

## **GOING WAY OUT WITH HEAVY TRASH - Heavy Trash (Yep Roc/Shock)**



It was an unnaturally cool and overcast fall early morn when I tickled the carbs on the old Chief, clicked the starter into TDC and gave her a good kick. That big ol' V-twin kicked into life straight away. I balanced the throttle, ran it through a few revs to check the carbs – I had a big roadtrip planned and I'd spent a few hours each of the last few days changing oil, tuning the valves and carbs, lubing and changing cables. It was time to move. I'd been hanging around West Hollywood for some months, catching a bit of work playing bass guitar in clubs and on a few recording sessions, but every now and then you gotta move. I felt the need to hit the desert, feel some space around me.

I had a change of clothes in a bag tied to the pillion seat, a leather jacket on my back and my uncle's WW2 fighter pilot's leather helmet on my head. I had a sweet-running '39 Indian Chief, it was 1958 and I was wondering if that rock and roll kick of the last few years was gonna just peter out. Sure looked like it would, pity, there was a lotta good music going on there and, wow, what it did to girls! Every 22-yr-old guy would dream about that kinda thing, but there was something about this gritty rock and roll and R&B that seemed to open life up a bit more.

I hit the open road and rolled east through cheapass suburbs like El Monte. I was somewhere near Palm Springs when the road really started to get ahold of me. The sky was a brilliant shade of blue, the desert around me was a gorgeous shade of gold, I had a rockabilly kinda riff in my head and I hummed it while I pulled into a gas station to fuel up and take a quick breather.

I rolled and smoked a cigarette, downed a soda, gave the Chief a kick and got back on the blacktop. I'd had half an idea of heading up to Vegas, a buddy was playing saxophone in a show at one of the big hotels, but the sense of movement just took me and I hit Phoenix before I knew where I was. I grabbed a room in a cheap autocourt, showered, changed and rode into town to find something to eat and drink. Downed some steak and eggs in a diner and walked over to a bar where a Western Swing band was playing. They were pretty good, but I'd done some studio engineering for Bob Wills and these guys had a long way to go. Still, they were good fun and I met this sweet Mex girl. Thought I might've been onto something until I discovered she was definitely with the sax player, who was the band leader and I left the bar with the thought of a knife in my belly predominant.

I did steal a bottle of whiskey from him, so it balanced out.

I woke around dawn, perhaps still drunk, but I don't get hangovers, so it don't really matter. I had an idea to hit El Paso for the next eve. I checked the Chief and hit the road, quite forgetting to pay for the room. Well, fuck 'em, if they had beds less like bad hammocks, I might've felt guilty.

The day was fucking glorious. Miles of open desert all around me, light-fucking-years of brilliant blue sky. I didn't look for a motel, I just pulled up outside a bar and walked in. A Tex-Mex kinda R&B band were just setting up and once they got going, they were hot shit! Tequila and beer was raining over the bar, it was Friday eve and the field workers were

making the most of all of it. I kicked back and enjoyed it.

Knocked back several shots and a few beers, shared a joint in the carpark with a few Mex guys, didn't try to hit on any of their women. As fulsomely gorgeous as they were, I didn't want a knife in my gut. Sitting in the bar after closing, nursing a beer, Darlene, a barmaid old enough to be my mum, showed me a corn pallet in a back room and I slept there comfortably enough. And it was a nice surprise to walk outside in the morning, 24 hours in the same clothes, and find the Chief and her luggage still sitting exactly where I'd left them the previous evening.

I was hoping to make Fort Worth that day – and, by fuck, it was a long day, but I did it. I'd covered a lot of territory since I left West Hollywood, and hit a lot different cultures. I rediscovered something I'd learnt as a kid when I travelled a lot, that people are just people. Some are assholes, some are superbly cool, most are just regular folks that wanna do their thing, have their fun, and be left alone to do it. I hit a bar in Fort Worth and there was a great C&W band playing there. They really had a great thing going, a super rhythm and wonderful harmonies. I got to sit in with the stand-up bass, they were a great bunch of guys to play music with. Friendly, too, especially to an out-of-towner like me, that was waking up in Hollywood a few days earlier.

Still, I couldn't help but notice some things about them. They thought I was one weirdass dude, but at least I was white. Yet they didn't have a problem with praising black or Mex musicians. It's as if music is a leveller of all things human. You don't have to be this or that or think one thing or another, as long as we can play music together, enjoy the sheer sound and feel of it, then nothing else matters, not the colour of our skin, not our political opinions, nothing. Cos we get music, we hear this something in it, that makes life worth living.

I made New Orleans from Fort Worth in one long day. It really was a long day, the Chief started to give me grief. I limped into Shreveport, in no way my favourite town, but the local mechanic was a great guy, he got me back on the road and I went hard and fast thru Louisiana with Robert Johnson tunes rattling through my skull.

I knew this corner bar in the French Quarter, a bud from the LA club scene was running it. I rode up onto the sidewalk, left the Chief and walked in to be greeted with a double shot of bourbon and a beer chaser.

"Good to see ya, Doc" I said. He had a great band playing there, they kinda sounded like a little bit of everything I'd heard in the last few days, just mashed up and played thru better amps by hip white kids. I think the band name was Heavy Trash. I dug 'em. Met a gorgeous Cajun woman, too. And this guy name of Otis Blackwell asked me over to his studio to do some bass gtr on his sessions. Looks like I got a reason to hang here in the Big Easy for a little while. I'd like to catch that Heavy Trash band again. - **Earl O'Neill**