FOREVER GYPSY

LIFE IN THE GYPSY MOTORCYCLE CLUB

BY

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Gypsy MC Houston

July 11, 2011

GFFG
Foreword

I am pleased to introduce Raoul’s “Forever Gypsy – Life in the Gypsy Motorcycle Club”. The information in this document is an overview of our club, as it exists in 2009. It is presented in sections that describe how the club and chapters are organized, the process that a rider goes through to become a prospect, a member and a lifer. Raoul discusses the culture of the club as well as many of the traditions that have been established over the years. He also presents information on the Gypsy MC Museum and Hall of Fame; a project that is dear to my heart since we started it in 2002. There’s also a section that describes many of the annual events held by the club and chapters. Finally, Raoul discusses the club and chapter Internet sites and the “Forever Chapter” that talks about how we say goodbye to our fallen brothers and sisters.

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Distribution of this material will largely be made electronically and will be the responsibility of the Area Vice Presidents and Chapter Presidents to ensure that members receive the essay. It is VERY IMPORTANT to inform our members that this document is intended a “CLUB CONFIDENTIAL” and should not be posted on Internet sites or distributed to the general public.

I believe that this information will help to develop a more consistent culture within the club; I hope that all our members will profit by having this reference.

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1.0 Introduction

“Life in the Gypsy MC” is one member’s view of the most important things to know about this club. The Gypsys have become my family and I’ve enjoyed the many friendships that I’ve made over the years. I decided to write this document in an effort to share, what I feel are, some of the most important things about the club. To me, the club is about motorcycles, riding with Gypsys and enjoying the many events that are held throughout the year. I feel that the Gypsy MC is unique within the biker community and this document attempts to describe some (definitely not all) of the traditions that have been established over the years.

Although this material may touch briefly on the rich history of the Gypsy Motorcycle Club it is not intended as a historical reference. The intended purpose of this document is to educate Gypsy MC members about how this club functions. The purpose of the Gypsy Motorcycle Club is to provide an organization for members to share their love for motorcycles and motorcycle riding and to encourage friendships and camaraderie within the chapters and the club.

1.1 Description of Club

The Gypsy Motorcycle Club (Gypsy MC) has grown from its humble beginnings in east Tennessee in the early 1930’s to over a thousand members living in three countries and four states (in 2009). The club has chapters in the U.S., Mexico and Germany and currently has chapters in Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma and Kansas. There are Gypsy MC Chapters as far north as Wichita, Kansas and as far south as San Luis Potosi, Mexico. The majority of members live in Texas where chapters are aligned in areas designated “A” through “E”. The club has grown through geographic expansion as well as chartering new chapters in existing areas.

1.2 International – Upper Management

The Gypsy MC is a not-for-profit organization governed by a board of directors who are also referred to as International Officers or “Red Rockers”. The Board routinely meets in May (at the club’s annual Birthday Party and Mandatory) and in December (in conjunction with the Monty Mann Poker Run Benefit). Board meetings are held to discuss and solve problems that cannot be resolved within the

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1 The Board of Directors “E Board” is comprised of the Chairman of the Board, President, Vice President, Sgt at Arms, Enforcer, Secretary, Treasurer, Legislative Officer (the 1999 Gypsy MC constitution does not include a description for a Legislative Officer or Legislative Assistants), Historian/Public Relations Officer and Supply Officer. The board of directors (“D” Board) includes the “E” Board members as well as all Area Vice Presidents (Area VP), Sgt at Arms and Legislative Assistants.
chapter and to discuss matters of mutual interest. According to the Gypsy MC constitution the International President serves at the pleasure of the Chairman of the Board. The Chairman maintains the ultimate authority over the club and can make any decision he deems appropriate. All International Officers are appointed; there are no elections for officers other than at a chapter level. Chapters pay dues to International each month, based on the number of members in their chapter, that the club calls “blood money”. International uses the chapter’s blood money to support initiatives, donations and travel expenses for International Officers, Legislative Officer and Assistants as well as other expenses approved by the President.

The semi-annual Board meetings are followed by the President’s Meeting, which includes the President or their delegate from each of the club’s chapters. There is no distributed agenda for the President’s Meeting nor are official meeting minutes distributed. It’s up to each attendee to take notes and communicate information gleaned from the meeting back to their members. An informal agenda has developed over the years, which starts with a role call and distribution of membership rosters (December only) and treasurer’s report for the club and chapter. The International President welcomes the attendees and makes comments regarding chapter submission of required minutes and treasurer’s reports. Other agenda topics pertain to chapter openings or closures, upcoming events or reports on International’s initiatives and a legislative report on activities that affect the rights and freedoms of riders and club members. The floor is then opened to other business before the meeting is closed with the International President asking “What Time Is It?” and the attendees responding “Party Time!!”

International maintains oversight of the three countries and four states within the U.S. but each Gypsy chapter operates autonomously under a written constitution and club rules. The constitution establishes the name of the organization, the purpose, the administration and definition/responsibilities of International Officers, the function of Chapters, By-Laws, Membership, Chapter Government, Lifer definition, Expenses and Governing Continuity. The Club Rules and Amendments establish requirements for membership and how prospects become members, guidance for dispute resolution, dues and other requirements. The Chairman and International President have the authority to open and close chapters, which usually occurs at the recommendation of an Area Vice President. Area Vice Presidents have an Area Sgt at Arms to assist them with the oversight and management of chapters within their area. The Area Sgt at Arms is the only staff member that the Area Vice President has to manage issues in his area. The International Legislative Officer manages the activities of Legislative Assistants assigned to each Area. Legislative Assistants often work closely with the Area Vice President and Sgt at Arms, as well as the chapter Presidents to ensure that important legislative information reaches all members. The
Legislative Officer and Assistants attend national meetings throughout the country, representing the Gypsy MC and defending our freedom and rights with other participating motorcycle clubs. The International President has an Enforcer that answers only to him and can be deployed to assist in managing any issue. In addition to oversight of the chapters the Area VP and his Sgt at Arms are responsible for maintaining relationships between the Gypsy MC and other motorcycle clubs in the area. Each area has a unique complement of motorcycle clubs that form the MC “biker” community and hence, a unique set of challenges that may exist for Area Officers, the Enforcer and the International President.

1.3 Chapters – Local Management
In contrast to International, Gypsy MC Chapters operate using a democratic process, i.e., all members of the chapter have equal access to power due to the fact that they may run, annually, for various elected offices. Officers are elected each year in October and, although the President has the authority to take any action he (or she) feels necessary, the next election is his day of reckoning. Running a chapter without the consensus of its members does not constitute a formula for re-election. Chapters set their own monthly dues which must include a portion that goes to pay the member’s dues to International. Chapters essentially run their own programs as long as they are within the boundaries established by the constitution and club rules. International Officers don’t generally intrude into chapter business. There are exceptions and each Area VP may have a little different view of how far his authority reaches into a chapter’s business. The Area VP and Sgt at Arms serve as resources that provide guidance and help chapters solve problems. One of the most important responsibilities of the Area VP is to influence the chapter’s growth by creating an expectation for the quality and character of members recruited into the club. The Club must recognize that compromising the quality expectations of potential members in favor of building numbers will, in the end, cause more problems than it solves.

