

A SPACE IN TIME

BY ALAN N WEBBER

As dusk descended upon the Arizona desert, daylight dissolved, and the warmth melted into the pavement of Interstate 10. As the hours spent riding the old Harley nonstop from San Diego my knees barked against the encroaching chill. My stomach howled from lack of food. My hands had gone numb an hour earlier from gripping handlebars.

As I laid in bed this Saturday morning drinking coffee, I reflected about our travels and the wild week we had just lived through.

I recalled glancing over at Doc going down the road at 85 mph. He seemed oblivious to the encroaching darkness and chill. Doc could ride longer than anyone, and the fact he was sitting atop that new Indian Chief only made his ride smoother.

I had known up ahead was a rest area where we could stop. However, a few miles before the rest area I spotted an exit sign leaning listlessly, as if someone had taken one of its legs out from underneath. The sign indicated this was Exit 72 for Chebanse. I had traveled this route many times before and had never noticed exit 72, or any town at this mile marker.

Deciding to check it out, I roared up the ramp. Doc was caught off guard by my departure and roared past the exit. I think he gave me the finger as he whizzed by.

I rolled up to the stop sign of the intersection. I knew what Doc would do; he'd be there momentarily. I stared across the intersection toward the highway. Oddly, everything about this intersection looked brand new, and totally unused I thought. Not a blemish or oil stain on it.

Within moments Doc came roaring up the wrong way on the exit ramp. Grinning at him I braced for the verbal onslaught I knew was coming.

“Dude, you coulda got me killed,” Doc spewed.

“Needed a drink and a stretch, Doc, ‘ol boy,” I grinned. “You look like you could use some grub, too. Wouldn’t want to be responsible for you missing a meal.”

I pointed at the directional sign for Chebanse, which said the town was to the north. “Doc, in all your travels out here, you ever see an Exit 72, or a town named Chebanse?” I asked.

“Uh, no,” came his expert response.

With that, I put the bike in gear and roared north, Doc following.

On the outskirts of Chebanse we passed a closed Texaco station before stopping at a four-way intersection. Eerily, the streets were deserted. To the east was a neighborhood of older homes. To the west looking over a railroad track, it appeared to be the main street through town. There was a hardware store, a grocery store, and a restaurant. All appeared closed. If we went north, it appeared we would very soon be out of town. I turned east. I wish now I hadn't.

A block down, the road split into a Y. We veered left and rode up to a dead end. There was a white-washed cinder block building, set back from the road to our left. A mobile home and a Sinclair gas station was across the street, evidently buttoned up until morning, or forever.

The name Smitty's was discernible on the building, thanks to an old, rusted lamp with yellow light hanging above the name. I could see a neon Pabst Blue Ribbon sign in a window too. It had been years since I had seen one of those signs.

Parking our bikes, we made our way to the front door. Hung on the front of the entrance a wooden lean-to had been constructed with an aluminum door to guard the entrance from the elements. It seemed to be losing that battle.

Another yellow bulb hung from the ceiling. Smitty must have got a good deal on yellow lightbulbs. The corner served as storage for spent kegs. The space reeked of vomit.

I opened the warped door to the bar, stepping up into the dark establishment. I stopped just inside for my eyes to adjust. Wrong move. Doc bumped into my back nearly sending me sprawling. I remained upright, but it must have been a hell of an entrance.

Cigarette smoke hung in the air, making visibility difficult. I was surprised the place still allowed smoking indoors. There was a pool table left of the bar. A Schlitz table light hung above it, light valiantly challenging the haze to illuminate the playing area. Farther to the left, in front of the windows, some older gents in pork-pie hats were playing poker.

Turning attention back to the pool table, a guy in an olive-drab army coat was eyeing his shot, while at the same time trying to keep hair from falling in his eyes. A cigarette hung out of his mouth, the smoke also wafting into his sight.

Another dude sat at a small high-top table, cue in hand, waiting for his turn. He was short and thin, but his hair was long and Afro-curly, held in place by a red bandana. Army coat yelled at Shorty to watch his shot. Neither pool player paid attention to us. I thought I made more of an impression.

Just to my right was a juke box. I recognized *Sweet Home Alabama* blaring from the machine. As I stared at it, I noticed the music being played was from a 45-rpm record. I was aware juke boxes used to play records but had never seen one.

