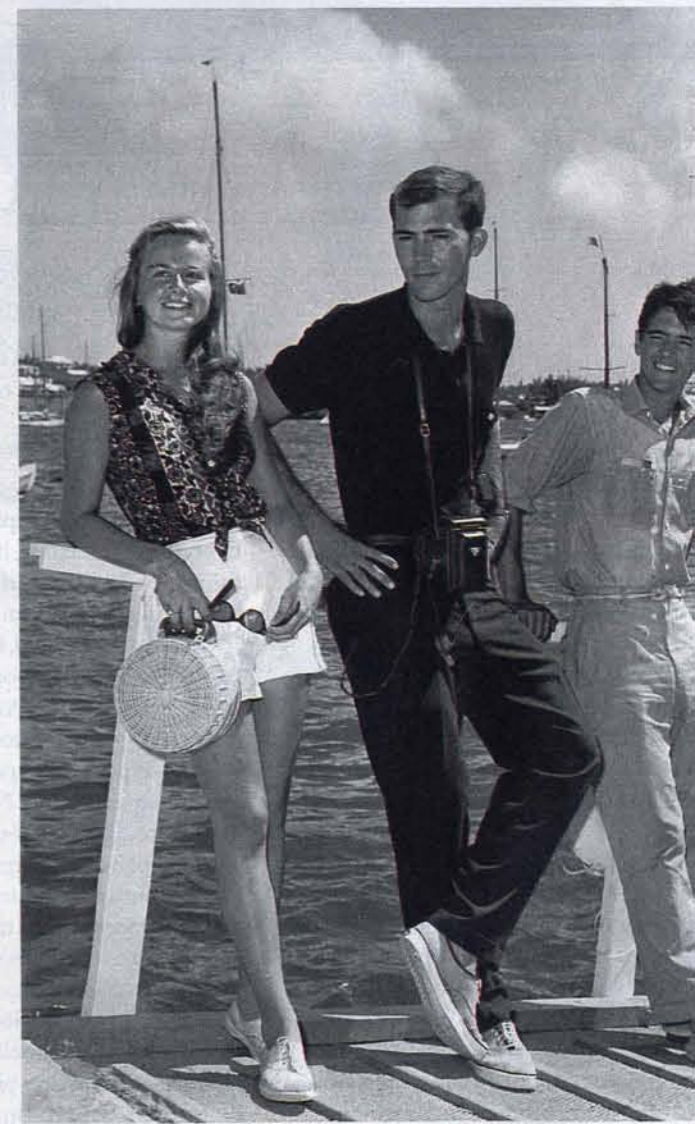


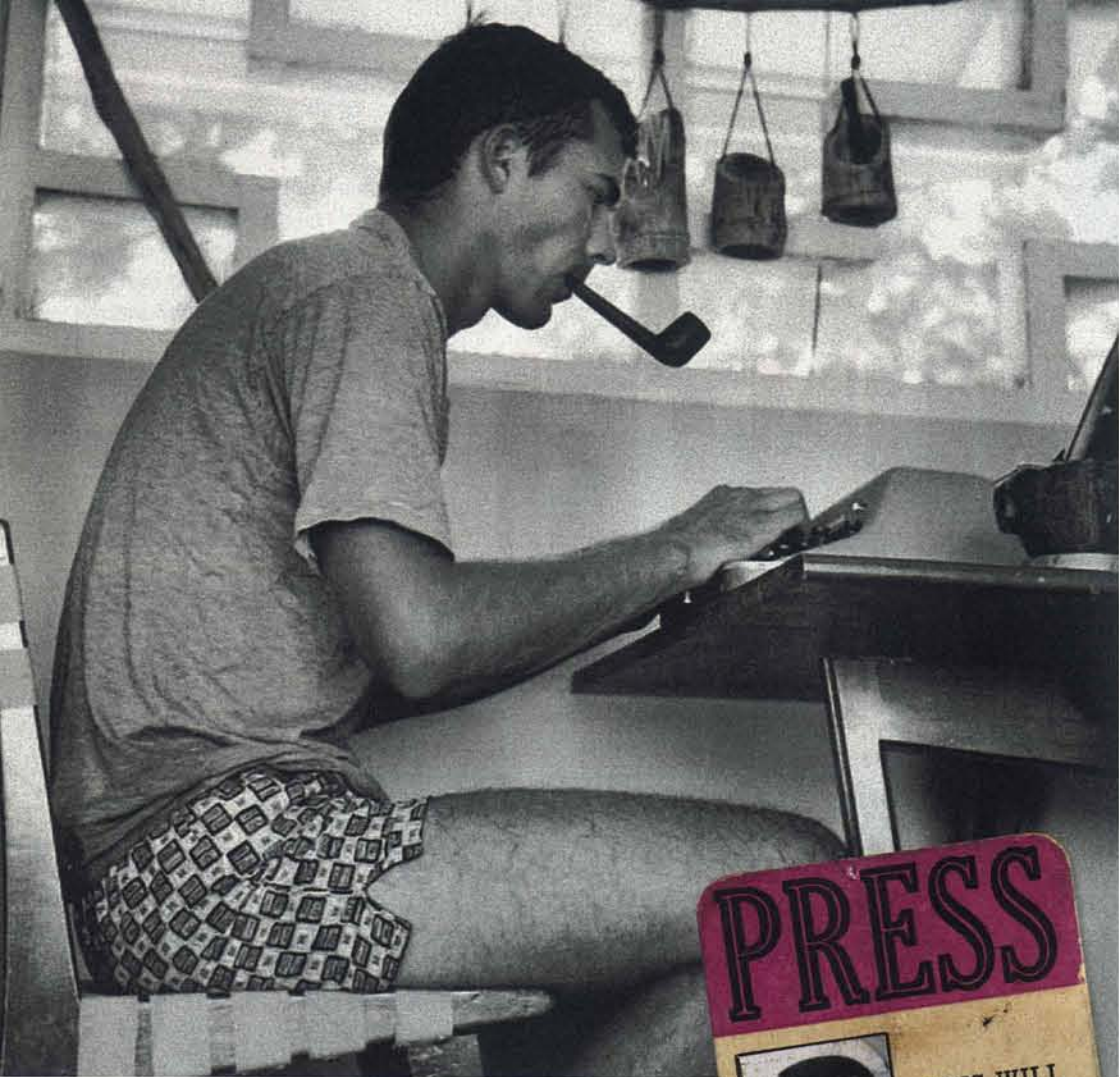
Hunter S Thompson with a dog
and one of his many guns
at his 'home-base fortress'
Woody Creek, Colorado.
Bottom right: Thompson (in
centre) in Bermuda in the
1960s, with his friend Paul
Monin and Sandy Conklin,
whom he married in 1963



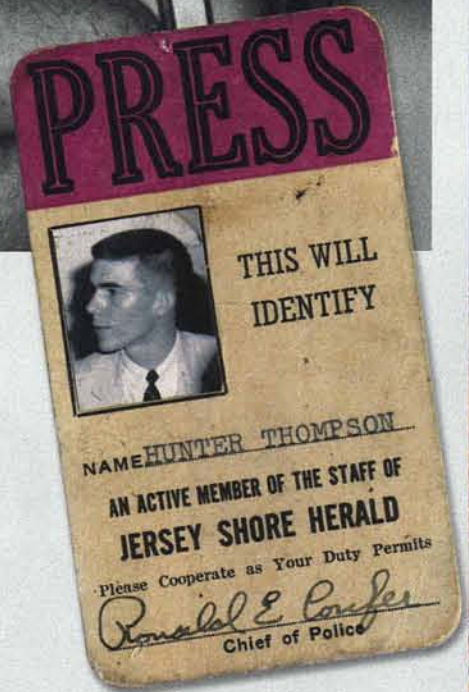
HUNTER THOMPSON GATHERED

He was the gun-toting king of gonzo journalism, famous for his
fuelled sprees across America. Hunter S Thompson was a
secret hoarder — and the many pictures and souvenirs he saved
the story of a bizarre and eventful life. Mark Edmonds re





Left: the writer at work in the 1960s. Below left: Thompson's press card from a brief stint as a sports writer on the Jersey Shore Herald, Pennsylvania, in 1957, when he was 20. Right: Sandy in Big Sur, California, where she lived with Thompson in the early 1960s



W

hen Hunter S.