1.4 Membership
The Gypsy MC is a “family oriented” club and accepts both men and women as members. Becoming a member of the Gypsy MC follows the traditional path adopted by most motorcycle clubs. A rider might know a member or learn about the club from a friend or see members when visiting a local biker hangout or attending public events. The interested rider might introduce themselves to a member and let them know that they are interested in the club and wish to learn about membership requirements. The club should not approach a potential member, instead the rider should approach the club – the club should not appear desperate to recruit. If the interested rider makes an adequate impression on one or more chapter members the rider begins a “getting to know you” period where the potential member is called a hang-around. The hang-around period gives the interested person the opportunity to meet members, attend
events and ride with one or more chapter members. Since the Gypsy MC is a motorcycle club, the primary criterion regarding potential members is their commitment and ability to ride. There’s absolutely no substitute for spending a weekend on the road with a rider to determine whether you want him (or her) to become a member of your chapter and wear your club’s patch. The period of time that a person might hang around prior to becoming a prospect varies. The hang-around process is an unwritten rule within the motorcycle club culture and there’s no mention of it in the Gypsy constitution or club rules.

When a potential member sees enough of the club and especially the chapter that they may belong to they let the chapter know that they want to become a Gypsy “prospect”. The member that the potential prospect knows the best will normally become the hang-around’s sponsor. This member will communicate the potential prospect’s interests to the other chapter members, typically at the chapter’s monthly meeting. The hang-around will attend a monthly business meeting where his or her formal interest in prospecting is presented to the membership. The hang-around may be put on the spot and asked why he wants to become a member. After he’s said his piece the Sgt at Arms escorts him from the meeting room and the floor is opened for members to discuss the pros and cons of allowing him to prospect. The sponsor normally stands up for the hang-around and gives the general membership information that will encourage the chapter to support this rider’s candidacy. Once everyone has had an opportunity to voice their opinion a vote is taken and, if the hang-around obtains the required number of votes, they become a Gypsy MC prospect. During the prospect period a potential member is gradually taken into the club’s confidence and taught what they need to know to become a member.

According to the Gypsy MC Constitution the prospect period ranges from four to six months. The prospect period is not an initiation, as you would find in a fraternity, but instead a period of time when the prospect learns to conduct themselves in a manner consistent with the club’s expectations. It's a time when the prospect is:

- conditioned to display a sense of responsibility and respect toward the club, the chapter and the members.
- educated in basic motorcycle club protocol and etiquette.
- trained to develop habits that are basic to good security and communications.
- conditioned to participate.
- accustomed to trusting the judgment, at times blindly, of those members who may someday be his or her brothers and sisters.
A prospect wears a gold Gypsy MC vest, just like a full patch holder but without the center back patch. Members and prospects wear the Queen Gypsy and Papa Jack chevron patch which is an “In Memory Of” patch on the front of their vest. An AMA patch is required to demonstrate that the Gypsy MC is a family oriented club and a TMRA (Texas Motorcycle Roadriders Association) patch may be worn to indicate our support for this organization. Patches worn on the back of a prospect vest are limited to “Gypsy”, “MC” and the “Town Rocker” designating the chapter’s location. All of the back patches, with the exception of the road name, remain the property of the Gypsy Motorcycle Club and must be returned if a member leaves the club. A prospect will not wear a center patch. That patch, which is often called the “pickle” patch, is only worn by members who have completed the requirements for membership.

Figure 1 – Gypsy MC Vest Patch Placement

The prospect period is a minimum of four months and a maximum of six. Each prospect will have a sponsor responsible for mentoring them into the club. There’s a lot for a prospect to learn in a four to six month period; chapters and sponsors must work as hard as prospects to make sure that all necessary information is provided and absorbed thus preparing prospects for membership. Prospects should be competent to ride their motorcycles in a pack and keep up with, but not endanger the lives of other members. Prospects generally ride at the back of the pack as they need time to learn how their chapter
rides and what it takes to stay in the correct formation. It can be quite intimidating to ride 70 to 80 mph in the middle of a pack. You’ve got to trust that the riders in front of you, beside you and behind you will all maintain their “line” and that everyone pays attention to traffic and road conditions.

The progress a prospect makes is discussed at each monthly chapter business meetings. The chapter president may assign the prospect to do any manner of tasks that are required during a meeting and he may put the prospect on the spot by asking him or her about their chain-of-command or “what’s the only reason for having tread on your tires?” or “what is rule #22 in the club rules?” A good prospect will be willing to work for the chapter and will know the answers to the questions that every member should already know. Each chapter will develop their own way of managing and educating a prospect during the prospect period. One chapter, Big “D”, does what they call a “patch-in” ride where the prospect is required to make a Gypsy sponsored ride that’s at least 150 miles, originating and ending at the clubhouse. Although a ride like this doesn’t ensure that the prospective member is, indeed, a committed motorcycle rider, it does weed out people that own a motorcycle but don’t ride or those who shouldn’t even be on a motorcycle.

At the end of four or six months the prospect will be asked if he or she thinks they are ready to become a full patch member. They’ll always say “yes” so that question is usually followed by “why do you think you’re ready to become a member?” It’s amazing the diversity of answers that result from that question. After all the members have the opportunity to torture the poor prospect one last time the prospect is ushered out of the meeting room and the floor opens to discuss the prospect’s potential as a member. After every member has had an opportunity to voice their opinion a vote is taken and the prospect is called back into the room where the result of the vote is shared. If the answer is “no”, the prospect is told why. If the answer is “no” but the reason for the “no” vote is something they can fix, they can come back and start again, if not, they’re done. If the answer is “no” and the prospect is voted on at four months, the remaining two months may be allowed for the prospect to correct whatever issues exist. If the answer is “yes”, they are congratulated, given a center patch, which is usually pinned on until the new member can find a seamstress to sew it on permanently. From that moment on, the new member has all the rights and privileges of any existing chapter member.

Once a prospect becomes a member they are encouraged to participate to a greater level in the workings of their chapter. Full patch holding members have the opportunity to hold office and to accept various responsibilities for the growth and success of their chapter. Members are expected to be knowledgeable
of the Gypsy MC constitution and club rules and to be supportive of the direction that the International Officers may take the club.

The chapter, especially the presidents and other officers, i.e., the leaders, bear the responsibility to recruit and train members who will make the chapter and club stronger and preserve the most important values of the club. As the Gypsy MC has grown and as additional chapters have been established the importance of setting minimum expectations for potential members and creating a strong and consistent culture must be emphasized. Failure to attend to this will result in weak members, weak chapters and a club that is internally inconsistent.

Once a prospect becomes a full patch holding member they will continue learning about the club, not only from members of their chapter, but from members of other chapters and International Red Rockers. New members will begin meeting members in their area when they attend functions hosted by other chapters. Most Gypsy areas (A through E) sponsor an annual “get together” primarily for members of their area. This run may be a one-day event or a weekend event that may range from a “family picnic atmosphere” to an event having all the trimmings of a larger rally. The intent of this get together, like any Gypsy event, is for members to meet and create bonds with other members. The Gypsy’s are an extended family and often provide support to each other that may be lacking from their immediate family.