In front of the juke box a woman was dancing by herself. It really didn't look like dancing; it was more of a shuffle with her head down, long blonde hair hanging over her face and on to a white blouse with billowy sleeves. Her blue jeans were flared and frayed at the bottom. A bright yellow

happy face was stitched midway up her leg. I also noticed a peace sign sewn into the back pocket of her jeans. She had no shoes on her dirty feet. I shook my head while moving toward the bar, Doc in tow. People were looking at my buddy, more than likely due to his enormous size.

The bar was U-shaped, open from the back. It looked like there might be a kitchen behind the open end, as there was a window with a ledge for food orders. Yellow light shone brightly from back there. The other end of the bar abutted the wall, where a rack holding bags of chips sat. An entryway leading into a dark hallway where washrooms were located was behind us. Beaded string hung from the top of the entrance to the hallway.

We sat on bar stools at the far corner of the bar, next to the chips and restrooms. We could surveil the bar from here. I took out my cell phone, placed it on the bar.

Lagrange by ZZ Top roared from the juke box. I tried to get the attention of the bartender, who was at the other side of the bar, one foot propped on a cooler. He appeared to be educating a couple of elderly bar patrons with his wisdom. He looked back at us disdainfully, finished his conversation, then headed our way.

As he approached, I sized him up. He was unshaven with unruly dirty hair that hung in clumps around his portly face. There was a bushy handlebar mustache nearly covering his mouth. A bar-towel hung over one shoulder of his shrinking *Bad Company* T-shirt, exposing his belly over the top of dirty jeans. Before saying anything, he wiped the towel on the bar in front of us, leaving wet streaks across the surface where once the bar seemed to be dry and clean. He wiped around my cell phone.

He studied the phone and then up at me. "Look, guys," he said in a gravelly voice, "we don't want no trouble."

I looked at Doc before answering. I surmised his comment was referring to our cuts. We are members of the Iron Order Motorcycle Nation, the San Diego California chapter. The club was started in Jeffersonville Indiana on July 4th, 2004, by eight of our brothers. It was part of biker culture to wear our vests when representing the club. We were on our way to attend the funeral of one of our brothers who lost a bout with throat cancer. We get this reaction a lot and were used to it.

"You'll get no trouble from us," I replied. "We're just looking for something to eat. Might want something to wash it down with too," I said smiling.

This seemed to calm the fears of the bartender. "What's that?" he asked, pointing to my cell phone.

'Odd question,' I thought. He was looking at me, awaiting an answer while biting his lower lip.

"My cell phone, dude," I said exasperated. "What ya think it is?"

He looked at me as if I told him it was a rattlesnake, backing away slightly. He had no idea what I was talking about.

“What ya gents have then?” he asked.

“Tequila shots with Bud chasers for us both,” I said. “And we’d...”

“No Bud,” the bartender interrupted. He offered no other selection as we waited for what else he had. He was still eyeing the cellphone in case it was going to bite him.

“PBR’s, then,” I said. “And we’d like menus too.”

“Sorry guys, our cook didn’t show up today,” the bartender said. “I got my old lady back there fixin’ burgers and fries tonight, and she ain’t happy ‘bout it. That’s all we got to offer.

I stared at him for a moment. “Well then,” I said, “I guess we’ll each take a couple cheeseburgers with everything and some fries then. That ok with ya, Doc?”

Doc grunted his acceptance. Without another word, the barkeep headed back to the kitchen. On the way, he stopped in front of another bar patron with his head hung over the bar and shoved a bottle of warm beer in front of him. Not a word was said between the two. I heard some screaming though when he entered the kitchen.

“He’s a buzzkill,” Doc grunted. Doc only spoke in grunts.

I looked around the bar. Something looked “off” about this joint. I’d felt uneasy ever since I got off the interstate at an exit I had never known to exist. Seeing how the two pool players were dressed and the young gal in front of the juke box, it felt as if we were in another world. And there was Buzzkill’s odd reaction to my cellphone.

Buzzkill returned with drinks. Two shots of tequila and two PBR’s. “You want glasses for your beer,” he asked.

Doc shrugged him away.

I stood, offering a toast, and clicking shot glasses with Doc, “To Paul, may he rest in peace,” I said. We downed our tequila and sat silently a few moments. Finally, I said to Doc, “anything look odd or different to you?”

“Nope, why? Doc asked.

“I dunno,” I replied. “Something feels weird.” I realized trying to explain myself to Doc was futile. Doc was a true friend but not the sharpest knife in the drawer.

