

Prologue

Peculiar travel suggestions are dancing lessons from God
- Kurt Vonnegut -

*I'm shaken the dust of this crummy little town
off my feet and I'm going to see the world.*
- Jimmy Stewart from *It's a Wonderful Life* -

I left September Eighth a Tuesday. Frankly, I was scared and I felt a bit silly pushing my eighty plus pounds of gear down the mile and a half long dirt road I live on. I hoped that the neighbors would not see me I did not feel like telling the local redneck boys in the pick-up that I was going to attempt to ride a red Schwinn mountain bike across the country, while towing a red plastic Kiddy Kart I bought used for fifty dollars. Accompanying me was a small border collie named Lucy who rode in the cart. Lucy belonged to my roommates' kids and I had not had much of a chance to train her, but I could tell she was smart and we had done a few training rides together and she would be good company. I figured she had a fifty-percent chance of making it back, but I did not tell Lucy or the kids this. They had several dogs and I figured they would get over it if she were lost. I would do the best I could.

Why would anyone do such a thing? I was asked that question a hundred times and I still get asked the same question often. Why? Why not? Why do we do anything? Why do you stay in an unhappy marriage or work at your crummy job?

There is something magical about adventure travel; to not know where you are going to end up that night or who you are going to meet. Wanderlust. As Jimmy Buffet said, "some days were laughter and others were tears." I had sold my real estate and mortgage company in Colorado

and my house in Florida was paid for. I had no car payment. no alimony, no girlfriend, no mortgage, no job and no one to say good bye to. What did Bob Dylan say? Freedom is just another word for nothing left to lose. I still do not know why I did it, but it was one of the happiest times in my life and at the time of this writing I would leave again tomorrow morning if I could. I met so many people on the way who said they would give anything to do what I was doing. If only they could leave their job, or their wife or their car payment or whatever it was. The single best line was when an older fat black lady came up to me and said, " You just like Jesus, wandering in the wilderness".

I do not know why I did it. I had taken another bicycle tour across Wyoming. It was a trip of just over one thousand miles and it was one of the best times in my life; perhaps I was trying to recreate that. I had never seen California and I always wanted to do that. When I left I really did not think I could make it all the way across the country. I really had no idea how far I would go or how long it would take, which was one of the joys of the trip. I would pull into some small town and stay a night or a week depending on who I met and whether I could find a good camping spot. A lot of times leaving was even more fun than arriving. After a day in some crummy red neck town I was so glad just to be out of there and on to the next town that is was worth the trip just for that. I met so many people that were stuck in some horrible little town in some awful job, that would give anything to do what I was doing. Not that it was all easy. At times it was unbelievably lonely. Sometimes it was scary as hell. There were a few mornings when I woke up and just cried because of all the breakdowns and flat tires. I fought incredible wind storms in west Texas and mountains in California. One day the wind blew so hard I only made three and a half miles and gave up. I was hit by a truck in Mississippi and was lucky to live. I was bitten by at least ten thousand insects in the deep south. My dog Lucky Lucy had four near death experiences and seven puppies. I had nineteen flat tires in Texas alone. I met people that I would have never met any other way;; some of the nicest and some of the nastiest. It was great! If I never do anything else again in my life I will always have this trip. I can roll up and down the halls in the rest home in my wheel chair and brag about how I rode a Bicycle across America. So read on gentle reader. It is a good story.

Chapter One

The First Five Hundred Miles: Newberry, Florida to Mexico Beach

I pushed the mile and a half of my sugar-sand drive way without encountering any of my redneck farmer neighbors and hit the paved road Fla. 337 about ten thirty am. From there it was about an hour's ride to the town of Newberry. I stopped frequently to check the equipment and tires. If I was going to have a breakdown, I hoped it would be sooner rather than later. If I broke down relatively close to the house, at least I could get home to make repairs. I had few tools, no spare tire, and almost no knowledge of bicycle repair. I had done a thousand mile bike trip from Colorado to Montana a few years back and I knew a little about bike touring. Eastern Wyoming is about as tough as you can get as far as bicycling goes. It is a hilly, windy desert with vast distances between food stops or bike stores. I found that things have a way of working out or as Jimmy Buffet said, "Tragedies have a way of becoming comedies real fast, and they better become comedies or else you're in a whole lot of trouble".