Within two to three years a new Gypsy member is usually ready to hold an office within the chapter and provide leadership that they were unable to offer as a new member. They may introduce riders that they meet or who they know in non-Gypsy parts of their lives into the chapter and club. These riders may become hang-arounds, prospects and, eventually, members in the chapter. This cycle goes on with new members coming into the club, older members becoming lifers and retiring and, unfortunately some members leaving because they’ve lost interest or they’ve been unable to conform to the standards established by the club or chapter.

1.5 Lifer Status and Retirement

Once a member has actively participated in the Gypsy MC for ten consecutive years he or she is eligible to become a “Lifer”. The member’s Chapter President must request lifer status from the Area Vice President who, in turn, elevates the request to the International President and the International Secretary. If the International President approves the request and the Secretary verifies that the member has been in the club for ten years they’ll receive their lifer patch during the award ceremonies at the annual Mandatory and Birthday Party held during the Memorial Day weekend.
After a member receives their lifer patch they may elect to remain active in their chapter or they may retire. A “Retired Lifer” maintains their colors and accepts an “emeritus” status. The Retired Lifers comprise what is called the “Lifer” Chapter that, unlike active Gypsy MC Chapters, has no officers, collects no dues, has no regularly scheduled meetings and exists only to facilitate communication between the active and retired members, to influence the culture of the club by virtue of their seniority and to continue enjoying the brotherhood of all Gypsy MC members. The Retired Lifer Chapter is managed by two “Lifer Coordinators” who publish a periodic newsletter and chair a strictly voluntary meeting at the annual Mandatory and Birthday Party.

1.6 Culture
Reference to the culture of the Gypsy Motorcycle Club is frequently made throughout this work. In this case, culture refers to the behaviors and beliefs that are characteristic of members of the club; a set of shared attitudes, values, goals and practices that define the Gypsy MC. For example, organizations like the United States Marines have established a culture of official and unofficial traditions that serve to reinforce the camaraderie and set the service apart from others. Establishing a uniform culture is the responsibility of the club’s leadership which begins at the very top. The original culture of the club was established in Tennessee and seemed to focus on riding and friendship. Papa Jack understood the significance of tradition when he established the Gypsy Motorcycle Club in Texas in the mid-1960’s and referred to his family as the founders of the club. These statements immediately defined the Gypsy MC as a Simerly organization; ensuring that members will look to a Simerly for leadership as long as there is a Simerly to lead.

The culture of the club not only changes as the leadership changes but also as society changes. Life in the 30s, 40s and 50s in the United States changed dramatically in the 60s and 70s and continues to change with each passing decade. Life in post-depression era eastern Tennessee is far different than our lives in the new millennium. Influencing the behavior and belief, i.e., the culture, of a diverse group of individuals is a challenge requiring that leadership adopt a “top-down” approach that is communicated throughout the entire chain-of-command. There is little doubt that the strong culture enjoyed by the U.S. Marines is a result of their leadership’s focus on developing camaraderie by emphasizing values through military discipline, communication and continual reinforcement. As members we must understand that these same principles must be applied to the Gypsy Motorcycle Club.

In the late 60s and 70s members lives revolved around the club with jobs and families often becoming secondary concerns. Changes occurred with the club’s culture when the Gypsys moved towards a family
organization in the late 1970s. Papa Jack influenced changes to Gypsy culture when he issued his advice for member’s priorities: he emphasized family, job and club in that order. Members often misinterpret his guidance when they are confronted with their lack of participation; they use Jack’s words as an excuse for not maintaining even a minimal involvement in the club. There’s little doubt that Papa Jack intended members to balance the priorities of family, job and club and to place the appropriate level of emphasis on each area.

Probably the most significant factor impacting culture is the relative emphasis that members place on their motorcycle and riding and how this love is integral to the goals of the club. There was a time, in the history of the club, when every patch wearing member owned and rode their own bike … this tradition is gradually slipping away from us. In the early years of the club everyone rode their motorcycle to weekend events and packed everything they needed on their bike … today members are just as likely to drive their automobile to a rally, towing a trailer loaded with their bike. It’s not uncommon to see members come into run sites driving expensive RV’s outfitted with satellite TV, internet access and a feather bed. Times have certainly changed and it’s up to the individual and the chapter officers to determine if these changes enhance or detract from the club’s culture.

In addition to the cultural influence provided by club leadership each chapter must establish a local culture that works for them. With over sixty chapters the ability to maintain a unified culture becomes a struggle. No doubt there are two schools of thought: leave the primary responsibility for culture to the club or allow chapters to establish their own culture. Allowing chapters to be the primary influence leads to inconsistencies that threaten the character of the club. The optimal approach for establishing a consistent culture is maintaining healthy communications throughout the chain-of-command from the Chairman of the Board through the Area Officers to the Chapter Officers and the active members. The Lifer Chapter, with its retired members, who often still stay very active through their participation in Gypsy events, offers local chapters an excellent avenue for positive cultural influence. Nothing gives a retired lifer more pleasure than to be included in a discussion of how to manage a chapter effectively or how to establish strong club values in their members.

1.7 Gypsy MC Museum and Hall of Fame

One of the most significant projects that the Gypsy MC has undertaken to preserve and share club culture is the Gypsy MC Museum and Hall of Fame. The museum is housed in a large self contained trailer that can be towed to a rally site for display. The exterior of the museum is painted black with the Gypsy MC name and trademarked logo prominently displayed on both sides of the trailer. The bike that the club
bought Papa Jack in 1978 has been restored and is part of the museum display. The interior of the trailer contains both floor and wall mounted display cabinets that make maximum use of available space. Display cabinets can be configured with various display materials depending on the occasion. A flat panel video monitor and DVD player will be able to play slide shows or other visual displays. The potential for the museum to have a positive impact on both members and non-members is truly significant and it’s up to chapter and area leaders to encourage members to visit the museum and take note of its contents.

The museum curator is the Gypsy MC Reporter and Historian, Oh Baby. She has been working on the museum project since the trailer was purchased in May of 2002. The museum was first displayed at the Gypsy MC President’s Meeting and Monty Mann Benefit in December 2004. The museum, at that time, was a “work in progress”, although a full complement of Gypsy artifacts were already on display. The different cabinets showcase various leaders of the club and focus heavily on the Simerly family and Erdin-Erdin. Photos, run flyers and pins are integrated into the displays. Gypsy club colors belonging to Papa Jack, Erdin-Erdin, Crazy Indian and a member of one of our Germany chapters, are included in the display. The cape that Papa Jack’s mother, Estella, wore in 1974 during a Buccaneer Days parade in Corpus Christi is prominently displayed. One of the cabinets is reserved so that the hosting chapter of the rally can display their chapter museum items.

