

A Hobo Memoir, 1936

John E. Fawcett

Introduction by Elizabeth Rambeau*

The following extracts come from John E. Fawcett's 1991 "Awakening of Conscience," an unpublished memoir of the author's experiences as a teenage hobo in June of 1936. Fawcett based his longer version of the story on a diary he kept in a pocket-sized spiral notebook, which he took with him on the journey. The memoir in its entirety, too long to print here, describes Fawcett's background and earliest hobo adventure and goes on to detail his round-trip hobo journey from Wheeling, West Virginia, to Dallas, Texas, in the summer of 1936. Reprinted here are two segments of the memoir: the author's introduction, which expresses his reasons for taking to the road that summer; and his description of the westward journey through Indiana and Illinois and into Missouri.

Fawcett joined the hundreds of thousands of homeless transients in 1936 not because he himself was destitute but because he was what hobo scholar Drummond Mansfield has called a "scenery bum," a person who lives the hobo's peripatetic life for the thrill and enjoyment of travel. At the beginning of June, 1936, Fawcett and his best friend and travelling companion, Mick McKinley, perused a brochure for the Texas Centennial Exposition to be held that summer in Dallas. The boys made their plan then to ride the rails to Dallas, take in the fair, and get summer jobs on a Texas ranch. Fawcett remembers feeling secure with McKinley as his fellow hobo: although a year younger, "he outweighed me by about ten pounds or so and had a more athletic build than I did. . . . He walked with an easy grace and a sort of swing to his shoulders which communicated to any observer that he was ready for any one at any time."¹

*John E. Fawcett is a retired seaman and lives in Seattle, Washington. In 1965 he won that city's Community Brotherhood Award from the National Council of Christians and Jews in recognition for his volunteer civil rights work in Mississippi between the months of February and June of that year. Elizabeth Rambeau is assistant editor for the *Indiana Magazine of History*. She is a Ph.D. student in history at Indiana University, Bloomington. The editors would like to thank Drummond Mansfield for supplying some of the illustrations and bringing the article to the attention of the *Indiana Magazine of History*.

¹ John E. Fawcett, "Awakening of Conscience" (typescript, 1991), 33. This memoir is in the possession of the author.

The summer journey was not Fawcett's first hobo adventure. He and friends from the Linsly Military Institute had practiced riding freight trains and passenger blinds to neighboring towns each Saturday. He had also made a solo trip of several days' length during a cold snap in February, 1936, to visit a friend whose family had moved from Wheeling to Huntington, West Virginia, a distance of about 180 miles.

Now that Fawcett had experimented with riding the trains locally and had spent several days on the road, he was ready to make a longer trip. He and McKinley left Wheeling on Saturday, June 6, 1936, on the B&O railroad. They decided to use assumed names while they travelled in case they were arrested: Fawcett became George Murphy and McKinley took on the name of John Kendall. It was not long before their new names proved useful; the boys were thrown in jail in Parkersburg, West Virginia, less than twenty-four hours after setting out from Wheeling. They remained in prison for three days, losing all of their emergency money to jail fees and to other prisoners. But the experience appears not to have deterred them. "After we got out of the jug," wrote Fawcett in his diary on the day the boys were released, "we got some eats and then nailed a hot shot train of solid reefers, about 70 cars all iced."²

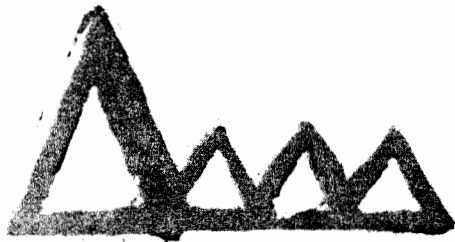
Many hobo autobiographies were written by "professional" hoboes with the help of professional writers.³ John Fawcett's memoir of his hobo experience is set apart from others in both of these instances.⁴ To begin with, Fawcett was not, as has already been mentioned, a hobo by necessity. He also wrote his memoir himself,

² The "solid reefers" were loaded refrigerator cars filled with ice and possibly fresh produce from the South.

³ Examples include: William A. Bailey, *Bill Bailey Came Home* (Logan, Utah, 1973); Ben L. Reitman, *Sister of the Road: The Autobiography of Box-Car Bertha* (New York, 1937); William Edge, *The Main Stem* (New York, 1927); Charles Elmer Fox, *Tales of an American Hobo* (Iowa City, 1989); Douglas A. Harper, *Good Company* (Chicago, 1982); and Charles Ray Willeford, *I Was Looking for a Street* (Woodstock, Vt., 1988).

