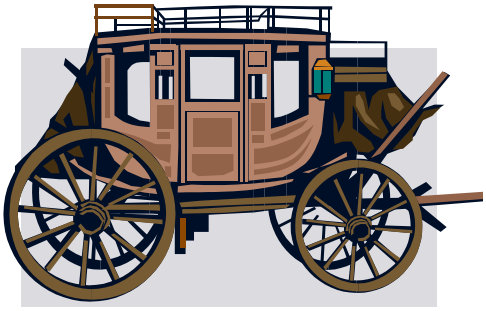
RECOLLECTIONS



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By

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(1912 –1991)

Albuquerque, New Mexico

From his unpublished hand-typed chapters

Composited, Illustrated, and Edited By Harry Briley

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Reviews:

Wow! Super cool! Thank you! The further adventures of Jack Rittenhouse really should be published! - Linda Stewart (2011)

This chapter was my favorite! I want a copy of these chapters for re-reading. They look great! - Judy (Rittenhouse) Burgess, Niece (201, d. 8/2016)

CHAPTER 6: WANDER YEAR

[This cultural snapshot of transients in 1935 has Jack exploring the country and picking up odd jobs to live. He wanted to go to France but wound up in Arizona. Jack wrote two versions of his trips to New York. Some parts were brief and other parts offered details. This chapter rearranges, merges, and edits together the best details from both versions.]

Perhaps each young man spends about a year wandering before he finds himself; those who do not do so must miss a great deal. I had such a time, and in it, did no great things. When I came to settle down, I was ready to settle.

Fort Wayne - 1933

Weekly Book Review Column

In early fall of 1933, a couple of months before my twenty-first birthday, I went home to my parents' place in Fort Wayne, out on Edsall Avenue. All of the family was still there.

I needed some sort of work, and thought I might get something at one of the two local newspapers. I tried the News-Sentinel without luck. I saw Frank Roberts, editor of the morning Journal-Gazette, with no luck. I went to the public library and read a book on job-hunting. It mentioned if you wanted to get a job in a particular firm, study that firm to see what work was not being done there that you can do; then, offer to do that.

I studied the newspaper and noticed that they had no locally written book reviews. Instead, they used a syndicated book column that came free with their wire service. I went back to editor Frank Roberts and offered to do a weekly book column, without pay. All I asked was that they let me use a typewriter during off hours, to provide stationery to write publishers, and to pay the postage on letters I wrote. Frank Roberts agreed. He added a useful bonus: a streetcar pass, which sold for $1 a week and enabled the bearer to ride anywhere in the city, unlimited times.

For the next six months, I showed up every morning in the news room. The Journal was a morning paper, so the staff did not arrive until after lunch, except that Frank Roberts and a few others worked by day. In time, I picked up small extra benefits: free theater passes, occasional lunches at the Chamber of Commerce (to cover some speaker), and now and then, a dollar or so. I sold my review copies to bookshops and the public library, at half price, and thus picked up perhaps five dollars a week.

I spent most days in the newsroom doing odd jobs of reporting when the regular men were busy, sick, or on a trip. I covered a concert by George Gershwin, who had James Melton with him, and Charles Previn’s orchestra. I talked backstage to Gershwin, who told me about how he worked on "Porgy and Bess" which he called "an American opera.”

I covered a concert by violinist, Nathan Milstein, but committed an error by identifying one of his encores incorrectly. My knowledge of music was not great.

I spent much time in the United Press room watching dispatches come in on the teletype. It was spring 1934 and there was a Nazi tide rising in Germany. There was trouble in Austria and many thought of war. The governments of Europe were in trouble.

I listened to the radio broadcasts of Father Coughlin for a year, a Catholic priest from Royal Oak, Michigan. Later I became disillusioned about Coughlin, but at that time he was one of the few radio speakers with an inner conviction, more than reporting. He predicted “war before the end of spring” and "war in Europe by April.”

historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5111 with audio (edited)

Father Charles Coughlin occupied a strange and familiar place in American politics in the 1930s. Politically radical, a passionate democrat, he nevertheless freely vented angry, irrational charges and assertions. His weekly radio sermons, by 1930, drew up to forty-five million listeners. Strongly egalitarian, deeply suspicious of elites, a champion of the ordinary person’s rights, Coughlin vigorously attacked capitalism, communism, socialism, and dictatorship.

By the mid-1930s, he combined harsh attacks on Roosevelt, as the tool of Jewish bankers, with praise for Mussolini and Hitler. His relentless anti-elitism pushed Roosevelt to sharpen his own critiques of elites, and in that sense, had a powerful impact on politics beyond his radio audience.

However, government tolerance was short-lived.

On April 14, 1942, his weekly paper, Social Justice, was cited as seditious, in violation of the 1917 Espionage Act, and was therefore denied mailing privileges. – American Headlines, Calvin Linton, ©1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers

I had a wild, exciting idea of being a war correspondent, at least junior grade. If I could not get a paying job in Fort Wayne, perhaps I could be a war correspondent, like Floyd Gibbons or Lowell Thomas!

"Interview with a Bookman," by David Farmer. Unpublished transcript, 1989.

Jack: *The Anschluss was on in Austria. I was twenty-one. You're growing up. Your direction changes. You have no mentor to guide or tell you. No role models as such. You just drift along. So I hitchhiked to New York.* [From there,] *I was going to bum my way across* [to Paris].

I wrote to the Paris bureau of the United Press using Journal stationery, asking if there might be an opening for a young man. They replied politely, saying that they did not see immediate threat of war, although the situation was unpredictable, and full of possibilities. They could offer nothing but if I got to Paris on my own, and if anything did "break", they might consider me for some sort of office work. This was no clear promise, but it was all I needed. I started to make preparations.

www.otr.com/gibbons.shtml (edited)

One of radio's first news reporter/commentators and with probably the fastest talking delivery, Floyd Gibbons (1887-1939) often spoke from personal experience. The reporter lived the life of danger.

Gibbons hit his stride while reporting for the Chicago Tribune. A quintessential foreign correspondent, handsome, with a huge sense of adventure, unlimited daring, and great personal courage he became legend for his reporting on the Mexican border war in 1916.

In 1929, Gibbons took his quick style to the new field of radio as commentator and news reporter. Time Magazine described his fifteen-minute news summaries as "machine-gun stream of syllables". His broadcasts left one breathless and on the edge of the seat. Through the thirties, Gibbons voice was heard over the newsreels that held viewers captive at local theaters.

The Radio Hall of Fame wrote of Lowell Thomas (edited):

Traveling to remote sites around the world, Lowell Thomas (1892-1981) brought news and a sense of adventure into America's living rooms. It was not just the news story that captured his listener's imagination, but Thomas himself.

He pioneered radio journalism and made his first sojourn to the battlefield during World War I, and began a daily newscast on NBC in 1930. Thomas was the first reporter to enter Germany following World War I, bringing back eyewitness accounts. People knew they were hearing a solid, objective voice of authority. – www.radiohof.org/news/lowellthomas.html

Preparing for Europe

Only four and a half years before, I had attended the International Boy Scout Jamboree at Liverpool in 1929. We had traveled then by Cunard liner from Montreal. I thus felt more familiar with Canada than with New York, which I had never visited.

My plan was to get a passport, hitchhike from Fort Wayne, north to Grand Rapids and Reed City, then over to Detroit, stopping with relatives in all three places. From Detroit, I would cross to Windsor, Canada and continue hitchhiking to Montreal. There I would find any possible sort of work on a ship sailing for England or France. Once there, I would jump ship and get to Paris. It was simple and naive.

Since the Journal men carried no Press cards, I had one typed up. The Journal executives signed the paper I drew up stating that I was a correspondent for them, but added that they were not financially responsible for any expenses I might incur. I got a passport, a book-style affair with a red cover, No.87307, listing my occupation as "newspaper correspondent," dated April 10, 1934, and signed by Cordell Hull.

I had one passable suit. I got a good little Kodak camera that took vest-pocket roll film, and a light tripod. The backpack I had used at the Jamboree in 1929 was my luggage. I stitched an oilcloth patch on it painted with the word "PARIS" in big white letters. The pack was a simple canvas bag with two web straps over my shoulders, and in it was a limited wardrobe.

Leaving Home – April 1934

I had ten dollars in cash when I left Fort Wayne in late April 1934 to visit my great-aunt Josephine in Detroit. I first stopped off to visit my aunt Gladys and Cousin Bob in Grand Rapids and my great-grandmother in Reed City. I picked up perhaps another ten or fifteen dollar in gifts from them. My relatives in Detroit added five or ten dollars.

The cost of living in 1934 far exceeded Jack's entry-level income!

The economic markers for basic living were:

New house	*$6,000*
Average Income	*$1,600/year ($6/day or 75 cents/hour)*
New car	[$700 4-door 8-cylinder Hudson sedan]
Average Rent	*$20/month*
Movie Ticket	*25 cents*
Gasoline	*10 cents/gallon*

The price points for food were:

Milk	*45 cents/gallon*
Eggs	*17 cents/dozen*
Fresh Hamburger	*12 cents/pound*
Bread	*8 cents/loaf*

- "Remember When: A Nostalgic Look Back in Time", Seek Publishing

Detroit

In Detroit, I spent hours around the waterfront and made ready to go across to Windsor, Canada. I had a romantic photo taken of myself seated on a dock looking across the water. My plan ended abruptly on the first day out of Detroit. I slung on my pack, got on the bus to Windsor, and joined the line going through the Canadian gate when it landed.

If I had kept silent and just walked through the gate as a casual visitor nothing might have happened. Instead, I had to start my role as an important person right away, and so I handed the surprised inspector my nice, new passport when I crossed the border.

He asked me to step out of the line to a side office. The officials asked me what I planned to do in Canada. I said I was going to Montreal for a job on a ship.

"How?"

"By hitchhiking."

"Not in Canada. Hitch-hiking was illegal."

They asked me if I had any money and I showed them my twenty-five dollars, not enough to qualify me to enter Canada for an extended stay. They asked me if I had any letters of credit. I did not know what the term meant. "*Was anyone at home ready to send me money in case of accident or illness or other trouble?*" I said no, because I knew my parents could not raise even fifty dollars during those Depression years. I knew one or two well-to-do businessmen but doubted that I could rely on them to answer a plea.

The Canadian inspectors said that I could not enter without assurance that I might not become a charge on the Canadian government, in case of illness, etc. They were gentle, polite, and firm. They gave me a pass to return by bus through the tunnel under the river, back to the Detroit side. I took the free ride back to the States, but was startled when I looked at the slip of paper that served as a pass. It was the only form they had on hand for such a purpose, a deportation order. Back in Detroit, I felt humiliated. I could not go back to my relatives as a failure.

Finding a Way to New York

I stayed in Detroit overnight and someone told me to try my luck in New York. He suggested that I might get a ride in that direction at one of the "drive away" auto companies out near the automobile factories.

I took a streetcar out to that part of Detroit and found one of the drive away firms that specialized in hauling autos from factory to dealer. The long trucks were still seen, a stubby truck pulling a long trailer with autos loaded in double-deck fashion. I went out to the big Chrysler auto plant and talked to the man in charge of shipping cars east.

This time my passport impressed someone, for it indicated to the office clerk that I was a responsible young fellow and not a wandering young punk. He gave me permission to ride with the driver on a trailer-load of several cars headed for Pennsylvania.

The autos were the 1934 Chrysler Airflow models, with a sloping front not unlike the later Volkswagen.

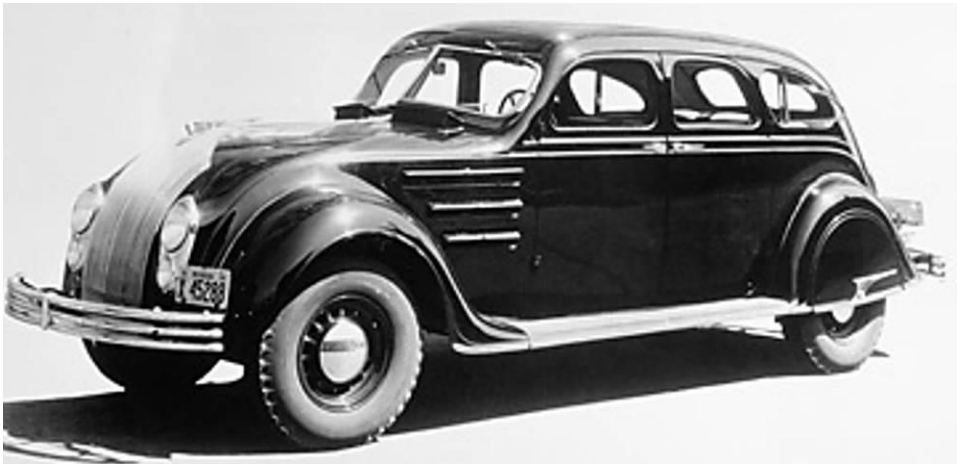


Figure 1 - 1934 Chrysler Airflow (Time.Com 2007)

The car did not catch the public's fancy and never sold especially well. It was comfortable to stretch out in the back seat of one on the rig's trailer as it rolled across Ohio and into Pennsylvania.

"The 50 Worst Cars of All Time" (edited)

> *The Airflow had spectacularly bad timing. Had it been 1954, the many design and engineering innovations the aerodynamic singlet-style fuselage, steel space-frame construction, near 50-50 front-rear weight distribution and lightweight would be celebrated. However, in 1934, the car's dramatic streamliner styling antagonized Americans on some deep level, almost as if Bolsheviks designed it. Chrysler tried to devolve the Airflow stylistically, giving it more conventional grill and raising the trunk into a kind of bustle, but the damage was done. Sales were abysmal. It would not be the last time that car buyers looked at the future and said, "No thanks."* - www.time.com/time/specials/2007

Pennsylvania

This was a long but pleasant ride. I remember my first shock at seeing the heavy pall of smoke that hung over the valleys before entering Pittsburgh. I left the drive away there and hitchhiked on east, through Chambersburg and into Philadelphia. Along the way, I became aware that I was in Civil War country, and the tales of the old veterans of the GAR who lounged around the Fort Wayne courthouse became more real.

When I reached Philadelphia, I remembered how Ben Franklin had walked down the streets of Philadelphia, and had spent his last few cents for three small loaves of bread, on his first visit there. In that less than genteel appearance, the girl, who became his wife, smiled upon Ben. I went into a bakery and bought three rolls and mimicked Ben, and ate them as I walked the streets, but no girls smiled at me.

I made my way out of Philadelphia and on through New Jersey. Usually I started out walking along the road, hoping to catch a ride along the way. Rarely did I ever wait standing at one point, waving a thumb. I observed the New Jersey countryside as a region where Washington's troops had marched perhaps along the same road

New York City - May 1934

Arrival

I went on up through New Jersey and crossed the Hudson by ferryboat. I forget how I found the ferryboat, probably at Hoboken. I crossed into New York City, landing in lower Manhattan near the Battery.

I [first thought I] knew nothing about New York, except what could be gleaned from movies, [but] I knew New York better than I thought, for I had read nearly all of the works of O'Henry and for years had followed the chatty newspaper column by a man-about-town know as O.O.McIntnre, syndicated in the Journal. I knew Brooklyn Bridge when I saw it, and I knew some of the street names- Park Row, Chinatown, the Bowery.

I walked around the streets until I saw the towering height of Brooklyn Bridge and made my way to its entrance. Not far away, I saw a street sign with the word Bowery, and made my way down its length beneath the rattling elevated [railway].