Thompson, inventor of gonzo journalism, blew his own brains out with a 44-calibre pistol at his farm in Aspen, Colorado, in February 2005, he left behind a forceful literacy legacy – and a collection of memorabilia beyond compare. Never one to underestimate the importance of his own posterity, he had been an inveterate hoarder for much of his four-decade career. The road trips he took through the underbelly of American life – with the Hell's Angels, on the presidential trail, among the loucher denizens of Hollywood – would invariably also see him emptying the nation's wastepaper bins. At the peak of his powers in the early 1970s, it appeared that he could not venture into America without his travelling companions: industrial quantities of drugs, a bottle of Wild Turkey and a plastic bag just begging to be filled up. He would salvage bus tickets, official documents, tax statements,

Polaroid snaps of companions and friends. Everything, it seemed, had a place – especially the more squalid reminders of his hard-drinking, hard-drugging years on the road.

By the time he died, his basement at Owl Farm, his self-styled “compound” where he lived with his second wife, Anita, had become de facto the Gonzo Memorial Library. The walls were covered with souvenirs, among them a machinegun, a rubber Nixon mask and, on the refrigerator door, a series of black-and-white photographs of Thompson with his friend Bill Murray, one of the many professional bohemians that the writer tended to attract.

To many, such items were no more than easy-come, easy-go ephemera; a manifestation of one man's love affair – the love object being, in this case, Thompson himself (since in gonzo journalism, the writer places himself right at the centre at the action). But to the growing



Left: Hell's Angels on the road in the mid-1960s, when Thompson documented the biker cult. Below: a training certificate from his abortive USAF career in 1956. Right: driving in Las Vegas, 1971