I took a swallow from the beer before heading for the bathroom, deep behind the Great Beaded curtain. The hallway was poorly lit. The bathrooms were on the same side to my left, ladies first.

An old pay phone hung on the wall between the bathrooms. Seeing the payphone made me think about checking my cell. No service was available, so I slid it back into my pocket.

The wall to my right, across from the commodes, had a huge corkboard nailed to the wall for posting notices. On my way back from the commode I stopped to read some of the posts.

There was an advertisement for a lawn mowing repair service. Some guy named Mike would fix your lawnmower. We had passed that place when coming here.

I studied the board further. There were signs for Harry's car sales, Jim's Texaco, and Berg's grocery store. Ordinary advertisements usually found in a small town. The next sign was a red, yellow, and blue cardboard sign advertising a wedding. The only other one I ever saw like this was the one my mother kept from her wedding to dad. I never understood why she kept it; she's been married three times since.

Paul Benoit was marrying Judy Perzee at the Catholic Church with a dance to be held afterwards in the Community Building. Music was being provided by the Silhouettes. Then I read a line that gave me a chill. The date of the wedding was Saturday, August 24th, 1975. I read it again...1975. I did some quick math in my head. That sign was 49 years old. And yet, it still looked better than my mother's.

Looking at other notices, searching for dates, I found there was a party right here in Smitty's next Saturday, the 5th. for a July 4th celebration. \$5 per head got you all the food and half-priced beer until the fireworks were over. That was cheap. I didn't plan on attending that party. No year was listed so I continued my search.

I was getting anxious to find something that might hint at what year it was. Then I found one. The Chebanse Lutheran Church was having a potluck on Sunday, July 20th, 1975.

This was not some coincidence. Somehow, someway, we had stumbled back into 1975. My parents would not get married for another year yet. I was getting a queasy stomach. "Where are we?" I wondered.

I returned to the bar, motioning for Buzzkill. He sauntered across like he owned the place.

Yeah," he said, winded from the short trip to our side of the bar. I nudged Doc.

"Say, dude," I said, probably a little too quickly. Buzzkills' face became defensive. "What's today's date?" I asked.

He looked at me, as if terrified he'd get the answer wrong. He stuttered, "I think's it's June 28th," he stuttered.

"I know that dude!" I barked. "What year?"

This question, combined with my reaction, caught him off guard. He looked like he thought I'd shoot him if he gave the wrong answer. Finally, slowly, he asked, "what year ya think it is?"

Aw Jesus, I thought. I didn't want to scare him any further. Composing myself, when every fiber of my being wanted to grab him by his shirt and drag him across the bar to punch his fat face, I said, softly, "seriously, dude, what year?"

"1975," he said sheepishly while scratching his head. I looked at Doc, my eyes wide. Doc had heard the entire conversation and seemed equally astonished.

"No way, dude," Doc said, coming to a full 6'5" stand now. "It can't be '75, it was 2023 when we left San Diego." He stared hard at Buzzkill, as if he was playing a joke on us. "This ain't funny, dude," he barked.

"Yeah it's 1975 guys," Buzzkill said. "Honestly, ask anybody here. They'll tell ya," he said defensively.

I looked wildly around the bar. It all made sense now with the atmosphere and the dress. But how did we get ourselves into, what should I call it, a time warp? And more importantly how the hell would we get out of it!

Doc thundered, "what did you put in that tequila?"

I put my hand on his arm. "Calm down, buddy," I said in a hushed tone. "Let's figure this out."

A bell chimed, letting Buzzkill know that somebody's dinner was ready. He made a beeline to the other side of the bar, disappearing into the kitchen. I wondered if he was getting somebody's burgers or a gun. I kept one eye on the kitchen entrance.

He seemed to be taking a long time, or that might have been my stomach talking. I walked around the bar to see inside the kitchen. Buzzkill was sitting at a small desk towards the back of the kitchen talking on a phone attached to the wall. He hung up when he noticed me.

"Burgers done," he called out to me. "Bring 'em right out."

I headed back to my barstool. Buzzkill was right out with our food. We ordered a couple more beers then attacked our food. As I munched, I kept wondering how we were going to get back to 2023. Worse, what if we never could get back?

I was finishing up my fries when someone came through the door. I turned to look as he stood there letting his eyes adjust. This gave me time to study the bar's newest patron, a sense of foreboding coming over me. This dude was a member of the Hell's Angels motorcycle club. Another member followed him in. The Hells Angels and the Iron Order don't get along so well.