Chicken-Wire Ceiling

Where Park Row (here covered by the elevated railway) meets Chinatown, was Chatham Square in the heart of the Bowery. I found a cheap hotel with the overpowering name of Grand Windsor Hotel on Chatham Square. It cost twenty-five cents a night. It was not a hotel but a genuine flophouse of two floors of what might have been a warehouse.

Each cubicle was about six by eight feet, with walls perhaps seven feet high. Frames of two-by-fours nailed to the floor supported flimsy wooden partitions. Each room had an iron cot, a chair, and wall hooks for clothing. The tops of the walls did not reach the ceiling but were covered with chicken-wire mesh. This provided some ventilation. Since the "hotel" was only a series of warehouse floors with rooms partitioned off, the chicken wire ceiling kept thieves from climbing over into your room.

If you were lucky, your cubicle was next to a window; otherwise no daylight. There were washrooms and a simple sort of lobby where a scruffy clerk had you write your name in a notebook when you paid your twenty-five cents and got a thin towel and an equally thin sliver of gray soap, when you checked in. I left my pack there and started walking down the Bowery and across the old City Hall Park to Broadway.

That May 1, 1934 evening I walked three or four miles. I started walking up Broadway. It was a fine spring evening and I kept walking, walking, walking. I came to Union Square, at Fourteenth Street. It was littered with trash from left wing May Day demonstration that had filled the square. I walked past Herald Square and Macy's, past the Metropolitan Opera building, and came to Forty-Second Street and Times Square. No one visiting the garish, trashy Square today can imagine the glamor it had in 1934. The old legitimate theaters were giving way to movie houses, but there were still a few legitimate plays in theaters just off the Square, even on Forty-Second Street.

I walked more than sixty blocks. It was well into the dark of evening, and I had left Philadelphia only that morning. I rode back on the trolley cars. Fare was a nickel. I rode to Broadway, unwilling to venture so soon into the unfamiliar subway. These trolley cars were open-sided affairs with benches that ran clear across the width. A conductor swung along the wooden running boards and held out a coin receptacle to accept your nickel.

Figure 2 - Bowery Prices - 1930's (wirednewyork.com)

For several days, I wandered lower Manhattan, learning to ride the subways, eating workmen's food in Chinese restaurants, going to cheap movies, walking through Wall Street, the lower East Side - everywhere.

For the next several days, I stayed around the Bowery. Just back of the hotel, lay Chinatown, with its Pell and Mott streets. Across Chatham Square, a cheap movie house never closed, admission ten cents, with a hideously painted old witch as cashier. Inside, it must have once been a music hall; the floor was level, the screen was therefore up high, and along both sides and the back was a sort of balcony with chairs; once there were small tables there, too, perhaps, where girls sat with men for drinks.

Everything felt strange and magical to a boy from Indiana. Shops sold merchandise never seen along the Wabash River. The streets were crowded with jobless and the elevated [railway] roared overhead. It was a place where a young romantic could bring every fancy to reality. My fancies were mostly unsophisticated. For example, I always imagined that an Italian peasant's lunch of bread, sausage, and wine must be wonderful. I bought a small loaf of French bread (seldom seen in Fort Wayne), a link of Italian sausage, and a small bottle of wine, and ate them in my wire-ceilinged cell. The meal did not live up to its envisioned reputation but it was one more experience chalked up.

I broke out my fairly good suit, cleaned up, and visited the book publishers with whom I was corresponding from Fort Wayne. I did not tell them why I was in New York, and they assumed I was only a visiting book editor. Some took me to lunch; nearly all gave me a new book or two to review.

I went up to the offices of the old New York Sun and talked then into letting me use a typewriter, on which I wrote my book column. I then went out to sell the review copies.

I visited a fraternity brother named Will Weng, who worked on the New York Times. I had not known him in college. He was ahead of me a few years, but he honored the old tie by taking me out to lunch.

Looking for a Ship

Every day I walked, rode the trolley or subway and looked and looked and looked. I went down to the waterfront and kept on with my search for a job, any job, on a ship. There were unions for seamen of course, but the tough, tight work restrictions were not yet in effect. The waterfront was thick with jobless men, all looking for work.

It was soon apparent that unless you had seamen's papers you had no chance. Every seaman, on completion of a voyage, got a slip of paper bearing his name and the title of his job: wiper in the engine room, deck hand, scullery man. Experienced seamen had thick packets of such papers, and anyone could buy a slip for a dollar from someone. I paid a fellow a dollar for one, so I could prove my "experience". It did me no good. Once I went over to New Jersey to try for a job on the Holland-American Line and almost got a job as a scullery man, until the hiring boss asked to see my hands. No callouses; I did not get the job.

I haunted the hiring halls of the shipping lines around Manhattan, not at the union halls, but with those employment offices to which ships' officers telephoned for any needed crewmembers. I almost signed on a ship to Barranquilla in South America but decided against it as selling away from Europe and not towards my goal.

I still went to all the seamen's hiring halls. By now, I realized that there were thousands of good seamen out of work, and little chance for a raw hand. I decided to get any job even on a vessel bound for South America in order to get some seaman's papers of my own and perhaps qualify for a European run.

I had a peculiar experience that [not much later] had strange consequences. One day I got my chance: a post as a scullery man (dishwasher) on a Grace Line ship bound for Havana and back. I decided to take it, as my money was almost gone and perhaps I could somehow make a connection that would get me to Europe. The clerk gave me the slip of paper and I tore across the waterfront to the pier. When I got there, the gate was closed. When I finally talked my way through the guard and met the ship's chief steward, he said he had hired a man off the dock and needed no more help. Too late. The job was filled.

Selling Swinburne

The money I had when I started was gone. I could make no more rounds of publishers. I had pawned my little camera for five dollars and that too was gone. I lived on about a dollar a day, rent and meals included. I decided to give up the scheme of getting to Europe, but there was no plan left in its place.

It was possible to get a rough sort of a meal on the Bowery for fifteen cents, but I lacked even that, although my room rent was paid up for a week. When I was finally flat broke, I walked down the Bowery to City Hall Park and sat there in the late afternoon reading a little book that I had brought along in my pack. It was a small volume of Swinburne poems, a chance selection with no special significance.

> *Algernon Charles Swinburne (London, 1837 - 1909) was an English poet, playwright, novelist, and critic.* [His early poems 1865-1879], *obsessed about the Middle Ages, lesbianism, cannibalism, sado-masochism, and anti-theism.*
>
> *Oscar Wilde stated that Swinburne was "a braggart in matters of vice, who had done everything he could to convince his fellow citizens of his homosexuality and bestiality without being in the slightest degree a homosexual or a bestialiser."*
>
> *Swinburne devised the poetic roundel form, wrote several novels, and contributed to the Eleventh Edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica.*
> https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Algernon_Charles_Swinburne (Extracts)

G.K.Chesterton commented in "Orthodoxy" (1908):

> *I rolled on my tongue with a terrible joy, as did all young men of that time, the taunts which Swinburne hurled at the dreariness of the* [Apostle's] *creed: "Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean, the world has grown gray with your breath." But when I read the same poets' accounts of paganism (as in Atlanta), I gather that the world was, if possible, more gray before the Galilean breathed on it than afterwards. And yet, somehow, Christianity had darkened it.* [Page 78]
>
> *The fact that Swinburne was irritated at the unhappiness of Christians and yet more irritated at their happiness was easily explained. The restraints of Christianity saddened him simply because he was more hedonist than a healthy man should be. The* [happy] *faith of Christians angered him because he was more a pessimist than a healthy man should be.* [Page 83]

I went into a bookstore just where Park Row meets the Bowery and offered to sell it. Business was slack and the bookman was willing to talk. At first, he refused the book, but later offered me fifteen cents [or a quarter] for it.

Therefore, I had supper. I took the money and hurried back to Chatham Square where a cheap restaurant served meals for fifteen cents, consisting of such dishes as sauerkraut and pig's knuckles, with a big boiled potato, day-old bread, and a cup of cheap coffee. My rent was still paid up for another day or so.

Park Row Books and Magazines Shop

The next day, I received three dollars from the Journal for a feature column I had written on life in a Bowery flophouse. The next day, when I passed the bookstore, the owner called me over to ask what a young fellow living on the Bowery was doing reading a book of poems by Swinburne. I said I liked them, at least some of them.

"Interview with a Bookman," by David Farmer. Unpublished transcript, 1989.

Jack: [The owner] *sold books and back number magazines, technical magazines (American Perfumer, American Chemist--you know, technical journals). Because the guys in those fields who were out of work had no way to get their own trade magazines, so they would buy them second hand for ten and twenty cents a copy.*

[That Swinburne] *was a Modern Library edition, kind of beat up, I'd carried in my backpack all that time. The hippies in the 1960s carried backpacks and all that stuff. God, a lot of us were doing it back in the 1930s! Finally, he gave me a quarter for it, which was all right because I could get a ten cent breakfast and fifteen cent lunch out of that there on the Bowery. They had these kind of soup kitchens that served nourishing food at low prices. There was a cheap restaurant right next door where big, thick hamburger loaded with additives to bulk it up with plenty of gravy and all, was a nickel. So I could do all right.*

So then he said [that next day]*, "I'm curious. Did you read this book?"*

"Oh, sure, I read the book."

"Where did you learn about Swinburne?"

"Well, I got a college …"

"Oh, you're a college man?"

"Yeah, well, I've had three years of college."

"Well, gee whiz, and you're reading Swinburne and now you want to sell it for your last 25 cents. Why is that?"

"I don't have any work."

He seemed surprised that I had attended college for three years, and after a little more talk offered me a job as his only clerk in his shop. My salary was five dollars a week; the hours were from 8am to 9pm, seven days a week, and I had the privilege of sleeping on a cot in a back storeroom. This may seem a ridiculous salary, but it was not impossibly low in that time and place.

The bookman's name was Harry Smolin [at Park Row Books and Magazines located] at 89 Park Row on the edge of the Bowery. The shop was passed by a steady throng of bums coming from one direction and businessmen coming from another. We were near the entrance of Brooklyn Bridge, their common goal.

The shop was not much on books, but dealt chiefly in back-number magazines. A magazine that sold for twenty-five cents on the newsstand could be bought a month later for a dime at Harry's. Harry paid two or three cents each. This was a new type of venture and Smolin had all kinds: racks of movie magazines, western pulps, home magazines, and business/technical magazines. The latter brought the most money.

Figure 3 - Harry Smolin at 89 Park Row - 1934

I worked for Harry from the middle of May until September. With no rent to pay, and little to do but lounge around the shop during its slow days, I spent the rest of the summer learning bookselling. In time, he gave me a little more money and gave me time off on various afternoons when he would take over the shop himself. I still planned on going to Europe, although it was now apparent that there would be no "war by spring".

Smolin stood for no nonsense, but I did not feel exploited. While I took care of the store he went out to buy magazines, usually from wholesalers and news dealers.

In rush hours, he was in the store, and often he told me to take a few hours off. When this happened, I went around visiting book publishers whose books I had reviewed: Dutton, Longman's, Viking, Morrow, and others. I still sent back a book column to the paper and selling [and trading] my review copies to bookshops, such as Schulte's on Fourth Avenue just below Fourteenth Street, where Book Row began.

"Interview with a Bookman," by David Farmer. Unpublished transcript, 1989.

Jack: *And here and there I met kindred souls. I met a lot of interesting people who later became small legends in publishing. Every time I'd go in, I must have looked awful. I had a suit, but it was like a J. C. Penny bargain suit and not in the best of shape. But they'd say, "Here's our latest book. Take this, review this."*

I didn't sell them. I'd take them down to Schulte' Books on Fourth Avenue and I'd trade them. Y*ou get more in trade than I would in cash. So I was building up a complete set of Modern Library. All the books. And I was reading them as well as collecting them. So I got to know publishing circles.*

I had no typewriter. Instead, I went to the newsroom of the New York Sun where they let me use one during the off hours. This was not convenient, so I eventually rented a typewriter for three dollars a month.

About this time, one of the people who brought books and magazines into the store to sell brought in a thick volume of all lessons in a correspondence course about writing, published by the Newspaper Institute of America. As we did not deal in that sort of material, Smolin let me buy it for myself. The seller asked only three dollars. It probably cost him thirty times that much. The idea of writing was not new to me, but this set of lessons stimulated me, and I knew I had to polish up my skills.

Nearly every morning I rose in time to write for an hour before opening the shop. Most of what I wrote was sketches of the people I met during the day before. They had no purpose other than being "finger exercises", with no thought of publication. Each day tried a different sort of exercise such as a character description, a dialogue, a humorous account, and that sort of material. I sent a couple of pieces back to the Journal, such as a description of the Grand Windsor Hotel. They were amateurish, but the newspaper sent me three dollars for each one used.

Small Enterprises

Everyone seemed to feel that he must succeed by his own efforts alone. No organized charity or welfare amounted to anything. Around the bookstore were men engaged in various small enterprises. Next-door was the Busy Bee cafe, where fat hamburgers, well extended with cereal to increase their bulk, sold for only five cents. The man at the hamburger counter had a Ph.D. in English literature from Columbia.

One man set up an ice cream sandwich stand using a space about two feet by two feet in our wide doorway. He had a small wooden cabinet, homemade and painted white, with a lid. He had a container of dry ice inside, a few bricks of ice cream, and some square wafers or biscuits such as were sold to make ice cream sandwiches. The sandwich sold for five cents and was made by cutting a slice of ice cream to put between two waffles. He paid space rent to Smolin and still made three or four dollars a day.

Next-door was a bootblack, an older man who owned a real shoeshine stand with a chair on a raised dais. This fellow was a bootblack all his life and as a boy had known Diamond Jim Brady and Steve Brody, who jumped off Brooklyn Bridge. Among such a mixture of people, we could entertain each other for hours simply by describing our origins, travels, and experiences. Among such diverse beginnings, even the truth was so strange to others that it need not be embroidered.

Opera

The bookstore closed each evening at nine, but on rainy evenings, I could close earlier. On such occasions, I could hurry uptown on the subway to a theater or opera. An opera company appeared at the old Hippodrome, and I sat high up in the second balcony, or it may have been even a third balcony in that old structure. The seats were shallow, with straight backs, built as benches like church pews, and you looked down almost on the singer's heads. It was my first genuine opera and I went several times.

Living was easy, since I had little chance to spend much. The depression was on and prices were low. Sometimes I had evenings off and walked to Times Square, got a chop suey dinner in an upstairs Chinese cafe on Eighth Avenue just above Forty-Second Street, and then went to the old Hippodrome theater, where the Chicago Opera Company played. I sat in the highest balcony for 50 cents on a hard wooden bench like a church pew.

Greenwich Village

One evening, I struck up a conversation with a young man in circumstances like my own seated next to me [at the Opera], and I bought some spumoni ice cream for two. He said his name was George (or Giorgio) Cavallon, and that he was a beginning artist from Greenwich Village.

He invited me to his place in Greenwich Village, which in 1934 was still the haunt of many artists and writers. Through him, I got to visit many studios in the Village. There was some wine, hours of endless talk about James Joyce and Bertrand Russell, nothing wild or frantic. The Village was still full of struggling young (and old) artists and writers. One of the favorite haunts was an all-night cafeteria on Christopher Square, where you could sit for hours over a couple of cups of coffee.

