the lady gave the banjo-drum to one of the other children, and she disappeared into the trailer. The bottle of Wild Turkey, half-empty, went with her.

We talked, told stories, sang some more, and drank beer until we were out of music, out of lies, and out of beer. It must have been well past 2am when I finally fell asleep. Some of the guys were still up, which was fine. Tomorrow was an "off day". I remember thinking as I was drifting off that it would be nice to be able to do this again tomorrow night.

I woke up with a start - not knowing where I was, or what woke me. Then I heard it again. It was a gunshot, and it wasn't far off. I wasn't the only one that woke - most of us did. I rolled behind the row of bikes while I tried to clear the sleep (and booze) from my head. I needed to know what was happening.

Boom! Another shot. This time I heard something hit the shed about 50 feet from us.

Boom! Boom! Boom! These were rifle shots. They all seemed to be aimed at the shed, so the fire wasn't directed at us.

Still, we each crawled to our bikes, withdrew our firearms if we had them, and loaded up. I was behind a small swell in the yard - at the farthest point between our bikes and the shed.

Boom! A window in the shed shattered.

Then a HUGE boom - and flame of fire from the shed window. Someone just fired a shotgun from the shed. I was safe from shots being fired *at* the shed - but not from shots coming *from* the shed!

One of us panicked (it wasn't me - I hadn't fired) and shot a few wild rounds into the darkness, in the direction of the initial shots.

Boom! The rifle adjusts closer to the bikes. We still don't really know where it is coming from, or what is happening. This is exactly what they mean by "the fog of war". We had three shooters at this point. One we knew was with us. We had no idea who the other two were. The rifle shot didn't come close to us, but there was no doubt it was *closer* to us than to the shed. Someone must have calmed "our" shooter down - we didn't shoot again for almost 20 minutes - although there were occasional shots fired to and from the shed.

Now there are a lot of things we might have done differently - get on the bikes? Not really an option. Starting them would not be unnoticed. Running? Where? We didn't really know what was 50 feet away from us. We stayed behind the bikes, and me behind my little hill.

Dawn was approaching, slowly. We could see it was coming though. I wasn't feeling very good about that because a dozen pistols are no match for a single rifle - not at range.

Boom! The rifle fires again. Suddenly we hear another shot - from a different direction - almost behind us, but more to the right rear. Not a rifle. Confusion, and some panic is now kicking in. About half of us are Military - but we are Military Medicine - Doctors and such. We are not trained for combat. Someone in our group fires a *lot of shots* quickly - in the general direction of whatever was behind us. Enough shots that I am sure they pulled the trigger until they had no more bullets.

Boom! The rifle, again trained to us, goes off. BOOM goes the shotgun from the shed. Bang, Bang, Bang, go shots from whatever is behind us.

Suddenly everyone in our group with a weapon is shooting somewhere - at the shed, towards the shotgun, or at whatever is behind us. It is absolutely insane as round after round are fired in a very short amount of time. You can smell the gunshots in the air. The sheer magnitude of the volley seems to shock everyone - there are no more shots for minutes - at least three, maybe as many as ten. Maybe someone killed someone, I think. Bullets were flying blindly in every direction.

We hear one more rifle shot, which didn't seem aimed at us, or the shed. It seemed to be aimed *in yet another direction*.

People were scrambling to reload - trying to get shells out of saddle bags, trying to scrape a deeper whole. It was surreal.

It was also dawn. We could see a few hundred yard now.

We couldn't see anything interesting, but we could see *more*.

Just about this time a huge cloud of dust rises in the distance, and sirens can be heard. The Calvary is coming!

Now just to set the stage here - a ton of ammo was just used from at least four firing positions. With the exception of the initial rifle and shotgun shots, 80% of these shots came from where we were (it seemed to me at the time). Some were aimed behind us, but most back towards the rifle shooter. Nothing from us was aimed directly (or *effectively*) at the shed (which is good, because it's the only thing our pistols could have reached).

