

Ghost of Electra

Story: Koz Mraz

Ghosts are real. We've all seen or felt them, a dark figure in our peripheral vision, an icy otherworldly shiver up our spine. Or simply, we're haunted by a mysterious memory that forever endures. Residual Ghost energy inhabits every aspect of external life and eternal spirit. I have mine, her name is Electra. She fills my heart with dreams of travel and adventure. She is my muse and my mistress. Electra inspires miles of riding in the dead of night yet protects me with her "Angel's Bell." Tonight she guides me to lands of light and shadow; substance and specter. Tonight ***Electra Glide*** rides with ghosts.



The Desert is laden with long lonely highways filled with forgotten dreams, a place replete with ghosts. Ghosts of the American Indians who called this desolate mecca home for thousands of years. This barren landscape is buried in phantasms of perished pioneers crossing wagons chasing the glitter of gold. And of course, Route 66, America's mother road that once connected a bustling nation, now lies forgotten. I

traversed this land of the lost on a beautiful Superior Blue ***Electra Glide Ultra Classic***.

Old route 66 traverses much of the Mojave Preserve and is an eerie reminder of days gone by. Littered with abandon homes, cafes and hotel, the remnants of America's motoring past lie scattered along this lost highway. Places like Goff's Ghost Town on Lanfair Road in Essex, population 23, Amboy, population 19 or Danby, Cadiz Summit, Chambless, Bagdad or Siberia - population zero.





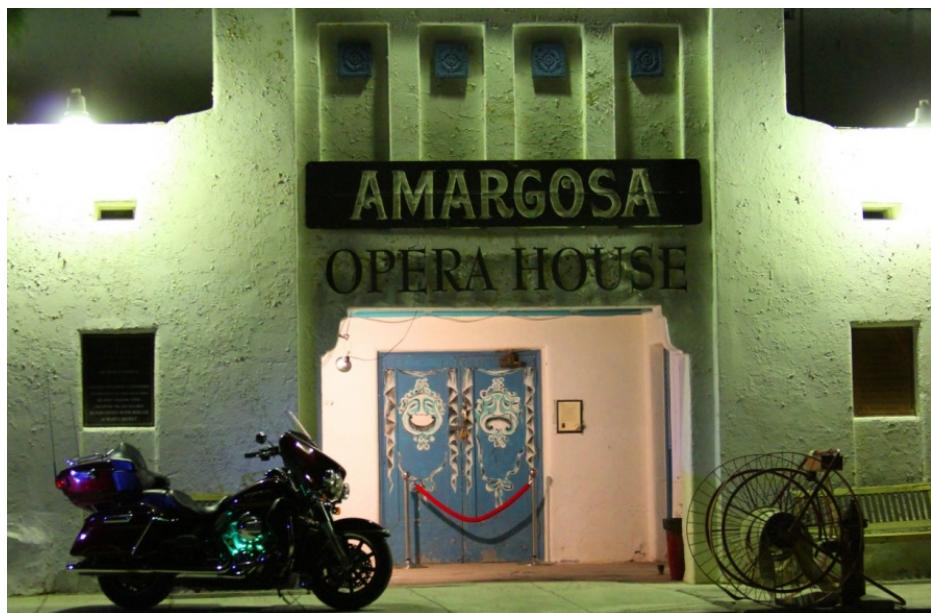
This ethereal journey began at State Route 62 and the 10 freeway where “girlfriend” (who strangely wishes to remain anonymous) and I met up with Zac King, a fellow ghost rider on his red sunglow Electra Glide. We stopped at Palm Springs Harley Davidson to visit my friend Mike Roach. His father, Tom Roach, opened the dealership twenty five years ago and is proud to be part of the legacy of family owned Harley Davidson dealerships. I told him about my journey and Mike demanded I wait a minute and scurried off. He returned with a guardian bell. An “angel” or guardian bell is carried by bikers around the world to ward off danger. You can’t buy one and put it on your motorcycle yourself, it has to be gifted. I gladly accepted, mounted it on Electra and continued to Yucca Valley through Joshua Tree. SR 62, or the “Blue Star Highway” connects to Amboy Road in 29 Palms. This is a beautiful road filled with long straightaways and expansive vistas and connects to Rt. 66 in Amboy.



Romanticized by Hollywood, the reality of Route 66 is far harsher. This tattered shamble of unmaintained 66 through the Mojave tells the naked story of the Oakies escaping the Dust Bowl. You can really sense the hope and hardship they must have endured, that feeling still prevails on these long lonely miles of unforgiving desert. I’ll pass on telling the fanciful romance of Route 66, as I embraced the reality of this road. It’s a story where nature prevails and the best laid plans of men and mice are mere anecdotes.