The Gypsy MC “Hall of Fame” plaque is also displayed in the museum. The Hall of Fame was established by Papa Jack in 1979 for members that have made contributions “above and beyond the call of duty”. The International President accepts nominations for entry into the Hall of Fame and the Executive Board is responsible for selecting the nominee for induction. Hall of Fame inductees receive a patch to wear on their colors and their name and date of their induction is included on the Hall of Fame plaque. Three members: Estella Simerly, Erdin-Erdin and Tiger Red were the first inductees into the Hall of Fame. By 2008, a total of sixteen Gypsy members have been inducted into the Hall of Fame, making this group one of the most prestigious in the Gypsy MC.
1.8 Road Names

Road names have been part of the Gypsy Motorcycle Club since the club began. Road names are those “ridiculous monikers” that bikers often use to refer to themselves. Road names or nick names or aliases probably originated to safeguard bikers’ true identity or to make it easy for other bikers to remember them. In 1932 Lee Simerly was known as “Happy Jack”; in the 1960’s, Lee’s son Jack became known as Papa Jack. Each of the club’s International Presidents have had a road name including Crazy Indian, Pappy Jim, Erdin-Erdin and the current President whose road name is Hap. In the Gypsy Motorcycle Club it is traditional, but not required, that members have road names.

The club doesn’t like to recycle road names and makes an attempt to manage the approval of road names through the International Supply Officer. When a chapter places patch orders the Supply Officer checks to determine if another member has that road name. If a search doesn’t indicate the road name has been used the patch will be issued. The new member will sew the patch on the back of their colors, at the bottom and it’ll become their road name. Unfortunately, a number of notable problems have occurred with road names over the years. There have been two members named “Bumper”; the second Bumper took the name “Mr. Bumper” but changed to “Bumper” when the original “Bumper” was out of the club.
That road name duplication was let slide. We had two members called “Little Bit” until one protested and the other one decided to change her name to “Lil’ Bit”. Over the years we’ve had three members named “Rooster”.

One of the Gypsy MC International Presidents, Erdin-Erdin, got his road name because he was always in a hurry. Although Erdin lived in Del Rio, Texas he became a member of the Corpus Christi chapter (without prospecting) in 1974. Erdin rode from Del Rio to Corpus to attend chapter meetings and to hang out with the club on weekends. Erdin quickly established himself as both a serious rider and a committed member; the one way trip between Del Rio and Corpus was over two-hundred fifty miles. Erdin was always the first one ready to go and would say, “Let’s saddle up and erdin-erdin”, probably because of how his motorcycle’s motor sounded when he’d gun his motor two times and then let the throttle settle for a moment before repeating the same throttle action. The motor made a “vroom, vroom” which sounded like “Erdin, Erdin” and the name stuck. In 1975 Erdin became the President and a charter member of the Del Rio chapter and later became an Area Vice President. He was appointed International Vice President in 1985 and was appointed, by Papa Jack, International President and Chairman of the Board in 1994.

Members can either chose their own road name or one might be chosen for them. Some Gypsys think that if a member with authority thinks that they should carry a certain road name they are obligated to accept that name. Other members feel that the new member should be comfortable with their road name since they’ll carry that name with them, hopefully, for the rest of their lives. Some members may even change their names over the course of their membership. One retired lifer came into the club with the road name “More-On”. As a prospect he said something dumb which was called to his attention; his reply was, “I guess I’m a moron!” Fort Bend member Maniac thought that the name fit and this prospect came into the club with a road name he really didn’t care for. After a short time, he made it known that he didn’t like the name More-On so his chapter asked him what he’d like to be called. He replied that he wasn’t really sure but, at that time, he was feeling a little alienated. His name was then changed to “Alien-8-ed” and he kept that road name for over ten years. Shortly after he retired he changed his name again to “L.E.F.T.”. He’d had the letters “L. E. F. T.” tattooed on his left arm, not because he was often times confused but to remind him of the love of his life, “Loving Elaine Forever Truly”. He had a road name patch made that he wears on the back of his vest, not centered, but on the left side. L.E.F.T.’s road name legacy is one of the most interesting in the club.
1.9  Riders and Rides

Members are free to ride any make and model of motorcycle that they chose with only one limitation; the bike must have an engine with at least 250 cubic centimeters (cc) displacement. In this day and age, 250 cc ain’t much; a new big twin Harley is 96 cubic inches or just a bit over 1600 cc. The 250 cc restriction must be a holdover from Papa Jack’s very first bike which was a 250 cc Sears Allstate. Almost any bike will meet the club’s minimum requirements. The bikes that members ride range from small to large and from domestic to all kinds of foreign bikes. We’ve got members that ride big touring bikes, both Harleys and metric bikes like the Honda Gold Wing, there are also members that ride sport bikes like Ducatis, Ninjas and Buells. A number of members own several bikes and use one for touring and the other for short runs and day trips. There are even a few members that own true vintage bikes like a 1930 Harley VL equipped with a side car and a Moto Guzzi that our Int’l Vice President has ridden since he prospected in 1982. When you agree to ride in mass with members of the club you need to know who you’re riding with because bikes vary so much that there’s always an opportunity for a very poor match up with bikes and riders that are comfortable riding 80 mph versus others that will feel uncomfortable riding more than 55 mph.

The experience and competency of riders also varies a lot within the club. We have many female riders who ride and easily hang with the men. One female member, Uno Mas, has put well over 140,000 miles (as of May 2009) on her Road King since buying it in 2001. She’s a hard core rider and often makes two rallies in a single weekend. Each chapter has the power to establish the criteria that will be required for membership into their chapter. The chapter presidents are the gate keepers for determining what type of members, more specifically, what type of riders are acceptable to their chapter. Some chapters have actually allowed potential members to prospect before they even own or learn to ride a motorcycle. It’s easy to justify the old-timers not riding; they’ve put in their miles and their years and many of them are legitimately unable to ride. It’s the youngsters who don’t ride that threaten to test the fiber of a motorcycle club. It’s up to the Area Vice Presidents to provide guidance to the Chapter Presidents to recruit riders and not posers into the club.

1.10 Traditions

The Gypsy MC, like most motorcycle clubs, has a number of traditions that have been part of the club for decades. One tradition that all Gypsys know is the refrain resulting from the question, “What time is it?” Everyone replies it’s “Party Time!” The origins of this tradition go back to the early 70’s when the Gypsy clubhouse was on Brownlee Street in Corpus Christi. Rene and Hombre remember the origins a little differently but they do agree that Hombre initiated the saying when Papa Jack decided there would be no
more drinking during chapter meetings. When the meeting came to an end, Hombre would yell “What time is it?” and attendees would respond “Party Time”. Hombre also remembers asking members “What time is it?” and, if they’d look at their watch, he’d slug them in the arm, kinda like the kids game “slug bug” where the first kid to see a VW bug would yell “slug bug” and hit his friend. Very few Gypsys can remember when “Party Time!” wasn’t heard during a Gypsy gathering, whether it’s a chapter meeting, a poker run stop, a Gypsy rally or the conclusion of a President’s Meeting.

