

Eulogy for Rowdy Cloudy

By Kenn Hartmann

Life's fragile in retrospect and reflecting on lost opportunities to enjoy the moment lends fuel to the sorrow of existence, so tonight as I roll beneath the melancholy November sky against an autumn wind embracing a shadow of lost love, I celebrate my old pal Rowdy Cloudy whose body now lies stiff in a box to be buried in the damp earth in the rainy morn. Rowdy Cloudy would have loved this midnight motorcycle romp, the spirit and spontaneity of it, his words endlessly echo his crazy mantra, "Let's fly man fly, go baby go, deal with it dude!" If I had other plans, or no plans at all, staring mindless at TV, the wall, the empty abyss, he'd torment me, refuse to let me be, in his tenacious voice say, "Come on, what gives? Let's go man go; let's roll boy roll. Time's a-wasting." He could talk my ear off, get so close I'd put up my hands as if to protect myself like a boxer against the ropes, I'd cover my ear, cupping my hand, seriously, because that's how aggressive Rowdy Cloudy could get, without spite, just unbridled excitement and passionate curiosity. He'd cock his head, lean forward, too close for comfort, cast a sharp gaze from his penetrating eyes and demand, "Why act afraid? I don't bite." Yeah, but I could never be sure. Perhaps he was fearless or not but his recklessness may have been his demise, the only clear thing is no longer will he leap to confront me over a perceived slight, no longer instigate his grand plans of action, no longer move at all, only the stillness of the cold November soil now waits, and even the soil seems alive.



Tonight as I ride in a light rain like tears, the land seems foreign inhabited by strangers and the silhouette of a monster stumbles near the forbidden woods, my thoughts are unable to focus due to emotional distress, heartache and pain. I recall a conversation about ten years ago with my life-long friend, filmmaker Andrew P Jones. I told him I had been out riding my bike and came upon a young girl gazing upon calm waters of the lake at Busse Woods and she was crying. I asked, "Why are you crying?" She answered, "My sister went underwater and never came up." I ran to the boathouse but a crew had already been dispatched to search the outer bay and the authorities had been notified and were on their way. I returned to the girl who was fifteen and she kneeled and prayed. I kneeled with her and held her hands in comfort. She was from Viet Nam, her family had just moved to Chicago only a few years earlier. She said her sister was seventeen and had learned to swim only a week ago. Tearfully, she agonized over how to tell her parents about the tragedy. How could she say it? Like Jones said, "she came from the East to die in the West." While kneeling on the banks, it started to rain and she let out a loud wail, "Oh God, don't let it rain on my sister!" As if the drizzle could make a difference to a body already immersed beneath the placid surface. She still hoped for a miracle that was not to pass. The authorities arrived, fire engines, dive teams and police, milling around vehicles, scanning the water, and joking. A news team showed and a reporter skulked close and asked for details. I growled, "Leave her alone." He did. Andrew was fascinated with the story and referred to it as "the Lake of Rain" where mortal spirits gently wade into a murky deep as their souls engulf eternity. Andrew P Jones slipped into the Lake of Rain a year ago.

My brother Bob said, "You always see the good in people that others see as worthless." Well, I learned it from our father. My dad used to say, "Don't look up to kings or down at paupers." When people laugh and mock those suffering from obvious handicaps or hardship, my dad used to say of the unfortunate, "There but for the grace of God go I." Cloudy wasn't into religion or politics. He could care less about Christians, Muslims, or Jews. He didn't try to understand Republicans or Democrats, he was blind to national origin. Sports were of no consequence, football uninteresting, rock climbing an exception – he seemed fascinated by street corner gymnastics, freestyle, straddling the bus stop bench or balancing on a handrail. He was caught up in the moment. And for the rest of us caught dwelling on our past or plotting out futures, the moment is a fairly intense place to be. Cloudy didn't care about a pointless job or tyrannical boss, didn't care about doing dishes or cleaning his mess. He just wanted to kick out the jams and like the Sultans of Swing "he didn't give a damn about no trumpet playing band." I heard on TV news this morning that homeless panhandlers in Oak Park are causing local establishments to lose business right before Thanksgiving. Those panhandlers have names like Ray Ray and Johnny. Once, I was trapped at traffic light on Harlem Bridge over the Ike and Johnny yelled out, "Hey, Kenn, you got a new Harley? What happened to your Triumph?" Ray Ray said, "Aw, he's moving up." I shot back, "I ain't moving

up, I'm moving out."

Ah, Cloudy, you weren't that rowdy, rambunctious sure, the life of the party, yes. You were a pain in the ass, but I'd laugh at your persistence. I hate seeing you laid in a coffin, forever wrapped in a brilliant blue suit and biker gloves, to think of you lifeless when you were all life all the time, to think of you trapped in some weird death ritual, to hell with society. When I stare at your fragile body, imagining did your eyes just blink? Did your chest just heave? Praying for a miracle that will not be, I prefer to remember you "on the fly" on some grand scheme, some great motorcycle run, some crazy flight of fancy. You rode like Indian Larry, precariously balanced on your machine, arms spread like wings, angelic wings, I guess, or more like Meat Loaf's Bat Out of Hell. I loved the animated way you talked, your frantic gestures, almost like a dance, tribal and strange, always chasing the girls "after a piece of tail." Cloudy, I don't want to say anything bad here, not in your Eulogy, but you did lack a certain sense of decency, perhaps from DNA or shoddy upbringing, but I always felt uneasy at your quest to "go humping." And the way you ate food was disgusting, like a ravenous vulture, uncouth and selfish. No wonder the girls got nervous when you were around. But you could be tender and gentle and especially protective if your friends were threatened. I imagine you could hang with the Occupy Wall Street crowd and could hang with bankers without a care; only the bankers couldn't hang with you and your love of corny gags, too much drinking, puking and fighting. Imagine hearing their lament, "watch out for that one; he'll shit all over you if you let him." There's no Doctor Frankenstein, no Resurrection Stone, no magic Time Machine to bring back the dead. hate to see you in that box brother; it makes tears cloud my eyes so bad I'm afraid I'll lose sight of the highway. But when I imagine you rolling free on the open road, breaking free of cages that unmindful people lose consciousness in, letting your heart sing, soaring over the countryside, that's how I remember you. I Like the Ballad of Easy Rider, "all he wanted was to be free and that's the way it turned out to be."

It's a terrible night, winter's on the way, the cold rain streaks my glasses, my bones and muscles hurt from last summer's highway trauma, the chill soaks into my leathers, but you're already cold and tonight the fire that burns within me now is from you brother. I'm going to ride like you taught me, ride through this bleak night until dawn breaks over Lake Michigan and not care about the evil in men's hearts, their petty schemes and conniving wives, their Black Fridays and black-hearted corporate greed, because you were the best of the best, the best that's ever been.

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