I went to my first Greenwich Village studio party, taking along a bottle of wine. It was no great revelation, only a couple of rooms with no floor covering and only a few pieces of plain furniture and an easel. The people, mostly between twenty and thirty, stood around or sat on the floor and talked. One asked me if I did not agree that James Joyce was the greatest of all writers. I had read no Joyce then and felt out of the conversation, although I felt that all of the people had somehow managed to enter a world of thought that was worth investigating. No one cared for my wine; it must have been some odd type. I know that I drank a great deal of it myself and on the way back to the bookshop room, I was not drunk but very sick.

I saw Cavallon once or twice later, and then never saw him until thirty years later when Life magazine ran a feature on successful artists in New England. There was Cavallon.

Morro Castle Tragedy

About three months passed in this way, and I had no definite plans for the next move until an event forced itself on me. I was astonished to read in a newspaper (there seemed to be a new edition of some paper almost every hour) that a ship, on which I had almost became a scullery man, had sailed Havana and had caught fire on the return trip to New York and was lying off the pier at Asbury Park, New Jersey.

It was the SS Morro Castle, and in the tragedy, many lost their lives. It was said that many of the crew forced their way into the lifeboats. The ship was reported still burning and drifting toward shore. This was something of the sort I had set out to write about as a news correspondent. It was the possibility of a good story with a local tie-in for the Journal. I told Smolin I wanted the day off and when he refused, I quit.

I caught a Greyhound bus down to Asbury Park and arrived there late at night. There was the hulk, smoldering and charred, stuck in shallow water not far off the end of a steel pier. I went out as far on the pier as I could and took some pictures in the light of the floodlights shining from shore. The event was already hours old and there was little I could describe that had not been fully covered by the wire services.

Still, I wired back collect about two or three hundred words to the Journal, telling how "a local boy almost loses life at sea." It made the front page and I got a byline and five dollars. I blush at the purple prose and clichés every time I look at that old clipping.

> *The SS Morro Castle was a luxury cruise ship of the 1930s built for the Ward Line for runs between New York City and Havana, Cuba. The Morro Castle was named for the Morro Castle fortress that guards the entrance to Havana Bay.*
>
> *In the early morning hours of Saturday, September 8, 1934, en route from Havana to New York, the ship caught fire and burned, killing a total of 137 passengers and crew members. The ship eventually beached herself near Asbury Park, New Jersey and remained there for several months until she went down.*
>
> *Only six of the ship's 12 lifeboats were launched-boats 1, 3, 5, 9 and 11 on the starboard side and boat 10 on the port side. Although the combined capacity of these boats was 408, they carried only 85 people, most of whom were crew members. Many passengers died for lack of knowledge on how to use the life preservers. As they hit the water, life preservers knocked many persons unconscious, leading to subsequent death by drowning, or broke victims' necks from the impact, killing them instantly.*
>
> *The devastating fire was a catalyst for improved shipboard fire safety. Today, the use of fire retardant materials, automatic fire doors, ship-wide fire alarms, and greater attention to fire drills and procedures resulted directly from the Morro Castle disaster.* - Wikipedia

After this point, other circumstances made me feel there was no point in trying to get to Europe; I never went back to the waterfront again. I still had to live. Quitting left me without a job and no living quarters. Finally, I was broke again and discouraged.

I went into a private charity office I had heard of to see what they might suggest. They gave me a ticket for a week's lodging at the YMCA on Thirty-Fourth Street, and a meal ticket good for a week's food at a "penny restaurant."

I often ate at this sort of welfare restaurant, one of a chain operated by Bernard MacFadden, the health faddist and publisher. They were called "penny restaurants," for everything sold for one, two, or three cents. My favorite was a big dish of thick, boiled cracked wheat (three cents), with a dollop of brown sugar on top (one cent), and some coffee (two cents) made from raisins instead of coffee. For fifteen or twenty cents, a good meal, especially breakfast, could be had.

A Good Suit Walks

I saved enough to buy a good suit. How I shopped for it! I knew precisely what I wanted, a good brown gabardine, with patch pockets and a "bi-swing" coat with shoulder pleats for action. I got it for around $18. I bought a "Panama" hat with a wide, turned-down brim, and even sported a light tan walking stick with an "ivory" knob.

Figure 4 - My Good Suit, Hat, and Walking Stick - 1934

I soon stopped carrying the stick, although it was common to carry one at that time. I guess it was the O.O. Mclntyre in me. I later lent this suit to a young friend to wear on a date. He left town in it and I never heard of the suit again.

Magazine Scout

While at the YMCA on Thirty-Fourth Street, I went into business for myself as a supplier to back-number magazine stores. I went up to Riverside Drive and West End Avenue, up near Columbia University, sometimes taking the subway to 125th Street and walking across through Harlem to Morningside Heights.

I went to apartments and arranged with janitors to buy scrap magazines. I offered to buy the higher-priced magazines. Tenants sent their trash down a chute; the janitor sorted out slow-burning papers such as magazines, and I sorted out what I wanted.

"Interview with a Bookman," by David Farmer. Unpublished transcript, 1989.

Jack: *I had a whole bunch of selected places. I'd give them a whole list of* [desired] *magazines.*

"Hey, I'll give you a nickel a piece for these magazines. I'll come by every week and pick them up. You could make a couple of bucks that you're throwing away."

I'd make my rounds, and I'd go back with these and hit this store or that store, and sell them for two or three times what I paid for them.

I gave one or two cents for most magazines, but up to a dime for higher-priced publications such as Fortune or Esquire. When I had two twenty-pound bundles, I took one in each arm and rode the subway down to the nearest back-number magazine store. I made about a dollar per trip, and made two round trips in a day, earning two dollars.

Rodeo Peanut Vendor

On the bulletin board of the YMCA were occasional job offers. One evening at the YMCA a young acquaintance asked me if I wanted to work as a peanut butcher in Madison Square Garden, where the "World Series Rodeo" was in progress. He explained what was involved and carefully coached me in the names of various ball parks/arenas in Detroit, Cleveland Saint Louis, and other places, where I had supposedly worked before.

I went to the Garden, a large enclosed arena that existed prior to the one that now stands in Manhattan. Men, mostly about my own age, crowded in for work. After I glibly listed all of the spots where I had [supposedly] worked for many seasons as a peanut butcher, I was told to get my uniform. The method was simple. You went into a locker room and changed into a flimsy white suit, not unlike heavy pajamas. Your clothes were locked up until you settled accounts with the concessionaire at the end of the evening.

Each man received a tray of food or drink, hot dogs, popcorn, or cold drinks. I drew peanuts. Your floor area was assigned. Known men got the best spots. Newcomers drew balconies. You were furnished with a dollar's worth of change, and turned loose. When your tray was empty, you paid the concessionaire his share, and drew a refilled tray. When the show closed [that evening], you settled up for your last tray then and got your clothes back. For two weeks, I went up and down the aisles.

I learned two things. We called out, "*Get your peanuts! Fresh roasted peanuts here!*" One night, I remembered that some peanuts were grown in Texas, and as the rodeo had a western atmosphere, I sold a few more peanuts when I called out, "*Get your big Texas peanuts here!*" I doubt Texas peanuts were any different from Georgia goobers, but perhaps the customers felt more a part of the rodeo if they ate Texas peanuts.

I learned how to shout or "bark" while selling. The noise level was high. To sell, you had to shout. Three hours of steady calling was difficult, even though I specialized in debate in college. One experienced fellow taught me to talk from the diaphragm, bringing up a deep sort of growl from your belly. This put less strain on the throat, gave a steady volume to the voice, and provided an odd pitch that made your words stand out from the voices around you. The words were not always as intelligible as with a normal speaking, but the sound attracted people and the tray of peanuts conveyed the message.

The World Series Rodeo, a top cowboy event, lasted only a few days and then the Garden was dark for several nights. I earned only two or three dollars a night. That was added to returns from an occasional trip to West End Avenue during the daytime for magazines.

When things grew slack, I picked up a few dollars working for Smolin's bookstore during the Jewish holidays. He gave me my first lessons in race relations. Back in Fort Wayne, I had three good Jewish friends, but with such a small Hebrew population, I never thought of them as Jews. At the bookshop, I told Smolin how I had "*Jew'ed a guy down on his price.*" Harry bristled, "*You what?*" I repeated the phrase and saw the light at once. If I engaged in such a practice, how could I characterize it as a Jewish habit?

Theater Barker

I stayed on at the YMCA, and when the rodeo ended, I noticed a sign on the bulletin board about a theater barker wanted by the Berman Theatrical Employment Agency. I saw these fellows around Times Square and knew that they did. I went over and listened to one man's spiel and then went to the theatrical employment office. This firm furnished cashiers, ushers, doormen, barkers, and similar help.

I had exercised my voice shouting about peanuts, and in the summer of the previous year was around a carnival for a season, so I felt I could land the job. Berman was more dubious. He asked me to audition, so I closed the door and cut loose with the spiel I had picked up, delivered in the diaphragm bellow I had learned at Madison Square Garden in my loudest, deepest tones. I got the job, not due to start work for a week, at the [old] George M. Cohan Theater, a movie house on Times Square, one or two doors north of the corner of Broadway and Forty-Second Street.

To fill out the week, I got a job as a busboy for Bickford's Cafeterias. I was hired at their Forty-Second Street place, but worked on the late night shift at a branch in Flatbush, over in Brooklyn. For a week, I spent each night clearing tables, running a dishwashing machine, squeezing two gallons of fresh orange .juice, and polishing the ample brass plates on the big front doors, Pinafore style.

> *George M. Cohan Theater - 1482 Broadway - Built 1911 - Demolished 1938 - Seats: 1,086 - Owners: George M. Cohan and Sam Harris (1911-1915), Joe Leblang (1915-1932) - History: The lobby artwork was a tribute to the vaudeville career of Cohan and his family. It served as a full-time movie house from 1932 until its demolition.* - www.musicals101.com

Finally, I reported for work as a doorman-barker at the Cohan. The theater once was a legitimate stage. In back of the movie curtain it now held, one could climb the spiral stairs to the old dressing rooms. In an old closet, I picked up a program for O'Neill's "Desire under the Elms" with Walter Huston as star.

Now, it was a re-run movie house, playing five-year-old films that often attracted the stars who liked to see their own pictures. Actors such as George Arliss sometimes came in. They were always admitted free, as professional courtesy.

I worked the evening shift, as few theaters used barkers during the day, except burlesque houses. Four to twelve, seven days a week, with pay at twelve dollars a week. A doorman's overcoat, heavy with braid, and a fancy cap were furnished.

My job was to walk in front of the box office making a raucous monologue. It did not matter what one said. No one paid any attention. The objective was to catch the attention of a passerby, who would then look at the marquee or movie posters in front of the theater to see what was playing, and that caught enough of them.

> The usual spiel ran like this, "*Going in now, you're just in time for another complete performance. See the stars you've always liked, in the pictures you've always wanted to see. Plenty of good seats available in all parts of the house*."

This same set of phrases was delivered over and over until they became automatic. You could bark without thinking and keep your eyes on all that was going on around the Square. I was now in a regular job that I could hold as long as I wished. This was one of my most non-standard jobs.

Wrestling for a Parking Space

One of my other jobs was to act as bouncer for unruly patrons, and to keep a parking space clear in front of the theater. The upper stories of the Cohan Theater had offices, with the entrance to the elevator located next to the box office. Parking in front of any theater was illegal for safety reasons, but there was one parking space next to the theater, and the theater owner told me to keep it open for his wife's car.

This was not always easy, for the wrestling promoter, Jack Curley [d.1937], had his office upstairs [at 1475 Broadway]. Curley seldom came around, but when he did, he would pull into the parking place I had fought to keep open, climb out followed by one or two huge wrestlers, and walk into the lobby.

> I ran after him to protest but never got beyond "*Mr. Curley, sir!*"
>
> He would tell one of the jumbos to "find out what that kid wants."
>
> One or two of the ox-like wrestlers came over, towered above me, and rumbled "*Whacha say?*"

I would find myself mumbling up into a stern face big as a pumpkin and about as intelligent. I could do nothing but wait for the theater owner to complain.

Times Square

I enjoyed just being on Times Square. Right across from me was the Times Annex, with news bulletins traveling around the building in a series of lighted letters. It was understood that there were all kinds of characters around the Square, real Damon Runyon "Guys and Dolls" types, for this was the time of which he wrote.

Figure 5 - Times Square 1935 with Streetcars (wirednewyork.com)

Times Square was then a theatrical district, chiefly movie houses. Minsky's Burlesque [converted from the Theatre Republic into Broadway's first burlesque house in 1931] and one other were open on Forty-Second Street, but Bob Hope played in the stage version of “Roberta” at the New Amsterdam on that street.

On the corner of Broadway and Forty-Third Street, a drugstore carried a full line of theatrical makeup, and one evening in there I met an actor named Bramwell Fletcher, who had appeared in the movie “Raffles”. We struck up a conversation, mine being that of a fan. He was a relatively young actor playing the role of the poet in Sean O’Casey's "Within the Gates," opposite Lillian Gish. Fletcher once let me see part of the play from the wings. He often waved as he passed the Cohan. Later we corresponded. A couple of years later, he arranged for me to see him playing in “Lady Precious Stream”, produced by Morris Gest. I doubt that I made any lasting impression on Fletcher, but he was always pleasant and generous.

Roommates

I teamed up with another barker at the Cohan named Al Coste, a French-Canadian, whose one great passion was chasing girls. We shared a furnished "apartment" at 138 West Forty-Sixth Street up on the third floor, just east of Broadway and back of Loew's State Theater. Each "apartment" was really only one room with an arch divider that made it seem like two rooms, and with a closet converted to a kitchen by installation of a washbowl and a gas plate.

The place was a theatrical boarding house in the big days of vaudeville and still had a few performers there. I forget what shop was on the ground floor. A theatrical wigmaker had the second floor. The third and fourth floors were "apartments" at front and rear, sharing a bath between. It was a walk-up, no elevator.

The landlady was a comfortably padded old biddy named Mrs. McDemott, motherly yet still firm when the rent was due each week.

Coste and I saw little of other tenants. We had our own group of friends picked up around the Square, and they were a cosmopolitan bunch such as could be found only around Times Square.

One was a huge Jewish refugee, with a roaring voice, who had fled from Germany. He spoke with a British accent, sold vacuum cleaners, and was a licensed pilot on blimps and balloons. He later went to California and lived for a while panning gold as many others did during the Depression, making $3 to $5 a day at it.

A short and slim fellow, a Dane or Swede, had jumped ship. He was afraid of the immigration authorities. He made his living as a night watchman for a security firm. His made the rounds each night to visit stores that paid for his employer's service, and the watchman tried the door of each store to make sure it was still locked and no signs of burglary. Then he slipped one of his cards under the door as evidence of his visit, and went, on to the next place.

The others were Americans from all over the country. We pooled our funds to buy food and took turns cooking dishes from our homes. I recall the delicious "lentils mit knockwurst" cooked by the blimp pilot.

The Italian Prince (or How I got my Uniform)

I made one more attempt to get to Europe, but not on a ship. The Saturday Review of Literature carried pages of personal ads. They were overly personal; they have since placed restrictions on these ads, so they say nothing [scandalous] now. I ran an ad about "Will do anything legal to get to Europe". There was one reply and the following was so strange that when I have told people of it, they think I must surely be lying.

The reply was from a young man who claimed to be an exiled Italian prince. I forgot his name, but he referred me to an article in the New York Post, which I read at the library and found verified his claims. His letter was non-committal, and asked me to call at an apartment on Stone Street in Brooklyn. I went on the appointed evening, but his name was not on the list of cards above the doorbells. The janitor said that a stranger was in a certain apartment, so I rang that bell and was admitted by an extremely beautiful girl in a rich gown. Seated before a pleasant fireplace, was a dapper and slight man about my age.