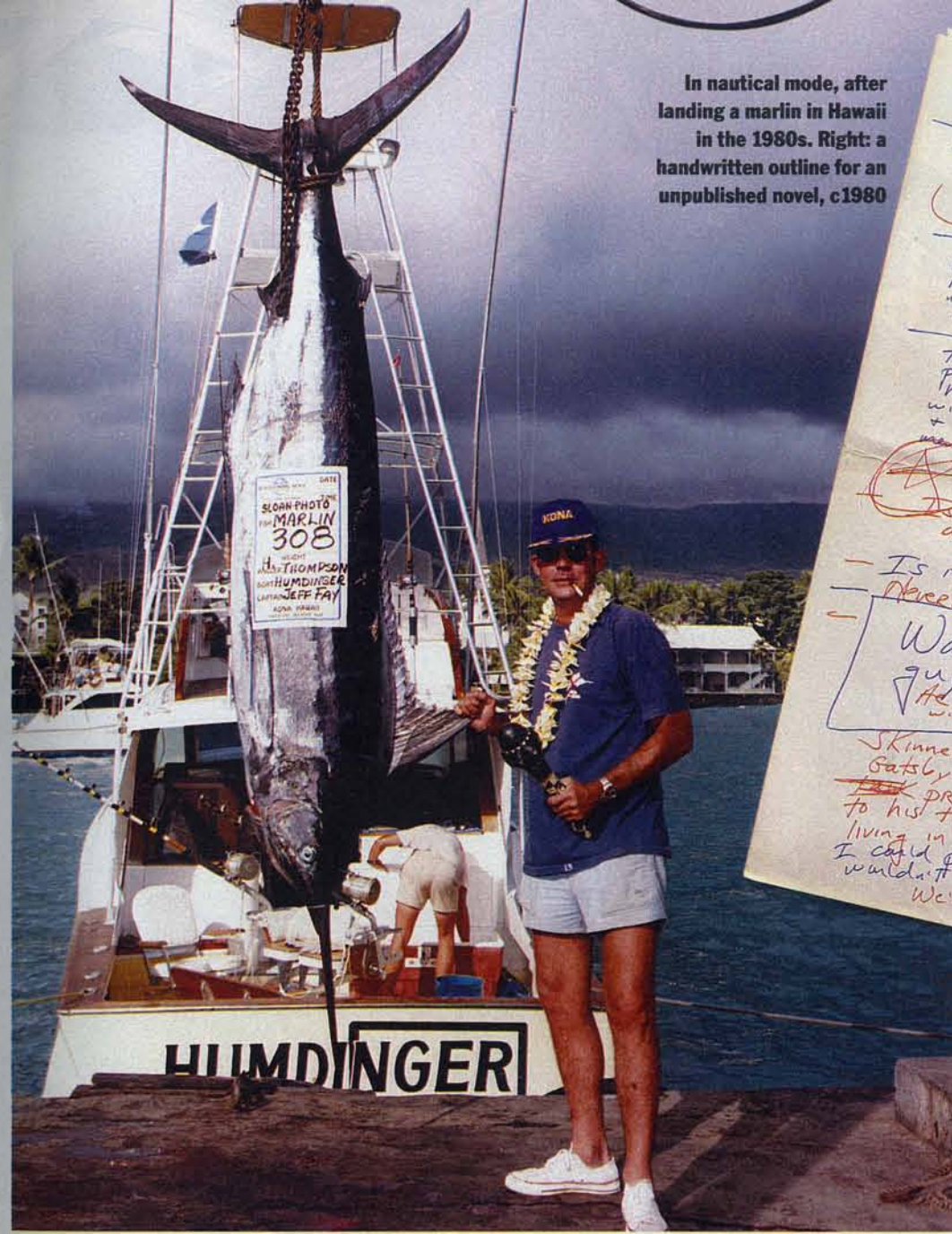
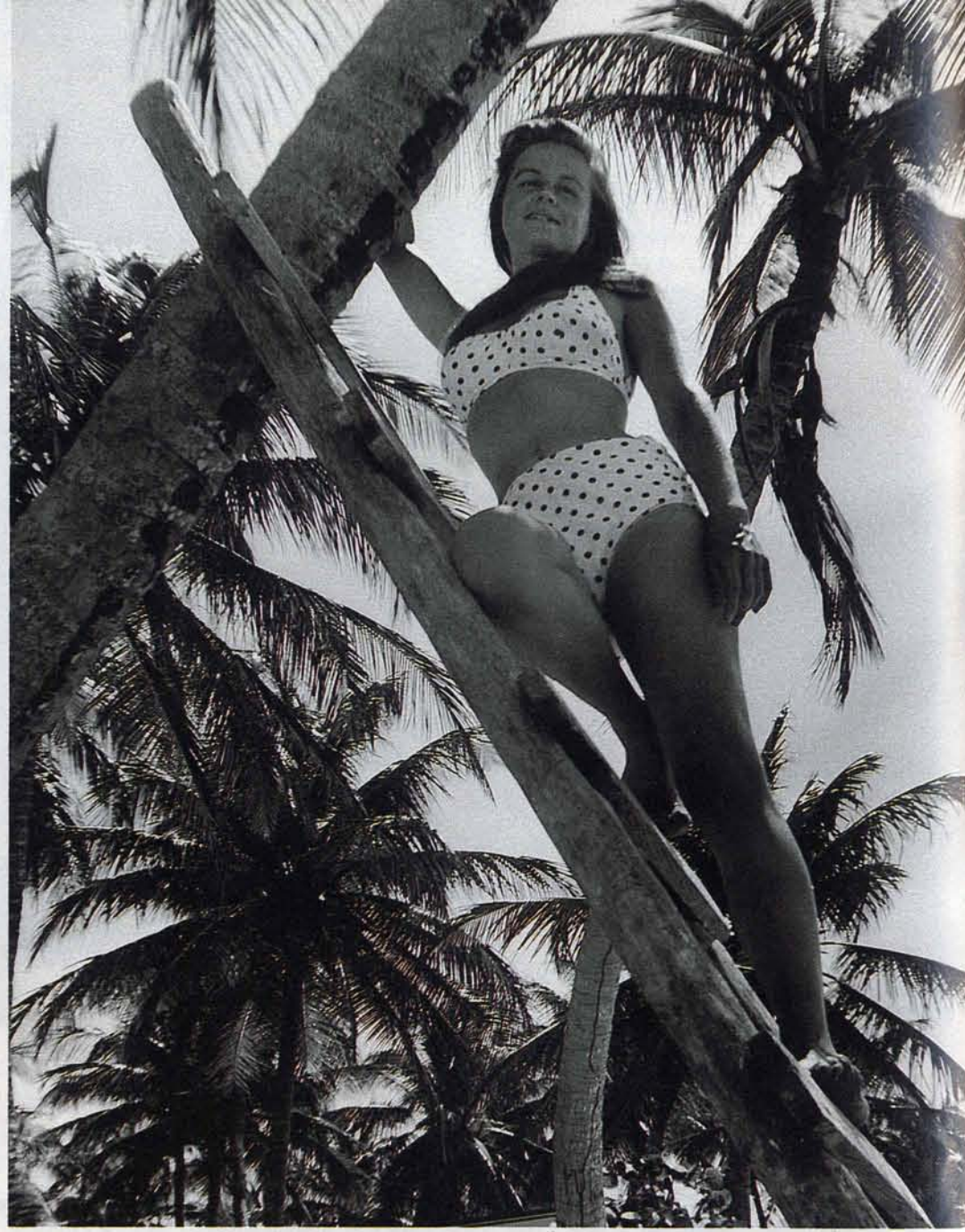


