

Bud Ekins & Me

October/November 2007

For: Susie and Donna Ekins.

A few of my memories, of your Mom, Dad, and this old boy.

I can remember the sound of a 500 single echo throughout the canyon. It was in the 1950's that I would play in the stream and dirt road down the steep driveway that leads to my Hollywood home on the hill. I would play in the dirt road and stream, building small dirt roads, stick forts, dams, and bridges that would meander in the dirt and mud on the edge of the stream where an occasional car would slow down to pass through the water on their way up Nichols Canyon Road.

We called this "Radiator Cap Gulch". On a Sunday drive in the Hollywood Hills some pretty fancy cars would stop with their front end in the stream. The driver would get out, take off the radiator cap and fill up the radiator with water from the stream. Some people would forget to put the caps back on, thus the name. I had a tree house in the Green Wattle tree on this country corner where two dirt roads met by a stream, in the Hollywood Hills of California. Many stories I can tell about the happenings at this intersection.

The rumbling sound was closer now. I knew to look out for the on coming thunder then lightning that would pass through my world in a flash. There went Bud Ekins on a Matchless, Triumph, or other two-wheeled contraption that spit dirt dust and mud.

WOW! The race in my mind had begun. I knew I could not ride up the hills on an engine spitting fire, like Bud. So I began to build a wheeled coasting kart like the one in the "Our Gang" 1934 short, "Hi Neighbor!" That's another series of stories!

By 1960 I had mounted a 5 hp gas engine on a home made go kart and began the ascent up hill, under power! Problems still existed, I had no brakes, the throttle was always on full power, and the only way to slow down was to pull on a string that would kill the spark. More stories to tell here! (Hitting Sara Taft's Henry J in the rear and going under it!)

I built my first two-wheeled mini bike in 1962. I had mounted a high compression McCullough, Mac-10 engine, with twin carburetors, in the frame. It was very fast! A friend of my fathers, Phil Johnson, who worked for McCullough in Inglewood had loaned me the demo engine. I would fly up and down Nichols Canyon raising hell on all the dirt and now paved roads. I remember passing a big Oldsmobile on Nichols Canyon on the straightaway up from the Dam. David Richardson was on the back. We were going so fast that the vibration on my handgrips felt like my hands weren't there. We must have been a site to the driver of the Olds. Two bodies that look like they were clutching two small wheels, flying past on the left, riding a chain saw, disappearing into the canyon curve above! No helmets, old torn jeans, t-shirts, and tennis shoes, no vehicle license, no muffler, and oh the smell and sound! Life was good in the neighborhood!

I'll never forget the day when Bud threw me the keys to his Ford pick up. I was at his shop on Ventura Boulevard in Sherman Oaks, California. It was 1964 and I was 14 years old with my Nevada motorcycle permit in my wallet. By working the summers on our Coyote Creek Ranch I was able to acquire a Nevada motorcycle driver's permit in 1964. Bud said "Tiger, ya want a job hauling motorcycle parts from the shop to my home?" "You Bet Bud!" That began the first of many moves that Stuart Taft and I made in that pick up back and forth from Bud's shop in the San Fernando Valley, up Laurel Canyon to Mullholland, Woodrow Wilson, Woodstock, Willow Glen, and down Nichols Canyon to Bud's home. Von Dutch had painted the truck doors with a Triumph motorcycle and "BUD EKINS" in big letters. We were the coolest kids in Hollywood driving that truck!