After we talked a while, he explained that he was "playing the marriage market". He had a perfectly good title, but no money. He had all the social graces, and openly admitted that he was in the United States to get a wealthy bride. His plan was to find a wealthy father, with a plain but willing daughter, and move towards marriage.

Somewhere before the wedding, he would coax the father into giving him a sum of money- either for a business venture, or on any pretext. His plan was then to "postpone" the marriage and head for Europe. When I asked him how I would fit into such a scheme, he said that I would have no part in it but would be only a sort of "aide". He said that he needed someone to take messages, act as a sort of servant and secretary, and in general, help him put up the appearance as a gentleman. It sounded unethical. He assured me that there would be nothing underhanded about it, and so I said I would think about it.

He said that I must have some sort of a uniform. Therefore, we went to Bannerman's military store. I got a fine but plain uniform jacket, or tunic, that buttoned up to the chin, cavalry type breeches, riding boots, and an officer's cap. He stated that according to his tradition he could simply proclaim me as a "Lieutenant" in his non-existent ancient family guard (I recalled that Count Felix von Luckner had wanted to become a Lieutenant, and became one quite easily for a day … in the Salvation Army!)

I wore the uniform for a while and met the Prince occasionally in various swank cafes, while he developed his idea. The thing came completely to naught when I received a telegram, sent from the famous Heublein Hotel in Hartford Connecticut.

It read, "*Sorry, whole deal is off; have married the girl.*"

Still, the breeches and boots were useful as part of my barker uniform at the Cohan.

Heading West

November 1934

As the fall wore on into winter, it was less pleasant working as a doorman. The theater owner insisted I walk back and forth along the curb, but the passing cars threw slush on my pants legs and shoes. [As described, I] invested in a pair of good English riding boots and some whipcord black cavalry pants. This was fine at work, but when I took off my theatrical overcoat and went home in jacket, breeches, and boots, I looked a little like a Nazi storm trooper.

In 1934, this SS outfit was not too commonly recognized, but some young Jewish fellows knew it well enough and one dark night a bunch of them backed me up against a wall on a dark street and were about to pummel me. I managed to talk my way out of it.

Thanksgiving passed, and Christmas, my first away from home, and on New Year's Eve, I had the late shift as 1934 turned into 1935. The Square was jammed in traditional style, and we had an extra barker on hand to ward off trouble and keep drunks from trying to overturn the box office when the crowd was heaviest. After New Year's, there was little novelty left in the job.

Plans to Leave New York

I still lived in the flophouse and ate rough food. There were plenty of fights around the Bowery and lots of drunks, but I never got into any difficulty. Once or twice, on a Jewish religious holiday, I worked for Smolin to keep his shop open at day wages. In time, this sort of life and hard work became a little dull; there was no objective in it. Days went by in a routine, and there were few diversions. It was not what I had come east to do.

By now I knew dozens of characters around the Square; one was a friendly young fellow named Tony Mason, a drifter hanging around the Square, who was a petty gambler and did anything to make a deal. Al Coste had moved on, and I was living alone in the little apartment. I came down with a bad but brief case of the influenza and lay alone in the room for a few days, weak and with teeth chattering. No one called. No one cared. I was utterly alone, except that Mason came around when he missed me at the theater. We became close buddies.

In mid-January, I had lunch with Tony in a Chinese restaurant on Eighth Avenue, looking down at the cars making crisscross tracks in the dirty slush on the streets below.

"*It's mighty nice in New Orleans at this time of year*," Tony said.

I admitted that I had never been there. The more Tony talked about the place, the more enthralling it seemed. We decided to go there, and right then was as good a time as any. I went back to the Cohan Theater, drew my pay, it being payday, and quit. It was no inconvenience as the theater could get a replacement at once simply by telephoning Berrman's agency.

On the Road – January 1935

The next morning, Tony and I started off for New Orleans. I travelled much as I had from Fort Wayne to Detroit and onto New York eight months earlier, except that I wore the black riding boots and breeches. My hat was a black felt with a three-inch brim, good in sun or heavy rain. I still had the packsack, but the oilcloth patch now carried only my initials JDR; the word PARIS was gone. In the pack was a pair of dress shoes and pants. Rolled under the top flap was a black waterproof trench coat.

Not much happened the first three days out. It was not really a journey of two young men, because we separated. A motorist might pick up one hitchhiker, but would rarely pick up two. Tony and I rode over to the Jersey shore on a ferryboat, made our way to the edge of town, and separated. He named a cheap hotel where we met that night in Philadelphia. The next day, we repeated this procedure and reached Washington. It was my only visit to date to the capital, but I did not take in any of the sights. In those years, it always seemed there would be another opportunity.

Virginia

On the third afternoon, we were in Roanoke, Virginia. When I met Tony, he suggested we go to the "transient center," In the mid-1930's, with so many men traveling the roads looking for work, the government established these centers to provide food and a bed for the wanderers. Few men stayed more than a night, and I later stopped at transient centers in New Orleans, Fort Worth, and Indianapolis.

In Roanoke, we first went to register at the office, in what was a residence. The rooms of a small home were converted to offices, each with the bored "caseworker" who filled out long questionnaires as he or she asked questions of the newcomer. The rest of us sat around on kitchen chairs, waiting for our turn. These long sociological documents must have been sent on to some vast clearing house, perhaps in Washington, where the facts were sorted and tabulated to make a composite portrait of the jobless wanderers. Every night, if he kept moving, a man answered the same questions:

"Where are you from?"

"Where are you going?"

"When did you work last?"

"What is your occupation?"

After a while, the men took delight in coining new answers. In Roanoke, one older man said that he had difficulty finding steady work because his occupation was so specialized.

"And what is your line of work?"

"I'm a professional Christmas tree decorator."

After the interview, we went around the corner to another house where the rooms had double-deck bunks, dormitory style, and were assigned a bed. It has a small center, with perhaps twenty transients.

The next morning, Tony was sick, and a visiting doctor said he should stay there and rest, for a week or two. We talked it over and it was decided that I should go on to New Orleans and Tony would come along later. He never came. I started on alone. When I left New York, I had only the last week's pay, twelve or fifteen dollars that lasted me until I reached New Orleans. All I had to do was find free lodging each night, some cheap flophouse, or a room.

Tennessee

That day I made it almost into Bristol, Tennessee. When darkness came, I was out at a small crossroads at a filling station that had one room full of groceries. The owner lived back of the station. The night was cold, and I asked the man if I could sleep inside the station beside the stove. This was an astonishing request, of course, and the owner said that he did not want to take any chances with strangers. I told him I was not really a stranger but could identify myself and I pulled out my passport. He had never seen such a document, and as he looked at it, I had an idea. I showed him that it bore the signature of Cordell Hull, who came from that part of the United States.

> *"I, the undersigned Secretary of State of the United States of America hereby request all whom it may concern to permit safely and freely to pass, and in case of need, to give all lawful aid and protection to Jack DeVere Rittenhouse."*

This official document so impressed the man that I spent the night beside the stove. The only time that passport ever did me any good was <u>inside</u> the country.

Traveling was slow in Tennessee. The next day I made it only to Knoxville, where I sought out the Salvation Army shelter. They were so swamped with transients that their facilities were makeshift. Bunks were built at least two high, made of two-by-fours and resembling bins in a warehouse you slipped in one of these pigeonhole compartments from the end, with your head at the open end. A mattress covered with ticking; was an old quilt was the only covering, and there was no pillow. A strange rack of humanity snored through the night. In the morning, there was a great pot of coffee and a vast kettle of thick oatmeal. The next day was a long one and a fast one.

Alabama

I went through Chattanooga past Lookout Mountain, on to Birmingham in Alabama down to Montgomery, and by back roads to Pensacola. In one of those towns, probably Birmingham, I boarded a streetcar to get to the edge of town. It was the first time I ever rode in a "Jim Crow" car, and unknowingly I sat in the back seat that was reserved for blacks. Not until I got off did I realize why the passengers, both black and white, had looked at me so strangely.

Outside Montgomery, a black man driving an old panel body truck picked me up. He was headed south for Pensacola, so I went, there. Again, I had a lesson of sorts in discrimination. The driver asked me my name and I said it was Jack; I asked his and got a similar first name. For the rest of the afternoon, he seemed to take a special delight in addressing me by my first name, until it dawned on me that in those years and in the South a white man was usually addressed as "Mister" and a black man as "boy".

We drove on south, through country that seemed worn out and tired of producing crops. There were turpentine camps and miserable clapboard shacks. Finally, we reached Pensacola and I strolled around my first plaza lined with palm trees. It was warm and pleasant, and I found a bed for twenty-five cents. In each town, I saw only what might be seen in a short walk during the late evening or early in the morning as I moved out.

The next day was difficult. From Pensacola, west to Mobile the distance was only about fifty miles, but it took me all day, plus much of the night. After dark, I was still walking in almost full darkness along the country road. Up ahead I saw a campfire under some trees, not far off the road and could see the silhouettes of three or four men. There was loud laughter, and I suspect they were drinking. They sounded rough, and I wondered if they might not try to rob a stranger passing.

There was a faint moon, enough that they could see that a man was passing. They could hear my boots on the road. I reached over my shoulder and pulled my camera tripod out, thinking I might use it as a weapon. It had telescoping legs about three feet long. I pulled one leg out to its full length and cradled it across my left arm. It the moonlight it gleamed as if I were a hunter walking home with a shotgun in his arm. I walked straight past them. The talking became hushed and stopped. Nothing happened.

I do not recall where I slept in Mobile. I waited all of the next morning for a hitch at the west end of town. A passerby told me that few motorists picked up hitchhikers because the road west had one or more toll bridges, and no driver wanted it pay toll for a hiker.

I decided to catch a freight train. This was the first time I rode as a hobo, and I could not have picked a better place. So many men were going west, that the railroad had made a sort of treaty with the bums. Each afternoon at three, a train of empty cars stopped beside some vast storage tanks, resembling gasoline tanks but used for bulk molasses. The bums swarmed from the bushes and boarded the train. They were allowed to ride that train without being troubled. In return, they kept off all other westbound trains.

Getting on that train required no more skill than boarding a passenger train. I was in a gondola car with a dozen or more others, and I stood by the chest-high side watching the towns roll by: Pascagoula, Pass Christian, and Biloxi. Sixteen years later, I was again in Biloxi, riding as a paying passenger on an expense account to a convention.

It was a steam-driven train, of course, and a shower of gritty cinders swirled back from the engine. These hot, sharp-edged grits were fiendish in the eyes, and I soon learned to keep my head turned aft.

Beside me was an old timer who looked like a professional drifter. He used a phrase of carnival slang and I answered him in kind. In my last summer at college, I had worked briefly in a carnival that was playing for an exposition at Terre Haute, and I had studied the slang. It was a secret language, based on thieves jargon and words from gypsies. There were many variations; the children's common "pig Latin" was one.

The "dialect" this fellow used was like pig Latin but was formed by inserting the sounds “ee-uh-zee" after the first consonant. Thus, "pig" became "p-ee-uh-zee-ig" and "train" was "t-ee-uh-zee-rain”. It was not necessary to do this with every word in a conversation, several such words, especially keywords, handled this way made any conversation unintelligible to the uninitiated. My companion told me where to jump from the train as it slowed down near the center of New Orleans, and I got off without interference.

New Orleans for Three Months

The police in New Orleans were not so tolerant of hobos. I found the local transient bureau and stayed there, for the first night. I was down to my last dollar or so by then. I had not had my boots off since leaving Pensacola thirty-six hours before, and my feet were swollen. For a while, I feared I might have to take the required shower clad only in boots, but some others helped me get the casings off.

I was in New Orleans less than ninety days. They were days and nights of intense sightseeing, visiting, talking, and were the equivalent of ten months of weekends. Every day, every hour, was a new experience. It was the best time of the year in many ways, leading up to Mardi Gras and just beyond.

After the first night at the transient center, I checked out and began to seek some way of maintaining myself. I found a lodging house at twenty-five cents a night in an old place in the French Quarter. It had once been quite a house, built in the Mediterranean style of a hollow square; flush to the front sidewalk, with a large patio within. Each room held only several cots, and the washrooms was enlarged. If you had a suitcase, you kept it under the cot. Many put their shoes under their pillow as a protection against thieves if the shoes were good. In a day or two, my Times Square wages were gone. There were no jobs of any sort to be had as far as I could see.

Le Artiste

Around Jackson Square, the plaza of the French Quarter, I saw artists displaying their paintings. Only a few were passable; most were slightly below average or worse, but prices were often under five dollars.

I had taken one course in art at college, enough at least to learn what sort of materials to use. I pawned my little camera again, for three or four dollars. With these funds, I bought some illustration board, some penny picture postcards of patios, gardens, and street scenes, and a set of watercolor pencils. They were like indelible pencils in that they were used as you would draw with any graphite pencil, but when dampened the color blurred and blended like watercolor.

In the mornings, I sat in the patio of the flophouse, working at an old laundry table, and copied the postcards into enlarged paintings, perhaps nine by twelve inches. I made mats or frames for them of other cardboard. Sometimes I tried to achieve an "oil" effect by shellacking the paintings.

It the afternoons, I went down along Royal Street and found a store that was empty and boarded up. I had bought a cheap folding stool with a canvas seat and a beret. There I sat, fiddling on a painting as though putting on the final touches. The tourists from Ohio and Iowa and Wisconsin came along, with many women, especially middle-aged, stopping to see "a real artist at work in the French Quarter!" I spoke little, trying to keep my Indiana accent hushed, and sometimes using a bit of college French.

Figure 6- Patio, New Orleans (J. Rittenhouse 1935 4x4.5)

Figure 7- Cabildo, New Orleans (J. Rittenhouse 1935 3x5)

There is no point in detailing the standard scenes of the French Quarter; they were still there and still the same. My paintings were only a dollar, and even at, that were overpriced. I could make three or four pictures in a morning and sold two or three each afternoon, so it was not so bad. As soon as I had all I needed I knocked off work. On some days, I did not work at all, but wandered around town.

