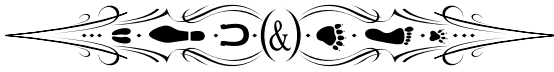


Ride Like The Wind

SANTA FE'S ANNUAL NARF INDIAN
MOTORCYCLE RIDE OFFERS
A GREAT TIME FOR A GOOD CAUSE



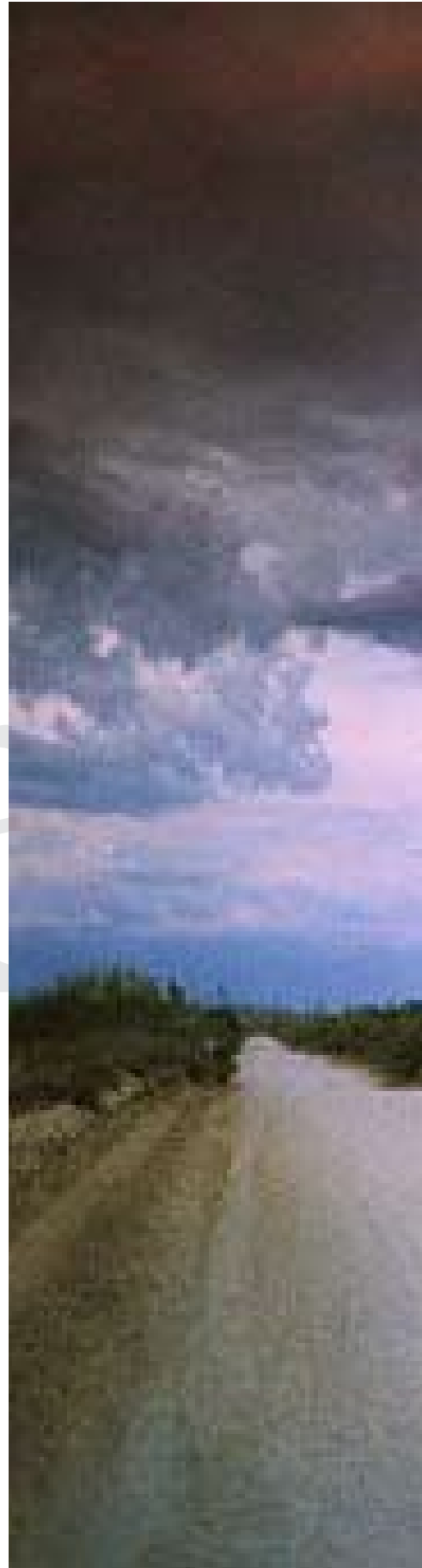
By Wolf Schneider

AS I CLIMB ON THE BACK OF RODNEY A. GRANT'S Harley-Davidson motorcycle, he tells me, "Put your feet here," motioning to the second set of footrests he's flipping down. "Get on, and hold on. And don't get up suddenly." I wrap my arms around his motorcycle jacket and we roar off. Wow. We're on the I-25 frontage road near Santa Fe, New Mexico doing about 50. The bike is vibrating, the engine's loud, the breeze is cool, and the sunflowers are so very close. This is the stuff fantasies are made of: empowerment and togetherness in the wide-open outdoors where remote mountain ranges loom against mauve and blue skies, the cars are few, the sage smells fresh after a summer shower—a soft "female" rain, as the Navajos term it—and we're seizing the moment for adventure.

It's Indian Market weekend here in Santa Fe, and Indians are everywhere. The festive downtown plaza is filled with 1,100 Native American artists from 100 tribes selling their jewelry and pots, but the deeper camaraderie may be with the small group I'm hanging with today. Comprised of about two-thirds Indians, one-third Anglos, it's a band of brothers—and sisters—gathered together for the second annual Native American Rights Fund (NARF) motorcycle ride. "Instead of getting around on war ponies, today it's the iron horse," declares potter and former San Ildefonso Pueblo governor John Gonzales. For \$25 a head, riders gather at Santa Fe Harley-Davidson beginning at 9 a.m. to register and select their first card of the poker run.

"On the rez, it's freedom when you ride out there on horseback or

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PHOTOGRAPHY: TK





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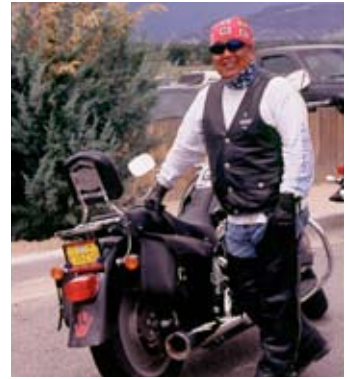
on a motorcycle,” says Comanche artist Rance Hood, from Denison, Texas. Hood donated a painting to the annual NARF art auction because he likes what the event benefits. “It’s a very important foundation,” he says. “They fight for the rights of the Native American. There are all kinds of problems even today—slant drilling for oil on Native land, and water rights of course.”

