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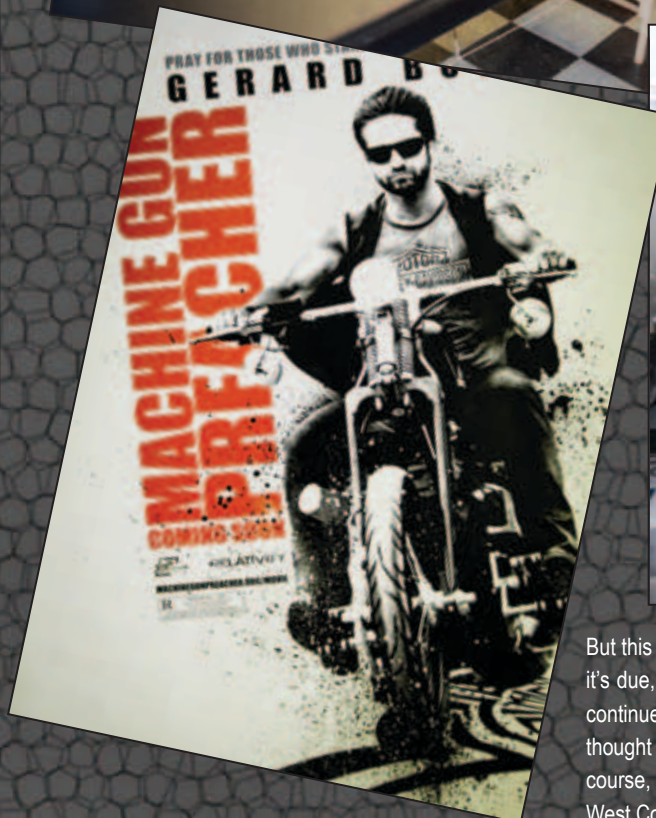
WHERE THERE'S BIKES... THERE'S GOING TO BE THUNDER...

MACHINE GUN PREACHER

by Ed Hinchey

As you cruise out Route 30 through the Central City area, you will probably see a hearse in front of a bike shop. If you look closer you may see a couple trailers with the Angels of East Africa logo and another logo....a machine gun. The shop, hearse and trailers belong to Sam Childers – The Machine Gun Preacher. I was familiar with the Hollywood version of the Machine Gun Preacher, a movie starring Gerard Butler in the lead role. Movies are great, but as Sam Childers the man has a shop right here in Pennsylvania, I figured I ought to find out the back-story and see what the Machine Gun Preacher had been up to since his life story hit the big screen. I stopped and introduced myself to the wonderful crew that holds down the shop while Sam is out on missions and left my card and asked if Sam might be able to spare some time for a quick interview. Good on their word to have him get in touch, I got a call from Sam as he was prepping for a trip to Australia to promote his most recent book “Living on the edge – For something worth dying for – the children of Africa” and had about 72 hours until the plane was wheels up. I headed up 2 days later and spent 3 solid hours getting a complete tour of his shop, and a full dose of Sam Childers intensity. Sam is unflinchingly direct. He is very open about his 1%er background. He readily admits he was mean. He looked me in the eyes and told me some pretty tough stories from his past. Then he began to talk about what’s he’s done since he became a Christian. Sam’s intensity doesn’t change a bit, in fact he drives points home with even more ferocity as he talks about the orphans he calls The Angels of East Africa. He has used his mission, his celebrity and almost all his time to help where he says God has told him he’s needed. Here in Central City PA, he is the founder and pastor of the Shekinah Fellowship Church. He preaches when he is here and uses all the funds raised to support his missions in Africa. He currently operates orphanages in South Sudan, Uganda, and Ethiopia along with several businesses he’s built in Africa that also help with support. One of his projects, and one we continued to visit and revisit during the interview is a 6-story building he hopes to finish soon so he can continue to train and employ the orphans who turn 18 and need jobs. He has established Vo-Tech schools that teach welding and car repair. He has built and supports schools teaching woodworking and the trades. He has an acting school he is working on. Anywhere he can teach the kids a trade so they can begin to support themselves. He readily acknowledges he doesn’t have much education. In his books, both “Another man’s War” and his most recent “Living on the edge”, he opens up about dropping out of high school. Now he sits across from me in his shop driving home how incredibly important he believes schools are for the future of the children.

There is a picture of Gerard Butler and Sam together on the wall. In another, Gerard is riding one of the MGP Rat Bikes. I asked him point blank, since the big Hollywood exposure, haven’t things gotten easier? He says no. He agrees that the celebrity that came with the movie has opened some doors but it also shut some. Donors that had given steadily in the past figured he was swimming in money and stopped giving. He does stress that some big Hollywood names, Morgan Freeman for one, made generous donations. But he says he’s only received a small portion of the money promised from the film. The books point to poor stateside distribution for the movie being the main culprit.