At Newberry I turned east on State Road 26 planning to hit Highway 27 at Trenton. I stopped at the Hitching Post bar for a beer. The owners saw Lucy outside and invited her in. They gave her a bowl of milk which she gratefully accepted. After she finished I playfully tapped the bar stool next to me and Lucy jumped up onto it. It was a good trick. The bartender commented, "that sure isn't the ugliest bitch we have had sitting on that stool." I did not know it then, but that was the first of a great many barstools Lucy and I would sit beside each other on.

After a few beers I began talking with the bar owners about my intended trip. They suggested I take a small paved road running due north from the store. After five beers it sounded like a good idea. It was my first lesson in "Never trust the locals for directions." They told me to "turn at the Baptist church near the big oak trees." If you have ever been in north

central Florida you would notice that is all they have down there—oak trees and churches. But, after five beers it sounded like a good plan. It was a very small road with hardly any traffic which would make it easy to find a camp spot. I did not want to ride very far the first day. One thing I had learned on the Wyoming trip was that the first week is the hardest. After a week you start to ride into shape and get used to sleeping in a tent every night. The soreness goes away and you start to get to know where things are. So we headed north on the advice of a bunch of drunken rednecks. We camped that night under a huge live oak tree at the end of a logging road. It was hot, about ninety eight in the shade. It was so hot that the sweat made puddles in the depressions of the tent floor.

The next few days are a blur of rural pine forests and being really lost. The rednecks directions were nuts. It took three days to get to Bradford, Florida; it should have taken one. Bradford is right on the Suwannee river. I found a really nice camp within twenty feet of the river. The Suwannee river has always been one of my favorites. It is the color of really strong tea, due to the presence of tannic acid from the roots of the cypress trees. The river runs from the heart of the Okefenoke swamp in southern Georgia to the Gulf of Mexico. It is lined with beautiful clear springs that boil up from deep in the Florida aquifer. There was a huge spring near the camp with a diving board that the local kids hung out at. Lucy is a good swimmer and we spent three days camping, swimming in the river, and resting up. On the second day a weird looking guy in his late fifties would walk down near the camp and stand behind a tree with his dick hanging out. It was very strange. I kept Lucy out to watch him and after a few hours he went away. I guess he was some kind of local pervert or something. He was the first of many weird people I would meet.

At this point I had a battery powered TV and I got to watch the Florida Gator Football game in camp as they have no bars in Bradford. As I remember, the Gators lost at home for the first time in years. If you have never lived in the deep south, you have no idea how fanatical college football fans are. At Florida games pregnant women wear tee shirts that have an arrow pointing down to their bellies with the caption, "Baby Gator Under Construction". You sure do not see that at pro games.

From Branford we headed north on Highway 27 to Perry where we picked up Highway 98 headed west for the Gulf of Mexico. We would follow 98 all the way. It is a small winding two-lane road with a lot of log trucks around Perry, but it had a good shoulder. The stretch of 98 running from Mobile to Hattisburg, Mississippi is called "Bloody 98" because of all the wrecks, but that is in the next book. The log trucks were generally courteous, but they went really fast. Just outside Perry we entered the Aucilla National Forest. It is some of the most dense forest of the whole

trip. We camped off the side of the highway by going under the logging chains that blocked vehicle access to the woods. We were camped on a lonely stretch of road when I heard a big jacked up pick-up truck pull into the logging road. Lucy ran out of the tent and began barking furiously. The guys in the truck had a key to unlock the padlock that held the chain together. Since I was camped right on the logging road there was really no place I could hide. I was drinking a vodka and cool aid and I put my drink down and stepped out of the tent. I had no idea who these guys were or if they were pissed off about me being on their land. Lucy was going nuts barking and I yelled, "She won't bite. We are on a cross country bike trip." "That's O.K. you can camp here. Do you want a beer".

