



Photos: Blake Dunneis, Jean C. Howard

# BIKER POETS

live to ride *and write*

"The sharp line  
of the highway  
runs its stitch  
through and through.  
Our rearview mirror  
a glass bead  
on its thread.  
"Behind us,  
a trinket of Time."

Biker poets Rob Van Tuyle (above) and Jean C. Howard

It was a tough-looking crowd all right—one that might not stop at merely booing the poets off the stage. "It was bizarre," said Jean Howard, recalling her first poetry reading in a biker bar. A renowned Chicago-area poet, Howard was well-accustomed to reading her works in bars. "I'd do anything to get people to listen," she said. But this crowd looked hard-boiled. "We were nervous," she said. "We thought they would not only not like us, but kick us out of the bar."

When the readers got rolling, though, the riders chilled and listened, said Howard, the organizational road captain of a group of biker poets loosely called the Word Pirates. The often-humorous and sometimes intense poems about life on two wheels were so well-received that the Pirates were invited back to other Chicago-area biker parties. Now there's a concept that would make your average librarian cringe: Bikers as judges of literature!

But these are stories any rider can relate to: living to ride, riding paranoid because you think the wheels might fall off. There are poems about copycat bikers, helping fellow riders, and of not giving a damn what some "civilian" thinks of your lifestyle. It was the honesty and from-the-gut