Finally we hear a voice over a PA system telling everyone to "drop your weapons and come out with your hands up". None of us moved. First, we had no idea which way to go - certainly not to the shed, or toward the rifle. Behind us seemed like a bad option as well. We were all scared shitless - we woke up and didn't even have time to take a proper piss yet. Disoriented would be an understatement.

Finally we hear the voice again, this time announcing that they are police, and that, "God-dammit, Jerry, this isn't funny anymore - we got your ma".

None of us move, but the shed door opens.

The old man walks out, without a shotgun, and walks straight out towards the street (which we can't see). He never says a word. He just walks out of our line of sight.

It's quiet for another minute or two, then the PA comes back on: "OK, you biker boys - I want you to come out one at a time, and walk over here to the street. No weapons, hands in the air".

After a brief and frantic discussion Tiny's brother says he'll go first. He had not had a weapon. He slowly walks out of site, then shortly he comes on the PA and says, "OK, guys, come on out - leave your guns where they are - it's ok".

We all walk out - with our hands up - even though that command hadn't been given this time.

When we got around the corner to the street we saw four police cars. Three were some kind of local cop, and the fourth was a state trooper. They all had weapons drawn, but Tiny's brother was standing with his hands on a car, and not in cuffs. It looked pretty safe. The old man was not in immediately in sight. As we got close, we could see he was handcuffed and in a car. And he wasn't alone. There was an even older woman (who we had never seen) in the car with him.

OK - jump ahead about 9 hours. I'll give you the short story of what we learned, and what happened to us in that time. The exciting part was above; it's not in the details 😊

So here's what happened that night. We all were pretty buzzed, but I don't think any of us were really drunk. I certainly wasn't. I went to sleep first, and woke up first. I fired one shot (but do not remember doing it). Everyone else emptied their weapons at least once. It was chaotic - when you think you are being attacked from three sides, you return covering fire.

What we didn't know was that the old man wasn't that old - he was in his early 40's (I am 45 now, and don't feel old). The woman was his wife - although she looked like his daughter (but not attractive). The kids were theirs. The other person in the car was the old guy's mother.

And she was fucking crazy. And very drunk. She drank the rest of the Wild Turkey (about half the bottle). She had the other half of the steak. She was a mean damn drunk. She had shot the place up before - many times.

The "old man" slept in the shed I guess - either because he was drunk, or he wanted to get away from the women.

When the crazy old lady got drunk, she took a rifle and for whatever reason ("They do this all the time - to damned often" - according to the State Trooper) she decided to start shooting at her son in the shed. It was dark, and she was a long way away, and drunk. Lucky she didn't get a "lucky shot" and kill someone).

She shot at the shed, and the "old man" blindly shot back with his shotgun.

We weren't involved until one of our guys suddenly freaked and emptied his weapon. We were never sure who it was (it was dark, we were scared).

The gunshots from behind us was a local cop. He didn't even know we were there. He was on the other side of a hill from us - just shooting to get these crazy jackass's attention. But he DID realize something was different this time when he suddenly heard a half dozen weapons firing at the same time - some shot seemingly in his direction.

He "called 911". Every available cop showed up.

Somehow they caught the old lady. The "old man" gave himself up. We "surrendered".

We took a ride to the local town, which didn't have a local jail. The local cops wanted to handcuff us - the Trooper wouldn't let them. The local cops wanted to transport us to a jail. The Trooper wouldn't let them. The local cops wanted to charge us with "reckless discharge of a firearm". The Trooper wouldn't let them. The Trooper was NOT a friend of the local cops. It was very clear though that he was *our* friend. At least the best friend we had in that town.

All of our ID's were pulled. While we were "in custody" all of our bikes were searched. All of our weapons were confiscated - even knives from the bags on our bikes.

None of us came up with a record, except Tiny - for possession some ten years earlier. He paid his fine/did his time (whichever) for that and it wasn't a big deal. One of the guns came back registered to someone else. That was eventually cleared up.

