

Day Dream

By Kenn Hartmann

Shadeless in Monroe Harbor parking lot, I lean against my sickle and smoke a cigar, listening to screenwriter Nora Ephron being interviewed on National Public Radio, my thumb poised over station changer on right handlebar grip ready to change to rock and roll, only pausing because Nora is talking about being a writer. Maybe I can learn something. She's talking about her movie with Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan. Ah, my first mistake! I would have named it "Stalker in Seattle" not "Sleepless..." The wind is off the Lake, for a moment it smells like putting your head in a minnow bucket. I'm being dive bombed by screaming seagulls for parking too close to a jettisoned bag of greasy fries. I take a long puff off a Cuban Cohiba. Nora discusses her struggles as a woman in a media empire dominated by morons; did she say that? No, I imagined it, lulled by racket of sailboat rigging banging against a thousand masts like an immense front porch wind chime, the traffic on the Drive is humming, ah, Chicago, Sweet Home summer.



The NPR interviewer talks about the rise of Internet and decline of newspapers and asks, "Do you think the printed page will disappear forever?" Nora replies, "Newspapers in the future will always exist in some distant hinterland of the nation, somewhere like Stevens Point, Wisconsin." There you have it, loyal readers, the kicker to my story as a writer for one of the most illustrious newspapers in Stevens Point, Nora you made my day, hells ya, wait did she say "distant" like miles, many thousands of miles? She could have said, "some place farout like hippies or cool like beatniks or way cool like hipsters, but no, just distant like remote, our intrepid editor, Preacher's the best Stevens Point can do, oh yeah and beer from Point Brewery. Granted, it's not Hollywood or New York City, but I wonder if I'd be like a celebrity if I went to Olympia Restaurant on Division Street in Stevens Point everyday for breakfast, they'd be "Hey, it's Kenn from Free Riders Press, give him a free refill on coffee." Cruise my sickle to FRP's plush corporate headquarters on State Hwy 66 by the Municipal Airport and hang out with local luminaries who jet in to jive some journalistic by-jingo at Preacher's pad. I hit the handlebar radio button a couple clicks and finish my cigar in a midsummer's day dream, listening to Amy Winehouse rehab song, an after death tribute.

That was then and this is now. That's when I could ride my sickle. Now I sit on a corner bench near Memorial Hospital in Streeterville, exhausted, a few blocks northeast of where du Sable, Chicago's first non-native settler set up his palatial little shack a couple hundred years ago when to white man this was hinterland, of course to indigenous Potawatomi this was the very heart of things. I had to sit down after walking only a few blocks from the Chicago River Water Taxi drop-off at Du Sable bascule bridge at Michigan Avenue, where river boat Captain Wayne Heinrich, who in the early 70's had apprenticed as a 597 Union Pipe Fitter with my father, described my dad as "a tough s-o-b I always thought was going to kick my ass." I corroborated; he had that demeanor. Captain Wayne said, "Sometimes he came to work looking like a pugilist, you know, involved in fisticuffs the night previous." Let's see, in the early 70's that probably would have been with some teenage punk talking shit about Viet Nam. Captain Wayne said, "Of course, we worked in the powerhouse at Homan and Arthington, a tough neighborhood." My father died in 1983 and to hear Captain Wayne reminisce, ever so briefly, I felt like King of Chicago; I felt humble.

Now I'm slumped on a bench just east of the Magnificent Mile on Erie, watching folks walk by as they twitter and text on cells, the rare stroller indeed looking where he's going. It's hot and I'm tired; I had taken the train to Union Station early that morning. It seems like a long day and it's 9am. I look at my right arm in a cast, stitches in the back of my hand, a broken wrist and a gash on my inner forearm. My left arm is in a sling to reduce pressure on my separated shoulder and cracked ribs. The black and blue bruise on my hip extends to my knee. I've got a golf ball sized lump on the side of my skull. I feel dizzy after walking only a few blocks and my vision is blurred. This is because a week ago a distracted driver plowed a car into me and another rider just like that. Tweetering, twiddling, twaddling, it was over quicker than you can say, "Twitter" let alone fumble with your thumbs. Man, it was total mayhem and serious carnage, twisted metal and shattered glass and the aroma of leaked gasoline permeating the air like a pungent shroud. The impact knocked me out. To awaken from a daze in a dirty pool of blood in the middle of the road with copies of Free Riders Press strewn across the highway is painfully surreal. The distracted driver told the cops, "I never saw the motorcycles." It sounds familiar because it's the same sad refrain. To quote Dave Zien's May FRP story, "I'm happy to be alive."

All I ask loyal readers is when you pick up a copy of FRP at your local biker bar, café, truck stop, Harley shop, or even personally from one of the wild-eyed eccentric though illustrious writers or perhaps even from Preacher himself, and not to lecture you but all I ask is please don't read the paper while riding down the road on your sickle. And don't tell me you're multi-tasking, that's corporate double speak for "Why do one task half-assed when you can do two tasks twice as half-assed?" Alright brothers and sisters of the open road, 'nuf said.

-Kenn Hartmann
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