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late. He tells me to grab whatever bike I want, so I grab a 29" cruiser because it's the closest to my size and we take off.

Toby, Greg and I cut through the parking lot and are confronted with four lanes of fast-moving, rush-hour traffic. With a lot of teeth sucking and white-knuckled sprints, we make our way through the phalanx of steel and cut past the Poodle Dog Lounge and into a quiet residential area on our way to Thunderbird Coffee.

Greg stays outside with the bikes because no one has a lock. Toby orders both he and Greg a couple of pints of beer, but my thin, fourth-generation California blood demands something warmer, so Toby orders me a cup of joe. We sit in the parking lot. I remind myself that coffee isn't food, but it's sure welcome at this point.

"When I first came across Brad Farbstein at Real Ale Brewing, he was already making a great beer and we just hit it off," said Greg between sips of his Fireman's #4 Blonde Ale. Greg has since become friends with Real Ale Brewing Company's owners, and now they do a lot of cross-promoting between the companies. Flip over any six-pack of Fireman's #4 Blonde Ale and see for yourself. (Greg recommends being careful when you do that because the bottles have a tendency to fall out when you flip the container upside down to read it.)

Greg, Toby and I retrace our steps back to the storage area. I take the opportunity to do some curb-hopping on the way. It's been decades since I've ridden a bike without clipless pedals, so it takes me a while not to feel like a one-legged kid on a pogo stick. At some point my inner sixteen-year-old must have kicked in, because I'm able to make it back to the storage area without casing any curbs or totally burgering my shins.

We arrive at the storage area as the last of the daylight finally fades. Greg suggests that we head off to one of his favorite watering holes, the Pour House, located right next to one of Fireman's original locations, a former Travis County auto repair depot.

"We were at this location for about a year previous to our current location," said Greg as we pulled into a complex of buildings that looked as if they could be used for a period

piece set in the '40s. "It was a great place, but it was really creepy at night. I don't know if you believe in ghosts, but couldn't you imagine this place being haunted?"

Looking around at the mixture of unused auto shops and single-story buildings made out of locally quarried stones, listening to the wind whistle through the leafless trees in the compound, it would be easy to say yes.

The Pour House interior was quite cozy. At the bar I was able to ask Greg a bit more about his past. Prior to hooking up with NFL Hall of Famer Earl Campbell and Earl Campbell Foods, he "did whatever I could to keep the lights on." "Earl is a great guy," said Greg, "and did a lot to encourage me to go into business for myself."

"I had a regular job for seven years as a field representative for a developer," Greg reveals. I had a full time retail shop in the late 1990's, but I figured out that we could get our product to the customers without all the overhead once our name was established."

Dinner shows up and Greg produces a scrapbook that holds some memorabilia from the early days of Fireman's Texas Cruzers. While leafing through the pages of postcards and shop photos, Greg stops at one photo and says that this was "so and so" and doesn't he look like the singer from Pantera?

"Uh, Phil Anselmo?" I ask.

"Dude!" says Greg, shaking my hand and then throwing some horns.

The evening winds down after some more beers. Greg takes it upon himself to call me a cab, for which I am immensely thankful.

Toby takes off for a party and Greg and I wait in the parking lot for the taxi. Greg opens the cab of his truck and starts fishing around, then hands me a copy of the latest Alice In Chains CD as a parting gift.

The cab finally shows up, so it's time for me to go. I reach out my hand to shake his, but he gives me a big hug instead and says, "That's how we do things in Texas." ☺

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