

Dr. Gonzo's Wild

By Peter W. Knox

"The Edge... there is no honest way to explain it because the only people who really know where it is are the ones who have gone over."

– Hunter S. Thompson

"Hey guy in the suit!" It was another misguided freelance reporter wanting to talk to me purely on the grounds of my attire. I had to disappoint him and tell him that I was just a college student from Philadelphia hoping to get into the tightly guarded high profile event that was Hunter S. Thompson's funeral.

Standing outside the gates of Owl Farm, the "fortified compound in Colorado" always mentioned in Thompson's author's bio, my black funereal suit was the only thing that separated me from the horde of followers paying their respects. I had worn it in hopes of sneaking past the guards disguised as an invited guest, a ploy that failed utterly.

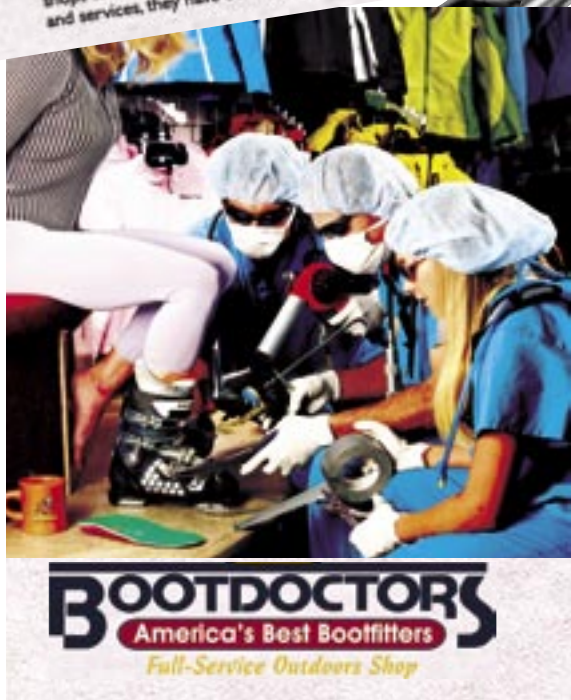
Thompson's final wish was to have his ashes shot from a cannon over his property in Aspen. And there it stood, a 2.5 million dollar cannon, a one hundred and three foot tall metallic cylinder topped with a red two-thumbed "Gonzo" fist clutching a color-changing peyote button. It was six months to the day from Thompson's suicide on February 20, 2005, at the age of 67.

"I feel like I might as well be sitting up here carving the words for my own tombstone... and when I finish, the only fitting exit will be right off this fucking terrace and into The Fountain, 28 stories below and at least 200 yards out into the air and across Fifth Avenue... Nobody could follow that act."

– Hunter S. Thompson 12/23/77

Thompson used his typewriter the way Jimi Hendrix played the guitar and Bob Dylan wrote lyrics. He was an innovator, and showed the world that you could cover an event without reporting a single fact – that there was more truth in fiction – subsequently creating a genre of journalism called Gonzo.

Thompson prowled for weirdness in a time before you could cover the presidential race through the Internet – he wrote pages on a typewriter and submitted them through a fax machine, and traveled on a bus full of journalists.



Ride

His finest work was completed under the influence of a slew of drugs, hours or days past deadline, locked in a hotel room with no sleep and hundreds of dollars in room service charges. Covering a Kentucky Derby would entail a four-day whiskey binge, and a yacht race meant trying to spray paint "Fuck the Pope" onto the side of a boat. Every article read like a survival story with Thompson trying to escape from situations he'd found himself trapped in.

Thompson considered himself a "politics junkie" at heart, starting with his coverage of the 1968 Democratic Convention. The rioting and police brutality of that event encouraged him to run for Sheriff of Aspen on the "Freak Power Party" ticket – to rid the town of "greedheads." His platform included plans to tear up all the streets and plant grass, and he lost by only a small margin.

Unquestionably, Thompson has inspired many to pursue work in journalism, but none has come close to duplicating his style, and it is safe to say he'll never be replaced. Writing called to him and he pursued it vehemently from the time he created his own newspaper at age eight. He later retyped entire novels by Hemmingway and wrote out *The Great Gatsby* longhand to incorporate its rhythms into his own style, stating, "He that is taught only by himself has a fool for a master." The fifteen books and countless articles he left behind are a testament to his unique blend of experienced prose and extreme lifestyle, and will be remembered as the work of one of America's greatest writers.

The sky darkened after sunset, and the glowing of the cannon's peyote button was the only proof that anything was there. Soon the repetitive drumming of a Japanese tribal band filled the valley as Hunter S. Thompson's son Juan raised a champagne glass and proclaimed "The King is dead. Long live the King." At that moment, the sky exploded with two rounds of fantastically colored fireworks high above the cannon, Thompson's ashes falling among the debris.



Illustration by Matt Jay



Furniture that entertains the room when you're gone