Doc seen them too. Out of the corner of my eye I saw him reach for the revolver under his vest. I quickly put my hand on his arm. "Let's see how this plays out."

The bikers made a direct line toward us. Doc kept his hand on his gun inside the vest. They nodded at us and sat down at the bar, their backs to the front door. The guy who had been silently sitting there previously got up and left in what I could only think was fear.

I nodded back. "Evenin'."

Buzzkill had come up to the where the bikers now sat, two Bud's in his hand. He set the beers in front of them and turned our way, possibly to see if I'd noticed he had Budweiser for his friends.

Then it occurred to me that Buzzkill had called them here as backup for the crazy way he must have thought we were acting. He had a smug look on his face, if a guy with a round head and overgrown mustache could look smug.

The biker closest to us, possibly the leader, looked us over. "These the guys, Smitty?" he asked Buzzkill. Well now we knew Buzzkill had a name.

Smitty nodded but said nothing.

He looked back at me again. He reminded me of Kris Kristofferson. His gray eyes were boring into me now. "Where you boys from?" he asked.

With that question, Doc stood up, his hand still in his vest. Doc's actions caused the other member of the Hell's Angels to stand. It was a simple enough question. I answered matter directly, "San Diego...you?"

'Kris' answered, "Cave Creek." I'm John and my partner here is Jax."

With that, I nodded. I knew of the Hells Angels chapter in Cave Creek Arizona, just north of Phoenix. Hells Angels founder, Sonny Barger had lived there before he died of cancer.

"What's your business in town," 'Kris' asked.

I didn't like this question, so I thought about whether I was going to reply. It had occurred to me there might be a whole bunch of Angels on their way up there. It would be just me and Doc to defend ourselves.

Discretion being the better part of valor, I replied, "On our way to the funeral of a brother in Phoenix."

This seemed to have satisfied him. Then, he looked back at me, "Say, who's this Iron Order outfit you have on your cuts. Never heard of them before."

Doc looked over to see how I was going to answer this question. As I mentioned, the Angels and the Iron didn't like each other. I thought about telling John it was none of his business, but then there is that whole discretion thing.

Suddenly it occurred to me, if it was 1975 like Smitty said, John would not have heard of us. We were founded in 2004, almost 30 years from this time warp we found ourselves in. John and Jax would be unaware of the existence of our club, or our history. Given this situation, there really wasn't any reason to go to battle with these goons.

I stuck out my hand introducing myself. "I'm Randy and that there is Doc," I replied. "We're a new club out of Jeffersonville, IN." I purposely avoided the whole 2023 thing with him.

John stuck his hand out to shake mine. "Welcome, my brother." When we shook, I thought Smitty was going to die.

"We're on our way over to Phoenix to be pallbearers for a brother tomorrow," I said. I have no idea why I told him that. "We stopped by to get a burger and a beer on our way."

"Who drives that Indian," Bob asked. "I'm thinking of gettin' one. That damn chopper is beating me to death."

That got Doc's attention and the two talked more than 20 minutes about Indian motorcycles. I never heard Doc talk so much. If the two realized they were in different eras from one another, it was not apparent.

I nudged Doc that it was time to go. He wanted to stay and talk motorcycles more, but I insisted we get on the road. I wanted away from this situation with the Angeles and hopefully to make our way back to 2023.

"You boys take it easy," John said as we got up, "Good luck with your new club too." Smitty rolled his eyes.

I smiled at his comment as he had no idea what was to come.

We walked back to our bikes. My old bike looked so much different than the two choppers the bikers were riding. Doc's bike looked near futuristic compared to the other bikes.

"We're going to go back out to the interstate," I explained to Doc over the roar of our engines. "When we get there, we will head back west to see if we can escape this time bubble or whatever the hell it is. We'll head up to route 60 and take it back down," I shouted.

"We ain't runnin' from those dudes, are we?" Doc feared no man.

I looked at him skeptically. I waited a moment to regain my composure. "Doc, my buddy," I said. Those boys might have a whole posse on the way to that bar. And if that's not trouble enough, we're somehow stuck in 1975. How you did that, I'll never know." I waited a second to see if he would catch my attempt at humor, blaming him for us being in 1975, but it seemed to go right over his head. "This route might allow us to avoid those Angeles and hopefully, this time warp. You can stay if you want but I'm heading back to 2023." With that, Doc let out the clutch and fish-tailed out of the parking lot, me in back.