⁴ Hobo autobiographies which more closely conform to Fawcett's experience are those written by nonprofessional hoboes: Nels Anderson, *The American Hobo: An Autobiography* (Leiden, The Netherlands, 1975); Gerald Leeftang, *American Travels of a Dutch Hobo, 1923-1926* (Ames, Iowa, 1984); Jack London, *Jack London on the Road: The Tramp Diary and Other Hobo Writings*, ed. Richard W. Etulain (Logan, Utah, 1979); Dale Maharidge, *The Last Great American Hobo* (Rocklin, Calif., 1993); Jim Tully, *Beggars of Life* (Garden City, N.Y., 1924); and George Witten, *Outlaw Trails: A Yankee Hobo Soldier of the Queen* (New York, 1929). Other studies of hoboes from a scholarly perspective include: Kenneth Allsop, *Hard Travellin': The Hobo and His History* (New York, 1967); Nels Anderson, *The Hobo: The Sociology of the Homeless Man* (Chicago, 1923); Howard M. Bahr, *Skid Row: An Introduction to Disaffiliation* (New York, 1973); Roger Bruns, *The Damndest Radical: The Life and World of Ben Reitman* (Urbana, Ill., 1986); Roger Bruns, *Knights of the Road: A Hobo History* (New York, 1980); Irwin Godfrey, *American Tramp and Underworld Slang* (London, 1931); Richard Wormser, *Hoboes: Wandering in America, 1870-1940* (New York, 1994); and Daniel A. Wren, *White Collar Hobo: The Travels of Whiting Williams* (Ames, Iowa, 1987). Collections of hobo music are also available, such as Larry Penn's "Workin' for a Livin'" and Utah Phillips's "All Used Up."

basing it on the brief journal he had kept during his trip, fifty-five years earlier. While it is true that Fawcett's status as the sixteen-year-old son of an upper-middle-class ophthalmologist made him different from the professional hoboes, bums, and tramps whose mode of travel he shared, that fact does not make his experience any less authentic. He and McKinley rode the passenger car "blinds"⁵ and the freight trains, worked for their food, and slept in the hobo "jungles" just as other homeless transients did during the Great Depression.



ARTIST'S
INTERPRETATION
OF THE
HOBO SIGN MEANING
"TELL A PITIFUL
STORY"

Fawcett's memoir, both in its longer version and in the excerpts published here, reveals a person who does not conform to the stereotype of a 1930s hobo. Hoboes, bums, and tramps, while lumped together in the popular imagination, are each viewed in their own circles as being distinct. "A hobo was someone who travelled and worked, a tramp was someone who travelled but didn't work, and a bum was someone who didn't travel and didn't work."⁶ All three groups were generally believed to be lazy and inarticulate, misconceptions which have attained the ring of truth through years of repetition. In fact, hobos found ingenious ways to communicate among themselves while keeping their words secret from non-hoboes (whom they occasionally called "hoosiers!"). They accomplished this through the use of hobo signs, symbols they drew in chalk to mark places where the sick could go for aid or the starving could receive a free meal. Hoboes developed signs to designate biting dogs, safe camps, dangerous towns, and clean water supplies. Because the signs were drawn in chalk, however, no actual examples—or even photographs of them—survive. The symbols reproduced in this article are based on research into actual hobo signs but were created by artists at Michigan State University and published in 1965.

⁵ The blinds are located on the outside of the accordion-like structures which connect baggage cars on a passenger train. A person standing on the ledge and holding on to the metal bar there is not visible to the engineer or any of the conductors while the train is moving.

⁶ Quoted in Lynne M. Adrian, "Introduction," in Fox, *Tales of an American Hobo*, xvi. Adrian's introduction to Fox's autobiography provides an excellent, if brief, overview of the genre of hobo autobiography.

All hobo autobiographies, writes Lynne M. Adrian, include "certain persisting elements": the author's reasons for going on—and leaving—the road; the inevitable encounter with a seasoned hobo who introduces the newcomer to the ways of hobo life; tales of riding a particularly fast or dangerous train; descriptions of train wrecks which frequently involve the death of a hobo; stories of the author's experiences in jail; and proud recounting of the author's acquired prowess at begging or working for food.⁷ It is interesting to note that Fawcett's original journal contains these elements as well, although its author had never before read a hobo autobiography.

Fawcett finally reached his destination of the Texas Centennial Exposition on Sunday, June 28, after three weeks of hard travelling. He spent one day at the fair before finding an eastbound train to take him home, where he arrived on the fourth of July. His trip back to West Virginia took just five days.