Another popular chapter tradition is the “nipple”. Most Gypsy chapters have a nipple that somebody in the chapter currently “owns” but doesn’t want to keep. It’s a mark of shame to have possession of the nipple and you can bet that the current owner is on the lookout for the next recipient. The nipple is basically a baby’s pacifier that can be small or large, it doesn’t matter. The guy that’s got the nipple has somehow gotten his bike down; it might be so simple as his foot slipping at a gas station causing the bike to go down on the engine guard and the rider picked it up immediately … no harm, no foul! Wrong. If a guy that’s holding the nipple (by the way, it’s pinned to the front of his colors for all to see) sees the other guy drop his bike he’ll immediately take his nipple and pass it on to the guy that dropped the bike. It doesn’t matter if the bike goes down while at a full stop or whether it’s a legitimate collision or crash. The nipple keeps on being transferred from one member to the next, all within the chapter. The member that’s got the nipple suffers the embarrassment of having his brothers and sisters see it pinned to his colors so he’s on alert for the next spill and the opportunity to pass it on to the next guy.

In December of 2003 a member who lives in the Fort Worth area introduced the “challenge coin”, a military tradition, into the Gypsys. The member, Body Shot, is a career Air Force pilot who learned about the challenge coin during one of his active duty assignments in the Middle East. Most scholars agree that the challenge coin originated during World War I when a wealthy lieutenant commissioned medallions struck in solid bronze and presented them to members of his unit. One young pilot was shot down and captured by the Germans who took all of his identification except the medallion. The pilot escaped but was detained en route to his squadron by the French. The French thought the pilot was a saboteur and, since he was unable to produce any identification, prepared to execute him. He showed the medallion to his would-be executioners and one of them recognized the squadron insignia. They delayed the execution long enough to confirm the pilots identity and instead of shooting him they gave him a bottle of wine. It became a tradition for squadron members to always carry their medallions. To ensure that the member had his coin, any member of the squadron could call for a “coin check”. If one or more members cannot produce their coin they have to buy a round of drinks for all the members that had their coins. If all the
members produce their coin the member calling for the “coin check” is stuck with the tab for that round of drinks.

The Gypsy challenge coins are beautiful; one side contains the words “Gypsy MC” and “What Time Is It?” along with the trademarked logo and a plate with a unique number stamped on the coin, the other side contains flags from each of the three countries where the club has chapters: Germany, U.S.A. and Mexico. The coins are issued to members and a record is maintained that associates the member and that particular coin. If a member leaves the club, it’s the chapter president’s responsibility to retrieve the coin when the member returns other trademarked club property.

Cardinal Puff is another Gypsy tradition. Cardinal Puff is a drinking game that also originated in the military. Members of the club as far back as the early 1970s were playing Cardinal Puff. A candidate seeking to become a Cardinal is seated among his peers and orders a drink, usually a beer. He solemnly intones, “Here’s to Cardinal Puff for the first time this evening.” Then he taps the table once with one finger of his left hand, once with one finger of his right hand, he taps the floor once with his left foot and once with his right foot, he rises up in his seat and sits down once and taps his glass once on the table and takes one sip of beer. He then repeats the procedure, doubling and tripling the actions; including doubling and tripling the introduction, i.e., “Here’s to Cardinal Puff, Puff” and “Puff, Puff, Puff”. Upon any mistake, he must chug-a-lug his glass and begins afresh with a new stein. If he completes his part successfully, he is a Cardinal Puff and is entitled to wear one of two patches, the first is a large circular patch, white with a green border and lettering that says “Cardinal Puff’s”, the other patch is black with a red border and sports the letters “OCAC” which stand for “Once a Cardinal Always a Cardinal”.

Some Gypsy members participate in late-night Breezy Riding. Breezy Riding has become a long standing tradition within the club; the practice was brought to the Gypsy MC’s attention in the 1980’s by a San Antonio rider, known as Breezy, who wasn’t even a Gypsy. He was attending a party one night and decided that he and a lady friend would go for a late night ride “au natural”. They shucked their clothes, got on his bike and went for a ride, but before they returned they were stopped by the local police. Although Breezy wasn’t a Gypsy, his antics were so adventurous to many members that the tradition was born. One member went so far as to design a patch that is awarded when they complete their midnight ride around the campground.

Breezy Riding has caused several problems over the years. There have been incidents when breezy riders have left the run site for a ride into a town and have had their ride interrupted by local police. In the past, Gypsy chapters have done a poor job of conducting breezy rides and haven’t properly segregated the
breezy riders from children and adult run participants that found this practice unacceptable. Breezy riding came under the scrutiny of International in 2002 resulting in a set of guidelines being issued that continue to allow the practice but establish expectations that were good for everyone. The International Sgt at Arms usually reminds the Chapter Presidents of the guidelines in the packet of information sent with the guard duty schedule.

Chunky Dunking is a more recent Gypsy practice that a member can participate in and earn a special patch. Chunky Dunking is similar to Breezy Riding; it happens at participating runs around mid-night, but instead of a motorcycle ride around the campsite, it is a late night dip in a swimming pool or a lake or river. Chunky Dunking is held at only one or two rallies each year and has yet to achieve the popularity of breezy riding.

1.11 Events

Chapters and their members are the substance of any motorcycle club. International exists as the glue to hold the chapters together and point the club in the right direction. With the exception of the annual President’s Meeting (December) and Birthday Party and Mandatory (Memorial Day weekend), all Gypsy events are organized and managed by chapters or individual members. Chapters put up their own money to stage events, betting that registrations and other revenue generated will be adequate to make a profit. A portion or all of the profits from Gypsy events are typically donated to charities selected by the chapter’s membership. The majority of Gypsy events are weekend rallies that begin on Friday afternoon and end on Sunday. Most all Gypsy rallies are open to the public and they sometimes draw more non-members than members. Members and guests typically arrive at the run site on Friday afternoon or early evening; setting up their campsites and greeting other attendees. Friday night’s entertainment often includes a band and “typical Gypsy beverages” (keg or canned beer). A variety of vendors offer food cooked and served from onsite trailers. Other vendors sell various trappings necessary to outfit riders and their rides. They sell t-shirts, leather jackets and other pieces of riding gear; other vendors sell jewelry and trinkets. They line up their trailers and tents in a makeshift shopping mall that most attendees cruise at least once during the weekend.

With over fifty chapters located throughout the majority of Texas the Gypsy MC offers one day and weekend events at the rate of about two per month with the exception of January. Some of the well established rallies include the St. Valentine’s Day Massacre, Still Goin’ Run, St. Patty’s Day Run, Cinco de Mayo, Ein Stein, Gypsy MC Birthday Party and Mandatory Run, Aardvark, GDI, Lifer Appreciation Party, Knockout, Fall Down, Halloween Party and Monty Mann. Each of these events has at least ten
years of continued scheduling. Newer events include (but are not limited to) the Fallen Brother Run, Pig in da Ground, Fiesta, Party on the River, Twin Canyon Run, Fools Gold Rally, Run to da Bayou, Armadillo Run, Rumble Thru the Pines, Piedras Negras, Moscow Birthday Party, Hot Damn Run, Cannonball Rally, Beach Bash, Casino Run, Los Gitanos and Wild Child.

1.11.1 Alamo City’s St. Valentine’s Day Massacre

Gypsy rallies are scheduled throughout the year beginning in February with Alamo City’s St. Valentine’s Day Massacre. For at least the last ten years the Massacre has been held in Boerne at the Kendall County Fairgrounds. The Massacre was first held in 1977 and has become the largest non-profit motorcycle rally in Texas. The Alamo City chapter has established the “St. Valentines Massacre Foundation” that donates profits to an organization that works with disabled children providing them with therapeutic horsemanship experiences. Although the Massacre is held in February, a time when riding weather is at its most unpredictable, it has become a fitting tradition to celebrate the beginning of the Texas rally season.

