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and it was all I could do to keep Mike from walking up to every young coed and saying "Friend?" I found a coffee shop with e-mail access, and caught up on some work (IRS take note), and visited several bookstores (I'm still in the business, yes I kept receipts).

My friend was by this time over her flu, and we decided to meet for lunch. Mike took one look at the No Smoking sign in the Vietnamese restaurant and began to moan. Anyway he wandered off and we had a lovely talk; I promised to bring Mike to the bar where she worked that night. "He's a sweetie," she said. Women's taste in men is a constant mystery. The week had flown by and this was to be our last night in Tempe, and wouldn't you know it, my friend worked at one of the best bars we had seen on the whole trip. As we settled onto our stools at the bar, my friend came out and hugged us, and then went back in the kitchen to bring out a young man and pointed at us, and we smiled, and she pointed at him and he smiled. When she came by later she said, "What do you think? He's a poet." My eyes must have rolled back, because she said rather defensively, "He's got a scholarship in Poetry at a College back East." I gave her a hug and said that every woman should be in love with a poet at least once in her life, and it was better to get it over with early, or something like that.

About this time through the door came two people dressed in leather with what looked like the head gear Amelia Earhart wore, goggles and all. They saw us, and headed our way; we were looking around for an exit when one of them removed the goggles and leather helmet, releasing a cascade of multi colored hair, and the smiling face of Heide, the woman we had visited here ten years ago, emerged. After much hugging and kissing on our part and glaring on the part of her boyfriend, the other leather-clad person, she explained that they had just driven from Austin, Texas in a 69 Red Cobra with no top. Not a convertible, it just had no top. They were on their way back to San Francisco where she lives now.

Heide has since I met her has become a globe galloping photographer, an art director for *Mondo 2000*, a legendary cyber magazine, and she lives on the *Vallejo*, an aging grounded Ferry that used to be the home of Alan Watts. She is the only person I know who has been on the cover of Time magazine (it was for a feature about Cyberpunk in Feb. '93).

So, it turned into a wonderful going away party. Mike kept insisting that two young women were making eyes at us across the bar, but since he was on his fifth, possibly sixth Jack Daniels, I knew full well that he couldn't see across the bar. And besides we had to get on the road tomorrow. We decided to make the first leg of the homeward journey short, and visit a friend of Mike's in Kingman, just a few hours drive through the desert with no freeways.

#### "Hogs on the Hiway"

Getting out of Tempe was easy, compared to getting through Phoenix; the town is huge. Driving through what was obviously the old red light district, a young man approached the car while we were stopped at a light, and after bumming a cigarette indicated that cocaine and female companionship were readily available. We declined both and drove on. And on and on. Once you get out of downtown Phoenix you have to get through Sun City, the largest retirement city in America. Finally getting to our beloved two lane black top we started noticing a lot of motorcycles. "Great country for motorcycles," Mike said. I slipped the Bad Livers tape in the deck, and "Hogs on the Hiway" blared away as the Harleys kept coming behind us and then pulling out to pass. "This is getting ridiculous," I said. Apparently there was some huge rally going on somewhere near.

Sure enough we passed a cutoff road where a steady stream of bikes made the turn. Cops from several jurisdictions were in evidence, and seemed to be working hard at enforcing whatever laws they could. They seem totally ineffective at even slowing down the flow. Motorcycles stretched out for surely ten miles in both directions, mostly Harleys, but a few BMWs and Kawasakis and Triumphs, some with trailers, some with side cars, some stripped down choppers and some full dress Glides. Truly a sight to behold.

#### Nothing, Arizona, Nowhere, Nevada

Checking the trusty Nat'l Geo map we realized we would be going through Nothing, to get to Kingman. No, not just empty desert with no towns, but Nothing, Arizona, Pop. 4. We had to stop. It is aptly named, and we met the entire population. They were all in the tiny store surrounded by old dying trailers and assorted out buildings in various states of decay. The rest room was a Sani-can off to one side. We bought over-priced postcards and got back on the road.