In the end the police collected over 70 rounds of spent ammunition. They could attribute about 20 of it to our group (which seems right - most of our guys had revolvers). We were probably responsible for more. Who knows? This is "pre-CSI" days.

In the end, we received citations ranging from failure to obey a law enforcement officer (dismissed via mail) to improperly registered firearm (I think he was fine for it). We also did not spend our second night as we had planned. The Trooper made a deal with the local cops - we would sign over our guns (and knives) and leave the county that day.

So that's about the whole story. One cop kinda shot at us. Some of us definitely shot back at him.

I fired a shot that I do not remember firing (the scariest part of this story as far as I am concerned).

A window was broken. As far as I know that is all the damage that was done. I have no idea what happened to the crazy old lady, but apparently the cops had been out to this trailer many times for gunfire.

Odd that such a wonderfully gifted (musically) family was so screwed up. We learned they had no income. They were squatting on the property. The kids were supposedly "home-schooled". They had no power and no water.

We chipped in over \$200 to the Trooper for the family. He and a local cop "escorted" us out of the county. We were all equally happy that we were gone.

In part four, in a couple days, we'll finally meet our trucker friend. And we'll find out why biker's shouldn't use the showers at a truck stop. And why we really wish we still had our guns. But I am glad we didn't. This time, someone might really have gotten hurt. People in my own group wanted to chase this guy down and beat the shit out of him.

I was really starting to wonder what I had gotten into.

[The Spring of 1982 - the map](#)

I've created [this map](#) of the approximate route we took back in 1982.

I'll add detail to it in the future.

For right now I thought you might find it interesting to see just how damned far I rode on that seat with no padding! (and for those of you that don't know me, *my seat* doesn't have much padding either!)



I'm hoping to finish (I am lying, I haven't started it) the next part of my journey on Friday night. Maybe a late post then.

[The Spring of 1982 - part 4](#)

So I screwed up the timeline a bit - I left out meeting our trucker friend before we met the musical family from hell.

The first meeting wasn't a big thing - we were at a truck stop. We filled up with fuel, ate a good meal, and showered. This wasn't unusual - we often took advantage of truck stop showers. We were spending money, so we ignored the "trucker's only" signs. It was never an issue.

Until we met "Mr. Ryder". I call him that because his truck said "Ryder" on it and we were never formally introduced.

Unlike many of the truck stops, this one had individual shower stalls - some of the others were like a High School locker room - huge room, many shower heads, no privacy. Here there were walls. But they were only half walls - you could still see the person next to you, from mid-waist up.

In any case, we were showering when this redneck from hell comes in and starts talking crap from the time he entered the showers. He was just randomly talking bad about bikers, motorcycles, us, and even our momma's. None of us wanted trouble. Especially not at a truck stop - those guys outnumbered us 20:1. We wanted to get clean, and get going.

Surprisingly, everyone ignored him. We finished showering, dressed, and left. He was still in the shower. We would see him again in less than an hour.

We hit the road, and it started to rain. Nothing too bad, except I didn't have a windshield on my bike, and it was hard to keep my goggles from fogging up. We all slowed down as the rain increased. We normally would have pulled off the road, but traffic was light, and we weren't making good time on this trip. We pushed on.

Suddenly this 18-wheeler comes screaming up into our group. Really - we were riding in two lanes since traffic was light, and the rain was not. This guy flew right down the center of the lanes, pulling his air horn the whole time. We all swerved to the side of the road as his tires kicked up enough water to blind us. I saw only the word "Ryder" on the back of the truck. It was a stencil, and the R was faded much more than the rest of the letters. I would remember the truck.

We didn't see the truck again for a couple days - and we mostly forgot about it. We had no idea the guy in the truck was the guy in the showers.

OK - so now we are back where part three starts - we rode that day in the rain, and the next day was dry, but we were all tired - so we looked for a place to stay.

I'll assume you've read part three by now.