Figure 3 – Fallen Brother Run Flyer

1.11.2 Fallen Brother Run

The Fallen Brother Run was established in 2006 shortly after River City chapter member Bounce! started the Fallen Brother Project. The Fallen Brother Project is designed to create a source of support for members that may require physical or financial help. The project is not supported by Gypsy MC International but is supported by voluntary contributions by chapters or individual members. The annual
run is held the weekend after Massacre at the Atascosa Country Store in Rossville, Texas some forty miles south of San Antonio. Proceeds from the run go directly into the Fallen Brother Fund and form another source of assistance that requires approval by a board of directors composed of Gypsys located in each of five areas.

1.11.3 Del Rio’s St. Patty’s Day Rally

One of the best Gypsy rallies of the year is the St. Patty’s Day Rally. This rally was established by the Del Rio chapter in 1975. Although the run site for the St. Patty’s Day Rally is in the U.S., the festivities overflow into Ciudad de Acuna, Mexico, the border town located across the Rio Grande River from Del Rio. The main street in Acuna, more specifically the corner where “Ma Crosby’s” bar is located, becomes the epicenter of Gypsy celebration. Bars on each of the other corners: the Corona Club, Garabatos Dance Hall and the El Antro ensure that there’s adequate space for several hundred Gypsys to party. This is also spring break for most Texas colleges so a lot of college students spend the weekend partying in Acuna. This makes an interesting combination of bikers and college kids who have always seemed to interact and get along. The fun begins mid-day Saturday and by late afternoon the energy level and the blood alcohol titre brings out the Mexican Federales to monitor the celebration. Gypsys migrate from bar to bar, listening to music, sharing shots of Tequila or Margaritas and enjoying the “festival” atmosphere. Garabatos Dance Hall opens its doors to the occasional motorcycle that is ridden into the club to do a burn-out on the dance floor. Gypsy women have been known to dance on the elevated stage and often entertain the crowd by artfully losing strategic pieces of their clothing. As the afternoon wears on most Gypsys return to the U.S. for a rally-provided meal at the Sirloin Stockade and to party at the run site with the Del Rio Chapter.

1.11.4 Corpus Christi’s Cinco de Mayo

The Gypsy MC Mother Chapter, Corpus Christi, sponsors the Cinco de Mayo rally in Ingleside on the weekend closest to the 5th of May. Cinco de Mayo is the holiday that commemorates an initial victory of Mexican forces led by General Ignacio Zaragoza over French forces in the Battle of Puebla on May 5, 1862. The date is observed in the United States and other locations around the world as a celebration of Mexican heritage and pride. Although the Corpus Christi Chapter makes no claim to how many years the Cinco de Mayo rally has been held, it’s one of the best established events of the year. It’s an opportunity to visit members of the club’s Mother Chapter and to meet and spend time with many of the founding members of the club. The Corpus Christi Chapter often drafts several “Black Rockers” (members of Papa Jack’s chapter) to work security and help with field events. In 1979, Papa Jack and Jaynie Phillips were
married during the May 5th weekend making this weekend an opportunity to remember their wedding celebration.

![Cinco de Mayo Graphics](image)

**Figure 4 - Cinco de Mayo Graphics**

1.11.5 *Gypsy MC International’s Birthday Party and Mandatory Run*

The annual Gypsy MC Mandatory is the absolute highlight of the year’s events. It’s the one time during the year when all members get together to ride, visit, take care of club business and party. Mandatory is officially known as the “Birthday Party and Mandatory Run”; the mandatory part of the name suggests that all members must attend while the birthday party recognizes the club’s long history as a motorcycle club. This event, for members and their families only, is held over the Memorial Day weekend; beginning on Friday and concluding on Monday. Each Gypsy area takes turns sponsoring the annual get-together. Considerable planning and coordination is required for this event: an adequate run site has to be secured that will accommodate over a thousand participants. RV hookups are required for members that prefer all the creature comforts, a meeting hall is necessary to stage the President’s Meeting, the Lifer Chapter Meeting and the awards ceremony. A band stand is required for live music and a vendor area must be available to provide space for food and services as well as a place for product vendors to sell their wares.

Like most Gypsy rallies Friday is the when members arrive and set up their campsites and RVs. Chapters generally set up as a group and often display their chapter banner so that others can see where they are located. Mandatory is the event where several chapters bring out traditions that have been established over the years; Roundman, representing Calallen, always brought his award winning “Apple Pie”, a hard cider beverage made with pure grain alcohol and cured for at least two months prior to tasting. Not to be outdone, Bounce!, currently with the River City Chapter brings several bottles of her famous Root Beer; a sweet beverage with a definite kick to it. The Rockport Chapter has been putting on a Hawaiian Luau
complete with tropical drinks and hostesses dressed in hula skirts. Apple Pie, Root Beer, Border Blast and other drinks are gladly shared with members from all of the Gypsy chapters. The evening progresses and the hard partiers continue into the wee hours of the night. It’s all good fun and adds to the celebratory atmosphere of the weekend.

The President’s Meeting and the Lifer Chapter Meeting are held on Saturday afternoon. The President’s Meeting is one of two business meetings held each year. This is the primary communication tool used by International Officers to communicate significant Gypsy issues that have occurred or are planned. Announcements of chapter openings and closings, status of the construction or display of the Gypsy MC museum and changes or reinforcement of International’s expectations for members are presented at this meeting. The Lifer Chapter Meeting is held to bring all of the retired members together for an update on both the active and lifer chapter’s activities and news. Both meetings offer the attendees an opportunity to announce upcoming events and provide invitations to enjoy activities offered throughout the Gypsy Nation.

Award ceremonies are held on Saturday evening; the first of several activities that concludes with a band entertaining members with music they can dance to. The award ceremonies include presentation of “Lifer” patches for those members who have completed ten years of consecutive membership in the club and “USA” patches that designate the lifer’s retirement from active membership. Award ceremonies may also include induction of new members into the Gypsy MC “Hall of Fame”; the inductees receive a patch that recognizes the member’s “service above and beyond the call of duty” and will include their name on a plaque that is displayed in the Gypsy Museum. Other recognitions including awards that chapters might make for member’s contributions and patch-in’s for new chapters or members fulfill the final agenda on the awards ceremony.

Mandatory is a long weekend event; allowing the club to schedule poker runs into the more scenic areas around the run site on both Saturday and Sunday. Early morning church services are offered by members of the Christian Motorcycle Association. Many members pack up and leave on Sunday afternoon, especially those members that have traveled the furthest. Sunday afternoon and evening are generally times to relax and enjoy final campsite conversations with members that you might not get the opportunity to see during the rest of the year. By late morning on Monday, Memorial Day, the campsite will mimic the atmosphere of a Sunday morning carnival; it’s all business and the business is breaking down and stowing the gear for the trip home.
1.11.6 Gypsy MC Iron Butt Rally
The Gypsy MC Iron Butt Rally is a “members and prospects only”, one thousand mile ride that must be accomplished in twenty-four hours or less. It was established in 2004 through the efforts of Mount-N, who was then Vice President of the Big “D”; the first run flyers for the event state the sponsor as the Big “D” Chapter. When Mount-N became a Red Rocker in June of 2004 subsequent rallies have been sponsored through his independent efforts.