'EVERY SCRAP OF PAPER WAS SACRED TO HUNTER'

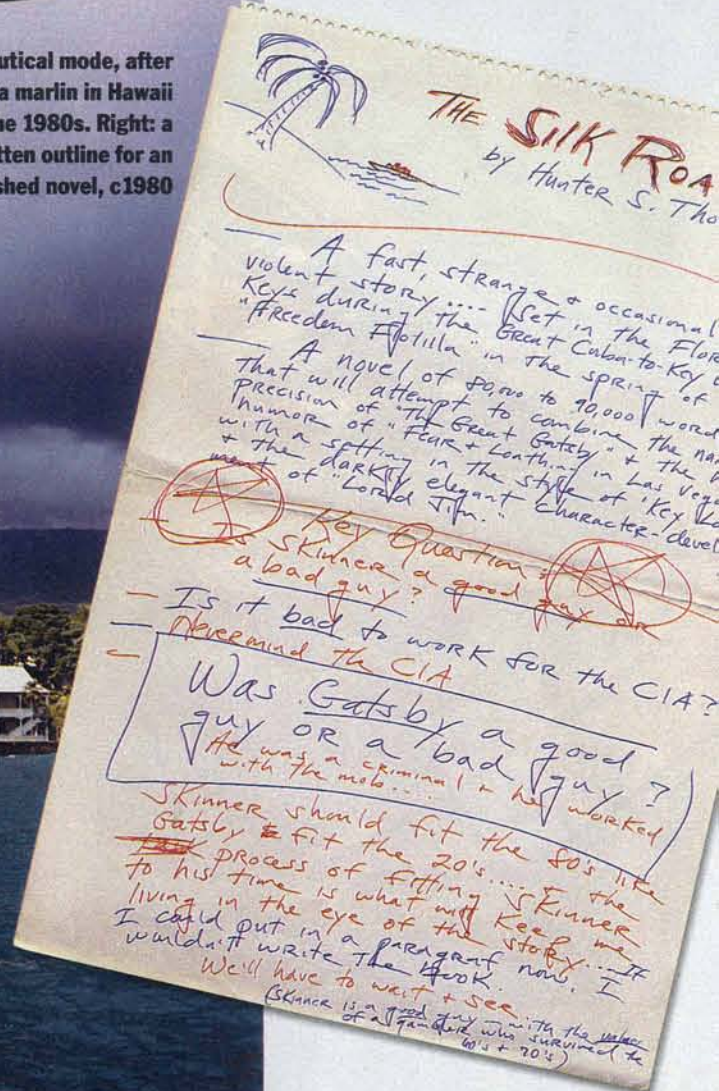
band of gonzo groupies, this material, especially the photographs, amounts to a definitive insight into one of the most important cultural phenomena of the late 20th century.

Much of this collection, culled from a new book and an exhibition about to open in London, has never been seen, let alone catalogued. For all of Thompson's attention to the notion of posterity – as a prodigious writer (and typist) of letters, he seemed to prop up the American carbon-paper industry single-handedly – he left the humdrum job of sorting it out to other people.