NARF’s executive director, John Echohawk, explains that the organization has been leading the fight for Native rights for almost four decades. “We’re governed by a Native American board of directors,” Echohawk says. “We protect our natural

resources, our human rights, our rights to practice our religion and culture. We want to promote the development of Indian laws and of tribal sovereignty.”

The NARF Indian Market motorcycle ride is just one of the ways they raise money—and awareness. Our ride today starts off on Cerrillos Road, drinking coffee and munching Dunkin’ Donuts. Everyone looks cool in their flashy riding leathers, particularly Grant, who’s decked out in leather pants, orange Harley Davidson shirt, hand-painted motorcycle jacket, wraparound sunglasses, and leather Harley do-rag. Grant doesn’t just have the threads—he’s got the engines, too. “I’ve got five—town bike, long-distance bike, show bike. I’m riding the stick horse today. It’s the Harley-Davidson Road King; that’s the long-distance one,” he says. Grant—you probably know him best as the warrior Wind in His Hair who befriends Kevin Costner in *Dances with Wolves*—came here from California for the ride because “Basically, all the money goes to NARF. To me, it’s a way to enjoy the camaraderie of folks who enjoy riding with the same passion. Meet old friends, hook up with new brothers. It’s a pretty mellow route, very easy.” Sometime in the future, he says, they’ll get up to Taos on the annual ride.

Today, we take Highway 599 north to Highway 285, continuing to Pojoaque Visitors Center. Plenty of Tony Hillerman books for sale here, along with Navajo and Zuni bracelets. Donovan “Tex” Brown, who’s the assistant attorney general for the Navajo nation, arrives in the chase vehicle. “If



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somebody breaks down, we're here to help them," Brown says. "We have a trailer. We can strap their bike on. We've got folks who can do minor repairs." Like everybody Indian and non-Indian on the ride, Brown is warm, friendly, and embracing of the gang of 75 or so hitting the road together. "We're hoping we can get this ride to grow and draw more riders—Indians and non-Indians are welcome," he says. "The more non-Indians that get involved with issues in Indian country, the more positive response we'll get."

With cornflower-blue skies and swirling clouds above, dog in a white pickup to my left, sweet-corn stand to my right, Indians in front of me and Indians behind me, I am driving a few legs. Later I'll finish the race sharing Grant's Harley. Right now I'm driving to stop three: Ohkay Casino. Over the cold-cuts lunch buffet, Phoenix-based actor-stuntman Flint Carney is beaming: "This is why we have motorcycles—we wanna have fun and be free." Grant agrees. "Freedom—it all has to do with freedom," Grant says. "Indians have always been a symbol of freedom, and motorcycles going down the road, it's freedom. It's a spiritually releasing experience. There's nothing like being on the open road, smelling the cow dung and dead skunk and cornfields and feedlots. A lot of that you miss in a car. Being on a bike gives you a new appreciation for life. It's so precarious out there. You're going 60 miles an hour. You're in spiritual thought enjoying life and thanking God for your blessings. We have such freedoms here in the U.S. Look at Iraq, look at Mexico."

Leaving Grant at the casino—"Some of us are gonna drop a few here," he says—we loop south for stop four: the rural Tesuque Village Market. We arrive at the wood-planked little complex and immediately smell the aroma of fresh-baked green-chile cheese bread. It starts drizzling outside, but Janice Black Elk-Jim, who rode a few hundred miles to get here from her job as assistant manager of Arizona's Hubbell Trading Post, is nonplussed. "This is my favorite stop," she says. "The ride is so beautiful, and we're all here in unity."

We finish at Santa Fe Brewing Company, which is where I hop onto Grant's Harley for a spin—but not before NARF development director Don Ragona reiterates the purpose of today's ride. "We fight for our sovereignty, whatever it takes," Ragona says as he hands out prizes from a raffle. "Sovereignty isn't free, guys. We don't fight on the plains anymore. Our battleground is the courtroom." As he thanks everyone for their financial and moral support, there's talk in the crowd about making the ride an annual motorcycle rally complete with Indian vendors.

"It's about the camaraderie, the friendship, the purpose," Grant says packing his raffle winnings into his saddlebags. He nods at Carney and they hatch a fitting finish for the day. "Let's head down to the Plaza," Grant says. "Indian Market isn't over." And with that, they roar off, turning heads as they go.

For more information about Native American Rights Fund (NARF): (800) 447-0784; www.narf.org.