⁷ Adrian, "Introduction," xvii.



"JUDGE"

Reproduced from *Idiom 4: Hobo Signs*, Michigan State University Department of Art (East Lansing, 1965).

When I was twelve years old I wanted to be a railway locomotive engineer or a cowboy, I wasn't sure which. When I was fourteen, I wanted to be a fighter pilot and fly Spads. When I was seventeen years old I wanted to be a lecher, but I didn't know how to go about it! I yearned to seduce women of all ages, but I didn't even know how to talk to them! I was painfully shy and had no social graces whatever so I built model airplanes instead, which I was very good at.

By the time I was a junior in high school I had come to realize that I was "different". I could not have put into words then, but I think I instinctively knew that I was not to be a doctor or a lawyer, nor destined for the usual life and goals of a private school boy from a well-to-do family. One can only speculate as to why children of the same parents with identical upbringing often turn out so differently. With me I think it started in the fascination with reading in about the 5th or 6th grade. When I was fifteen years old in 1933 my father gave me a complete set of Joseph Conrad which I had read by the time I finished high school. That was no easy task for me and not to be compared to Jules Verne or Zane Grey. But I judged it to be worth all the effort to read Conrad's epics of adventure at sea and of human struggle and the striving for personal honor in a world of adversity and corruption. He gave me my first experience of real inspiration and uplift and "victory." Slow reading, yes, but not quite such tough going as Marx' *Das Kapital* which I attempted with small success a few years later!

In 1936 I don't think I could have given a definition of the words Republican or Democrat nor explained the meaning of the political terms Right and Left. I did not know the reason for all the strife and the union organizing struggles going on around us in the nearby steel mills and coal mines of West Virginia, Ohio and Pennsylvania. I did not understand why all the Negro population of Wheeling were confined in a ghetto and referred to as Niggers. I remember even now being stunned and mystified upon hearing one of my classmates say in the locker room after football practice one day: "Come on, we're going on a Nigger hunt tonight." I never learned, and I don't know to this day, if this had some real sinister meaning or whether it was just adolescent prejudice and bravado. I only know that I walked the mile to my home that afternoon filled with apprehension, but I never had the courage to inquire further or to discuss it with anyone.

I had always been about an average student or maybe a little better, but in February 1936 I was full of anxiety and discontent. I was a junior in high school and believed that I was flunking in Chemistry and Algebra, which were my hardest subjects. I think now that I was just using that as an excuse for revolting against the suffocating confines of the strictly disciplined military educational system which I was growing to detest more every day. So on the

evening of February 7th, 1936, with the temperature down below zero, and the ground covered with snow, I ran away from home! Perhaps it would be more accurate to say I ran away from school, but I still shudder when thinking of that night.

One might guess that this act was not entirely un-premeditated! For over a year a couple of my non-conformist high school chums and I had been finding adventure in hopping freight trains on Saturdays. We would catch a train coming up out of the B&O freight yards and ride it thirty miles east to Washington, Pa. and jump off. After waiting there for an hour or two we would catch another freight going back to Wheeling, arriving there by four or five in the afternoon, in time for me to duck into the house and take a shower with neither my brothers nor my parents being any the wiser. And they did not learn of it for over a year until our football coach (my Civics teacher) got wind of it from one of our classmates who we'd been bragging to in study hall about our exploits! I felt only insult and anger (and I still do today) that Mr. Whitfield, instead of coming to me about it, or at worst informing my father, chose instead to report us to the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad police who sent a Special Agent to my father's office to report my crime.

It makes me squirm in my chair even now to imagine the humiliation it must have caused my father who at that time was surgeon for the B & O Railroad! That evening when my father got home he invited me up to my room for a talk, and he never even raised his voice in anger! I remember him concluding with these words: "That is the kind of conduct I simply will not tolerate." As he turned to leave my room he looked back at me saying: "Do I make myself perfectly clear, son." And that was the last I ever heard of that, but it sure as hell put an end to our Saturday afternoon train riding!

However, the damage was done. I was already a steam railroad freak and every night in bed I could hear the lonesome wailing call of those whistles echoing through the hills inviting me to be up and away beyond the horizon. All this is by way of saying that when I left home that frigid night in 1936, I *did* know how to ride freight trains, and the blinds on passenger trains as well, ("riding the blind baggage", as it was called then).