Over the years I moved many an antique for Bud. Triumph, Matchless, Aerial Square Four, Royal Enfield, BSA, BMW, Pope, Indian, Harley Davidson, Excelsior, Monarch, AJS, Dot, Henderson, Yale, Thor, Vincent, CZ, Crouch, The Flying Merkel, Harry R. Geer Blue Bird, Hudson, and many more. I organized and stacked motorcycle engines under the house and in the garage. Parts were boxed and stacked on shelves. Bud would always send me home with discarded motorcycle parts. I had several old Triumph gas tanks, tires, wheels, front forks, and miscellaneous parts. I would store these parts in my parent's garage up Nichols Canyon. The next challenge would be to build a bike around the Triumph tank. I recall one bike in particular; I called it "The Bush Basher". It was built up on a mini bike frame customized to fit the much larger motorcycle front fork and wheels. The bottom of the frame was two feet off the ground. A Hodaka Ace 90cc engine powered it. With the bikes short length and high engine clearance you could ride it over the top of rocks, sagebrush, and bushes with no problem.

In 1965 I bought a Yamaha 80cc motorcycle that was a stage prop on TV. It was one of the two Yamaha's on the set of the Tom Malone Ski Show in Hollywood. I worked it off by trading work time with my Dad and Tom Malone. I would race down the hill past Bud & Betty's home every day on my way to school with my tuned expansion chamber rattling out the chain saw sound of a screaming two stroke. I usually stopped by Bud's home on my way home from school and later after work. If his garage door was open you could see Larry Daniel and Bud sifting through antique motorcycle parts in the process of restoring old iron.

Bud's next move was to a warehouse on the North side of the San Fernando Valley in North Hollywood at 7306 Varna. This was a gathering place for many antique motorcycle collectors, Hollywood movie stars, and good old boys. Steve McQueen would be there working on his latest antique bike. Kenny Howard worked for Bud. Von Dutch, as Kenny was known, was there, drunk, painting the straightest pinstripe on an old bike you ever did see. How did he do that? On one of Dutch's hard on drunken days, he got in Bud's face, a bit too close, and Bud slugged Von Dutch. It only took one swing.

I would always enjoy driving around Los Angeles with Bud looking for antique motorcycles and parts. Bud would give me a call. I would run down the hill and jump in the old Ford van, a glass of ice in the dash for the scotch, a pack of smokes, it was a blue pack of unfiltered French Gauloises in those days, and off we would go looking for gold. I remember kicking around a lot of old motorcycles in the San Fernando Valley, Long Beach, Orange County, and Los Angeles. Bud and I would tell lots of stories while hunting. Both of us were born and raised in Hollywood with 20 years between us. We had similar experiences growing up with our parents working hard and we, roaming the Hollywood Hills and terrorizing the Hollywood "Flat Landers". As dumb kids we both had, what I called, "borrowed" several vehicles for joy rides. Both of us went to schools to keep us on the straight and narrow, and both of us had survived! These times spent with Bud are pictures in my mind that I will never forget.

How about the desert races with Bud in Simi Valley, Hope Town, Castaic, and Mojave. One such morning comes to mind. I remember loading up the van and trailer with several bikes and heading out to race at Castaic. Racers Bud Ekins and Roger DeCoster, and the crew of Hollywood kids, Stuart Taft, Doug Snyder, and Tiger Michiels. Bud had his Triumph, Roger had his CZ, Stu had his Bultaco, Doug had his Dot, and I had my Bush Basher. I remember both Bud and Roger leading the pack and doing some unbelievable jumps in the race. I still can see Bud on that heavy Triumph, fly up a hill and air born, change directions, landing in a position that gave him the upper edge on the trail needed to beat his opponents. Regretfully I was not into taking photos, no camera but the one in my mind. The area where we raced and played in the desert is now all developed with retail business and single-family homes for miles around. I was not there, but I remember the tails of how in a Mojave race the trail went through a canyon that had the California aqueduct pipe crossing just above the ground before it went back into the hill. To get around the pipe all riders went up the hill and over the pipe. Bud raced up to the pipe, laid his bike down into a slide, and passed under the pipe, popped up on the other side passing several racers.

Bud moved his shop again heading a bit south to 11027 Weddington, in North Hollywood. I again have many memories of this shop as it grew into more antique motorcycles, horseless carriages, and unique old automobiles.