Steve Crist, who started work on the book with Thompson before his death, explains: "When I first saw a small collection of 10 colour Xeroxes of Hunter's work about three years ago, I knew immediately that the man so many people knew for words had a strong and compelling visual identity of his own. I was used to working with visual artists and photographers, so it was quite a switch to work with Hunter's unique 'visual works' – every bit as potent as those of any artist I had worked with. So much of Gonzo, the book, is really a distillation of Hunter the man. The most important photographic images in the book are his photos of the Hell's Angels. No one had images like this, and it's important to note that these are the earliest members of the Oakland chapter, including Sonny Barger, the founder of the group. Back in his day, there wasn't a reporter or photographer alive who could handle working with these guys." ➔ page 33

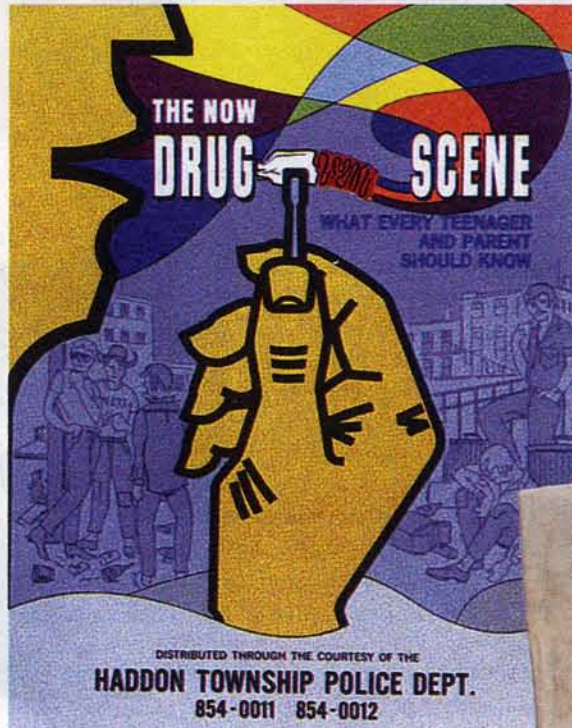


In nautical mode, after landing a marlin in Hawaii in the 1980s. Right: a handwritten outline for an unpublished novel, c1980

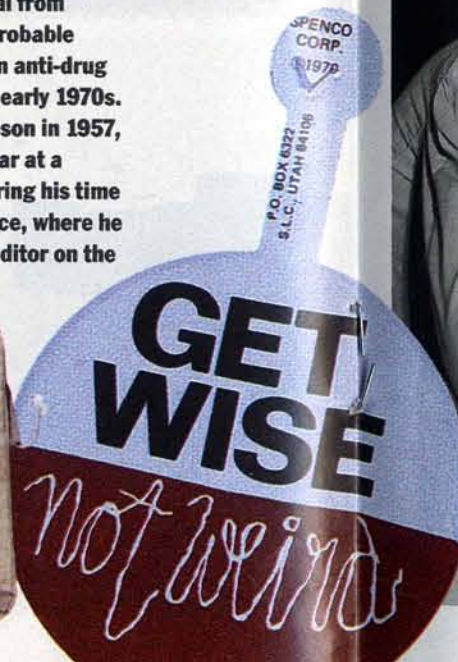
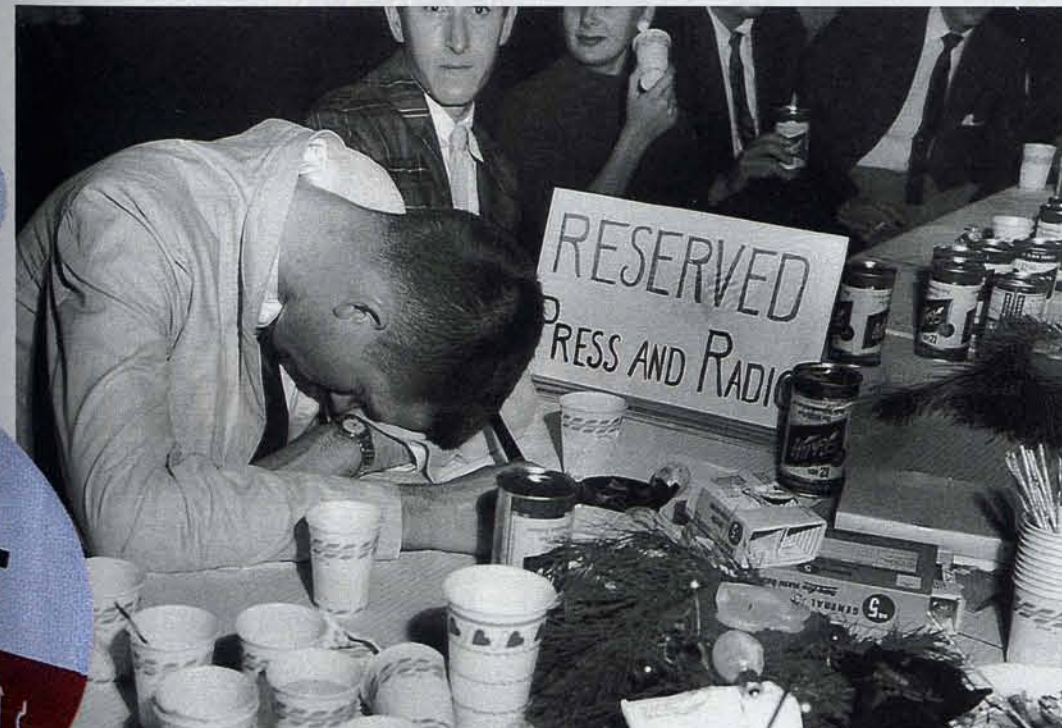