The blinds were the spaces between baggage or passenger cars outside the accordion-like structure that surrounded the walkway between the cars. At the bottom of the car ends there was a narrow transverse platform or step that you could stand on. Then up the outer corner of the car there was a vertical railing or "grab-iron" as it was called, that you could hold on to. This put you in standing position looking out to the side enjoying the scenery as it flashed by. Riding the blinds was not all that dangerous so long as you stayed alert and did not loosen your hold. However it was very tiring over long distances, because you couldn't relax or sit down and have a



"LEAVE TOWN"

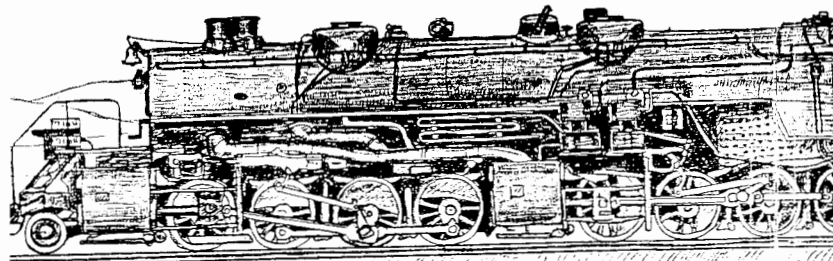
Reproduced from *Idiom 4: Hobo Signs*,
Michigan State University Department of Art (East Lansing, 1965).

cigarette as you might when riding the tops of freight cars, or inside an empty box car. The advantage of course in riding the blinds on passenger trains was that wherever you were going, you got there a hell of a lot faster! I have told how we started to ride freight trains, but a word about how we got to riding the blinds might be in order. I have said that Wheeling was on the main line of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, but in fact it was also served by a branch line of the Pennsylvania Railroad. This line ran along the Ohio River about 30 miles north from Wheeling through Warwood and Follansbee to intersect with the Pennsy main line near Weirton, W. Va.

One of Linsly's traditional rivals of our basketball team was Follansbee High School about 20 miles north of Wheeling. Follansbee was a scheduled stop for the local Pennsy passenger train that left Wheeling about seven in the evening. Johnson (Mick) McKinley, my school chum and best friend, had been riding the Saturday trains with me for a year or more. On Friday afternoon, January 10, 1936, while we were in study hall Mick said to me: "Hey, John, why don't we ride the blinds on that local Pennsy passenger train up to Follansbee tonight, and get off there and see the game, then get a ride home with one of the guys?" Unlike most well laid plans this one worked perfectly! It was snowing and a bitter cold night as we mingled with the other people on the station platform. When the train started to move we sprinted up toward the front and swung up into the first blind behind the tender, and we were on our way! A few minutes later we jumped off right across the highway from Follansbee High School as the train was slowing for the station. We saw the game, got a ride home and were in bed before midnight with a new adventure to our credit. The only bad part was that Follansbee beat us by a score of 24 to 22!

Before I left home that evening in February 1936 I put a note on my father's desk in his study, telling him that I was upset and just wanted to get away for a little while, that I was going to visit a friend, and please not to worry about me.

I can only begin to understand now (having five children and seven grandchildren of my own) what terrible anguish I caused my parents that winter night so long ago.



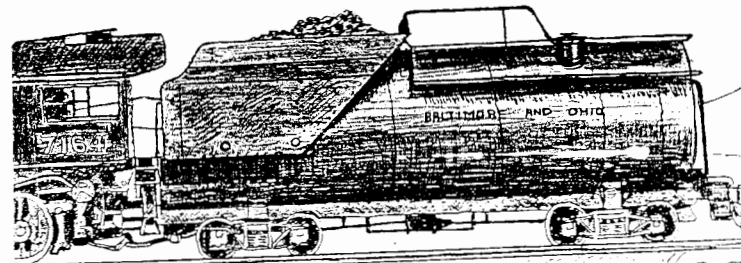
[A Hobo Journey Through the Midwest, 1936]

We were at the west end of the railroad yard in Cincinnati munching on stale rolls when we heard the unmistakable sound of a big locomotive getting a long freight train under way. Within minutes my friend, Mick, and I were on a gondola car full of sand and reclining in the sunshine. It was a train of over a hundred cars carrying other freeloading "passengers". We passed through Aurora and Osgood, Indiana and after a couple of hours came to a rattling stop in the town of North Vernon where we got off. A rather meager hobo jungle* was located on the north side of the tracks just a few blocks from the residential part of town. We'd been sitting there in the shade for a while when we got talking to a man named Shorty Frazier.