In 1973 I bought a used 1971 gun barrel grey, 1200cc, Harley Davidson Super Glide from a friend of mine in the film industry. It was the year I was looking for, and he came to me with the offer to sell. I paid about a dollar per cc. It was a man's bike with kick-start only. No sissy bike with electric start. Why did I want this motorcycle? In 1915 my grandfather, Frank Michiels, worked at the old Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Harley Davidson factory. One of my Uncles in law, Dave Ohrmundt, was a frame welder at the red brick Harley Davidson factory until he retired in 1970. I never did confirm it, but Bud and I figured by the numbers that family had welded on this frame. I still ride my old Harley.

One afternoon at Bud and Betty's house, we decided to walk across Nichols Canyon Road to a neighbor's new Jacuzzi and try it out. Al Simon was out of town and this new fangled swimming pool he had installed in his front yard was just begging to be skinny-dipped. I believe it was big enough to fit six people. At Bud & Betty's we disrobed, grabbed a towel, and ran across the street, up the stairs, and slid in. Just picture Betty Ekins, her daughters, Susie & Donna Ekins, the two Belgians, Roger DeCoster & Tiger Michiels, my ancestors came from Belgium, and I think three more people. Tom Brown delivered beverages from Almor and we partied! After turning into prunes we decided to head home. We wrapped ourselves in the towels. Betty was first to head down the stairs helped by Susie and Donna on her sides and Tiger from behind. Half way down Betty's legs gave out and back she came! I let go of the grip on my towel and grabbed Betty in my arms. In doing so I dropped my towel, grabbed both Susie and Donna's towels as Betty's towel fell open. So there we were, three well-endowed naked women and a naked man running up Nichols Canyon Road, a sight to see! We made it home OK, put Betty to bed, and wound the party down. Not knowing the do's and don'ts of a Jacuzzi none checked to see how it was doing. Having been overloaded by partygoers then leaving it low on water, we blew up the pump. We had some explaining to do when Al came home.

In 1975 the "Our Gang from Hollywood" left Hollywood and headed north to the San Joaquin Valley town of Visalia, California, for an antique motorcycle meet. Bud Ekins, Betty Ekins, Susie Ekins, Donna Ekins, Steve McQueen, Chad McQueen, Ali MacGraw, Josh Evans, Darby Collins, Dewitt Burdick, Chris Burdick, Urban Hursch, and Tiger Michiels, what a crew! We had a great time riding antique motorcycles and high wheelers. (More stories to tell here, high wheeler and auto almost meet, flat tire, Steve using my old auto engine air pump on my 1950 Chevy Suburban).

Saturday evening I went out and bought 5 pizzas, 5 buckets of chicken, several hamburgers, fries, sodas, beer, and two large cream pies. I loaded up the old suburban and headed back to Steve & Ali's room. All thirteen of us ended up having a party in Steve & Ali's small hotel room. No one knew I had the pies. I snuck one pie to Steve and said, "Nail Ali". Then I snuck another pie to Ali and said, "Nail Steve". When they both stood up and walked toward each other the pies flew, and the food fight had begun! I have a picture in my mind of Steve and me lying on his bed with pie and food all over us. The actual photo did not turn out, camera malfunction. Wish I had a photo of that hotel room!

To get away from the crowd, Bud, Steve, and Tiger took off into the country on antique motorcycles with sidecars, and back up vehicle. Bud was on Greene. Steve was on his Indian; I followed in my 1950 Chevy Suburban that I bought from Joe DeYong for \$1.00 (another Hollywood history story!) We stopped at a bar north of Farmersville near the Kaweah River, had a few beers, then went outside and played some horseshoes. We had a great time and no one figured out who Steve was.