The Gypsy Iron Butt establishes a route with checkpoints where Gypsy volunteers record the rider’s name and time. Typically, there is a starting point and at least two check points; the starting point is also the ending point. The Gypsy MC award includes a patch (prospects must become full patch holders before they are awarded their patch), the riders name engraved on a plaque and, most importantly, bragging rights.

The demands of endurance motorcycle riding cannot be under emphasized; a thousand miles ridden in a twenty-four hour period requires a rider to be in good physical and mental condition and his or her motorcycle must be mechanically sound. A thousand mile ride should take approximately eighteen hours without requiring the rider to sustain excessive speeds to accomplish.

The ride celebrated its sixth anniversary in 2009. The ride is not intended to be a race but the time required for each participant to complete the run is recorded and listed on the plaque in order of completion. Mount-N realized that the club needed an event that would spotlight hard riding in the club and he rose to the occasion. The Iron Butt is definitely a challenge and those who have completed the ride know why Mount-N sez … “I dare ya!”

1.11.7 San Antonio’s Aardvark Rally
The Aardvark Rally is one of the oldest continuing Gypsy MC rallies that the club sponsors. The rally was first held in 1974, the same year that the San Antonio chapter was formed. The San Antonio chapter can be thought of as the “genesis” chapter for the San Antonio area. Members of San Antonio split off to form the Alamo City and Hill Country chapters. The first San Antonio Aardvark rally was held in the President, Tiger Red, mother’s back yard near Medina Lake in the Texas Hill Country. The Aardvark was held in Floresville from 1992 until 2000 when it was moved to Max Starcke Park in Seguin.

Max Starcke City Park in Seguin is one of the best-equipped locations where Gypsy rallies are held. It is a large and beautifully shaded park with the Guadalupe River defining the eastern perimeter. The park has adequate facilities to accommodate the eight-hundred motorcyclists that attend the event each year. Rally events include a warm-up party on Friday night; Saturday includes a fun run (poker run), field
events, bike show and a parade through downtown Seguin. Saturday evening features a live band and awards from the field event competitions. The San Antonio chapter often gives awards for non-field events such as the “Light Bulb” award to the Gypsy that is the most fun to party with and the “Tom Cat” award that recognizes a member who’s made significant contributions to the club.

1.11.8 Big “D” Labor Day and Lifer Appreciation Party

The Big “D” chapter, located in Dallas, sponsors a Labor Day weekend event (started in 1997) that was once simply called the Labor Day Party. The Saturday and Sunday event is currently held over the Labor Day weekend and now includes appreciation of the clubs lifers (they get in free) and the return of the Typsy Gypsy Poker Run (in 2007). The Typsy Gypsy is an old Dallas tradition that was brought back into existence by Big “D”.

In contrast to most all of the Gypsy rallies that are held at parks and campgrounds, the Labor Day Party is held at the Big “D” clubhouse. The Typsy Gypsy Poker Run is held on Saturday followed by a band that plays on a permanent stage located in the clubhouse back yard. Sunday’s activities include music, a home-cooked dinner and no-host access to the chapter’s full bar. Since there’s no poker run on Sunday, Big “D” members usually provide an escorted ride to Stroker’s, Rick Fairless’ bike shop and ice-house, a
fifteen minute ride from the clubhouse. The Labor Day Party has developed a large following from both members and friends.

1.11.9  *Calallen Halloween Party*

The Calallen chapter hosts their annual Halloween Party, established in 1984, at the KOA Campground in Mathis, Texas. The Mathis KOA is a beautiful park that borders Lake Corpus Christi, a 21,000 acre lake formed from damming the Nueces River. Tent camping and forty-six rental cabins are accommodations available at the campground. The campground is large enough for the thousand plus attendees that attend the Halloween Party each year. Members of the Calallen Chapter bring in Bar-B-Que pits and cook briskets for the Saturday night dinner. The Halloween Party is a “theme” rally that offers all of the normal amenities of a Gyspy rally, but also features a Halloween costume competition. Many individual members, non members and chapters take this contest seriously and really dress for the occasion. The costume competition is held on Saturday night during one of the band intermissions. The weather at the Halloween Party is generally beautiful as it is held the last weekend in October.

1.11.10  *Monty Mann Benefit*

The San Antonio area motorcyclists, assisted by the Gypsy MC, host the annual Monty Mann Memorial Run. The December Gypsy MC President’s Meeting is always held in conjunction with the Monty Mann Memorial Run. Monty Mann, a San Antonio Gypsy, put together this one-day run to benefit the San Antonio State School. The history of the “Monty Mann” states that “the run memorializes our brother, Monty Mann, who led the event each year until his passing in 1991. Since then, the run has been established in his name and boasts participation from motorcycle clubs all over South Texas.

The event typically raises more than $3,000 in cash, checks and gifts each December including toys, games and crafts for the 300 individuals with mental retardation and severe physical challenges who live at the San Antonio State School. Bikers, accompanied by Santa, deliver the gifts to the school. It is a touching and rewarding event to see these lovely people light up with excitement from Santa on his motorcycle and his biker helpers. It was founded to help prove that all bikers are not bad guys and that bikers care for the local community. Activities include a fun run, field events, vendors, a live auction, a drawing, music, dancing, food, fun and lots of generous friends.”

1.12  *Clubhouses*

Clubhouses have always been part of biker club culture. The clubhouse is the place where members hold their meetings, assemble for chapter rides and sponsor parties. The clubhouse provides the chapter with the ability to generate revenue and is important in attracting new members. The clubhouse becomes the
center of activities for the chapter and provides the chapter the opportunity to hold private meetings and activities or open it to the public. Most clubhouses also have some provision for a mechanical bay where members can perform maintenance on their bikes ranging from an oil or tire change to more extensive jobs.

The original Gypsy MC clubhouse in Corpus Christi was an old oyster house. Papa Jack rented the building that was located at the foot of the old Harbor Bridge. The old oyster house had a large parking lot and an open area inside the building that was used for meetings and social functions. The Corpus Christi chapter operated at least four clubhouses from the 1960s through the 1970s.

Considering the club currently has over sixty chapters, the number of clubhouses that chapters manage is fairly low. The Big “D” chapter in Dallas has the longest established clubhouse; there are two clubhouses in Kansas, a second clubhouse in the Dallas area (operated by the Mesquite Chapter), a clubhouse in Nacogdoches and in Del Rio and a very nice clubhouse in Germany.

There are a lot of positives that can result from having a clubhouse but there are also a few negatives. A clubhouse, especially one that is often open to the public, provides a great venue to recruit new members. The Big “D” clubhouse has an established reputation as a biker bar; it’s opened most nights and throughout the weekend, attracting members and non-members alike. Big “D” recruits from the guests that hang out with the chapter and when the chapter membership swells, members spin off to create new chapters. The Mesquite and Commerce chapters are both spin-offs from Big “D”. A clubhouse represents a real commitment from members but can also be a trap that snares members into spending more time at the clubhouse and less time on their motorcycles. A good chapter president recognizes the potential for members to become couch potatoes and makes sure to urge or maybe even require that members spend time on their bikes as well as at the clubhouse.