He was a professional hobo, having been on the road for years. He'd had polio (infantile paralysis, we called it then) as a child, leaving him with a withered leg and a very severe limp. We travelled with him for a week or so and found him to be a gentle man and a good conversationalist with a sense of humor. He read a newspaper every day, had a penchant for personal cleanliness and an abiding hatred of the capitalist system. I had never known anyone like him.

Soon the three of us agreed to "make our presence known" in the community by knocking on doors. We learned that day, the universal transient's rule that, when possible, always enter from the alley and knock on the back door rather than the front. This way there was a much better chance of success. The reasons were self evident, especially in the South, where tradesmen, Negroes and other unendowed persons were expected to use the back door.

*Where hoboes gather to cook and wash or just rest.



ARTICULATED FREIGHT LOCOMOTIVE USED ON THE WHEELING-PITTSBURGH DIVISION OF THE B&O RAILROAD

Line Drawing by John E. Fawcett, September 16, 1936.

Another fascinating bit of hobo-ology that our friend, Shorty, showed us that day was the habit of some old Knights of the Road of carrying a piece of chalk in their pockets. When one of those wor-thies received a handout, or especially a "sit down" (a plate of food brought out while sitting on the porch or back stairs), he would, when returning to the alley, write carefully with his chalk on the fence or garage door, the number eighteen. This was a secret code to others of the brotherhood that here is a house where "I ate".

There is one more incident which locks that day in my memory and makes me remember Shorty Frazier with fondness. We had agreed to meet back in the jungle after a couple of hours to share our bounty. The only success I had was from a little old lady who gave me a rather 'used' ham bone with a small amount of fat and meat adhering to it and all wrapped in newspaper. Mick and Shorty were already there when I returned with my contribution. When I removed the wrapping and proudly displayed my gift, Shorty roared with laughter and exclaimed, "By God, kid, that's one for the books. From now on I'm gonna call you Ham Butts Murphy!" Later we made a batch of coffee in a tin can to go along with scraps of my "Ham Bisque".

At dusk we walked the tracks through town to the freight yard where a westbound train was due out around ten o'clock. About a half dozen of us were waiting on an embankment under a highway overpass when a big railroad dick materialized out of the darkness with a pistol in one hand and a flashlight in the other. He yelled at us to turn our backs and "grab for the sky". He shook each one of us



"SAFE CAMP"

Reproduced from *Idiom 4: Hobo Signs*, Michigan State University Department of Art (East Lansing, 1965).

down with some care, then marched us single file up the embankment to the highway and told us to "keep right on going out of town". We walked about two blocks then turned left to walk another two blocks parallel to the tracks. Another left turn brought us back to the yards again where we found an empty box car and turned in for the night.

An hour after rolling out in the morning, we were sitting on a grassy knoll beside the tracks having just heard the wail of steam whistles coming from down in the yards. There she came and what a sight to see! It was a long double headed freight train pulled by two huge steam locomotives spouting smoke and steam as they came roaring through the switches onto the main line. Nothing compares to that sight and sound and it raises my pulse and blood pressure to this day. No God damn wonder kids run away from home!

Because of his crippled leg, Shorty was not able to run and catch a train "on the fly" as most of us preferred to do. He had to board the train before it got going or when it was moving very slowly, so he walked down into the yards to catch the train as it started. Most of us got on the trains at the end of the yard where all the tracks converged into the main line. Here there was less chance of encountering the railroad police or getting jailed for vagrancy. After boarding we walked back along the tops of the box cars until we found Shorty riding on an empty flat car. He claimed that being crippled made it an advantage for him to board within the yards.

Railroad dicks or train crews, seeing his condition, would often show him where to board or actually give him a boost to help him on his way.

It was a pleasant ride through the Indiana farm country. After passing through Seymour, we arrived at the little town of Mitchell, Indiana. Here we left the train and started making the rounds in search of lunch, all the while keeping an eye to windward for the local sheriff. Mitchell is where the east-west Baltimore & Ohio Railroad crosses the north-south Monon Line. Upon visiting here in recent years I found the town to look exactly as it did in 1936 except the engines are now Diesel instead of steam.