Another memory of Bud and Steve was when we were showing off some antique bikes and had spent too much time in a crowd of people. Steve was sitting on a Vincent Black Shadow, or was it the Velocette? I do remember, fast, black, and English. I said to Bud we had better plan an escape route soon, Steve gave his look of agreement. I ran to get Bud's Ford van and parked it out of sight on the side of the next building, opened the back doors and put out the loading ramp. I ran back just in time to jump on the back of the bike, grab on to Steve, and tell him where to go. The crowd had grown and I could hear people say "This guy is Steve McQueen!" as some tried to grab at him. Steve said "hold on Tiger, were going through". Steve nailed that Vincent/Velocette and away we went, front wheel in the air, dividing people like Moses parting of the Red Sea! Around the building we went, I jumped off as Steve loaded up the Vincent/Velocette. I pushed the ramp in and closed the doors, ran up front and took off with a yeehaw! We made it, and Steve still had his clothes on!

In 1976 I made the Visalia trip by my self with Bud's Ford van, trailer and a few antique motorcycles. I had moved to Redding, in northern California. I called Bud to see if he was going to go to the antique motorcycle meet. He said no, but if I wanted to go I could borrow some bikes and go. I flew down to Hollywood, got Bud's Ford van and had it serviced by Charlie Woit "Mulholland Charlie" as he was known (many stories here!). With all new points, plugs, oil, filter, a greased and gassed up van, I drove back to Bud's, picked up his trailer and bikes and headed north. All the time driving I was thinking to myself what a great friend Bud was. How many kids can move away, then come home and have an old friend loan you his van, trailer and priceless antique motorcycles, and then leave town for a few days!

Throughout the 1980's 90's and 2000, I would call Bud on the phone and we would talk about old Hollywood, tell stories, and recall old events and memories. Whenever I was in Hollywood I would stop buy and see Bud. We were two kids from the Hollywood Hills. My son Bob told me of a conversation that took place on one evening at Bud's. Bud was sitting in his favorite spot at the kitchen counter and the conversation lead to where Bob's fathers favorite spot was. Bud pointed down on the kitchen floor at the end of the counter and said, "There's Tiger's favorite spot!" I must admit I spent many a night there. Most of the time my homing device took me one mile up Nichols Canyon Road to my home. Some times due to too much J&B or "Jewish Booze" my homing device would fail and my home on the Ekins kitchen floor, or bedroom down the hall, would prevail.

Bud would ask me "Tiger, why did you leave Hollywood?" My answer always was, "It got to be too dammed crowded for me". Having worked on our family ranches in New Mexico, Idaho, Nevada and California, I enjoyed the wide-open spaces. I knew that I wanted to travel the world, and not get caught up in the Hollywood scene. I've lived it! My ancestors came here in the 1850's. In my early 20's I invested in our 500 acre, Rocking M Ranch, on the Sacramento River in Redding, California. In 1976, I made my headquarters on the ranch in Redding, a beautiful town in the Northern Sacramento Valley centrally located in the West, half way between Canada and Mexico.

The stories we would share about the old trails in the Hollywood Hills. The caves we would explore. The old cars were that had been pushed off the old Hollywood Hills fire roads. The over the hill 1932 Chevy. The old Model T. The 1926 Nash, still there with wood spoke wheels, body, engine and drive train. We would compare stories of where we would race our dirt bikes. How Betty and Bud used to go to my cousins bar, The Coach & Horses. Betty used to work at the Coach; I was raised up there (so many more stories, the book is next!) How Bud met Betty at the Bob's Big Boy at 4211 West Riverside Drive in Burbank.