When we got back to the interstate, oddly we found there was no exit or entrance ramps. Just an old, dilapidated overpass across the interstate. Weeds were growing through the cracks in the asphalt. 'Did I take a different street out of town?' I wondered. 'I couldn't have, there was only one way in and out.'

"Where'd those ramps go," Doc screamed, as perplexed as I was. I know I went up the wrong way on one!"

Having no other choice, we took a gravel frontage road west and an unmarked road to Route 60, making our way around to the northwest side of Phoenix. My mind was racing with what had happened and more importantly if we were heading back out of this bubble to 2023. The trouble was this route did not offer much in the way of civilization. We rode on in complete silence, terror gripping us that we might have somehow gotten stuck back in time. The roads seemed different, less wide, and cracked. A few 1970's styled cars passed us by. One kid, who looked like Opie Taylor, gave us the finger and laughed as his mother buzzed on by.

A storm seemed to be kicking up and it was getting dark. Sand was starting to blow everywhere. We were riding up to what looked to be a wall of dust, and we couldn't see what was on the other side. We hit that sand wall at about 70 MPH. The sand was thick and gritty. It got into everything, my mouth, my teeth, my nose, and my eyes. I couldn't see anything, including Doc, so I let off the throttle of my bike.

All of a sudden, I felt I was riding through something, but what it was, I could not tell. Trouble was, I can barely describe it now. The only thing I can think of to possibly describe it would be sandy sound waves, if that makes sense and that I wasn't really the one guiding my bike. There seemed to be three to four sensations felt as I hurtled through the waves, if that's what they are. At this point, I had no idea where Doc was, but hoped he wasn't barreling at me at 70 miles per hour.

I kept going forward, my left hand on the brake in case I came upon a car or Doc. All of a sudden, I was out, on the other side of that dust wall. The air was so fresh and clean. Doc was there waiting for me alongside the road.

I pulled up behind my big buddy, and the only thing I could think of to say was, "Whoa! that was a hell of a sandstorm. I've heard about them but never had to be in one, Doc."

This got another grunt from Doc. He looked back at me, and I noticed the cake of dust in his beard and mouth. He had been wearing goggles when he went through the storm and now there were two clean white circles on his dirty face. His hair and beard were windblown straight back from his head and neck. There was a huge dirty ring around the neck that nobody usually ever saw. It was actually a comical look and I wondered if I looked the same way.

We let out the clutches on our bikes and continued heading east, still not knowing what year we were in. About two miles into our trip, we came upon an electronic billboard advertising Coke. The fact that it was electronic gave us hope that we surely were back in our own time zone. Suddenly, it flashed to a rodeo coming up in Cave Creek on September 22, 2023, we knew we

were back! I let out a sign of relief and Doc bellowed over the pipes of his bike, sticking both arms in the air at the same time. I didn't say Doc was the sharpest knife in the drawer.

We attended Paul's funeral the next day, a man we never knew. The casket was closed due to the number that damn cancer laid on him. The funeral home had taken family photos of him when healthy and arranged them on a continuous playing video so visitors could see about Paul's life. Nearly all the pictures of Paul included his Iron Order cut over a crisp, white T-shirt. Many were of him sitting on his Harley or standing near his semi-truck. Paul was an over-the-road- truck driver. His family, who I would meet later, was in most of the pictures with him. He had one son and a daughter. One of them had a baby so I deduced Paul was also a grandfather. His ex-wife, Pat appeared in several clips of the video as well.

We followed the funeral procession out to the cemetery, as was our mission. Oddly, Paul's shined up black Harley was at the cemetery waiting for all of us. Not sure how it got there as nobody asked us. After the burial, I saw his son climb aboard the bike, loudly cracking open the mufflers before making its way back home. As he went by, I looked the bike over, it was a handsome Harly, I will give you that. But then I got a shock. As the bike got by us, I looked at the license plate. It was a black Arizona license plate, to be expected. But it was a vanity plate of Route 66. The number on the plate simply read "75."

When I got home, I looked up the history of our two motorcycle clubs. Evidently, we got into it at Sturgis South Dakota in 2006. I wasn't there at Sturgis as my old lady was buys having our son and insisted, I be there. Women are funny like that. Anyway, there was an Angel by the name of John Preston, 69 who died in a barfight with a member of the Iron Order. I never got John's last name back at Smitty's, but you don't suppose...