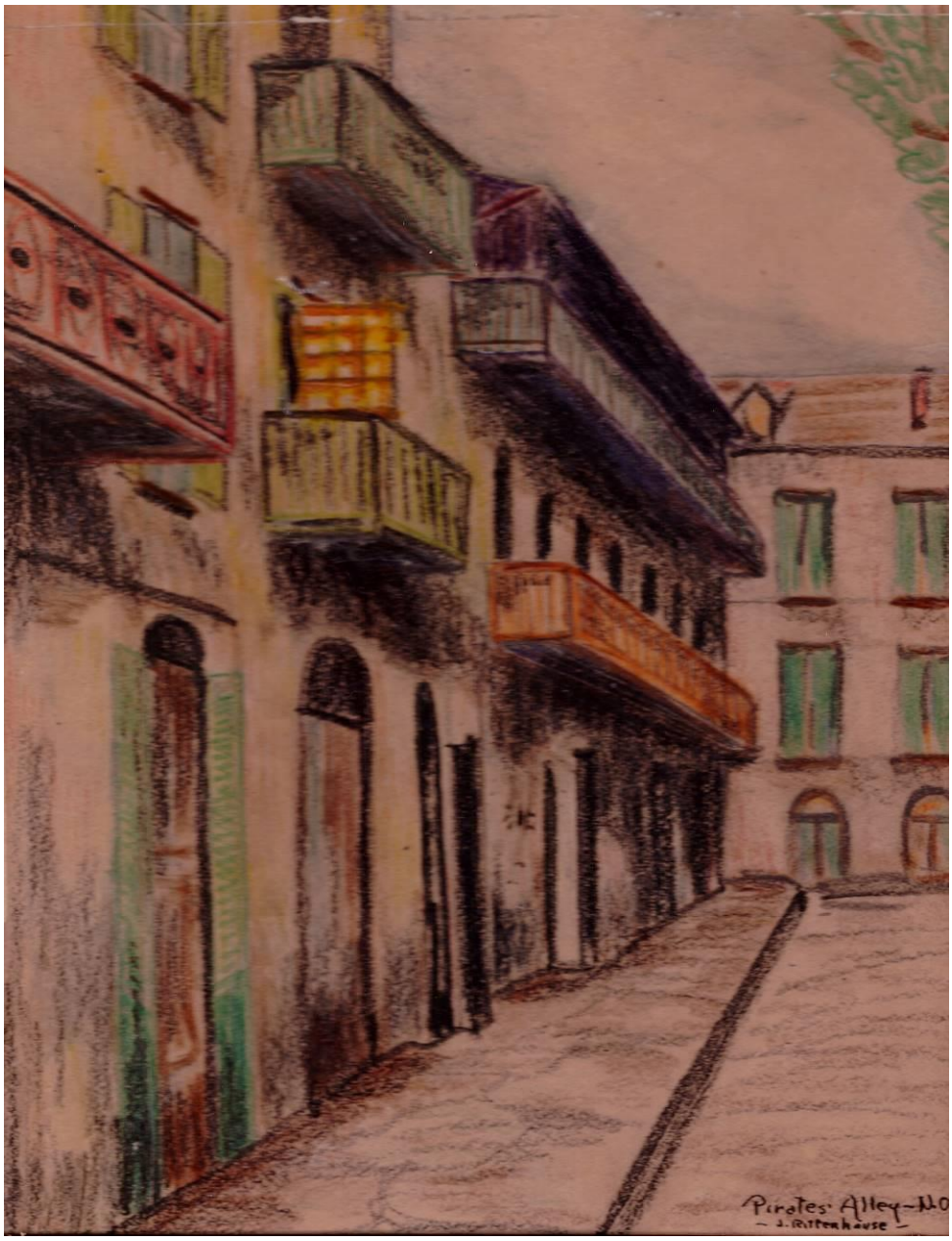


Figure 8 - Pirates Alley, New Orleans (J. Rittenhouse 1935 6x8)

I continued to work at my paintings. I improved a little. I especially liked to work with a crow quill pen and India ink on good illustration board making black and white sketches of the wrought ironwork grilles and balconies around the Quarter. I drew a large map of the French Quarter and sent it home. In quality, they would still not be given a passing grade in a freshman art class, but it was pleasant and provided a small livelihood

Figure 9 - Vieux Carre, New Orleans (J. Rittenhouse 1935 9x11)

Food prices were low. One small restaurant near the Pontalba Buildings provided a meal of fried chicken with a small glass of plain wine for thirty-five cents. Red wine could be bought for a dollar a gallon in a plain glass jug. I saw everything, went everywhere, and watched the crowds grow as Mardi Gras approached.

One visiting restaurant man commissioned me to sketch in colors the interior of a cafe that he liked. He wanted to use the ideas in decorating his own place back north.

On Mardi Gras night, or rather on one of the nights of that week, I went from bar to bar to watch the crowds, joining in barroom quarrels. After the Mardi Gras ended, the streets were almost empty and business grew slack.

One day a fellow just slightly older than me came along with a suitcase. He stopped to watch me for a while and then commented that I did not seem to be drawing any customers. When I said that business was light, he said he could help. Opening the suitcase he extracted a ventriloquist's dummy. When a pair of tourists went past, the dummy started to talk to them. They turned and were soon the center of a small circle of people. In a short time, I had sold nearly all of my stock.

The Artists and Writers Center

The ventriloquist introduced himself as Ted Valentine, and said he did his act occasionally in bars and small nightclubs. He asked me where I stayed and then told me that he organized a sort of cooperative or share-and-share rooming house and asked I if I would care to come in with the group.

Today this would be called a hippie commune, I suppose. We did not know the word commune then, and neither did we know the word hippie. We were just individuals, and I mean individuals, because we followed no similarity in dress. Ted was the organizer of the project. At a corner of Bourbon and Dumaine Streets, there was a house of three, perhaps four, stories, with a bar occupying the ground floor. The upstairs was vacant and consisted of four or five sleeping rooms, with a common bathroom on each floor. I had a fine room for five dollars a month. The exact economics were never revealed, but I suspect that Ted rented the whole place for forty or fifty dollars a month and made this sum from the group of tenants, getting his own room free for his share of the enterprise.

At that time of year, no heat was needed. The lights consisted of a single bulb on a cord from the ceiling. The furniture consisted of only an old bedstead and a mattress; each person brought his own bedding, chair, etc., picked up in any salvage shop. The tenants came and went, and often bequeathed things to others when they left. In this way, I picked up a small table, a chair, and an artist's easel. We lived our lives as individuals, not as a group, each man going out in the morning to follow some line of activity.

Often in the evenings, we sat around in one room in a group bull session, almost like a college fraternity house. One or two smoked marijuana; all passed around a jug of red wine; no one got drunk; there were no women in the house and rarely one at an evening session, although there was one room upstairs rented by a stranger who came there only once or twice a week, apparently with a girl.

It was hard to recall the tenants. One was a college art instructor from Minneapolis. He was a real painter. Each year he took a few weeks off and went to a different part of the country to paint. The year before, he visited Cape Cod painting ships and the sea. This year he painted around New Orleans. He painted fast and well, and explained that he painted partly for enjoyment and partly to sell, and that he could produce four or five paintings a week, most of which sold for a hundred dollars each when he returned to

Minneapolis. As he did not always sell all of the paintings after a trip, he said he had accumulated quite a small gallery of varied scenes.

He made no pretenses of self-importance, but said he was just a working painter who got to travel around, live well, and supplied middle-class people with fairly good original paintings for their homes. We saw little of this painter, because he was up and out at sunrise and retired early.

Another fellow, in his early twenties, worked furiously on a novel. He was not yet published, but said quite pompously that he was working on "the first volume of a trilogy". We could hear him in his room all day, at the typewriter.

Another chap there was a silhouette cutter, who worked on the streets, standing in a doorway of some closed store, cutting a tourist's silhouette for fifty cents.

Of course, there was Ted Valentine, a strange fellow who had rambled everywhere. He explained that his father was a ventriloquist, taught him the art, and bequeathed the dummy to him when he died. Ted said he sometimes felt that the spirit of his father still lived in the dummy; neither of us believed this. Sometimes when Ted had enough drinks to blur his speech and became melancholy, he would bring out the dummy and talk to it. Ted's speech would be slurred; but the dummy always replied in clear and true tones. It was a strange scene of a man talking to his subconscious as if it were another person.

Eddie

As the weeks went by, and the warmer weather approached, the tenants began to leave. A dramatic event hastened the end of "The Artists and Writers Center".

One of Valentine's friends was a shriveled fellow we knew as Eddie. He was on drugs, dope we called it, and I mean the hard stuff, heroin and cocaine. I never saw him actually take any, nor did I ever see him at his lowest and highest, points. He talked about it freely among us and warned us never to start the habit. He told how addicts in jail would loosen a nail from the heel of a shoe, rub the nail at an angle on the stone or brick wall until it had a sharp edge, and then scratch their wrist until it bled rubbing the drug into the raw spot, if they could get a fix no other way.

Eddie was married to a girl, named Bonnie, and he got her started on the habit. They separated, and Bonnie hung around bars. We never saw her at the Center, and in fact, Eddie did not live at the center.

A young fellow from a wealthy Shreveport family of some prominence left his home and came to New Orleans to live. He and Bonnie met, and she soon had him on the habit, it was said. One night in a café, they had an argument. Bonnie was either drunk or high on drugs. When she flared in anger at something he said, and told him, "*I could kill you for that!*" The young man drew a pocketknife and handed it to her. She leaned across the table and sank the knife [back] into him. He stood up, walked to the cashier to pay his check, and fell over, He died an hour or so later.

I was asleep in my room at the Center when this happened and it was not any affair connected with the Center in any way, except that the police knew that Eddie often came to the Center.

Within minutes after the stabbing, word had come through the strange grapevine of the French Quarter that Bonnie had stabbed a man. Eddie left town at once without baggage. Ted Valentine packed a suitcase, took his dummy, and left with him.

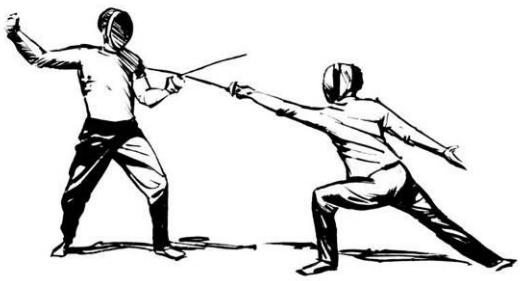
At that time, I had a room on the third floor. The next morning, two detectives kicked open the door with a crash and walked in. I sat up in bed. They asked me where Eddie was, and I truthfully said I had not seen him for the previous few days. After a few more questions, they left. I went down to look for Ted and found his room empty. The others told me what had happened. That decided that I, too, might as well move out. The Center dissolved in a day.

I sold my artist's easel and the few other possessions, packed my knap sack and left. I never heard what happened to Ted or Eddie or Bonnie, except the dead youth's family raised all sorts of pressure to bring her to trial, and I suspect she was eventually caught. There would have been no way of implicating Eddie. The completely sordid mess was a sharp object lesson to me.

Orest Mykar

I had a place to go, however. A few weeks earlier, I had made the acquaintance of an emigrant named Orest Mykar, as near as I can recall its spelling. Orest was a Russian, who as a young man was an officer, probably a junior officer such as an ensign or cadet, in the cuirassier guard of the Czar. This could have been true, for the Russian revolution had started only eighteen years before we met in New Orleans, and Orest was then in his late thirties. After a short period in the Revolution, still a Czarist supporter, he had fled to America.

He landed in Minneapolis, where he got a job as a streetcar motorman. He said this was a good job [without needing language skills]. Since the conductor took the fares at the rear of the car [and thus out of sight], whenever Orest heard the bell clang he started, or stopped when it clanged again. Still, he said he managed to get lost a time or two by taking the wrong switch in the tracks.



Eventually Orest learned a little English. As he had long and serious training in fencing while with the Guards, he found that he could make a small living as a fencing instructor or tutor at the university in Minneapolis. He found his way to New Orleans, where there was much more interest in fencing, and was going to open a small school or salon.

I was no fencer except for a lesson or two at the Salon Vince in New York and had slashed around with the foils a little with friends. I knew the terms and customs.

I moved in with Orest and helped fix up his quarters. In return for labor at whitewashing or painting walls, cleaning floors, building benches around the walls of the room, etc., he let me sleep in the place and occasionally we shared a meal he cooked.

In the evenings, a few students came in, and there was serious Instruction, a series of monotonous exercises repeated over and over: parry, lunge, recover; parry, lunge, recover. After an hour or two of this, he always let the students bang away at each other in enthusiastic if unskilled fashion, explaining that there had to be some fun. When everyone was tired, we drew the benches out from the wall, passed around the gallon jug of red wine. Then, Orest and a student demonstrated various moves. It was altogether pleasant. It could not last.

I was always aware that this was a trip and not a way of life, and that sometime it must end. I was about to go back to Indiana but my pride would not let me after my bragging that I would be a war correspondent. There was, of course, no war on in Europe at that time, although the fuses were burning short.

I thought that perhaps there was a way I could redeem myself in a youthful way. I could go to Mexico, at least to some border town to get my passport stamped. This would qualify as a foreign country, and if anyone asked, I could say that I changed my mind about going to France and had gone to Mexico. How I would make my way there and back, with no funds, was a problem. Yet even there, a solution turned up.

Silhouette Artist

The silhouette cutter had shown me a few of the tricks of his craft. First, you bought the materials for a kit of equipment, a good pair of small, straight-bladed embroidery scissors, the best you could afford. No cheap twenty-cent pair from Woolworth's, but a pair that cost two or three dollars.

Next, you needed gummed black paper. This was not usually available in stationery stores, so you had to make your own. This was done by spreading tarred paper on a table, laying out a sheet of black gift-wrap paper, and brushing on or painting on a coat of mucilage [A gummy substance obtained from certain plants]. When the glue dried you cut the sheet into six-inch squares, and then folded the squares once with the glued side in, making a folded piece three by six inches. This let you to cut two silhouettes at once, facing left and right, or "two for the price of one." The only other thing needed were some four by six inch white, plain file cards on which to paste the finished silhouette.

True silhouette cutting requires some genuine skill. After a dozen or so tries, many people can produce a silhouette of sorts. As my friend said, few people have ever seen

their profile. In the brief college art class, I had spent two or three days drawing freehand profiles and knew some of the principles.

In cutting a cameo profile, my friend said (and I followed his style):

- Cut a small slope along the upper chest to the bottom of the neck or throat.
- Cut upward with a small cut for the Adams apple and start out on the underside of the chin. Throat and chin cuts were almost equal length, establishing proportions for a guide. The chin was a determining factor, normal, prominent, or receding. Most people knew the shape of their chin.
- A little flick shaped the lower lip and upper lip. The distance from upper lip to nose was tricky.
- The nose was equal to the chin in importance. The stubby noses of little children were easy; a woman's nose had to be just right, preferably a little flattering to her.
- With eyelashes, I practiced until I could cut long sweeping lashes for the ladies and children.
- After the forehead and the hair line, the rest of the head was easy, especially for women where the head could be only a magnificent mop of outline.
- The curve of the head inward at the nape of the neck and falls a little above the line under the chin.
- There was a sweep back for the shoulders, followed by a swashing cut for the base of the silhouette, down to meet the start of the original cut.

The whole kit (of a few finished samples, gummed paper, scissors, and plain cards) could be carried in a thin little box that fitted into a side coat pocket. Any time I needed a meal, I had only to see a child or two playing in a yard go up to the house, and tell the mother that I would cut her child's silhouette, two for fifty cents. If she did not have any change, I would do it for a sandwich or any sort of food and a cup of coffee.

Thus, I was ready to leave New Orleans just as the warmer spring days came.

Except for Orest Mykar, I left only two friends from whom the parting brought little twinges. Around the corner, in a similar old building, there lived a most gentle young fellow, Dan Kelly, and his wife Mildred. He made his living as a picture framer, and was proud of the fine mortise saw he used for cutting the frames. Even in those days, a good saw of that sort cost thirty to fifty dollars. With a supply of various moldings and that saw, Dan could make any sort of frame. When no other work on hand, he bought back-issues of the French magazine "L' Illustration", which had splendid illustrations tipped in. Dan removed these and framed them, selling them for a dollar or so.

The couple was poor, but they enjoyed life and were happy. Among their friends was an excellent painter, who had a painting of an old man. He had refused four hundred dollars for the painting, yet he gave it to Dan one evening when Dan [had simply] marveled at its beauty. The painter wanted appreciation more than money, and this again was a characteristic of so many of the genuine creative people I met in the French Quarter.