So our two night stop turned out to be a one night stop - a night we thought we could afford to party a bit, since we didn't plan on being on the road the next day. A night we didn't get a lot of sleep. A day with the police, not knowing what was going to happen to us. It was anything but relaxing. None of us was in a very good mood.

When we were finally escorted out of the county we just wanted to put miles between us, and Idaho. We rode faster than we had the entire trip - pushing the then 55 MPH speed limit by at least 25 MPH.

The longer we rode that day, the more windy it got. The wind was so strong that I moved behind one of the larger bikes (a Gold Wing). I was looking for a wind break.

The large bike didn't provide a lot of relief, and as I looked at the group of bikes in front of me I realized why. The wind was causing all of the riders to lean fairly hard to the left - into the wind. The cross-wind was so strong that everyone had to lean into the wind to keep their bike's on the road.

I moved to the right of the Gold Wing, hoping to get some wind relief that way, but the road was a bit more congested, and the Gold Wing was moving all over the lane. I couldn't stay next to him because I couldn't trust him not to veer into me.

I dropped to the back of the pack, leaned my bike about 25 degrees to the left, and rode that way. For hours. I didn't think that seat could be more uncomfortable - but at a 25 degree slant, it rode up the crack of my ass. For hours.

Finally we stopped for the night, and it must have been unevenful. I imagine I fell asleep before the engine on my bike had even cooled.

The next day the wind was still from the left, and even stronger. We literally rode hundreds and hundreds of miles leaning to the left. When we finally rode out of the wind my bike was not "feeling right". There was a very rough feeling to the road, where it had felt pretty smooth. The road surface hadn't changed.

We finally got to a town with a Harley Dealership and all pulled in for a rest (Harley Dealer's are VERY friendly and almost all have free coffee, a lounge, etc). We ordered a pizza for delivery (the pizza guy had delivered to the Harley dealership before!). And we got our bikes serviced. Even the non-Harley's were getting looked at.

Most of us needed new tires - we had literally worn the left side of the tires off by riding so long while leaning so far. We were somewhere in Montana.

We had all planned on a tire change during this trip - somewhere around Los Angeles, we figured. We were a LONG way from LA. We were riding a long way and most of us were carrying far to much for our bikes. Not unusual to need new tires on a long ride.

But when the mechanic walked into the lounge, everyone held their breath - someone was getting bad news. It's really not unlike waiting in an Emergency Room and having a blood-splattered doctor walk in to give someone bad news.

"Who has the tricked out Sportster?", he asked.

Shit. That would be me.

"The bearings are gone front and back, but we gottem instock, yawannem?"

I had ridden far enough and long enough leaning into the wind that I trashed my tires AND my bearings. No, I did NOT want to buy bearings - but I had no choice. I needed bearings. They kinda help the wheels go around. New tires and bad bearings would make old tires out of the new ones very quickly.

It cost me over \$500 for that stop. Keep in mind that I was making only about \$620/month as an E-4 Navy Corpsman at the time. This was a huge hit - almost as much as I had budgeted for the entire trip. I was NOT happy.

A few minutes later, another guy was less happy - he lost a cylinder. His trip was done. We lost our second rider. We did stick around long enough to make sure he had some kind of arrangements to get "home", but we left him there. Alone. At the time I don't think it bothered me at all. Today I don't think I could do it - I've grown. Now I recognize the value of a team. We left him alone, a thousand miles from home. That's shitty.

But we rode on - having now decided to go to Seattle before we go to Oregon. One of the guys had a sister there. On a farm. With a lot of space. We were looking forward to really spending a couple of days in one place. So we rode hard.

About halfway through that day we passed a Ryder truck. I didn't think anything of it. We passed thousands of trucks.

But a few minutes later, when the truck comes flying back on us, with the airhorn blowing, I realize, as it passes doing at least 80, that the "R" in "Ryder" is faded.

I had seen that truck before.

This is part 4 of ? Part 5 in the next few days.