When we reached Kingman we found a cheap Motel with a pool overlooking the railroad tracks, and went off to find Mike's friend, whose name is none of your business. She turned out to be a beautiful young woman (why are you not surprised?) with a two year old equally beautiful daughter. I mostly sat there with my mouth open as she and Mike talked about literature, and she quoted Thomas Hardy, and generally destroyed any illusions I might have had about beautiful women being airheads. Mike had told me that he had met her in Portland where she was dancing at some bar. I sat there shaking my head, trying to visualize this woman taking her clothes off in front of Neanderthals, while reading the classics on her breaks. I must say I am still having a great deal of pleasure trying to picture it in my mind. She and Mike made our dinner plans while I was given the task of entertaining some one closer to my intellectual level, the two year old.

There are few pleasures in this world equal to having dinner with a beautiful woman. The service is always better, the drinks come faster, the view is delightful and if, as in this case, she is also very intelligent, the conversation is stimulating. As we finished dinner she excused herself and went off to change for work. These days she works at Denny's and keeps her uniform on. She explained it was honest work, the people were nice, and she was a single mother who was trying to find a place in the community. Like I've said, an intelligent woman. Getting back to the motel we soon found out that the railroad tracks kept very busy all night, which explained the cheap rent.

The next morning Mike started his pitch for spending some time in Las Vegas. As we headed for the Nevada border, he talked about the 99 cent steak & eggs breakfast. As we wound our way past the Hoover Dam (Surreal Industrial Strength Art

Deco, putting out so much electricity you can feel it) we were entertained with views of sternwheelers on the lake formed where the Colorado River used to be. As we crept along we watched a Model and a Photographer doing a photo shoot with the dam as background. Bus after bus of tourists from all over the world lumbered around the tight turns in excess of five miles per hour, but not much.

Finally we got into more open country and could tell by the billboards we were in a very different state. Eventually Las Vegas shimmered into view like a Hollywood special effect, which is pretty much what it is. As we reached the Strip, sensory overload cut in. Everything was everywhere. Artificial waterfalls, a full size Pirate ship, huge electric billboards, hordes of young men handing out newspapers with photos of naked or nearly naked women; prostitution, and apparently everything else is legal in Nevada, except poverty.

Mike pulled into the parking garage behind the Pirate ship and there was no one taking money. "Parking is free," Mike said. We took an elevator to the Casino because that is where the elevators go, no matter how many buttons you push. The air conditioning was on high like everything else. I will not attempt to describe the Casinos we visited, but by the time we left Caesar's Palace I had completely lost track of the 'real world'. It was suddenly made quite real to me again when I realized we had gone out an exit that took us behind the false fronts of the Strip. The street, just a block away from the busiest thoroughfare in the world, was devoid of foot traffic and what sidewalk there was, was more of an after thought, so if someone's limo broke down, they wouldn't have to walk in the street. The backs of the Casinos only have entrances for employees and the signs make it clear that you can't enter that way, no matter what. So we walked several long hot blocks until we found a way back to the parking lot where we'd left the car. That made up our minds, we headed out of town.

It is very difficult to find your way out of a Casino in Las Vegas, and it is almost impossible to find your way out of Las Vegas on the freeway. We got the feeling they really didn't want people to leave and since I had won \$5 of their money at the slots, I felt they might be trying to get it back by leading us around in circles until we needed to buy gas or lunch of something to recoup the \$5. NO, I didn't like Las Vegas. Mike had told me what a wonderful time he had when he was there last. I reminded him that he had been with a beautiful woman that time, and I was with a middle aged man. He allowed as how that could make a difference. Once out of Sin City we headed back into real desert.

#### "Pi is Round"

The road home from Vegas is Hiway 95. It is high desert country, flat, surrounded by snow covered mountains and mesas. The two lanes run straight for as far as the eye can see, and the minimum speed limit is 75 mph. "You asked me to remind you. You're doing eighty," I said to Mike. He really hadn't asked, but when in the middle of nowhere I start remembering all the things I used to know about cars, and one was that gas mileage went to hell after 65 or so. Mike explained that the last cars I knew anything about were now considered collector's items. I pointed to the gas gauge and then to the nothingness surrounding us. It's called the Loneliest Hiway in America.