When I left, Dan and Mildred came to bring me a present. I still have it, a curious little book on natural phenomena by David Brewster, entitled "Letters on Natural Magic" published by Harper's in l870. It was of no great worth as a rare book, but I valued the inscription, "*To Jack Rittenhouse, from Mildred and Dan Kelly, New Orleans, '35*".

Every time I see a hippie today, I think that they are somehow trying to imitate people like Dan and Mildred, feeling that perhaps if they dress that way they will acquire the other fine qualities. With those two, the spirit of gentleness, intellectual curiosity, and happiness worked from the inside outward. They were not rebels in any sense, merely true individualists living their own way of life.

Heading Further West - April

Louisiana

I was on my way again with my backpack and less than a dollar in my pocket, heading west across lower Louisiana. In one small town, on a street shaded with fine old trees draped with Spanish moss, I went up to a home and knocked. A most polite little old lady answered, and I went into my sales talk about cutting a silhouette. She wanted none, but insisted on making a plate of fried eggs, which I ate sitting on the big front porch.

When evening came, I was on the edge of Houma, Louisiana. I bought a small loaf of bread, often found for a dime, and carried a quart canteen of water. Walking out of the city toward dusk, I passed a field of big green onions and added a couple to my pack. Onions, bread, and water made a supper.

Not long afterward, I passed a golf course with low palm trees growing on the grassy fairway beside the road. One short palm had fronds that curved over and almost touched the ground like a great umbrella. There I crawled underneath and found myself in a sort of tropical igloo. I spread out my trench coat, curled around the short trunk of the tree, and slept soundly and comfortably. The next morning, I caught a ride with a Hughes Oil Tool truck making a fast return trip to Houston for more drilling bits.

Houston

By nightfall, I was in Houston on my first visit to Texas. I found a flophouse with the usual partitioned rooms holding a single cot. During the night, a thief got into my room and stole sixty-five cents. I awoke in the morning with no funds. I walked out of town, heading north along Jensen Drive in the industrial district, heading for Dallas or Fort Worth. I went into a cafe and offered to do any sort of work for breakfast. No work, but the counterman would give me some food. He tossed me a five-cent bag of potato chips. This was something, but hardly a good solid breakfast for a hungry man.

That night, I was in Corsicana where I saw a bakery open and tried for work. No work, but they gave me a loaf of day-old bread for my supper. I slept under the loading platform of a lumber company beside the railroad tracks.

Fort Worth

The next afternoon in Fort Worth, I found a transient center. This was one of the biggest and best, located in a vast empty factory building. All of the staff workers except for a few caseworkers were transients doing the work. Among them were some good cooks and one cook got some oysters which occasionally were cheap along the Gulf Coast. He made an oyster loaf about the consistency of dressing that comes with turkey, but was a white bread-like food with the rich flavor of oysters and with several oysters still in it. I wrapped up a big chunk of it and kept it for food the next day along the road.

That evening, still in Fort Worth and still hungry, I went into a religious "rescue mission" where the minister talked loudly about "food for body and soul" saying that after the services, the sisters would serve food. We listened to a rambling sermon mostly on the Book of Revelations for more than an hour, after which the ladies served weak coffee and ginger snaps. The men were “mad enough to spit.”

The next morning, I was on the road. By noon, I polished off my oyster loaf. The driver of a one-ton truck picked me up with a heavy square load covered with a tarpaulin.

He told me an anecdote while we drove along. Once he picked up a little dried-up old man who sat stiffly upright with a bundle on his lap wrapped in an old newspaper. Then they picked up a braggart who kept boasting about how "tough" he was, and how many fights he was in. He kept on boasting about how he was "the toughest man in the town of Monahan" until the little old man could stand it no more. He asked the driver to stop, opened the newspaper-wrapped parcel, and pulled out "*the biggest 45-caliber ‘dog-leg’ I ever saw*" and told the loud-mouth that he was not the toughest man in Monahan but had just met the man who was and that he had better get out. The braggart got out.

The driver kept looking furtively back out the rear view window. Finally, I asked if he were afraid of anyone following him. He said that he was worried because he was carrying a "hot" load. It dawned on me that the load did look suspiciously like cases of liquor covered by that tarpaulin. Therefore, I asked if he had a load of bootleg whiskey. "*Nope*," he replied "*Campbell’s soup*”.

I asked how hot soup could be bootleg. He explained that he owned the truck, but that his license did not cover inter-city commercial hauling, and that if the police stopped him he faced a heavy fine. We drove on into San Angelo and I helped him unload.

San Angelo

In San Angelo, I found a shelter. The Salvation Army, or perhaps a minister, had an unusual provision for transients. It was a small one-room frame shack with a double bed, table, wood-burning stove, running water in a sink, and an electric light. It was always open and available to one or two men. I shared it with a stranger.

Before evening, I went into a cafe and asked for some work for a meal. The owner gave me a piece of pie and a cup of coffee. He told me I could "straighten up the garage”.

Behind the café, a large garage room held various pieces of old furniture. I went to work and piled things up neatly, swept the floor clean, and kept right on working until the owner came to see if I were still there. He expressed surprise that I really wanted to work. He took me back inside for a full meal on the house and told me to come back for breakfast. The next morning, I hitchhiked up to the town of Big Springs, and struck the big highway that ran from Fort Worth west to El Paso.

Big Springs

In Big Springs, I had an experience that seemed innocent at first; not until later did I learn that it could have been costly. There were many hitchhikers at the west end of town. Because few motorists picked up more than one, the hikers spaced themselves about a hundred yards apart. The first man was nearest the town; the last one to arrive went out to end of the line, and that was where I went. Of course I was surprised when an auto passed up all the others and took the last man: me. There were two men in the front seat, talkative local characters. They asked the usual questions about where I headed.

A mile or so down the road was they came to another fellow who was walking along and stopped to give him a lift. He was a local man, an "old buddy," who explained that he was walking out to the scene of a drinking party the night before, where he had hidden a jug of whiskey "almost full." In return for their giving him a ride, he said he would bring the jug back to the car and provide a round of drinks.

When the new man said we had reached the spot, the driver stopped the car while "old buddy" got out and went over to search some bushes. While he was gone, the man in the right side of the front seat turned to me and said:

> "*Red, let's play a good joke on old buddy. Now, here is a little penknife, and you can see that it won't open until you touch this little trick metal thing here. Now when buddy comes back, I will tell him he's so drunk he can't open a knife, but that you can. He'll start an argument, and you bet him any amount of money, the more the better. He does not know the trick, so you will win. All we want is to have some fun. You can keep all you win. How about it?*"

I took the knife, examined it, then gave it back saying that I did not have a cent of money, which was true. Just then, 'old buddy' came back saying that a friend must have been there earlier and taken the jug. The three decided to go back to town for a drink, as all this talk had made them thirsty. They let me out and drove back to Big Springs.

Many months later, I mentioned this to a hobo. He told me that the same thing had happened to him up near Pocatello, Idaho.

> "*They are a bunch of cheap crooks*." he said, "*If you had offered to bet, they would have switched knives on you and given you one that was spot-welded shut. You would have lost. They probably went back to Big Springs and picked up the man who was then last in line. With no one returning to tip off the others, they could work that racket all day and clean out a fair little pile of change.*"

I hitchhiked west and was picked up by a pleasant young couple in an open touring ear. It was a delightful day that wore on into afternoon, with flat-topped little mesas beginning to dot the brush-covered semi-desert. After fourteen years since I left as a child from the Southwest, it produced some half recollections of a land I had enjoyed. In the late afternoon, we reached the town of Pecos, Texas.

Pecos

There was no time for the silhouette-cutting routine. Terribly thirsty and hungry, I went into a cafe and offered to work. No work but the cook fixed me a hamburger. While it cooked, I drank glass after glass of cold water. Halfway through the hamburger, I felt a churning nausea. I remembered an old rule of the desert not to drink too much water at once. I excused myself and went out into an alley. I did not want to lose the only food I had eaten since breakfast. Somehow I kept things down.

With some daylight left, I walked to the western edge of Pecos and came upon a small filling station converted into a vegetable stand with boxes of potatoes, cabbage, and other produce. I rested in the shade and talked to the owner offering to cut his silhouette. He was delighted and gave me fifty cents. By then, he was ready to move his boxes inside for the night. I helped and noticed a big pile of old potato sacks in the corner. He readily agreed that I could sleep there that night. He slept on a cot in the shop. We sat and talked into the night, with a pot of coffee for warmth. He noticed that my fingers were slightly longer and thinner than average and asked me if I "knew the cards." I said I was never much of a card player. He told me that he had once been a professional gambler.

> "*Stick with me, son, and I will teach you all the moves. We can team up. I'll steer and you deal, and we can make a pile.*"

I noticed that his own fingers were twisted and asked him if he was in an accident.

> He replied, "*Some guys did not like the way I played and broke all my fingers.*" I told him I thought I would head on for El Paso in the morning.

The next day, I walked out of town a ways for a lift. No one stopped. I went back into town and spent a dime for some bread. I was in the railroad yard finishing it when three young fellows from Chicago came along. They were obviously new to the road. Their clothes were cheap, flashy, and in sorry shape from sleeping on the ground. They had gutter knowledge to survive well in a big city but were helpless in Pecos.

They asked about food, having sixty-five cents. Taking one fellow along, I went to a bakery and asked for "broke." This was a phrase for broken cookies, day-old goods, fallen cakes, or unsellable goods. For sixty-five cents, I got a huge sack enough to stuff all four of us. Night came on and I was determined to catch a freight train.

The next town of any size was over a hundred miles away and no one picked up a hitchhiker for such a long lonely stretch. The railroad yard was hooking up trains.

The three Chicago punks followed me as their last forlorn hope. They did not know my name but saw the initials painted on my pack. As I dodged among the railroad cars to lose them, I heard them calling "JDR! JDR!" A train started to pull out and I jumped for the steps on a freight car. It was the first time I had really "hopped a freight". The earlier experience in Mobile was so easy to not count. Nevertheless, I knew what to do, for I had a seminar on how to ride freights while working at Art's Café in Terre Haute.

Railroad Slang

[Jack used hobo terms for which a glossary helps. Some definitions came from a page of railroad/hobo slang terms in "Singing Rails", Wayne Erbsen, 1997, Native Ground Music, Asheville, NC, page 69. Other vernacular words listed here came from Jack's text directly. This is not an exhaustive list.]

Slang:	Meaning:
Boxcar	Enclosed car with door on both sides for carrying boxed/sacked goods
Brake shoe pin	Long metal pin that held the brake shoe in place upon the car wheel
Broke	Broken cookies, day old goods, fallen cakes, unsalable bakery goods
Bull	Railroad policeman
Car	Railroad Car: Boxcar, Livestock, Refrigerator, Tanker, Gondola, Passenger
Crowbar Hotel	Jail
Egg	Railroad policeman
Flip	To board a moving train
Flop	place to sleep
Flophouse	cheap hotel
Freight	Train that carries no passengers, but only freight (of all types)
Gay Cat	Hobo willing to work
Gondola	Open topped car for carrying dry goods in bulk (wheat, sand, coal)
Hobo	Transient worker, usually destitute, traveling in search of work
Hot box	Bearing on each side of axle, covered by a metal box with a small, square lid
Hot box dick	Car inspector checking hot box for overheated axles
Hop	To board a moving train
Jerkwater	Small town or a local train
Journal	Bearing on each side of axle
Journal Waste	Rags in the hot box soaked with grease to keep the bearings lubricated
Jungle	Area near the railroad where hobos camp and congregate
Keester	Suitcase or trunk
Locomotive	Engine unit that pulls/pushes cars
Make-up	Assemble cars into a train
Mule	Brakeman
Pullman	Passenger sleeper car (most made by George Pullman Company)
Rattler	Fast freight train
Ringtail	Hobo
Reefer	Refrigerator car
Roughneck	Brakeman
Shack	Brakeman
Shuffle	To switch cars
Soup	Water
Spur	Dead-end track for storing unused cars
Switch	Long hinged lever which moves a guide rail that re-directs a train
Tanker	Cylinder-shaped car for carrying liquids
Tramp	Transient person, usually destitute, but traveling aimlessly

H. L. Mencken wrote in The American Language (4th ed., 1937)

Tramps and hobos are commonly lumped together, but in their own sight they are sharply differentiated. A hobo is simply a migratory laborer; he may take some longish holidays, but soon or late he returns to work. A tramp never works if it can be avoided; he simply travels. Lower than either is the bum, who neither works nor travels, save when impelled to motion by the police.

Café Seminar about Freights

Back in Terre Haute in the darkest years of the Depression, 1932-1933, a hobo named Art came to town. He had perhaps five dollars. With that as capital, he opened a restaurant down in the grimy section of Second Street. He hired a counterman named “Slim”, who probably worked for little more than his meals.

From Slim, I heard the methods of riding trains, for he was a hobo across the nation. I asked questions and he rambled on when we were alone in the place. He told me never to try to catch a train that moved faster than I could run.

> "*You'll <u>think</u> you can catch it but it will throw you every time."*

He told me always to grab the front ladder of a freight car, never the rear. The front ladder was on the right side of the car, and if your grip was not tight and you were thrown loose, you would swing against the side of the car and carom off to the ground.

The rear ladder was on the left rear, and if thrown from that ladder, the chances were high that you were thrown between the cars beneath the wheels to be cut apart. Thus, always catch the right front ladder, and as soon as you were safely aboard, swing around to the front where there was another ladder or rungs. Hide between the cars until you were sure no brakeman was looking along the side or along the top for hobos.

Slim told me that if I "hopped" a night train, I should walk along the right-of-way for some distance to locate switch lamps, gates, or other obstructions. More than one man clinging to the side of a ladder smashed against such an obstacle in the dark, or in running beside a train stepped into a ditch or tripped over a switch.

He taught me how to ride in a refrigerator car and how to avoid railroad police. My mind was loaded with such data, and never realized that one day I might use it. He told me that gondola cars were good. These roofless metal cars have a side about five feet high.

> "*But never ride in a gondola in the open space at either end of a load such as pipe*." he said, "*A sudden stop can shift the toad to the front, or it can slide back on a grade, and you can get crushed to death*.”

Figure 10 - Plain Gondola with metal Sides (Danny Robie)

The "Do Anything" Railroad Freight Car

Gondolas, a car related closely to the flatcar with its low ribbed sides, is the catch-all car of the railroad. Getting little respect, this poor car is typically beaten to death, but is loved for its multitude of uses. Its sides are bowed outwards from all of the heavy loads dropped into it. Gondolas are rarely maintained any more than needed. As long as their bearings, truck assemblies, knuckle couplers, and air-hoses work properly, little more is ever done with them (meaning they become rust buckets). - www.american-rails.com/gondolas.html

El Paso - Mexico Border

I rode on into EI Paso, and [walked] across the border into Juarez, Mexico. With my little high-school Spanish, I finally made the puzzled Mexican border guards understand that I wanted something stamped into my passport to prove that I had finally reached a foreign country. They pounded their inked stamp firmly onto the first page in the passport section for visas. "Abr 11 1935" it read. I wrote a few postcards to friends back home and returned across the Rio Grande Bridge to El Paso.

I do not recall where I stayed that night. The next day, I caught a westbound freight headed toward Arizona. I had an aunt in Phoenix whom I had not seen since I left there when a child of eight. As I was in her part of the country, a visit seemed plausible.