The Spring of 1982 - Part Five

So now almost broke, tired, annoyed, and seriously wondering if I would be better off just turning around and heading straight home, we meet Mr. Ryder again.

We are on a long stretch of highway, just entering the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. There is traffic, but not too much. It seems to come in spurts (normally stacked around RV's going too damn slow). While we are almost constantly climbing uphill at this point, the road is still fairly straight.

As Mr. Ryder flew past us we all looked at each other with a "WTF?" expression on our faces. Then, we noticed the trucker had hit his brakes - hard. He wasn't exactly stopping, but he was most certainly slowing down - quickly. I wasn't feeling good about this, so I slowed way down - almost coming to a halt on the shoulder. One of the guys on a rice-burner flew past us and screamed around the truck - probably doing 70-80 MPH. The truck eased off his brakes and started to accelerate after our friend - we sped up and followed. I stayed about a block back. I wasn't too concerned - I knew there was no way the truck could catch the bike - but I was concerned enough that I didn't want to be near it.

The truck was charging up a 10-15 degree incline, and it was accelerating hard. Black smoke billowed from the truck and we could hear the engine was working hard, but the trucker didn't back down. He was pushing his truck as hard as he could.

Suddenly, another pair of our bikes screamed out to the other lane, and flew past the trucker. Now we were split - three in front of the truck, and eight of us behind it.

Since we knew we could out-run the truck, the others of us in the back motioned to each other that we too would pass. We accelerated as a group, staggered about 50 feet down the road. This was a mistake. Mr. Ryder had enough time to react to us, and he started swerving his truck across two lanes - trying to prevent us from passing. Several bikes made it past him - I didn't. The six of us left behind the truck backed up a little and regrouped. We decided that we would try passing him again - but two at a time.

At this point we were all doing well over 80 MPH. So to pass the truck quickly we would have to accelerate to about 100 MPH or so. On the bike I own today, 100 MPH doesn't scare me much - the bike still handles very well at that speed (132 is the fastest I have done on it). But on my 1972 Harley, 100 MPH with that big front fork was just suicidal. The bike was barely controllable at 80. It wouldn't be stable at 100.

I elected not to be in the first new group to attempt to pass. I decided I liked where I was - the idiot was in front of me, and as long as he was far enough in front of me, I didn't think he could hurt me.

As we started a long curve to the right, two bikes suddenly dashed off to the left lane, trying to pass the truck before he could react and block him off. And this is when I learned a life-lesson -

people will generally take advantage of a situation to benefit themselves - without a lot of regard for their “friends”. It’s a survival thing, I think.

But what happened here surprised me - as two of the bikes screamed into the left lane at close to 100 MPH, two of the other bikes headed directly towards the rear of the truck, moving to the right only when they were close enough the trucker couldn’t see them.

The two of us still left behind the truck just looked at each other... neither of us had understood that there was a “plan”. Turns out there wasn’t - the other bikes just reacted. But I felt abandoned. The only two bikes left behind the truck were the largest bike (a big ass Harley that carried as much crap as four other bikes combined), and the only true chopper. The other bike was big, and it was slow. My bike wasn’t big, or slow, but it was also the bike with the most un-roadworthy configuration. We were the stragglers.

(I wrote this a few days ago, and planned to add more to this post - but since I don’t think I’ll get a chance to add more until next week, we’ll call this part five).

OK, so one of the guys I actually rode with called me after he found this post (quite accidentally). Danny is his real first name, but he really doesn't want to be linked (physically or electronically!) to this story. So from now on, we will call him *Danny*.

The first thing Danny did was call me an idiot (but politely). This story DID NOT happen in the spring of 1982. It was actually the spring of 1983. Duh - BIG mistake on my part. After he told me that, I thought about it - and he was right - it was the last year I was in the Navy that I made this trip. 1983. I got out of the Navy in DEC 1983, and got married in FEB 1984.

So shit - now what do I do? Try and rename the whole damned thing? No - that's too much work for me. It was over twenty years ago, and who really cares it it was 23 or 22 years ago? And if I don't care, why should anyone?

