



# Have Camera. Will Travel

By Debbie Hill

Long before hotel chains and big box retail became a mainstay in our country's landscape, before the words kitsch and Americana had entered our vocabulary, Colorado photographer Martin Garfinkel (Immediately above), straddled his Harley, took to the open road, and captured an unparalleled time on Main Street America.

Like many others who travelled Route 66; the stretch of highway from Chicago to Santa Monica, Garfinkel's small town sojourn in the 1970s and 80s was equal parts freedom and fortuity. For just as Garfinkel was moving away from a career in the corporate world, he unwittingly transitioned into a new role; visual historian of what John Steinbeck called "The Mother Road" during her halcyon days.

As carloads of tourists flooded newly constructed roads and interstates, eager to experience the novelty of cross-country travel, Garfinkel turned his attention (and lens) to rare ghost signs and rusted neon which beckoned weary travelers, and advertisements for everything from motel vacancies to blue-plate special diners. Martin elicited his intuition and keen eye while growing his portfolio of landscape and roadside memorabilia exponentially. What began as a biker's bucket list of fresh air and fewer distractions

seamlessly morphed into a collection of iconic images, defining the artist while launching his new business venture, Roadside Gallery.

An afternoon in Martin's gallery is akin to leafing through Kerouac's *On the Road* or any of Steinbeck's pages of personal travel journals. Visitors willingly assume a place in his sidecar, traversing the famed Route 66 when businesses weren't defined by bland corporate branding, but known for bold, playful images, only now considered to be roadside art. Take for instance the colorful image of the El Don Motel, a neon sign captured at night in Albuquerque, New Mexico. A confident cowboy with one arm raised commands a crimson steed, the gold lasso enclosing the name of the establishment. It's hard to imagine a time, an era, when family vacations meant surveying "vacancy" or "no vacancy" signs, and when "color TV, phone in rooms, cold pop, and queen beds" was not a given, but a welcome relief for those needing respite. Visiting the gallery or clicking through the thumbnails on the Roadside Gallery website fills the viewer with longing for a time and place they instinctively know has passed.

During his travels, Garfinkel realized there was no guarantee these nostalgic markers would live on. Once he no more than captured a neon image before being met with the person assigned to take the sign down the very next day. His Route 66 collection gives credence to a counter-culture of calm in the face of national crisis, void of cell phones, internet, Travel Advisor, Open Table, and Air B&B. It was Americana at its best; thanks to Martin it will remain permanently etched in our memory.

Roadside Gallery is located at 320 Main Street in Carbondale, Colorado. Additional images from the Route 66 collection can be seen at [www.roadsidegallery.com](http://www.roadsidegallery.com)

*Note: Some signs may no longer exist.*



About the author: Debbie J Hill's poetry, freelance writing, and photography have appeared in *Maple Grove*, *Southwest Metro*, *St. Croix Valley*, *St. Louis Park*, and *White Bear Lake* magazines; *The Atrium*, *The Century Times*, *FULCRUM*, and *Red Flag Poetry journals*; and the poetry anthology *The View from Here: Poetry to Help You Soar*. She served on the editorial advisory board of *White Bear Lake* magazine and as assistant poetry editor at *Runestone Literary Journal*. Debbie resides in Roaring Fork Valley of Colorado with her husband and a yard full of mule deer.



Tucumcari, NM



Newberry Springs, CA



Amarillo, TX





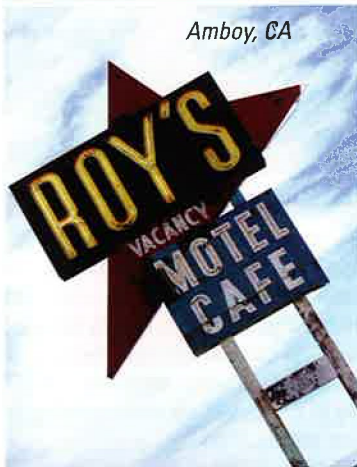
Tulsa, OK



Groom, TX



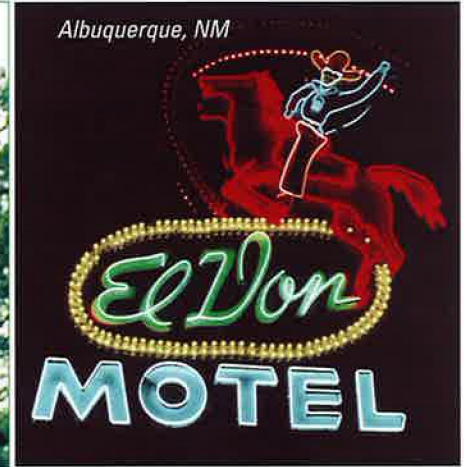
Grants, NM



Amboy, CA



Albuquerque, NM



Albuquerque, NM

# JAMES DEAN COLLECTIBLE

James Dean is remembered in this noteworthy collection that includes a duplicate of the speeding ticket Dean received on U.S. Highway 99, before the day of his accident, and a newspaper clipping announcing Deans death, plus photographs of his Porche before and after the accident, as well as a narrative describing the event. 8 x 11 frame included. Order from *Route 66 Magazine, PO Box 1129, Port Richey FL 34673*