We reached Tonopah without running out of gas or coming to blows. It had been a long drive and we were tired when we found a Motel, so we just shook our heads and agreed when they offered us the Senior Citizen Discount. It had come to this. The next morning we crossed the Oregon border, but not before stopping at a funky Casino in McDermott a few feet from the line. I still had a cup full of nickels from Caesar's Palace. It took no time at all to be relieved of my burden. Once in Oregon we started to smell the corral, and drove through to Burns where the legendary bird migrations were filling the skies. After a night in a cheap Motel that had some very amusing rules about drug use, the first we had encountered, we hit the hiway heading for home. Before we knew it we were back on old I-5, coming into Portland.

We did our best to clean up the Maroon Miata Mirage, but the bits and flakes of various flora I'd collected remained on the floor mat along with other vegetable matter spilled at various times on the trip. We turned in the car without incident, and found ourselves in a cab with the same driver who had delivered us here almost three weeks before. This time however, there was no classical music, and we couldn't smoke. After we were dropped off at Mike's son's house and transferred our stuff to Mike's car, we headed west. We were on SW Jefferson, close to the Goose Hollow Inn, when Mike pointed to the clock. It read 3:14. "Pi," he said. I said that made perfect sense, because we had just completed a circle, and Pi is round. At that very moment, a car pulled in front of us with an Arizona license plate, not just an Arizona plate, no, a vanity plate from ASU in Tempe.

When we finally pulled up to the old hide-out in Tolovana, and I unloaded my stuff, Mike didn't want to come up for a cup of coffee even. It was a time to be home, and alone. It was time to walk on my beloved beach, and watch the weather, to turn the radio to KMUN and listen to the familiar voices, to take an old book off the shelf and sit by the fire. It was time for vespers at Bill's and I had a whole bunch of new stories to tell.

"Everybody's jivin' and shuckin', everybody's drivin' and truckin'."

Some mention should be made of the state of the American Hiways at some time in this narrative. Two incidents come to mind, the first was coming down the Coast Hiway, where the road rises and falls, twists and turns and is filled with log trucks for some reason. There are things now called "runaway truck lanes." No, they are nothing like 'car pool lanes'. And they are something to see. On this particular stretch we saw two. The first consisted of a wide slightly uphill lane that was lined with plastic water barrels and then turned into a deep loose gravel pit roadway that then went steeply up hill. It looked like it might actually work. The second was a little different. There were the barrels, and the gravel, but at the end wasn't a hill, but a cliff, dropping several hundred feet. We figured the driver should try to jump when he hit the gravel, but either way, he wouldn't be blocking traffic.

The other little bit of truck stuff was getting caught in a herd of semis and going through a truck weighing station on Hiway 40. Neither Mike or I like freeways; of the three thousand mile we traveled we figured that we did no more than 500 on freeways, and none of it was fun, except going through the weigh station. It was the only time we saw people on the

freeways, especially truck drivers, laughing on the trip. It wasn't Mike's fault, he likes to drive in the right lane, like all rational human beings, so when we were suddenly surrounded by trucks, and the lane we were in became the lane for the weigh station there was nothing that could be done. I'm sure it happens all the time. The truckers on both sides each in turn would look down from their cabs and shake their heads, and then they would smile. The guy with the clipboard at the scales saw us coming, and so did the State Patrol guys, and some of them pointed. We were weighed, the scale said, '0'. When we got back on the highway and were forced to pass a semi, inevitably the driver would look down, smile, shake his head and roll his eyes. It reminded me that these people were working on that road. Both the weighing lanes and the 'runaway truck' lanes are an everyday part of their job. We were tourists here, they were locals.

Our Lawyers have advised us that we must confess that the story "Downloading Arizona" is pure fiction, and that Uncle Mike© is a registered trade mark, and that we must further confess that the photographs that accompany the above fiction were a rather crude attempt, with the use of a cardboard cut out, to defame and libel the good name of Uncle Mike©.



Baseball and Beer, is this Heaven?



GO Cubbies!!!



Not Uncle Mike©!!



Hogs on the Highway.



Bob's favorite Bar.