Shorty said that he was going to change railroads here and take the Monon north to Crawfordsville, thence the Big Four Railroad west which he claimed was safer and a better ride. Mick and I both felt secure in traveling with this old timer who was also good company. We decided to go with him. After some success in allaying our hunger, we swung onto a northbound Monon freight and held it down through Bedford to Bloomington. It was a truly hot day and we soon found the shady jungle on the banks of a creek not far from the yards. We all three splashed in the water and had a welcome wash up. Shorty did not have a 'bindle' instead carrying a worn old suit coat, the pockets of which held an impressive supply of basic possessions. These included a razor, bar of soap, small towel, jack knife, pair of socks and most surprising of all, a collapsible aluminum drinking cup such as I have not seen for many years. It consisted of four or five telescoping aluminum rings and when pressed flat was about the size of a snuff can. We asked where the hell he'd found it but he just smiled and, with a wink, said his girl friend had given it to him.

We all washed our socks and undershirts in the stream using Shorty's soap and hung them on a tree branch to dry. Shorty sat on the bank, stripped to the waist with his bare feet showing—the right one considerably misshapen and smaller than the other. He turned out his pockets, taking inventory of his worldly possessions, all the while talking to us about the problems of sanitation and personal hygiene while being on the road.

There were hundreds of thousands of homeless people on the road in those days and every one of them had to relieve themselves several times a day. It doesn't take much imagination to appreciate the magnitude of the problems this created while living under the kind of conditions that we did. In the open country it was usually a fairly simple matter to go into the woods or hay fields or corn rows. However, in populated areas it became a serious problem. City parks and libraries often had public toilets but these had been so overwhelmed after years of depression that they were usually out of order or closed entirely. I often looked for a filling station restroom that could be approached from the blind side, otherwise I was

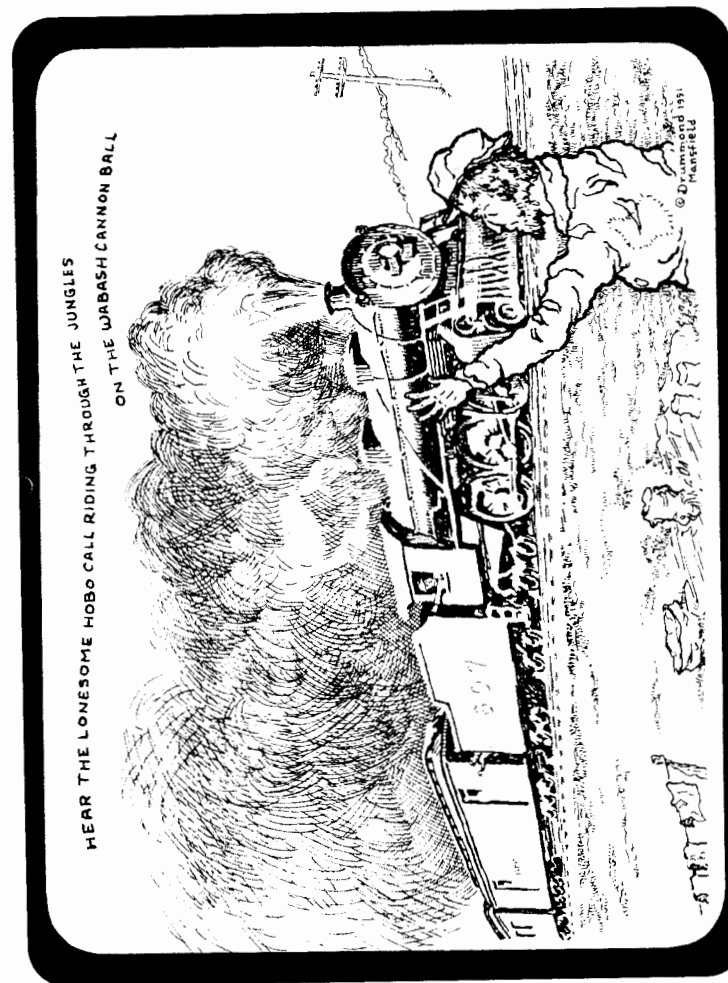
almost certain to seen and "informed" by a kick or a yell to "get the hell out o' there!" Railroad passenger station restrooms were the best for toilets and washing up, but due to our mode of travel, they were seldom nearby when needed. We learned never to go into a strange hobo camp after dark looking for a place to sleep for we were almost certain to lie down in something unpleasant. I found my sense of smell to be the best guide in these circumstances but urgency can be a tough taskmaster.

At the other end of the food chain was the problem of drinking water. This was always so in the summer time when "beating the road" and especially in the South. One emergency source was the drain at the bottom of ice compartments on refrigerator cars. Only small amounts of water were accessible from this source. When the train was stopped it took a long while for the the drip-drip to furnish enough water to satisfy a thirst. I have used this method when a freight train was stopped on a passing track awaiting a train from the opposite direction. Most times one would find a creek or pond and hope the water wasn't contaminated.

