

Born to ride, but made to write

BY MIKE AVERILL
World Scene Writer

You know those people your parents warned you about?

Edward Winterhalter was one of them.

A high-ranking member of the Bandidos Motorcycle Club, Winterhalter was an outlaw biker, a "1-percenter" — bikers known for being outside of the 99 percent of law-abiding motorcyclists.

At 52, "Connecticut Ed" has since left the club and lifestyle behind and now lives in Owasso, where he writes and serves as an authority on motorcycles and motorcycle clubs.

His latest book, "Assimilation: Rock Machine Become Bandidos — Bikers United Against the Hells Angels," focuses on his role in establishing a Bandidos chapter in Canada when the Hells Angels and Rock Machine motorcycle gangs were in a bloody turf war that would lead to more than 160 deaths.

The Bandidos, Hells Angels, Outlaws and Pagans are the "Big Four" in the outlaw biker world, a world Winterhalter said he entered in 1976, drawn to the brotherhood and camaraderie of the clubs.

And, of course, the Harleys they rode.

"You're born to ride, especially for us in the old days," he said. "These days, people wear a Harley like a girl wears a purse. But for us, it was just in our blood."

Winterhalter said he held the rank of El Secretario in the Bandidos national chapter. In 2000, he went to Canada to initiate Rock Machine bikers into the Bandidos club in a process called a patchover — where one club takes on the name, logo and patch colors of another. Because of Rock Machine's trouble with the Hells Angels, the bikers wanted to become part of the Bandidos, because they were big and strong enough to stand up against the Hell's Angels.

The book details that complicated process and how Winterhalter ended up in jail in Canada.

"My original trip was only planned for two days. They kept me a month," he said.

In the end, he was able to get back to his daughter and business in Oklahoma.

"It was sheer lunacy," he said.

The book also focuses on Winterhalter's life, and the difficulties of being a ranking officer in the national chapter, business owner and single father.

"The loyalty I had with my daughter conflicted with my allegiance to the club," he said.

Winterhalter, who grew up in Connecticut, moved to Tulsa in 1975 and soon joined the Rogues Motorcycle Club.

A couple years later, after meeting several members of the Bandidos, he decided to try and start a Bandidos chapter in Oklahoma, which took nearly 16 years.

But by that time, he had full custody of his daughter and no idea how to be a dad.

"It's not like she came with an owner's manual," he said. "I didn't want her to turn out like I did. I wanted her to have a good childhood."

That meant he couldn't hang out at night with club members around town.

He did, however, find answers to his parenting questions at the Parent Child Center of Tulsa, where he and his daughter went for seven years.

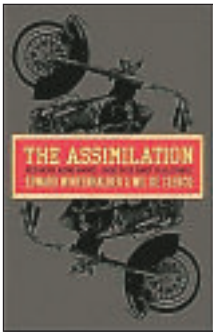
"I always tried to put her first. It was a juggling act between her, the club and my business," he said. "I look back now and have no idea how I did it all."

In 2003, Winterhalter left the club because of his conflicting views with some of the activities and to spend more time at home.

"I was running into an element of the club that I couldn't condone. That was the use of methamphetamine," he said. "In your world, that's like being opposed to management."



Edward Winterhalter, a former ranking member of the Bandidos outlaw motorcycle club, recently released his third book focusing on the assimilation of the Rock Machine into the Bandidos club in Canada and the bloodshed with the Hells Angels. Photos by SHANE BEVEL/Tulsa World



"ASSIMILATION: ROCK MACHINE BECOME BANDIDOS — BIKERS UNITED AGAINST THE HELLS ANGELS"

Edward Winterhalter, Wil De Clercq
Published by ECW Press.

Plus, traveling 20,000 to 30,000 miles a year was wearing on him — one of the largest components of being in a motorcycle club is the required attendance at several rallies and events each year.

"I'd work all week and be on the road all weekend. I wanted to relax and enjoy life a little more," he said. "It was getting hard to keep up with the younger guys."

"Assimilation" is the third book for Winterhalter, who started writing accidentally and admitted it wasn't anything he thought he'd ever do.

"In fact, it's the last thing

I expected to be doing," he said. "I thought I'd spend the rest of my days running construction companies."

His writing started as simple means of recording history.

"I knew I'd been involved in a lot of world-changing events in the biker world. I wanted to write everything down while I still remembered it," he said. "At the time it was more or less therapy. I never intended for it to be a book."

But 180,000 words later, he knew something needed to be done with it.

"I use to build multi million dollar buildings. I didn't think building a book would be that hard," he said.

With little interest from mainstream publishing companies, he published his first book himself, titled "Out In Bad Standings: Inside The Bandidos Motorcycle Club; The Making Of A Worldwide Dynasty," an autobiography about his time in the motorcycle club.

He put it on Amazon.com and to his surprise, it started selling and eventually made its way into the top 5,000 selling books for a spell.

That led to distribution deals with Barnes and Noble

Small Press and then Seven Locks Press.

His next work was part of a compilation titled "The Mammoth Book of Bikers," which was published worldwide in 2007.

After that, he didn't have much trouble getting representation and is already working on his next book, as well as speaking with TV companies about producing a movie based on his life.

"Nobody wants to push-start a train, but everyone wants to get on the train after it's going down the tracks," he said.



Winterhalter wrote a book about his biking life because he had all these words he needed to do something with. "I use to build multi million dollar buildings," he said. "I didn't think building a book would be that hard."

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