But this is where he drives home the reason the interview is taking place in a bike shop. Giving Hollywood it's due, he credits bikers and the motorcycle community with being the driving force behind his ability to continue the mission. A wealthy donor named Brian Most wanted to give Sam something just for him. Sam thought it over and told him a motorcycle with the caveat that Sam could do anything he wanted with it. Of course, Sam chose to raffle off the bike. And not just any bike. Sam reached out to Jesse James, owner of West Coast Choppers, and has Jesse build him a custom Diablo 2. On the fenders, 19 celebrities are autographs from supporters of Angels of East Africa including Steven Tyler, Kid Rock, Peter Dinklage, Slash, Guns & Roses and Big & Rich. For the next year, Sam toured the United States selling raffle tickets. The winner of the bike then, in an act of faith, tried to donate it back to the church. Sam refused. So there it is, sitting in

MACHINE GUN PREACHER

a bubble about 30 feet from us in the corner of the showroom. Together, Sam and the winner are working out how to best use the bike to help the ministry.

Again, the interview steers back to the building project. Sam is working on a 6-story building that will house:

A bakery on the first floor, a restaurant on the second, a hotel on the third, multi-purpose rooms on the 4th, Business rentals on the fifth and an open air kitchen/dining area on the sixth. He feels this will employ a host of people attached to his missions. Currently, he furnishes 4000 meals a day. That counts the families of the workers that Sam's business employ. That gives us an idea of the scope of the monumental effort Sam has undertaken.

All this so far is just a small piece of how far reaching the work that begins in the MGP Rat bike shop travels. Over on the counter is a stack of raffle tickets. One in particular catches my eye. Miracles For McKoy is the bold line at the top. You see, Sam Childers work is known for his mission in Africa, but he is also spread out across the United States helping where he can. He discovered when he did his bike raffle that most charities don't have the front money to buy an expensive custom machine. So in pure Machine Gun Preacher fashion, he began building charity bikes at his shop. All are old school and built by McClain's Jam Cycle in Acme PA and paint comes from The Paint Chop in Somerset. He then asks charities to cover the bikes with insurance until they have begun selling tickets and can cover the cost. Enter Eddie Dowdy of St. Louis Outreach. A fellow preacher, he was in a restaurant when he spotted a young man who had no arms or legs. Eddie went over and introduced himself to the young man's family. That young man is McKoy. After spending time with him in the restaurant, Eddie felt the need to help. Having met Sam after he'd been a guest preacher in St Louis, Eddie reached out for help. Sam was literally flying to Africa that day and promised to call back. Eddie says, "A few weeks later I get a Call from Sam. He had just touched down and was still at



the airport after returning from Africa. His first words were "Eddie, when are you going to come pick up your bike". They arranged to drive McKoy out to Central City so it would coincide with the 5th annual Angels of East Africa Ride. The whole way out 2-year old McKoy was amazed and enthralled with tractors. Upon arrival he played and even got his first ride on a motorcycle. McKoy and his family along with Eddie took the bike back with them. Other than an insurance policy to cover the bike in case it was damaged or stolen, all it took was Eddie's word to Sam. Perhaps McKoy's smile played a part as well. My phone call with Eddie Dowdy finished with two things. One was his promise to keep TRPA updated on McKoy. The second was a quote he asked me to promise I'd use.

"The world needs more Sam Childers" – Eddie Dowdy. There. Promise delivered. McKoy isn't the only charity bike MGP Rat Bikes has out there. We'll pass on the others in upcoming issues. Meanwhile, Sam Childers' work goes on. He needs \$500,000 to com-



plete his 6-story building. Sounds like a lot until you break it down. There are 404,000 registered motorcycles in Pennsylvania alone. If each of us gave the Angels Of East Africa a mere 2 dollars Sam could not only build the structure but stock it with all the equipment necessary to make it successful. We certainly won't reach every biker but you get the idea. Just in TRPA's summer issues we have covered biker led events that have raised over 1 million dollars for the needy. There is an RC up in Erie I know that made a donation to charity before they paid the electric bill on the clubhouse. This is what we do. This is why Sam credits the biker community for the core support of the mission. Eddie Dowdy says neither the government nor the secular community stepped up for McKoy. He credits the biker community for the effort to take care of McKoy. There is no way to do justice to a story that is still being written by guy like Sam Childers – The Machine Gun Preacher. Jump on his website at www.machinegunpreacher.org and take a tour of his shop, his missions and his story. He is an absolute force in person. We plan on a follow-up interview when he get's back for the holidays. In the mean time, now that the evenings are turning cool, hit Redbox for a win-win. A great biker movie for the guy readers and Gerard Butler for the women. The books are in stores and on Sam's website. If you are anywhere near that stretch of the Lincoln Highway just west of Bedford, out near the Flight 93 Memorial, stop in the Machine Gun Preacher's shop. His fantastic staff will welcome you and you can take a close look at the bike in this article along with the bikes from the movie. It is also a full service bike shop, host to Cupcake Tattoo and you can buy a brand new engine while you are at it. The Machine Gun Preacher doesn't do anything halfway. Look for the next MGP update in our December issue.