Toward evening the three of us walked the several blocks into downtown Bloomington arriving by chance at the Salvation Army building. We entered just in time to take in the brief prayer service which was a prelude to their public feeding program. We were then led into a small dining room next to the kitchen with a dozen other guys and served a large bowl of chili, bread, coffee and canned applesauce. A real banquet for us and I have been partial to the Salvation Army ever since.

We visited with a nearby railway crossing watchman in his little shack and he told us that all trains were cancelled because of a wreck at Putnamville, quite a ways up the line. So we found an empty box car down in the yards and sat in the open door chatting and watching the sunset before we "went to bed". The next morning the crossing watchman told us there was a local freight going out soon. A short time later we were on board and after an hour or so we were stopped in the little country village of Gosport, Indiana. The train could go no further because the wreck at Putnamville had still not been cleared. Just south of Gosport there was a pleasant woodland of small trees on both sides of the Monon right of way. Here was evidence of several small hobo camps at one of which a half dozen 'bos were sitting around a small fire. We elected to occupy one of our own nearby and settled in for what turned out to be an enforced and hungry stay of two days.

The opportunity for bumming food in the village of Gosport was limited and soon exhausted so we spent most of the time just sitting around our little jungle fire. The hunger and tedious monotony led to arguments, short tempers and a sullen silence among the three of us. During that period we saw little of Masfield's "jolly fellow rovers" or the joys of "the vagrant gypsy life" but one thing did hap-



1992 HOBO CALENDAR
ILLUSTRATION BY
DRUMMOND MANSFIELD

pen the next day that made the stay memorable for me. We were climbing the railway embankment to walk the tracks into town with Shorty in the lead. About half way up the slope he suddenly said, "Hello!" and leaned over grasping the bottom of the stalk of a half dried plant. He pulled his hand up the branches and in doing so, got a handful of small dried leaves and blossoms. He looked at us with a mischievous grin saying, "You guys ever see Hobo's Tobacco? Just as good as the real thing." He took two cigarette papers from his pocket and with the leaves, rolled a cigarette for himself and one for us. He lit up telling us to take a couple of easy puffs to see how we liked it. When we both said it tasted strange he laughed, "Well, don't smoke too much of it, kids, 'cause that's Mary Jane. It'll make you feel good and forget your hunger." Within a minute I felt as though I were walking about ten feet above the railroad tracks, but instead of feeling good I felt quite ill and rather scared. Such was my first experience with marijuana!

In the morning Shorty walked over to the camp near us to try and trade some doughnuts for coffee. He returned in a few minutes with a copy of the local newspaper which had an article about the train wreck. There was a picture of the locomotive engineer, Happy Eaker, who had been killed along with two or three hoboes who had been riding on a flat car loaded with huge millstones from a quarry near Bloomington.

In the middle of the afternoon there came the wail of an engine's whistle and in minutes we were on our way again! An hour later the train was crawling slowly past the scene of the wrecked train about a mile north of Putnamville. We were aghast at the sight of the big locomotive on its side in a cornfield amidst a tumble of smashed and broken freight cars. We went on through Cloverdale then on to Ladoga where the train went in the "hole" (siding) to await a southbound freight. Mick ran across a field to try his luck at a farmhouse. I stayed put for fear of being left behind for more starvation in rural Indiana. Mick returned with a smile on his face and a sandwich in his pocket and we were on our way again. Late in the evening, after a long day, we arrived at the sizeable town of Crawfordsville which appeared to hold more promise of sustenance for us. And so it did. We walked from the yards, circled the town square, and I went into a cafe to make my pitch and I hit the jackpot! The owner was stern but answered quickly saying, "Fair enough, if you'll work, you'll eat". He had me haul coal in buckets from the back yard into a small store room beside the kitchen for use in the cook stove. Then I swept out the whole place fore and aft. After washing up, the owner sat me down at the end of the counter and served me roast beef, mashed potatoes and the works! So it was my turn to crow at Mick and Shorty when we met later by the "wailing wall" on the west side of the court house. We gave it that name after hearing Shorty "wail" about the "young bucks strolling with

their girlfriends, sucking on ice cream cones and won't even give you a nickel!"

As darkness fell we walked a few blocks east over to the Big Four tracks and slept under a highway overpass along with half a dozen other footloose gentlemen flaked out on the ground. It was Sunday evening, June 14, 1936, and I was beginning to feel like a real hobo and having some doubts whether that was a good thing or not.