In life, Thompson was noted for his snarling charisma; a huge range of people from diverse backgrounds (and, it has to be said, mainly women) were attracted by the magnetism of his personality, and the blisteringly anarchic nature of his work. To the end, when he committed suicide, ostensibly in response to his failing health, he was a man of contradiction and surprise. There can be no greater endorsement of the drug-crazed American counterculture than Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas, yet he remained a stalwart of the American Rifle Association. He once said: "I hate to advocate weird chemicals, alcohol, violence or insanity to anyone... but they've always worked for me."

Thompson's passing was marked as he requested, with a small detachment of Oakland gonzo groupies (among them Sean Penn, John Depp, John Kerry and George McGovern) assembling at Owl Farm to send his remains to oblivion with a giant cannon. Depp, who played Thompson in the film of Fear and Loathing, says of his friend: "When I think of Hunter, which is very often, the floodgates open and I instantly, easily and willingly overcome a deluge of memories. Memories as diverse as the man himself soar through my mind..." Thompson's nature was to observe and participate in all situations, which he did with an inexhaustible fervour. He lived it, breathed it, and celebrated all of it. And if you were lucky enough to be alongside him on any of his escapades, so



Top left: Thompson hitchhiking, c1960. Above: Sandy in Puerto Rico, c1960. Left and below right: publicity material from Thompson's improbable involvement in an anti-drug campaign in the early 1970s. Far right: Thompson in 1957, the worse for wear at a hangar party during his time at the US Air Force, where he became sports editor on the base newspaper



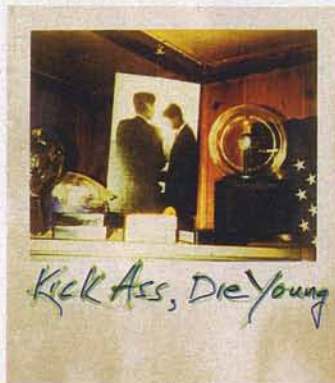


...ou did, to the absolute hilt. "Every document, scrap of paper, newspaper clipping, cocktail napkin and photograph were sacred to Hunter. They are essential threads of his life's tapestry, pieces of the puzzle that had been diligently packed away, safely and surely for posterity."

Nearly two years after Thompson's death, the gonzo phenomenon shows no sign of dissipating. A first edition of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is selling on eBay for more than \$1m, and on an official gonzo merchandising site you can buy a Thompson coffee mug for \$10. Or how about a "hot link thong" for \$12.99? From her home at Owl Farm, Thompson's widow, Anita, runs a blog for fans, and there is talk of the basement's contents being catalogued to form a permanent archive.

One imagines what Hunter S. Thompson himself might have thought, were his remains not blasted across the stratosphere with such characteristic lack of understatement. Almost certainly, he would approve ■

Gonzo: Photographs of and by Hunter S. Thompson runs at the Michael Hoppen Gallery, 3 Jubilee Place, London SW3, from February 3 to March 10. The book is published by Ammo Books in a limited edition at £195. Visit www.ammobooks.com



Gods!
I finally
see it now...
that... yes...
I am LONO
That explains
everything.
Ho, Ho!



Top: Thompson during his ill-fated campaign for sheriff of Aspen in 1970. **Above:** a note relating to his book *The Curse of Lono*. **Left:** photos Thompson saved from the 1970s include (bottom right) one of the actor Bill Murray and (above centre) a picture of John F and Bobby Kennedy captioned by Thompson