

## Me and Ethel

Dan Evans, April 1978

It was a Friday night, the moths was thick and the dog was layin' 'cross my foot dead to the world and snorin' up a gale like he had every right to do, when I leaned over towards Ethel during a commercial in the middle of F Troop and suggested we take a little ride on my motorbike. She switched over her normal type confused expression to her occasional you gotta' be kiddin' confused expression and said, "huh?"

"I don't mean right now, Ethel!" Then I explained how I thought it might be fun to head on out 'cross the desert to Mineral Springs and back – just the two of us – for a pleasant little Saturday activity, maybe even stoppin' for a picnic along the way. Ethel said, as enthused as a worm that had just wiggled into the midst of a herd of catfish, "why not."

It was still mighty dark and I hadn't slept no more than a wink and a half when I opened up the garage door so as to remove the motorbike. 'Cept I couldn't open up the garage door cause the regulation sized pool table, which is bolted to the floor to prevent it from rollin' out onto the street cause the house has a tendency to sink into the ground on the front side, was in the way. "No bother, I thought. I'll just take it out through the laundry room, past the wood pile, over the slip'n slide, through the neighbor's yard and around the block," which I commenced to do. Now that little detour woulda been a whole lot less trouble had I remembered to turn off the automatic sprinkler system.

The sun was just beginnin' to peek over them hills yonder when I and Ethel finished dryin' off the seat of my Mitsikoochy-coo motorbike with the towel she'd had wrapped 'round her hair which she'd just washed in the kitchen sink. We tooled on out 'cross the boulevards and the avenues toward the desert road, the cold mornin' air piercin' my wet Levi's clear to the bone and Ethel's damp hair trailin' behind us like the mud flap on a '63 Kenworth; we looked like we'd just rode through a Bubble Machine.

We was proceedin' East on the desert road to Mineral Springs, passin' wild burros and a jack rabbit now and then when we come upon an old bullet riddled sign that said:

Turnoff to Barney's Lunch, Gasoline and Rest Stop  
Visit Barney's Desert Museum  
Open Daily from 10 to 6  
Pet a live rattlesnake and meet a real Indian  
One mile ahead

I pointed out the sign to Ethel and she yelled somethin' in my ear, but I couldn't understand her cause the muffler had fallen off the motorbike 'bout an hour back. So, I decided to pull into Barney's place to use the facilities and pick up somethin' to drink with our picnic lunch.

'Bout another mile down the rode, we met up with another sign – this one in the shape of an old Desoto hubcap (mainly cause it was an old Desoto hubcap) with an arrow painted

on it and pointin' in the direction of the Outlaw Mountains. It said: "Barneys," so I made a tricky leanin' into the gravitational, right displaced, 90 degree, full Geronimo type expulsion (that's expert biker lingo meanin' we took the turn too fast and Ethel's Brownie got catapulted into a gopher hole) and then we bounced on out 'cross a dusty trail toward where I could make out the sun reflectin' off a corrugated tin roof.

Twenty-seven minutes, three miles and a leaky shock absorber later, we pulled up in front of a dilapidated shack with a tin roof and a sign danglin' down 'cross the door that said

Barney's Original Lunch, Gasoline, Rest Stop, Museum and Resort

Open Daily from 10 to 6

Snakebite kits available

Pay at the door and no booze sold to Injuns

I apologized to Ethel for makin' her run behind the motorbike cause of the broken shock absorber and then hauled her up off the ant hill she'd collapsed into and up the steps to the resort. There wasn't no door to knock on so we just moseyed on in like we was family.

Right away though, it become evident that we wasn't anywhere near family to the bunch of folks that was stayin' at Barney's. In fact, it was so evident, the ants lit off of Ethel volunteer and disappeared between the cracks in the floor like a possee chasin' some scoundrel in the T.V.

There in the middle of the room, sittin' cross-legged 'round a dismantled Harley Davidson carburetor and passin' a funny lookin' cig-greet between'em, was a dozen or so of the grungiest appearin' folks I ever seen – or smelled. They was starin' up and me and Ethel from a prairie of empty Inglenook jugs and motorbike parts, lookin' hungry and mean and just not too friendly at all. I looked at Ethel – her rump was fried and her eyes was wide – and said, "I think we best be makin' our way back outside so as not to intrude on the privacies of these nice folks."

It was 'bout that time that them nice folks figured out that we wasn't anyone they knowed and begun to stagger to their feet like a kennel of blood hounds risin' from a ten day snooze. It was the clankin' of their ear rings against the loggin' chains they was slippin' over their tattooed shoulders and the lice a fallin' outta their beards that set me and Ethel to high-tailin' it out the door in a spotted trail of perspiration and squished scorpions. We both flew off the porch of Barney's Resort and landed square in the saddle of my Mitsikoochi-coo motorbike, bustin' all three of the remainin' shocks.

I tromped on the starter. The engine belched up a cloud of blue and green smoke and Ethel sunk her genuine, acrylic enameled, carnauba waxed artificial finger nails into my ribs like a raccoon clingin' to a Dogwood tree in a Kansas twister. We zigged then we zagged and then we made an Evil Knieval death defyin' leap over a falled over outhouse and headed back the way we'd come toward the main road.

Well, the next three miles was pretty hairy. We tucked our tails between our legs and it looked pretty scary. The Mitsikoochy-coo was runnin' to the bore but with Ethel on behind there wasn't much more that I could do except to pray. We was prayin' and plowin' our way 'cross the desert, pursued by a dozen fallin' angels on chrome and black moachines that filled the great outdoors with a sound like that of a chorus of unmuffled Homelite chainsaws in a Kentucky coal mine.

My eye caught the sparkle of the hubcap sign then the glistenin' of the pavement of Highway 9. We jumped the ditch and hit the road then both of my tires decided to explode.

I was fixin' to pull over and congratulate myself on out runnin' them varmints when Ethel sortta flung her arm around and poked her painted pinky into my right eye so as to attract my attention.

I let out a holler then squirmed in my seat and with my one good eye stretched around and took a peek just long enough to see that we was still bein' followed. Without another thought, I twisted the throttle and we shot down the road like olives from a bottle. The blowed out tires was comin' apart; smokin' polyglass and rubber was turnin' the sky dark.

We went 'round a Fiat and under semi, past a dump truck and through a viaduct, at the end of which we come to rest in a pool of slimy water, still perched on the naugahyde seat of my Mitsikoochy-coo motorbike.

We was settin' there all alone in water up to our navels directly in front of a sign that said

Welcome to Mineral Springs  
\$500 fine for littering

with only an occasional gurgle from the engine of a former Mitsikoochy-coo motorbike and not an outlaw biker in sight. Then Ethel spoke up real brilliant like and asked if I'd remembered to bring along the suntan lotion.

I looked back at Ethel with blood and tears streakin' a path down my face from my right eye, through black soot from burnt tire rubber with ten permanent impressions in my rib cage and explained how I'd told her to put the suntan lotion in with the lunch.

"Ethel, do we always gotta end a nice day with a feud?" I asked. Then she started in harppin' 'bout me spendin' all my time a union meetings and card games and I brought up how I thought she could do a better job of pluckin' my ducks and maybe mow the lawn more often. Then Ethel said.....