

they brake for poetry

Motorcyclists park their Harleys, and ride words through the night

By MARY CAROLE McCAULEY
of the Journal Sentinel staff

As Martin Jack Rosenblum sees it, the urge to explore new frontiers is encoded in our DNA, and the road map is written in our arteries and veins.

For nearly 100 years, motorcycle enthusiasts have followed the call of the open road. Now, a growing number are following the call of the open mike.

On Tuesday, Rosenblum will emcee Biker Poetry Nite at the Milwaukee Public Library's Centennial Hall as part of the Harley-Davidson 95th anniversary reunion.

It's not as weird as it sounds. There's an unusual affinity between bikers and poets — an affinity that's finding an expression in cities across the United States, including Los Angeles, Chicago and New York. And now Milwaukee.

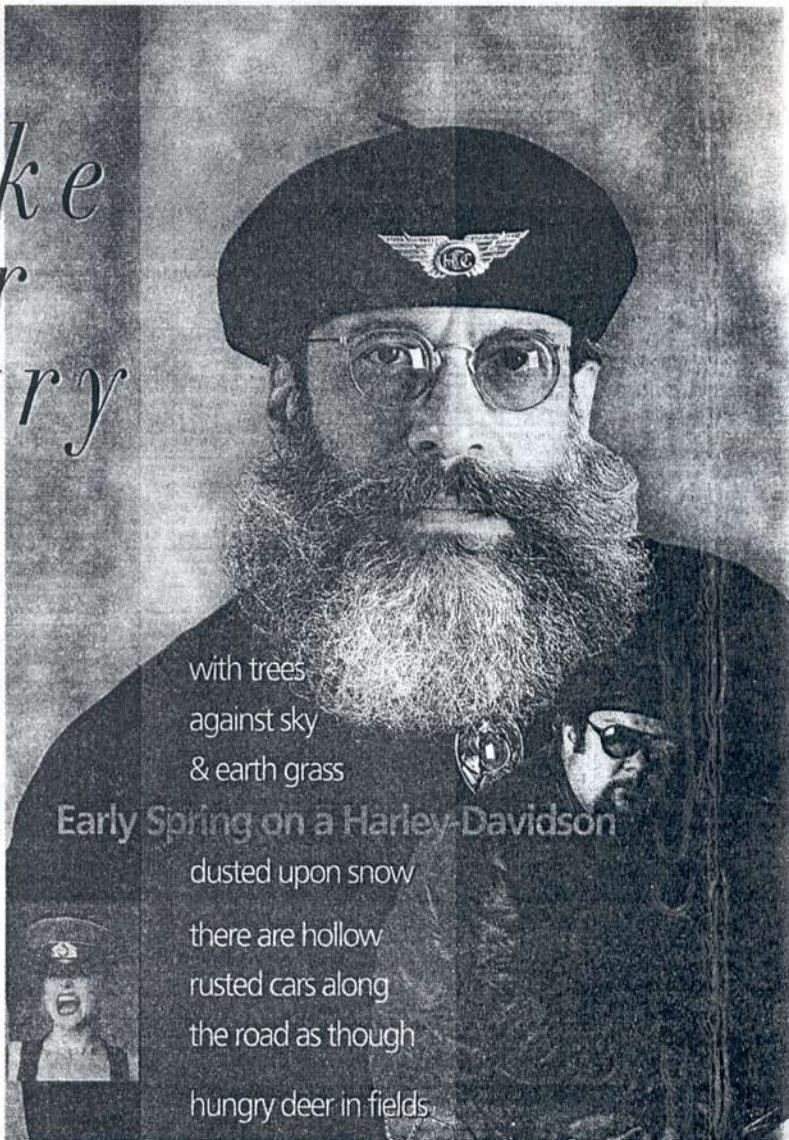
The event is free, so organizers don't know how many people will attend, but they're expecting a crowd: Centennial Hall holds about 700, and N. 8th St. will be closed to provide parking for the Harleys.

Chances are, however, that Centennial Hall's Biker Poetry Nite won't be followed by the traditional tattoo contest, although the evening will include a video and an audience participation segment. And no, there won't be a beer truck parked outside, but coffee and sweets will be sold.

While many biker poetry readings are open to anyone brave enough to stand on stage and read their work, this one is not — the six featured poets were invited.

What a wonderful meeting of worlds it could turn out to be: Picture bikers with handles such as "Hack" and "Elephant Man" and "Holy Ranger," burly, bearded guys bristling tattoos and ladies in leather, sipping on a latte while reading a poem they wrote, or listening to a poem written by a friend.

Picture Centennial Hall, with its carved plaster ceiling moldings trimmed



with trees
against sky
& earth grass

Early Spring on a Harley-Davidson

dusted upon snow

there are hollow
rusted cars along
the road as though

hungry deer in fields



KRISTIN PELUSEK/PHOTO ILLUSTRATION

in gold leaf, graceful lighting fixtures and ornate proscenium arch — a fitting frame for the motorcycles on stage, lights playing up chromed surfaces that ripple like water.

"It will be a fast-moving and fun event for people who like poetry, people who like bikes, and people who want to be in on the excitement of the week," Library Communications Director Lorelei Starck said.

Biker Poetry Nite came into being because the library was looking for a way to capitalize on anniversaries celebrated

this year by two classic, oops, classic institutions — Harley's 95th reunion, and the Central Library's 100th birthday.

Needless to say, the stereotypes of bikers and poets couldn't be farther apart. Just ask Gina Woods, co-host of "Open Road," a radio talk show for motorcycle fans that broadcasts Thursday evenings from 8 to 10 on Chicago's WCBR-FM (92.7). The radio show is cosponsoring the Tuesday-night reading by six Chicago-area biker/poets known

Martin Jack Rosenblum will emcee a poetry night Tuesday at Centennial Hall featuring biker enthusiasts including Jean Howard (left) and Hack (right). The poem "Early Spring on a Harley-Davidson," is a work by Rosenblum.