

# A Not-So-Easy Ride

**Former Bandido Now Focuses On His Book, Businesses, Family Life**



Biker, author and businessman Ed Winterhalder, a North Branford native, broke with the Bandidos Motorcycle Club in 2003 and is publishing a book about his efforts to take Canadian bikers into the Bandidos' fold amid a bloody war in Quebec. Winterhalder is shown here on a rural road near his home in Owasso, Okla. (DAVID CRENSHAW / SPECIAL TO THE COURANT)

By JESSE LEAVENWORTH | Courant Staff Writer

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He was known as "Connecticut Ed" in the Bandidos Motorcycle Club, where he served for years as an organizer and international ambassador.

Outlaw biker is one of many hats worn by North Branford native Edward Winterhalder. Others have included musician and songwriter, motorcycle and heavy equipment mechanic, husband and father, business owner and author.

Winterhalder's new book, "The Assimilation" (ECW Press, \$24.95), is due out in June. Co-authored by Wil De Clercq and subtitled "Rock Machine Become Bandidos — Bikers United Against the Hells Angels," the book details Winterhalder's efforts to take Canadian bikers into the Bandidos' fold amid a bloody war in Quebec.

That effort ultimately failed, and for various reasons, Winterhalder quit the Bandidos in 2003. It was a bitter split, but Winterhalder, 52, says he's happy now that the club has no claim on his time.



Ed Winterhalder's book "The Assimilation: Rock Machine Become Bandidos - Bikers United Against the Hell's Angels" is due out in June. (DAVID CRENSHAW / SPECIAL TO THE COURANT)

The self-described workaholic — who lives in Owasso, Okla., with his wife, Caroline, and 15-year-old daughter, Taylor — heads eight businesses under the banner Blockhead City ([www.blockheadcity.com](http://www.blockheadcity.com)), including construction, finance and entertainment companies. He's also recorded several albums under the name "Warren Winters," has written and contributed to other books about the biker life and is now marketing a new TV series about real bikers. Winterhalder was interviewed recently by phone.

**Q: You write in "The Assimilation" about seeing a group of bikers from New Haven, including two Hells Angels, at a North Branford carnival when you were 13 or 14. That was a turning point, right?**

**A:** Absolutely. It's hard to describe the feeling. It's like something that was born in you, and all of a sudden you come across what you are meant to be.

**Q: You were in trouble as a teenager — school vandalism, stealing cars — and you served a stint in prison in the early 1980s [for nonviolent crimes involving a vehicle title and a U.S. Treasury check]. Is breaking the rules a prerequisite for being a biker?**

A: All bikers live on the edge, to some degree. All of them have some sense of being against society and living outside society's normal rules and regulations. But most bikers also are looking for a sense of family, something they never had when they were younger.

**Q: You moved to Oklahoma in the 1970s and became a member of the Rogues Motorcycle Club. How did you become a Bandido? Did you have to go through any initiation?**

A: I ran into some Bandidos in Mobile, Ala., in the early '80s, traveling to Florida from Oklahoma. I ended up hanging out with them. It was the beginning of a long friendship. ... In 1997, a Bandidos chapter [in Tulsa] was approved, and I was the founding father of it. ... It was a long process. No one had to commit any crimes to do it.

**Q: You loved the accordion when you were a kid and "developed a fascination with Myron Floren," the accordion player who appeared on the Lawrence Welk show. You also say that you've always tried to avoid violence and that you quit drinking in 1986. So you don't fit the profile of a hard-drinking, hard-fighting biker. Is that public perception skewed?**

A: I actually won an accordion contest in 1966. ... The majority of the outlaw motorcycle clubs are just working guys who are only guilty of wanting to have a little bit too much fun on the weekends. They like to have fun and live on the edge. They don't typically conform to the view of the majority of society, but they're not somebody that the public should be concerned about or scared of.

**Q: You ventured into some tough situations, including a late-night visit to an Outlaws MC clubhouse, where you carried a handgun in case of trouble. Did you have many similar experiences as a biker club member?**

A: It was very, very unusual.

**Q: You talk a lot about the Bandidos' brotherhood and what it takes to be a member, and yet you acknowledge that some members were not up to par. You write that one club member was "incapable of taking a dog for a walk, much less controlling a Bandidos chapter." How much does character and intelligence count toward club membership?**

A: You end up taking in a few people — their agenda is about themselves; it's not about being part of a brotherhood. Those are people who have to have the patch to make them a man. Those people are all about something else. A lot of those people end up being the guys the public reads about in the newspapers. ... They are the minority.

**Q: The club leadership recognized your organizational abilities, and you were dispatched to Canada in 2001 to help a motorcycle club called the Rock Machine become Bandidos. [The Rock Machine](#) wanted to be part of a larger club because of the sometimes fatal fights they'd been having with the Hells Angels in Quebec, right?**

A: They thought that if we came on board that the war would automatically shut down. I think they were a little naive, and we were a little naive. ... The interesting thing about the Rock Machine is that these days, everybody looks at those guys as heroes because they stood up to the Hells Angels, but now a whole bunch of them are members of the Hells Angels.

**Q: You said in an interview with [the cable TV channel] Bravo that you did exactly what you wanted to for 30 years as a motorcycle club member, but you also write in "The Assimilation" that the Bandidos membership took a lot of your time.**

A: When I first got involved, the clubs were all about freedom. There were very few tasks back in the '70s

and '80s. As the years progressed, the clubs became more rigid, and there were more people telling you what to do, which is just the opposite of why you got involved in the first place.

***Q: You quit the Bandidos several years ago, in large part, you write, because of the prevalence of methamphetamine use among club members. Is that still a big problem?***

A: I think it's larger now. The clubs, because they accept everybody the way they are, and because they're founded on principles of having a good time, they tend to condone the use of alcohol and other "party favors," we'll call them. Sometimes people get addicted. ... and today's meth is made with a lot of chemicals. It's very common to run across mercury, battery acid, lye, Drano — my God, you talk about shoving some of that stuff up your nose on top of not getting any sleep for three or four days! We used to kid and say those guys aren't out in left field, they're in the bleachers; they're out in the parking lot.

***Q: You're a businessman with several enterprises; you're working on another book ["Women Bikers and Bikers' Women," due out next spring]; and you're marketing a TV series about bikers called "Living on the Edge." Are you enjoying life more now than when you were a Bandido?***

A: Absolutely. Especially at the end, there were so many places I had to go. ... I ran out of any free time, and there wasn't a lot of time left for my family, especially my daughter. She's not going to be young forever. Leaving the club gives me a much more balanced life.

***Q: You quit the club after what you call false accusations by fellow members about the leadership of the Oklahoma Bandidos and disagreements with the club's national president. You are now "out in bad standings" with the club, which means they forbid members from speaking with you, but do you still talk with club members?***

A: Yes, all the time. I just have to be careful about who's talking to me and who's listening because if the club finds out, the club is going to pull their patch and throw them out.

***Q: Are you looking over your shoulder these days? Are you worried at all about your break with the Bandidos?***

A: Not at all. I still live in the same house. I don't have any reason to be in fear of anybody.

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