Roys in Amboy is a stark reminder of that forgotten era. Kelbaker Road turns into State Route 127 (Death Valley Highway) at the tiny town of Baker. It's here we gassed up for the 100-mile ride to Death Valley Junction. The sun was setting and darkness quickly cloaked the desert. SR 127 is not a place to be riding in the dead of night. No cell service and one wrong move or mishap and the motorcycle is hurled into the sandy abyss; your body could go undiscovered for weeks. Death Valley Highway is a well maintained endless two lane road and it's easy to be lulled into a 90mph trance. Often times motorcyclists ride either side of the lane avoiding the oil strip in the center. For some reason I hugged the right side of the roadway even though the shoulder was soft sand. In the blink of an eye a 2 x 4 appeared covering the center of the road and I missed it by inches. At 90 miles an hour at night it's on you in an instant, I couldn't have touched the brakes. I have never hit a 2 x 4 on the roadway but have seen the bent rims of motorcycles that have. Girlfriend never saw that and I never told her. My guardian angel bell rings to the rescue.



Our first overnight stop was the Amargosa Hotel and Opera House in Death Valley Junction. Amargosa, meaning “bitter water” in the Paiute language, is home to less than a half dozen people.



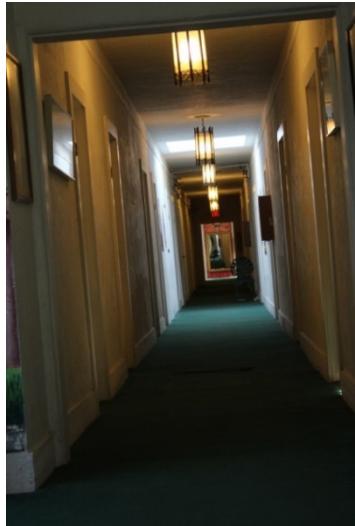
Founded in 1907 this mining community peaked at about 300 people in the 20's. The Spanish Colonial Revival whistle stop centers on a hotel, dining room, theater and recreation hall that stand today. Marta Becket, a Ballet Dancer began renovation in 1967 and the hotel and Opera house has become a unique destination for tourists and ghost hunters worldwide.



Marta painted all the murals throughout the opera house and hotel. The history here is palpable. A favorite haunt of comedian Red Skelton, the office is peppered with Skelton's famous sad clowns and we stayed Reds favorite room.



A guitar rests upon a chair, silently waiting for a guitarist. Murals of a 16th century Spanish Garden adorn the walls of the Dining Room. An un-renovated section of the hotel has long been referred to by the staff as “spooky hollow” due to a number of strange happenings which have taken place there. This part of the building was once used as a dormitory for the miners, as well as a hospital and morgue.



We reveled in the amazing opera house. Marta Becket was a professional dancer from New York. Her husband’s car had broken down here, and as she walked the abandon property, she was overcome with a prophecy that a New York psychic had told her only month before. Marta and her husband bought the Hotel and opera house and began performances in the 70’s. Marta recently passed away, yet ballet dancers and musicians still perform here on weekends carrying her torch. It’s a surreal step inside the diorama of Marta’s mind. Michele, the Hotel manager and opera house tour guide revealed that when shutting down the opera house for the night, the lights often turn back on. She then has to scurry back behind the stage to turn them off again then races to the door because all too often, the exit door becomes mysteriously locked. She then has to struggle with keys and a flashlight in the blackness and that freaks her out.





Guests have repeatedly reported hearing the sounds of a crying child during the night, when no children are staying at the hotel. This may be the ghost of a young girl who drowned in a bathtub. Room 9 is said to be the most haunted. Here, a number of people have reported that while they are sleeping, something would hold their legs and feet down. Yet more have heard the door knob turning, only to open it and find no one there.

We sauntered off to our room, Skelton's favorite, and retired early to get a good sleep for the long journey ahead. Girlfriend was repeatedly awakened by the noisy neighbor's door slams and late-night showers. I, on the other hand, slept like a rock. Upon checkout I mentioned her annoyances to the staff. They looked at me quizzically, "Sir, they replied "Its mid-week, you're the only people here." Turns out strange noises were coming from the walls, the sounds of footsteps crossing rooms in the night and coming down hallways are common. According to them, guests are often known to pack up their bags and abruptly leave in the middle of the night. I neglected to mention this to her, the ghost of Electra has only begun.

On the road again we left Death Valley Junction and SR 127 becomes SR 373 as we crossed into Nevada to catch Highway 95 north. We made a quick stop at the Area 51 Alien Center for a photo-op then continued on SR 374 to the Last Supper of Ghosts in Rhyolite.