1.13 Web Pages and Internet Sites
Gypsy MC International and many Gypsy chapters have established internet sites as a means of sharing information and photos. The International web site (www.gypsy-mc.org) provides basic information regarding the club that includes a calendar of events, contact information for the webmaster, a guest book and an “In Memory Of” section that shows photos and information on deceased members. The International site also provides a “Links” page that lists all Gypsy MC chapters and links to their web sites. Chapter web sites contain more local information; presenting photos from past events and information on upcoming events. Chapter web sites also provide contact information to attract riders with interest in joining the club. Perhaps the most comprehensive website was created and is maintained by
the Houston chapter (www.gypsyhouston.com). It contains more information and more historical photos than any other web site currently associated with the club.

1.14 Gypsy MC Funerals
Uniformed organizations including motorcycle clubs, police, fire fighters and military have developed funeral traditions that differ significantly from the remainder of our society. These traditions are designed to recognize a deceased member’s affiliation with an organization and provide a celebration of their life. Each organization has a set of traditions that are generally observed when saying this final goodbye and the Gypsy Motorcycle Club is no exception. The club’s membership is over a thousand and the Gypsys are an aging population which assures that we’ll lose eight to ten members a year. Many Gypsys die at the end of a full life but others are cut down in their prime. Regardless of the nature of their death, the members pay tribute to their deceased brothers and sisters by providing important emotional support to the member’s family, attending funerals and staging “benefits” that are held to raise money to pay for funeral and other expenses.

Notification of the death of a member will generally come through an email announcement or a phone call. A dark shadow is always cast on the remainder of the day, while surviving Gypsys digest the news, recollect memories that they might have of moments shared with the deceased member or even contemplate their own mortality. Funeral or memorial arrangements are announced that prepare families, friends and members for the difficult task of consoling the family and attending the viewing and/or funeral. The dress code for members attending viewings and funerals is a long standing tradition, established by Papa Jack in the early days of the club. Black pants and a white shirt are worn with Gypsy colors. This tradition is still maintained by the oldest members of the club, especially in south Texas, but seems to be lost on many of the newer members. Small groups of Gypsys will coordinate their travel to the funeral home or church and arrive to pay their respects to the family. Photos of the deceased during the time they were a member are often posted on a cork board in the lobby or next to the casket. Floral arrays of gold roses might be draped at the foot of the casket or arranged around the deceased. The mood is somber and the grief felt by the attendees is the overwhelming emotion. Despite the mood, recollections of the good times shared with the member and occasional laughter results when remembering of past experiences.

Black ribbons emblazoned with the road name and year of their death are distributed by members of the deceased’s chapter. The ribbon is pinned over the mourner’s back patch generally from the upper left to lower right corner. Only one ribbon is generally worn at a time. Some believe that the ribbon should be
flown until it is separated from the colors by the wind; others put a time frame on wearing the ribbon. International President, Hap Simerly, announced at a 2009 President’s Meeting that he only wanted the ribbon to be worn across the back patch during the funeral day. Members are now moving the ribbon to the front of their colors. A more permanent reminder of a member’s passing is an “In Memory Of” or IMO patch that is worn on member’s club colors. The IMO patch has a black background with red borders and white lettering. The IMO patch is rectangular and is worn horizontally under an oval patch, black with red lettering, with the words “In Memory of a Fallen Brother” or “In Memory of a Fallen Gypsy”. Only members that were close to, i.e., a chapter member, an International Officer or someone very special to the member, wear a deceased member’s IMO patch.

Funeral and memorial services are held with primary direction coming from the family; Gypsy funerals offer mourners the opportunity to eulogize the deceased member. A fitting eulogy for any Gypsy is our Gypsy Lifer Chapter Coordinator Silver Tongue's words that offer both comfort and strength to the inevitability of a life completed here on earth.

“If there’s a Gypsy Heaven, you know there’s a hell of a ride going on up there. They have some of our very best. I know one day when I move on to yet another Chapter, I'll still be in good company.

I'm beginning to find it comforting in these circumstances, which we are finding ourselves in with increasing frequency, to feel like there's a whole Chapter up there, just waiting with open arms, for each of us to join when it's our turn to do so. I never thought of an after-life as actually being full of angels. But after losing so many of the really close family that has been created over the long years, I'm starting to develop a sense of presence of a big group of brothers in Gold up there. It's like they've moved on to another event, and they're just waiting for the rest of us to show up and register. I feel like it's by invitation only, and that my gold-engraved card is in the mail. Whenever it arrives, I'll sign in and be ready to ride in the best pack of Gypsys ever put together. What a ride. I know you'll join us one day. Won't it be grand?”

Following the funeral services, the motorcycles will lead the procession to the grave site. A black limousine, carrying immediate family, leads the procession, followed by motorcycles. The deceased member’s chapter president and family ride up front followed by other members of other chapters. Members with seniority or rank ride closest to the front of the pack, prospects and non-members ride towards the back. The hearse carrying the deceased follows the pack with automobiles at the rear. Motorcycle escorts lead the procession and are responsible for blocking intersections to allow the procession to progress safely.
Once the procession arrives at the cemetery the graveside service is performed and the casket is carried to the grave. The casket is lowered into the ground and into a concrete grave liner and a cover is used to seal the liner. Flowers from the funeral are often placed on the casket before the concrete cover is put in place. Family, friends and Gypsy members often take turns shoveling dirt into the grave. When the grave is covered the mourners leave the gravesite and travel to a reception where food is served and for a toast to the good times that were shared with the deceased.

The club often continues to honor many of our deceased members through annual celebrations of their memory. The Fort Bend chapter sponsors a Poker Run each year for Buzzard, who died on his motorcycle in 1996; the Mesquite chapter remembers Stacks with an annual memorial run. Stacks’ colors are on display at the Mesquite club house. The Kingsville chapter does a weekend run that celebrates the memory of Juan Zavala (known as JIIIIZ) who was a Red Rocker and International Vice President for Mexico. Several chapter web sites and especially the Gypsy MC International site post photos and information about deceased members as a final tribute to their lives and membership.

1.15 Summary
A motorcycle club provides a social network for its members to share their passion for owning and riding motorcycles. The Gypsy MC has become unique as its leadership and members have established rules, culture and tradition that provide the framework for life in the club. The information provided in this document is intended as a tool to enhance all member’s appreciation of what the Gypsy MC is and what it offers.

If you have found value in this document, share it with other members. If you hold a position of leadership within the club, i.e., if you are an International Officer, a Chapter President or Officer, or a Retired Lifer, use your influence to help others learn more about the club. If you are a member, and you profited by reading the material in this document, tell other members and your leadership. Try to always remember that belonging to the Gypsy Motorcycle Club means having fun with your brothers and sisters and enjoying life on two wheels. WHAT TIME IS IT? … PARTY TIME!