

An Evening (Gasp!) with Hunter Thompson

Boston correspondent Sam Allis went to Colorado last week to interview Hunter S. Thompson, the inventor of gonzo journalism, author (*Hell's Angels*, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*) and defiant eccentric, at his home in Woody Creek. This is what happened:

I gave up on the interview and started worrying about my life when Hunter Thompson squirted two cans of fire starter on the Christmas tree he was going to burn in his living-room fireplace, a few feet away from an unopened wooden crate of 9-mm bullets. That the tree was far too large to fit into the fireplace mattered not a whit to Hunter, who was sporting a dime-store wig at the time and resembled Tony Perkins in *Psycho*. Minutes earlier, he had smashed a Polaroid camera on the floor.

Hunter had decided to videotape the Christmas tree burning, and we later heard on the replay the terrified voices of Deborah Fuller, his longtime secretary-baby sitter, and me off-camera pleading with him, "NO, HUNTER, NO! PLEASE, HUNTER, DON'T DO IT!" The original manuscript of *Hell's Angels* was on the table, and there were the bullets. Nothing doing. Thompson was a man possessed by now, full of the Chivas Regal he had been slurping straight from the bottle and the gin he had been mixing with pink lemonade for hours.

But then the whole evening had been like this. It began in late daylight, when Hunter shot his beloved tracer pistol into the air and then started training it at passing cars. One tracer hit a tree

and boomeranged back at us. Everyone thought that was really neat.

Then Hunter played his tape of a jackrabbit screaming. I didn't know rabbits even made noise. Hunters apparently use tapes like this to attract coyotes. I thought at first I was listening to a baby crying. Then I realized it was not human.

Then we shot Hunter's Olympic-quality pellet pistol

view, and he couldn't find one. "WHERE IS MY F_____ WIG?!" Deborah scurried off and found one. Then we sat down to talk. I began with a soft pitch on the '80s stuff he has written a lot about in his columns. He responded with questions on his views about suicide raised by his lecture audiences.

Then Deborah came in to tell Hunter she was going to bed, and Hunter panicked.

porch through the window resembled something out of Watts in 1965. The chimney was on fire. His five peacocks, whose roost was separated from the living room by a thin pane of glass, were not happy. Nor was Hunter, who yelled at me, "GET BACK IN THERE, FOOL!" He had given me an iron prodder with which I was to keep pushing the tree into the fireplace. "I'M NOT GOING BACK IN THERE," I yelled back.

The whole room was full of smoke, and flames kicked up onto the mantel and on toward the ceiling. Thompson dashed back in and did battle with the tree. Framed against the fire—his wig askew, his lower lip drooping, his eyes glazed—this 50-year-old man-child was in his element. Meanwhile, a tape of his favorite group, the Cowboy Junkies, played renditions of *Sleep Walk* by Santo and Johnny and then *Blue Moon*.

The video of all this is, quite simply, astonishing. I begged him for a copy, but Hunter only giggled. He knew it could be used in a mental-competency hearing. He was so pleased with it when we watched later in the kitchen that he brought out an earlier video he had made that involves him and an inflated life-size woman doll in a whirlpool bath. It was about then that Hunter called himself the "champion of fun." Deborah was so struck with the line that she immediately wrote it down.

It was now almost 3 a.m. Hunter was calm, his mania temporarily exhausted. He smiled as he walked me to my car and said, "I guess we will never see each other again."



Thompson swiftly dispatches a recalcitrant typewriter amid the snows near his home

at exploding targets he had mounted over his fireplace. This event was also taped.

Then we watched a tape of a pro-football game and then another of the famous 1971 Ali-Frazier fight. Thompson drank Chivas from the bottle and noshed on desserts he had taken from a fancy restaurant.

Then the fight tape ended, and Hunter decided he didn't want to do the interview with me. He decided he didn't like Q. & A. Deborah reminded him that he had agreed to do it. I reminded him that we had talked on the phone about it. He threw some things on the floor.

Then Hunter decided to try a few questions. But he needed a wig to do the inter-

Hunter, it became clear, is petrified of being left alone, particularly with TIME magazine and a tape recorder. Hunter Thompson is a scared little puppy beneath the alcohol, tobacco and firearms. He bawled Deborah out for not briefing him adequately on the interview and said that Sam Allis was not to blame for this. He said this was NOT THE DESIRED EFFECT. That's when he smashed the Polaroid on the floor and decided to burn the Christmas tree.

When Hunter tossed a lit match at the Christmas tree, it exploded into flames. He took a few pulls on the fire extinguisher and then joined us outside. The view from the

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