Just outside the ghost town of Rhyolite stands a strange museum, boasting one of the most mysterious and evocative art installations of the American west. The Last Supper, a collection of giant ghost-like figures garbed in white, are the work of Belgian artist Albert Szukalski. He came to the Nevada desert in 1984 to create what is perhaps the most unique piece of his career. Originally designed to endure a mere two years, “The Last Supper” sculpture has not only stood the test of time, but has lived on to become the “genesis” piece of the Goldfield Open Air Museum. It was here that our ghost rider Zac, and his sun glow red Electra Glide had enough of this ghost story, and we parted ways.



Girlfriend and I continued on the 95 north to Goldfield Ghost Town and the Car Forest of the Last Church. Most ghost towns have zero residents, while others have full-time residents—though not many. This type of ghost town is considered “semi ghost towns.” One of the most popular semi-ghost towns in Nevada is Goldfield, which is also one of the most haunted.

According to legend, the famed Goldfield Hotel (Room 109) is haunted by a formerly pregnant prostitute named Elizabeth. Supposedly, she was chained to the radiator by George Winfield, the hotel’s original owner. He didn’t want anyone to know he had gotten her pregnant and was afraid she’d tell, ruining his reputation. After giving birth, Elizabeth was left to die in the room and her newborn was disposed of by being thrown down the mine shaft, which the hotel was built over. Many people have reported seeing her in Room 109, felt her presence and heard loud cries from a baby. Ghosts of small children playing on the lobby staircase have been reported, in addition to a ghost that randomly stabs hotel visitors.



Gallows of Goldfield

Right outside of Goldfield is the Forest of the Last Church. Why I am here? Only Electra knows. She sent me on another midnight ride under a spell of a starry Nevada sky. The Car Forest, here is where machines of mankind come to die. This bizarre boneyard is a Daliesque landscape resembling surreal Stonehenge at night.





Nevada is a bizarre radioactive dead zone, teeming with ghosts of the Manhattan Project and Area 51. The most heavily “Nuked” place on planet earth, Nevada was ground zero to 928 thermonuclear detonations. The last ones were 1992, only 120 miles from downtown as Vegas.

Our second night’s stay was the strangest yet. 80 miles north of Goldfield on Hwy 95 is Tonopah and the Clown Motel. Yes, I am not kidding. A place filled with creepy clowns built right next to a century old cemetery teeming with the ghosts of dead miners.



This place may be ground zero for the Creepy Clown phenomena that's sweeping the nation a motel employee explained. *“For some strange reason we have been booked solid over the last year and have been selling tons of creepy clown masks.”* Stated a young woman who also demanded to remain anonymous. *“People from all over the states are staying here in droves and they just wander around the graveyard at night. It’s something about this location near the graveyard, it’s a paranormal vortex. People come here and get possessed by some weird phantom, go home, do weird stuff and they don’t even know it.”* She stated.



After being awakened in 3:00 in the morning to screams coming from the graveyard, girlfriend had enough of this Ghost of Electra story and we were outta there. Packed in five minutes we were back on Hwy 95 south heading home. These lone highways may stretch for hundreds of miles but are changelings at night, becoming glowing shape shifters of reflective signs, white and yellow lines fading into the vanishing point. Some parts of the freeway light up with the latest technology while others literally disappear in disrepair. Route 95 from Tonopah is as dark and lonely as it gets. Signs pop from the gloom like glowing Tarot cards foretelling a foreboding future.

In the distance, a thin wisp of mist appeared. I approached this spindly ghost-like figure intending to blow though this morning mist for fun but instinctively dodge what looks shockingly human. The hairs on the back of my neck bristled like an angry porcupine. Replaying the odd image in my mind another shape shifting apparition appeared. This time I slowed to see if morning dew and incandescence was brewing a spurious concoction. Approaching at half the speed, the eerie form showed detail, markedly human, a broken human. Rattled, heart racing, I twisted the throttle to put space between me and this specter only to see three more filling the road ahead of me. I downshifted and blew through the twisting mist.

Cresting a small hill, the wide swath of my bright headlamp dropped onto the roadway below, illuminating dozens of these ghostly shape shifters -- all drifting directly at me. Girlfriend lets out a blood curdling shriek and began loudly reciting the Lord's Prayer. I blew through them as fast as I could as I saw faces, yes, faces! Panic set in; Electra was taking me headlong into horror. It's as if the long dead miners were heading home to the graveyard after another hard day in the mines. They passed ethereally right through my body with a freezing chill that hurt my bones. I hammered the throttle to get the hell away from these abominations as fast as possible. With the freaky-ass Clown Motel and Old Tonopah cemetery in my rear view mirror, I left the ghosts of Electra behind...forever.



Photos: Koz Mraz, Ron Pinkerton www.dejavue.us (Night Photography) and Margie Trandem



Koz Mraz has seven motorcycle travel and adventure books www.kozmoto.com