We turned out early in the morning and walked out into the environs to offer the local citizens our labor in exchange for something to eat. As Shorty said, "If you offer to work, it ain't begging!" Before long we were back under the overpass helping Mick to make an important decision for himself. He had met a guy in Gosport who said his dad would have some work for him in a few days. The same kid said that he had an uncle who owned a sawmill in Marshall, Arkansas where we could get summer jobs. So within an hour Mick left to catch a Monon freight back to Gosport and I went on to Marshall to get the sawmill job and await Mick's arrival in a week or so. The best laid plans and all that!

Shorty and I lounged around the jungle most of the day reading newspapers and talking with some of the other "bedroll tourists". We bummed our eats in the evening and about sundown caught a westbound Big Four freight. We rode a couple of hours through the night to Danville, Illinois where we piled off. After spending the night in an empty box car we arose early and went our separate ways into town to find breakfast.

Shorty never showed up at the place where we had agreed to meet and a short sad sentence in my diary says, "I'm all by myself now." I loafed all day by the Wabash tracks in Danville, but there were no trains going west and no sign of Shorty. I met up with two fellows in the evening and we finally caught a Wabash freight about 8:30. We rode in an empty box car to Decatur and I slept most all the way. A railroad "bull" kicked us off in the yards, then we found another box car to sleep in the rest of the night.

In the morning I walked up to the main part of town and bummed my breakfast at a restaurant. It was here a trick that Shorty taught us came in handy. The way it worked was like this: You walked by the front of a cafe or restaurant a couple of times, peering in the window looking for a man that is eating his meal and has an empty stool next to him, or better yet, an empty stool between two men. You walk in and plop down on the empty stool and when the waiter or waitress comes to you, speak right up so you can be heard by the customers on both sides of you and make the pitch about "being hungry and doing any kind of work for something to eat." If it was the owner or a male waiter who'd spoken to you, then the chances were they would turn you down and tell you to "get outta here." If it was a waitress, then sometimes she would

say "O.K. just a minute" and perhaps, putting her job right on the line, she would go get a coffee and a doughnut and slide it quickly in front of you without giving you a check. But usually the answer was "No" from the other side of the counter. However, the kicker here is that when the guys on either side of you heard your plaintive pitch there was a fair chance that one or the other of them would say something as follows, "It's O.K., miss, I'll buy the fellow a doughnut and coffee," or "That's alright waitress, give the man some breakfast and put it on my bill." Believe me there is no greater feeling when you are hungry and on the bum to have someone spring for your breakfast right there before God and everybody.

I worked this ruse perhaps a dozen times on that trip, and scored maybe half the time, which is pretty good. A truck driver in Parsons, Kansas, not only paid for my breakfast, but gave me two dimes to "get yourself some lunch." The minute I left that restaurant I went to the corner store and bought a sack of Bull Durham cigarette tobacco, a Baby Ruth candy bar, and still had a dime for lunch! So if there's anyone in the world I can blame for my lifelong addiction to Kipling's "Great God Nicotine", it's that truck driver in Parsons who gave me the extra dimes! Oh sure, it was all his fault!

Meanwhile back in Decatur I had walked out to the end of the yards with a couple of other fellows. We were sitting under an overpass talking to an older guy who was giving out good advice which hit home with me right at that time. He said, "Learn to look out for yourself, kid, ain't no one else gonna do it for you, an another thing, never beat the road alone, always have a traveling partner. Ya' get dumped once and that could be the last time for you." Dumped is hobo's vernacular for being rolled, assaulted or otherwise physically attacked. Then he said, "You kids gonna ride the Cannonball this morning?" Before we could answer we heard the sounds of a big locomotive coming our way and within a minute we had caught the famous Wabash Cannonball on the fly. It was a hot-shot manifest train and the fastest freight I ever rode. I stood up the whole time holding the railing on the front of a tank car, and god what a ride! It is over a hundred miles from Decatur to East St. Louis and we made it in two hours flat including a short stop at Mitchell and at one other place. In East St. Louis I got separated from the two guys I'd been with and it seems that I walked for hours before getting to the Missouri Pacific Railway yards at Dupou, Illinois. I knocked on some doors in a poor working class neighborhood near the yards and got a couple of small handouts then caught a long freight on the Missouri Pacific after sundown. I rode in a gondola car full of gravel and went to sleep soon after leaving. We went on and on through the night, and I woke up when we rumbled slowly across the big high level bridge crossing the Mississippi River at Thebes, Illinois.