That particular afternoon was one I never forgot. The railroad snaked through sand hills, rock cuts, and across the desert. I rode an empty gondola car in such a long train that the [steam] locomotive cinders did not reach me. The sky was a rich blue, and the mid-April sun was warm but not hot. The ocotillo cactus flashed by as the train rocked along.

Lordsburg

We headed straight into a glorious sunset. In the early evening the train stopped at Lordsburg, New Mexico. Since cars were being removed or added to the train, there was time to walk to a grocery. I spent a dime for a loaf of bread and refilled my canteen.

Figure 11 – Boarding and Riding Boxcars in 1930's
Left: Source Unknown. Right: California State Railroad Museum (2014)

When I got back, I chose a boxcar for protection against cool night winds. Another man climbed in. He was broke, so we shared my small loaf. I awoke just before dawn with an intense hunger. Bread was not really food. It only deluded the stomach.

Tucson

We entered the outskirts of Tucson with streetlights still on. As the train slowed down for curve, I jumped off. An all-night highway café was across the way and I went there for a stack of hotcakes. A good stack cost fifteen cents, sometimes only ten, and occasionally twenty. Coffee was always a nickel. That trio of wheat cakes remains as richly memorable as the sunset of the night before.

I cleaned up easily with my costume of boots and breeches. I went to a park hydrant or to a filling station water hose, and washed the dust off my boots. The breeches, I brushed with a pocket brush of fine brass wire, the kind used to restore the nap to suede shoes. The riding boots were good for hoboing with no flapping pants cuffs to snag on the rungs of a freight car ladder. The whole ensemble certainly did not look like that of a tramp.

Still, as I sauntered down the streets of Tucson in the early morning, I did not escape the observation of a young policeman. He stopped me and began to ask questions. He asked if my belt was a Boy Scout belt. I said that it was and that the webbing made it stronger and more adjustable than leather. I told him that I was in the Scouts for many years and had gone to the World Jamboree in England in 1929. He said that he was currently a scoutmaster. Instead of arresting me, he warned me to stay on the side streets and told me just where to go on the other side of town to catch a train for Phoenix.

Aunt Stella in Phoenix

The train to Phoenix did not take long. I looked up my aunt's address in the telephone book. [Aunt Stella] was astonished and apprehensive. She was on my father's side, the wife of his brother [Charles]. Our two families had never been that close. I knew my uncle died [in 1931] and that her only daughter [Helen] married and left for Honolulu. I did not know that she ran a rooming house for three young women grade-school teachers.

Now here comes this riff-raff nephew off a freight train, to stay for heaven knows how long, under what could be embarrassing circumstances. When I assured her that I planned to stay only overnight, she became warm and welcoming, for she was indeed lonely for any relative. I stayed two or three days sleeping on a cot on a back porch. We visited my uncle's grave in a mausoleum and I did some chores around the house. In the evenings, I cut silhouettes of the young women teachers.

I thought of going onto California, but hobos across the Southwest told me so many unemployed tried to get into California that westbound trains were stopped at the border and all hobos taken off and placed aboard eastbound lines. I decided that I had reached the ultimate westbound point. Perhaps seeing a relative had something to do with it. I decided that the time of pointless wandering had ended and that I should head back home.

Going Home

I caught a train out of Phoenix through Tucson toward El Paso. That night I became hungry. Although my aunt gave me a couple of dollars, there was no chance to buy food. Sometime after midnight, the train stopped to add a refrigerator cars loaded with fresh lettuce. There was a long brightly-lit shed beside the track, where farm workers hustled crates of lettuce into the cars. The lettuce was picked that same day and leafy heads spilled in many places around the loading platforms. I picked up a big head and climbed into an empty freight car. Tearing off the soiled outer leaves, I ate nearly the whole crisp head. It was cool from the night air and sweetly delicious.

El Paso

In El Paso by the next evening, I had a little money for a cheap rooming house on El Paso Street which runs down toward the Juarez Bridge. Catching a train out early the next day was not so easy at first. The yards where trains were made up had high wire fences around them that could be entered only at certain points. At these exits, stood three or four railroad police with shoulder pouches filled with egg-sized stones. They threw these at any visible hobos clinging to the cars, and the police threw with serious intent.

I was afraid to run such a gauntlet. I found my way beyond the yards and out to a point where the train might slow down as it crossed other tracks. There I got inside freight car, which already had two or three men inside, and they helped me aboard. We closed the door except for a couple of inches of space, where a piece of board kept the door from sliding shut and accidentally locked. Hobos often carried a stick for such use. Out in the open country of western Texas, we opened the door and watched the landscape roll past.

Figure 12 - Watching landscape roll past - 1930's
(freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~elkridge/DepressionYears.htm)

Sidetracked in Sweetwater

In mid-afternoon, we approached Sweetwater, Texas and closed the door. We felt the train rattle over a switch and enter a siding, where we sat. Probably to let a fast train go past, we thought. We lurched to a stop and after a wait heard a train rattle past. Long after its passing, we wondered when our train would start moving. Someone peeked out the door. We were in one of a few empty cars on a siding with our train vanishing in the east. There was disgust, laughter, and then disgust again as we learned that not until the next day, at the same hour, would another east bound freight train be safe to catch.

We were afraid to venture [deeper] into town where the jail had a bad reputation. Instead, we walked out to the western edge of town and found a hobo jungle. A jungle was a spot frequented by hobos, bums, and tramps. The police knew their locations but raided them only when someone reported a robbery. Otherwise, it was a sanctuary. Sometimes the jungle was a clearing in high cane along a stream, or under scrub trees, or as in this case, where the railroad tracks crossed a small bridge over a dry stream bed.

Several of us gathered there spend the night. Coffee was an essential need of course, and we scattered to find some tin cans, preferably cans that had held peaches or tomatoes, as these cans were almost clean when emptied. Another man built a fire, and one went to get coffee grounds. We boiled water in a big can and then boiled our smaller cans until they were safe to use. The man who went for coffee simply went to the nearest houses and asked for any leftover coffee grounds. Although used once, they still made a strong coffee when boiled over a fire. It would not seem delicious but that night it was at least a good substitute for coffee. We drank it strong and black around that little fire.

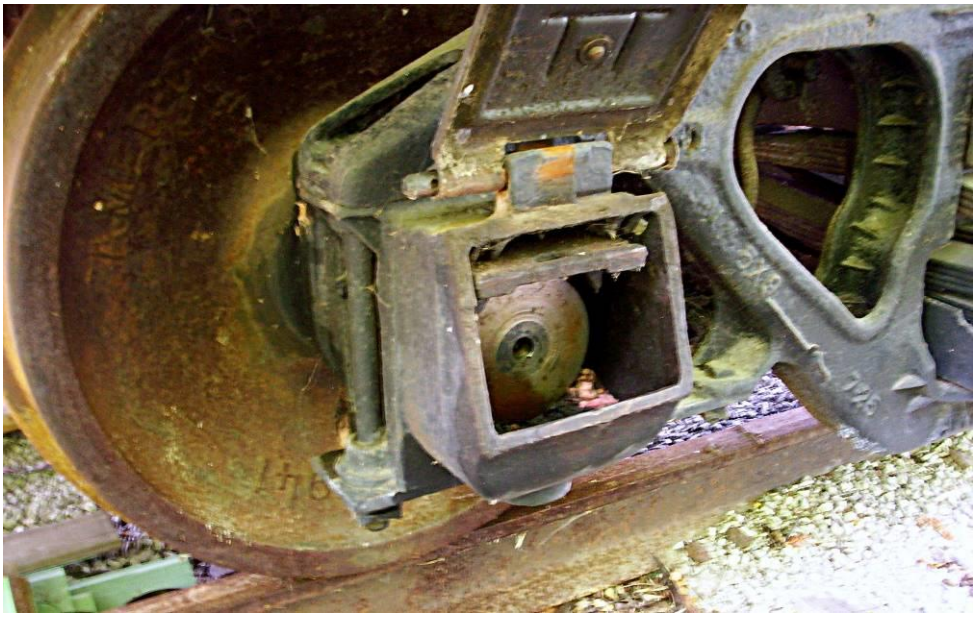


Figure 13 - Journal Box (Salem Depot Museum, Indiana 6/2016)

The man who made the fire was dissuaded from starting it with journal box waste, an old hobo custom. The wheels of a freight car were cast or fastened into one piece with the axle turning with the wheels. There was a bearing or journal on each side covered by a

metal box with a small square lid. When this lid was opened, one saw the end of the axle, surrounded by "waste" (a mass of shredded rag fibers). On the waste was placed a quantity of solidified grease, which melted into the waste to lubricate the bearing.

This oily waste burned fiercely at the touch of a match, produced a hot flame and sent up a cloud of viscous smoke that quickly sooted the hands and face. You could always tell when a hobo cooked over journal waste. The worst aspect of this method was that the freight car might be pulled out with no remaining lubrication on that axle. The result would be a hot box, then a fire, and possibly a derailment. Railroad police were fierce if a hot box was involved and the hobos themselves were reasonable enough to feel some human responsibility in the matter. We did not use journal waste that night.

The next morning we had coffee again and scouted our surroundings. On a little-used spur siding stood an abandoned circus car, once a passenger car that had carried performers. It was gutted of all seats and window glass, but still a gaudy yellow color with circus posters pasted on the sides and ends.

Toward noon, I became hungry, [demonstrating] how often hunger enters into any tale of a hobo. Feeling secure in my rig of boots and breeches, I went down into Sweetwater and asked for work in the first cafe I came to. The owner gave me a bowl of soup and a piece of pie, and then set me to work washing dishes. I was engaged in this when a chartered bus stopped outside and the place was suddenly jammed with customers.

I told the cafe owner that I had waited on tables in college, so I was pressed into service. The bus left, and because it was a profitable little rush, the restaurant man gave me a full meal. I picked up a few small tips which he allowed me to keep.

I went back to the railroad where I found several fellows waiting for an earlier train than the one we expected. I do not know how hobos learned of train schedules, but there was some mysterious grapevine that carried such news. It may have come from one man’s experience on the line, or from information leaked from a track repairman, or perhaps someone dared to venture down near the freight station.

Railroad Justice, Thieves, and Weapons

The train came in, moving slowly enough to catch if one ran fast, but with no apparent indication that it would stop [for us] in Sweetwater. I could see brakemen or perhaps railroad police walking along the top of the train. Several men jumped out of the ditch beside the tracks and climbed aboard hanging to the ladders. I saw one railroad "bull" on the roof of a car. He walked over to look down the side and saw a hobo on the bottom steps. The hobo looked fore and aft, but he did not look up. He started to climb the ladder, slowly; the railroad man climbed down a step or two and waited. Then the bull swung one leg back, forward and kicked the hobo squarely in the side of the head. The hobo flew off the side of the train and into a shallow spot near the freight station.

Those of us who had not boarded held back. One or two others who were hanging on ladders and saw the affair, dropped off and came back. After the train had passed, some men came from the rail station and took the injured man into town, probably to jail.

For the rest of the afternoon while we waited for "our" train, the talk was about railroad detectives. There was one vindictive one on that line, called "Texas Red," who had a sadistic pleasure in such methods as we had just seen; some even vowed that the man we had just seen was Texas Red. Others admitted that the railroad police often had to resort to such tactics, because thievery was on the increase.

Railroad thieves would board a loaded train, perhaps knowing exactly which boxcars held valuable and salable cargoes such as cigarettes. Once out along the line, the thieves would attach a rope ladder to the running board that lay along the roof of the car. They climbed down, pried open the door (often locked only with a thin strip of sealing metal), and threw out the cargo at a pre-arranged spot. There confederates waited with a truck. The thieves then jumped from the moving train and were picked up. It was risky, but profitable, and trainmen could not distinguish between a robber and an innocent hobo.

Someone described a wicked weapon that a hobo could easily find for defense or attack. We called it a "brake shoe pin," although the trainmen have a more proper name for it. The essential part of a freight car's brake was a "shoe," a piece of heavy metal bent in a shallow wide arc that matched the curve of a wheel. When brakes were applied, this shoe pressed against the iron wheel. Of course, a shoe wore thin in time, and in the railroad yards, brake shoes were easily replaced

A long metal pin held the shoe to its arm. When the pin was pulled, the shoe dropped off and a new one could be fitted in seconds. That pin was the hobo's weapon, ten or twelve inches long, with a sort of head formed by bending about an inch of the top over at a right angle. This weapon slipped down a pants leg with the slight curve of the pin fitting the thigh. The bent angled bead hooked over the belt to hold the weapon while one walked. The pin could be held by the head with its blunted point used to thrust, or it could be held by the point and swung like a hammer with the angled head ready to crush.

After an hour or so of this sort of talk, the eastbound train came in and stopped. It consisted chiefly of empties with no signs of railroad men, so we climbed aboard.

Central Texas to Kansas

I arrived that night in Fort Worth [and disembarked]. I decided to keep moving and caught a northbound toward Kanas. In the dark, I had no easy choice and boarded a tank car. It might seem the [old-style 1930's] tank cars, with a running board and handrail around all four sides, would be comfortable. They were easy to board, but terrible to ride. They had no springs as oil cargo needs no cushioning. I rode the entire night standing at the rear where I would be in the lee of the rushing wind that grew colder all the time. I stood on tiptoe slightly most of the time. To stand flat footed with my heels on the boards transmitted a tooth-jarring rhythm that was maddening. At Parsons Tower, Kansas, I caught an eastbound freight headed through Missouri toward Saint Louis.

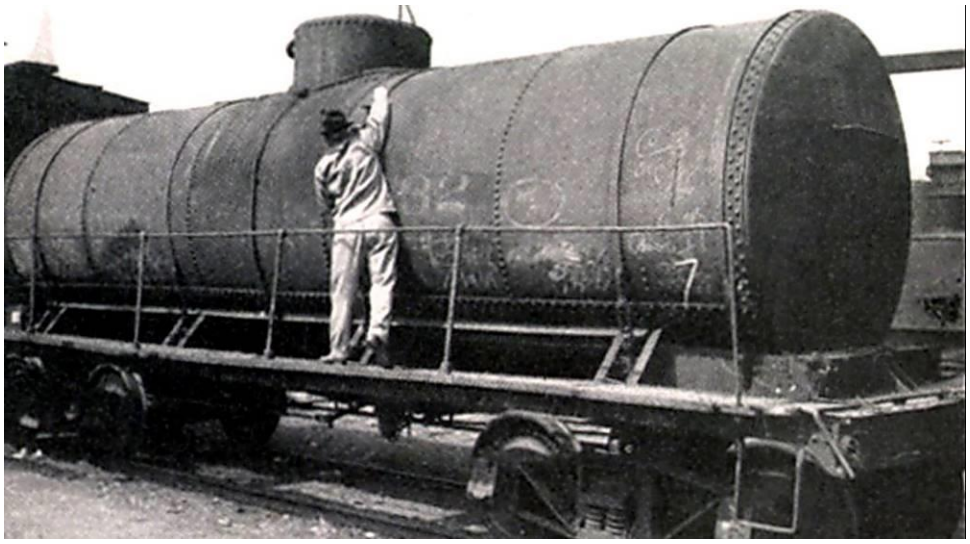


Figure 14 – Hobo on Oil Tank Car (Sarah White, Univ.Virginia)
www.therailroadpolice.com/hobo.htm

These older Tank cars carried everything from molasses to gasoline. Once in a particular service, such as crude oil, they never carried anything else due to the cost of cleaning them out. With the advent of pipelines to carry oil and gasoline, these smaller tank cars became uneconomical, and were replaced by huge chemical tank cars. - www.wcra.org/collection/tank-cars.htm

Missouri – Late April

That next night I found myself in Boonville, Missouri. It was late April, and the night seemed bitter cold, probably because I was in real need of sleep. I thought of lying on the ground anywhere and sleeping, but it was too cold for that.