So that was BIG ERROR NUMBER ONE.

BIG ERROR NUMBER TWO was forgetting a two bike, one truck motorcycle accident. That will be the lead-in to the next segment, kind of a brief flash-back (hey, every sitcom can do it, why can't I?). The accident didn't directly involve me (but it did, says Danny, affect Danny)... so I forgot about it. Selfish me.

Anyway, I offered Danny an editorial position over these posts. He said no. He says he enjoys reading them, and reliving them, but better some of his past stay in his past. I understand. Not everyone can walk naked on a nudist beach without feeling uncomfortable. Different strokes...

The way I look at it, all of my life experiences - from mistakes I have made, people I have hurt, chemicals I have abused - all of those experiences combined make me who I am right now - this day. And I'm not totally unhappy with who I am. For a while I was, but I just decided to be happier. Really - I made a decision that I was going to die one way or the other, so I might as well die happy. And since I don't know WHEN I will die, I try to just always stay happy.

Sorry - rambling.

So the problem with Danny now is that he won't tell me if I am screwing up until after I make a post. By then, it's a *public* screw-up. Danny - I really wish you would at least look at a post in advance, via email or something -if you agree to do it, I won't even mention that you've agreed to do it.

But I know he's looking over my shoulder... and that is kind of weird. For some reason, I'm finding it hard to just sit and *think the story*.

So I am working through my own style of writer's block.

Technically, I am curious to see if the next post has a different "feel to it" compared to the last ones.

Rob

I've struggled with this installment.

I have written it, re-written it, and deleted it. And started anew.

So here's what I have decided - <rant> if Danny, or anyone else wants to dispute it, then let them. I am not concerned about writing it for Danny anymore. And if he doesn't like it, he can comment here, or shut the hell up. I am going to write my story - the way I remember it. If anyone wants to challenge it, or write their own version, then good for them. Start a blog and link to me. But I won't let your nit-picking, fact-checking, minute detail correcting stop me from finishing this story. </rant>

It is, after all, just a story. I never claimed it was 100% accurate. I know it isn't. I was young then, and we were drinking a bit. A lot of bits, in fact. So I'll finish MY story. Write your version if you want.

So we left off with Mr. Ryder. He was harassing and bullying us on the highway. He was in a huge truck, and we were on bikes. Yeah - easy to bully us.

As I recall, me and another bike were behind this idiot - a guy that was doing everything he could to keep us behind him - to hurt us even, I thought.

We were at an advantage though - our friends were in front of us (and him), and we were not in a hurry. Trucker's usually are. We fell back - way back. We had fuel for another hour, (yes, motorcycles get AMAZING mileage - but they also have VERY small gas tanks... so we had to stop about every 2.5-3 hours for gas). We had an hour left. Maybe.

Maybe less, it turned out. We were heading uphill now - fairly steeply. We didn't burn a lot of gas, but the truck did. He needed to stop before we did - just about ten minutes up the road. As he pulled off the highway into a truck stop we pulled over on the shoulder. We needed to chat. As we started discussing where the next gas station might be (Google Maps didn't exist then. Hell, Google didn't exist then. Commercial GPS didn't exist. We were *guessing*.)

We guessed we needed gas now. So we watched, and waited for Mr. Ryder to fill his truck, and then enter the truck stop.

We then approached the pumps and filled up. We rode around the back of the place and parked our bikes. And did something we had not done the whole trip - we *de-bike-ified*. We took off everything biker we could - so we would look "normal". In the end, we didn't. But it didn't matter.

We went into the restaurant half of the truck stop - not the store/motel/warehouse part (it WAS one of those places). We sat down to eat about the time Mr. Ryder walked from the "store" side to the food side. And we were not well-hidden. You can't wash biker off people that wanted to be bikers - he saw us - and came walking over to us.