So many memories to recall. How I tried to get Bud up on Cress Street to visit his old home. I took photos of the old Weatherwax homestead, toured the original Frank Weatherwax home. Where Bud planted the row of Eucalyptus trees on Upper Cress. Where Lassie is buried. The original old shed built in 1915. The bear runs. I can remember when I was a kid going for a ride with Sammy Miles, the black delivery boy for the Coach & Horses. First in a 1935 Plymouth Coupe, and later in a 1949 Chevy pick up. We would go down lower Cress to the end of the dirt road, turn around by the barn, get a run at the hill and bounce in and out of the ruts in the road to get to the Snyder house. Doug Snyder is one of my oldest friends. Bud's father sold the lot to Doug's father. (Many stories here, Tim Considine, Doug's family, Doug & Tiger road trips)

On several occasions I brought my twin son's, Bob & Bryan to Bud's shop on Weddington. Bud became friends with both Bob & Bryan, made this old father very proud. Bud would visit my son's at their home in the Hollywood Hills of Studio City. Bob spent many evenings with Bud and Marilyn. Bob told me of how Bud invited him to watch a preview of the movie that Anthony Hopkins was in, called "The World's Fastest Indian". Bob enjoyed how Bud would comment on what happened to Burt Munro prior to it happening in the movie. (Many more stories here, Bud & I, with good friends Rick Pinkert, Tom McKnight, Bud had a crush on Ester DiMaggio, Tom's Mom. Sam DiMaggio told me of a story about him and Bud, must write about it! Sam still has one of Bud's Triumph's in his garage, get photo! Lloyd Thaxton, Lee & Jenny Thaxton, Jenny & Tiger in Malibu, Laurel Canyon and more!)

At Bob & Bryan's home Bud told many stories. We went through several old Hollywood photos from their grandfather's collection. Grandpa's name was Haskell "Buzz" Boggs. He was a cinema photographer for the Bob Hope and Bing Crosby Road Show movies, Jerry Lewis and Dean Martin movies; television shows Bonanza, Little House on the Prairie, Father Murphy, and Highway to Heaven. One story I recall is how Bud sold a Triumph to Parnell Roberts. I have a lot of this visit on video. I met Buzz's daughter Debbie in Redding, we married and had twin boys. Buzz passed away at 93, Debbie passed away at 48. For someone who never thought he would get married, so far I have out lived two wives. I've been married to my third wife, Susie, for 13 years. We have 5 sons, a UA pilot, a Secret Service agent, a computer programmer, a custom hot rod shop owner, and the third generation to manage Almor. 3 grandchildren and one on the way!

Bud would say, Steve always said, "I'm not an actor, I'm a movie star".

Regrets:

Not spending more time with Bud and writing down what we talked about!

Missing Betty's funeral, I was out of the country on business in Chile and Japan.

Missing Larry Daniel's passing.

My last visit with Bud was at his Hollywood home on August 6, 2007. My parents were in town, Dad was recovering from a cancer operation at home in Nichols Canyon. I was to go out to Musso & Franks with Mom & Dad that evening. I asked Mom to call me at Bud's when they wanted to leave. I took a photo of Bud on the phone with my mother. To have your 82 year old mother call your 77 year old buddy to tell your 57 year old ass to quit playing with your friend and come home! It's priceless!

About a month after I last saw Bud, he fell off his chair at his favorite spot in the kitchen. Bud said to Marilyn, "I think I need a doctor". I called Cedars Sinai, where my father had been just a few months before, and talked to Bud's daughter, Donna. It was good to hear Donna's voice and she gave me the skinny on how Bud was doing. I then talked to Bud. He was his usual self, very sharp and able to continue the conversations we had had a few weeks earlier.

The last time I called Bud a male nurse answered the phone. I told him who I was and he mentioned my name to Bud asking if he wanted to talk to me. Bud nodded, yes. The conversation was not our usual long story telling type. Bud tried to communicate but the morphine had taken over. At the end I said I would pray for him and said my good byes. With tears in my eyes and a very heavy heart, I hung up the phone. Bud died a few days later.

I miss ya Bud, we all do. I know I will remember more stories and tall tales we used to tell. I'll do my best to recollect and write them down for you.

James Sherwin "Bud" Ekins

May 11, 1930 October 6, 2007

Enough of my rambling,  
Tiger Joe Michiels