I remembered another lesson from Slims Café seminar on hoboing. I would find myself a sand house. The story back of that was this: As part of their braking system, locomotives have containers of sand located above the wheels. When the engineer pulled a lever, a trickle of sand falls on the rail ahead of the wheel and provides better friction for a stop.

The sand must never clog in the locomotive's little sand container. It must be fine sand and not gravel. To provide such sand, a small shack was located in many railroad yards, with a pile of sand kept dry by a low-burning coal stove. In Boonville, I hunted for this shack and found it. The door was never locked of course and railroad yard lights cast some illumination through the shack's window. There was the sand and the stove with its banked fire. I stretched out on my own artificial beach and went to sleep.

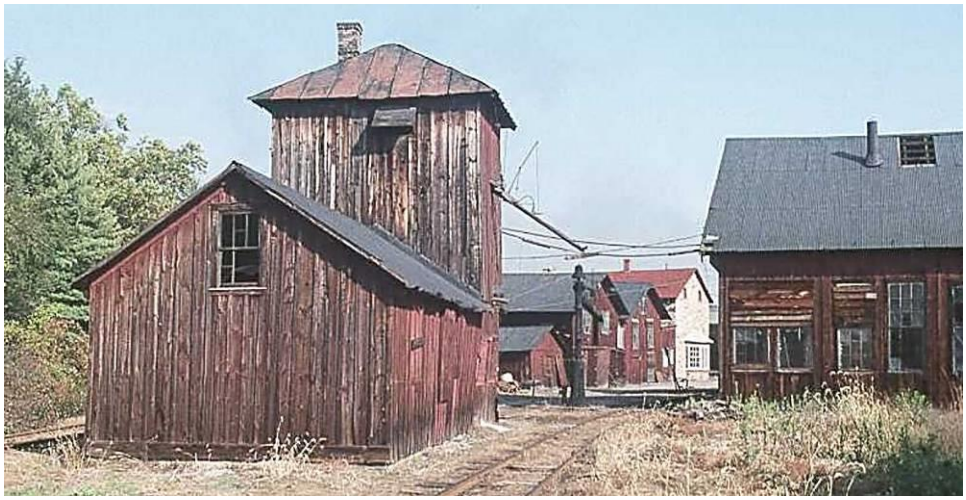


Figure 15 – Sand House in Pennsylvania Alleghenies (Christopher Coleman 1996)
www.spikesys.com/EBT/Tour/top.html

The next morning, I got out before anyone came around and caught the first train east. Several men were in the car, some still asleep, lying on newspapers spread out against the dirt of the floor. On long trips, men go without sleep or proper food for long stretches, until they become completely exhausted. I watched some of the men bouncing three or four inches from the floor of the rocking, fast-moving freight car. I could see that they left the floor completely and returned with a [sudden] jar. Yet they never awoke.

One of the men was a racetrack hanger-on, moving from one racetrack to another, and he sang a little song of the tracks. I recall only one verse:

> *"Oh, his legs were long, and his feet were loose,*
> *and the jockey was skinny from self-abuse,*
> *and he went around that track, like grease through a goose*
> *but he came home in a walk!"*

As the day wore on, the train kept rolling steadily. The day turned warm and we opened the door wide and sat in it. Our legs hung over as we watched trees and farms roll by.

We went on into Saint Louis. In some manner, I rode a train across the Mississippi railroad bridge into East Saint Louis. There, I walked across to where I could catch the Pennsylvania Railroad headed for Indianapolis.

During that walk, I first got some food at a butcher shop and buying about twenty cents' worth of bologna ends. These were the ends left when the meat cutter sliced the bologna. They sold cheap and had some meat left but were a nuisance to eat. I got a loaf of day-old bread from a bakery truck parked outside the store, and then went over and climbed into a Pennsylvania gondola. With meat, bread, and a canteen of water, I dined all right as the train headed east toward Indianapolis.

Indianapolis

I arrived in the Indiana capital that night. I planned to head for the local transient center, but knew that the kitchen would probably be closed when I got there. I stopped at a bakery and asked for work. No work, but they gave me a cherry pie that was cracked in handling and was not salable. I ate the whole pie and walked to the transient center.

When I entered, I was dead tired. All of the chairs were filled with waiting men, so I asked permission to stretch out on a table. Permission granted and there I lay when the caseworker came to question me. Both of us got a surprise, for he was a graduate of my own college, a couple of years ahead of me, but we recognized each other. When he asked for background information, I gave him the highlights of a full year's rambling. He got his money's worth that night.

Fort Wayne

The next morning, I headed northeast on the last lap, 110 miles from Indianapolis to Fort Wayne. This was familiar ground. I hitchhiked it many times in my student days. Was college really only eighteen months before? I seemed to have placed a generation between college and myself.

I made it from El Paso to Fort Wayne, not including the full-day layover in Sweetwater, in exactly 125 hours [5 days] by travelling freight trains day and night for the most part.

My wander year, give or take a week, was almost exactly a year from when I set out [in the prior April] to become a war correspondent in France.

Second Trip to New York – Fall 1935

[In late June, I married and had the idea of the returning to New York City and getting into the book publishing business.] I set my sights on [a job with Alfred A. Knopf book publisher] and went after it. From that point on, there were moves from one job to another, but there was no more aimless wandering. [That summer, we went separately and at different times, to New York.] I rode the freights again to New York, of course.

On this second trip from Fort Wayne to New York in [the fall of] 1935, I caught the Pennsylvania east out of Fort Wayne late in the day. There were no empties, and I had to ride outside. This meant the roof of the car, at least after dark. 0ne could hang on to ladders between freight cars, but not for long stretches.

There was a strong wind along the top of the train, and I needed some way of resting safely and blocking the wind. I lay down on the roof of the boxcar, which sloped gently downward from the running boards along the middle of the roof. With me I carried an extra belt, long and strong, and I looped this through my trousers belt and through the planks of the running board. I still carried my backpack, and I shifted this so it lay on the roof just beyond my head. This provided both safety and a windbreak, and so I made it into Lima, Ohio, the first division point.

Ohio

At one other point going through Ohio, I spent several hours in a hobo jungle in brush beside a creek. There was one other man there, and he told us about an unusual trough we could see between the rails. Fast trains often have to take on water "on the lam" and they cannot stop at a conventional water tank. A long trough was built between the rails, resting on the ties, with shallow square sides a few inches high. It was perhaps a hundred yards long and was filled with water. The engineer lowers a sort of scoop from the tender and this picks up the water at high speed.

The hobo warned me never to ride just behind the tender of an engine, because one man did that when a locomotive took water from the trough. The water tank on the tender filled quickly and the excess water came out through the lid atop the tender, flooding back on the hobo, and washing him down to his death between the cars.

> *A track pan (American) or water trough (British) enables a steam railway locomotive to replenish its water supply while in motion. It consists of a long trough filled with water, lying along a flat stretch of railroad/railway track between the rails. When a steam locomotive passes at speed over the trough, its water scoop can be lowered, and the speed of forward motion forces water into the scoop, up the scoop pipe and into the tanks or locomotive tender.*
>
> *John Ramsbottom, a Victorian locomotive engineer, devised the water trough track pan to meet this need. It is a long (several hundred yards) open-ended shallow trough lay between the rails. A nearby water source recharged the trough as passing trains take water. The entire length of the installation must be on level track, with a short section of rising track at each end to keep the water in. As trains needed to be moving at some speed to pick-up enough water, a suitable separation between trough locations and stopping points is essential.*
>
> *Track pans normally took a while to fill up, so they could not be used immediately by a close-following train. They were expensive to maintain, generally requiring a pumping station, a lot of plumbing, and an employee or two to maintain. They were thus only justified on a railroad with a high traffic volume. In the United States, several big eastern railroads used them, primarily the New York Central and Pennsylvania Railroad. –Wikipedia*

We went back to Indiana for all summer 1936 [living in a sparse lakeside cabin]. I intended to go back to New York [once again] that fall and get into book publishing.

Third Trip to New York – Fall 1936

I made that third trip to New York [after Labor Day] in 1936 over the same route with a hometown [Boy Scout friend, Henry "Hank" Doermer. Having practically no money, Hank and I decided to hop freight trains; [B would travel there later by bus.] This third trip was uneventful except for two [scary incidents with authorities].

We caught the Pennsylvania Railroad freight and found a flatcar with a new piece of huge machinery that appeared to be some sort of boiler chained down to it. The big firebox had a door large enough to admit a man. It was clean inside because the boiler was factory-new. We rode without trouble for the first third of our journey, well into Pennsylvania, stretched out in comfort with no risk of detection by a brakeman.

Pennsylvania

We changed to a train of empty refrigerator cars and climbed down inside through the trapdoor on the roof, into the clean ice compartment. We kept the trapdoor on the roof partly opened. These are generally comfortable, but require hobo knowledge for safety.

When the car runs empty, the trap doors were propped open by a hinged bracket of iron. Hobos enter through these ceiling vents. They swing the hinged bracket around so it blocks the trap door and keeps it from falling shut. There have been instances where a hobo was trapped inside a tightly closed refrigerator car and died. Some air could enter through the drain vents, but calls for help would be so muffled as to go unheard.

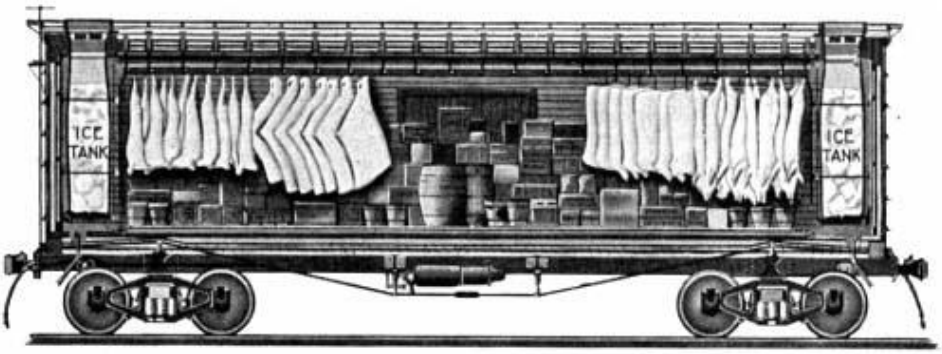


Figure 16 - Refrigerator Car
www.history-magazine.com/refrig.html

The reefers were well insulated and carried perishable goods, so they were nearly always quite clean. At each end of the car, the ice compartment was five or six feet deep and extended the full width of the car. The compartment was built with a solid partition half or two-thirds of the ways up, with heavy steel mesh the rest of the way to the top. You cannot enter the main section of the car from the ice compartment.

At the top of each compartment were two trap doors, one in each side of the roof. Ice was loaded in through these doors or lids.

Figure 17 - Icing Refrigerator Cars (Fruit Growers Express)

Inside, a freight car was taller than a man can reach, but with a slight jump can reach the top of the trapdoor. The experienced hobo tries to find a three foot length of two-by-four or similar sturdy stick to carry when tries he enters a reefer. He can thus knock open an unlatched trapdoor, prop the stick in a corner, and use it as a step to climb out. In case he was trapped, he can bang on the side of the car to summon help. An arrest was preferable to dying of starvation if the car were shunted onto some lonely sidetrack.

Figure 18 - Refrigerator Car Trap Door - 1940 (Travis Harry)

Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Police Sergeant shows where riders hide in a refrigerator boxcar - www.therailroadpolicе.com/photos.htm

Hank and I were riding in a reefer compartment up the climb above Altoona. We heard the footsteps of a brakeman on the walkway along the roof of the car, and then the trapdoor was slammed down and latched. I grabbed my heavy stick and started pounding on the trapdoor. For some time there was no answer. Then the lid was lifted and we were brusquely ordered to climb out. When the brakeman saw we were young fellows, he relaxed a little and asked us where we were going.

I knew that such trainmen sometimes could be placated at times by gifts, and saw he was smoking a pipe. I had a cloth bag with about a pound of cheap Granger pipe flake tobacco, and I asked him if he wanted tobacco. Granger seemed to my taste to be the least of all tobaccos, but it was cheaper than others. He took the sack, looked inside and snorted. He said we could not smoke that cheap stuff, and then offered me some from his own pouch. The tension was broken, and he became somewhat friendly.

He could see we were not criminals, and in those Depression days (late 1936), trainmen were generally not abusive to travelers seeking work.

He told us that we were approaching the famed "horseshoe curve" above Altoona, but said we could not “ride over the hump". Tramps were suspected of tampering with the brakes, resulting in wrecks as the trains started down the loop into the Altoona yards. Since then, the trains slowed to a walk when crossing the summit. At the summit, each car brake connections were checked, and all hobos thrown off.

He suggested that we get off right away (the cars were moving slowly), work our way through the trees along the mountainside below the tracks, and get back on the train after it passed the summit, but before it picked up speed. We did this and got back on the train safely and reached Altoona just after dark.

We had to find another train headed toward New York. While stumbling around in the darkness, a railroad detective in the shadowy yard saw me. He shouted to halt, but I turned and ran. There was the sound of a shot, and I thought I heard the bullet whistle past me, but by then I was out of the yards and we eventually found the train we needed. It was the only time I was ever threatened. I made it into New Jersey with no difficulty.

New Jersey

The other incident occurred as we reached the end of the line in New Jersey. This time we were on a gondola car, with sides about five feet high and without a roof. We were in a vast darkened freight yard late at night. In the distance, we saw the lighted towers of Manhattan, across the Hudson River. The train clacked across switches, and went slower and slower, until it stopped out in utter blackness near the banks of the Hudson River.

I told Hank that here was where we got off. As we climbed out, a large flashlight shone in our face and a stern voice announced that this was for sure the place where we got off.

The armed railroader asked us what we were doing, where we were heading, and why. He demanded that we show what we carried in our packs. Mine held mostly clothing, but

Hank had packed a big hunting knife with a blade at least five inches long. Hank did not intend to use it as a weapon. It was merely a cooking tool, but it looked sinister when he pulled it, sheath and all, out of his pack. He felt he would not need it in New York, and casually threw it, still sheathed into a patch of weeds and low bushes. The railroader told us to get out, fast and good, all the way. As we left, I looked back and saw his flashlight playing on the weeds, looking for the knife.

I went down to the Hudson River and tried to wash off some of the railroad grime, but the river water had such a thin film of oil that the more I washed the blacker I became. Finally, we found a pool of fresh water and cleaned up.

That was the last non-paying trip I took on the rails. A trip to New York took two or three days, at least twice the time of a passenger ride required. Since the price of a ticket was equal to at least a week and a half's pay, we "worked" for good wages as hobos.

Epilogue

Five years later, I did well enough to ride as a paying passenger. I often enjoyed an evening meal, on one of the old Pennsylvania dining cars, with its efficient waiters, heavy silver table service, and white napery.

Figure 19 - Dining Car 1930-1945 (Univ. of Minnesota Press)

I enjoyed sitting there eating a piece of deep-dish apple pie and drinking a cup of that full bodied rich coffee, later lingering with a good cigar as the farms went past, in the late evening glow. I had to admit that there was more than one kind of freedom.

As I sat musing there, I knew that probably on the same train, or certainly, on the freights we passed, there were still hoboes. I had no desire to trade places.