And, giving Danny his due on this one - Danny and two of the other guys step out of nowhere. Right into (physically into) Mr. Ryder. Now Mr. Ryder may have been an ass - but he was NOT a dumb-ass. He saw us two at the table, and the three of them. He could cipher, I reckon.

As it turned out, he was a *very* nice guy. Really - he did turn out to be very nice. He bought our "damn near everything" bag of food/snacks at the truck stop. He didn't have a choice. Danny wasn't happy with him. In fact, Danny stayed back and chatted with him for over 30 minutes - while the rest of us hit the road. Once Danny caught up with us late that evening he said he had not seen Mr. Ryder since he left from the truck stop. Mr. Ryder was a bit afraid when he wasn't in his big ass truck, it appears.

We spent the night in an out-of-business gas station - like the ones you often find in the middle of nowhere and wonder why they ever existed in the first place. It was an old Sinclair station - I haven't seen one in years. But they had this huge dinosaur statue in the front, much, much larger than this



one. They also still had the roof over the pumps, and since it was drizzling, we set up camp right by the long unused pumps. On the concrete, which wasn't a big deal, since we had sleeping bags (idea - why not invent a sleeping bag that has an air mattress built into it? It probably exists now, but didn't then!).

As we were sitting around chatting, and drinking a few beers, one of the guys came from the empty nearly destroyed gas station carrying a propane tank. He cranked it open, and some gas escaped. So of course, he lit it, to see if it would burn. It did, of course. He shut the valve off quickly, and the flame died out. Then we started joking around about what we should do with the propane - and someone had the bright idea of making the dinosaur breath fire.

We took the tank and duct-taped it to the dinosaur's neck. We also cut a section of gas pump hose off and taped it to the tank nozzle. We ran the tube up the side of the dinosaur, and to the mouth. All on the back side from the road. We tested it - and by opening the valve all the way, we could get about a three foot flame coming out of this dinosaur's mouth. Very cool! But it wasn't dark yet, so we didn't set it off for long. Instead, we had a few more beers, and wondered generally screwed around with a lot of things that could have killed us - for instance - was there any gas left in the underground tanks? Only real way to know is to drop a match in there, right? Yeah - not a bright move! But these tanks had evidently been filled with water, even as a safety precaution, or because rainwater eventually leaked in. We didn't even get a spark (thankfully!)

Finally it was almost dark, and we went about the process of lighting up our "dragon". It was amazing in the twilight, but it was just us - that was hardly fun! We were on a smaller two-lane highway - it didn't have a ton of traffic, but it had some. The gas station was also on a curve, so as west-bound traffic approached their car lights lit the dinosaur up very well - they couldn't miss it. And with a three foot fireball shooting out of its mouth, they absolutely couldn't miss it!

For the next hour or so, we played with traffic - the dragon would come to life with short bursts of flame, then die back out - only to shoot an even longer burst of flame. A couple of times people accelerated very quickly and raced away. Other times they stopped - and took pictures! Somewhere, in an old photo album, is a picture of a Sinclair dinosaur shooting flames out of its mouth. We kept this up until we ran out of gas, and beer, and eventually drifted off to sleep. Surprisingly we didn't get a visit from the cops that night.

On the next day, we will be in Oregon. Heading north, to Portland before heading south, down the entire West Coast of the United States. We aren't even halfway done with our trip - we've been going a lot more slowly than we expected. Partially because for some reason, being out on the road, none of us felt a sense of urgency to get back to our lives, jobs, kids, wives, etc. Even though most of us were in the Military we just didn't feel a lot of pressure to get going. Somehow I think we all knew this was the trip of a lifetime - and we were in no hurry to see it end.

I had already used all of my leave (vacation) to take this trip - and there was no way I could be back on time - not even if I turned around that day and headed back. Tomorrow I would have to call in some big favors. But on this night, I fell asleep under the aluminum roof of an old gas station - smiling about the fire-breathing dragon, and wondering what the people thought about it as they drove by. And today I wonder if they still occasionally remember it. And if they do, I hope they smile.