"Sure," I yelled back.

They were just a couple of local boys out drinking beer and hog hunting. They did not get many hogs, but it was a good excuse to get out of the house and away from the old lady for a while. We had a few beers and they drove off after feeding Lucy a pack of hot dogs which she seemed to enjoy. Lucy was a great ice breaker on the trip. Almost everyone likes dogs, and people think your O.K. if you have a dog with you. Who ever heard of a serial killer who brought a dog with them?

It took about three days to get through the Aucilla forest. Other than the bugs and the heat and the crazy rednecks in the log trucks it was easy riding. At least it was flat and there was no headwind. Lucy jumped off the trailer in a tunnel and was almost killed by a log truck. I heard the air horn and by the time I looked back there was white smoke coming off the front



I rode barefoot every night, because of the dust and sweat

tires of the truck. The guy had to be a dog owner. Anyone else would have hit her. I smacked her good when we got out of the tunnel and I realized I would have to do something about her jumping off the trailer. It would be a bad day for both of us if she got squished by a log truck. I could tie her to the trailer on a short lead. but then if she fell she would get dragged along behind the bike. Also, I would have to untie her every time we stopped. It would be a real pain. The best thing would be to convince her never to get off that trailer or cross the road without me telling her to. That night in camp I hatched a plan to scare Lucy, literally to death.

The next morning Lucy was having a particularly bad day. She jumped off her trailer several times and crossed the road to chase squirrels. We were coming around the big bend area of Florida and there were starting to be more towns. As we came into the outskirts of Medart I saw what I was looking for; a huge, smelly, decaying, Rottweiler. The dog must have weighed one twenty before he got hit by a car and left dead on the side of the road. I pulled the bike over just past the carcass and grabbed Lucy. I thrust her face directly onto the maggot filled eyes of the huge dog and yelled "BAD DOG!" several times. Dogs know the smell of death and it scared the hell out of her. I kept her face to face the dead Rottweiler for almost a full minute. I kept yelling "BAD DOG THIS IS WHAT HAPPENS TO BAD DOGS IN THE ROAD." She was visibly shaken. After that she stayed on the trailer for over an hour and then jumped off to tree someone's cat. I found a dead beagle a short time later and repeated the procedure. The dead dogs affected her quite a bit. She got very subdued after I confronted her with the dead mutts. I kept pointing at the side of the road yelling, "BAD DOG" Lucy is a very smart dog. I could tell by her eyes that she was starting to get it. Staying off the road was something she had to understand. I was starting to get attached to the little yellow mutt and I sure did not want to see her dead or badly hurt by a car. She had absolutely no concept of speed. At this point in the trip she would stand in the middle of the road wagging her tail in front of a fully loaded log truck going seventy five.

By the end of the third day she understood. I yelled and used hand signals to tell her what to do every time I stopped. She got so she would not jump off the trailer unless I signaled her to. It would drive her nuts sometimes to see a cat or chicken just waiting to be chased, but she stayed on that cart. It got to be an automatic thing that she would look up at me when ever I stopped to see what she was supposed to do. I am sure it saved her life.

As we pushed west from Perry the country began to change. We hit the Gulf of Mexico at Carable, Florida. Lucy and I spent the afternoon hanging out on the boat docks. I have always liked docks and some of the happiest memories I have are of hanging out on a Florida dock. There were

some pretty big shrimp boats and some flat bottomed oyster boat as well as a mix of pleasure boats. Most of the boats were faded and weather beaten as if they had too much sun and too much beer over too many years.

We camped that night on a remote stretch of beach right on the Gulf. There was a hurricane off Baja California and the waves were running four to five feet, which is really big for the Gulf. I towed Lucy out to the deep water and we bobbed around for a long time as the sun set. So far we had made one hundred miles. The bike was running well and Lucy was still alive. The new camp stove was working well, so far so good.

We camped that night at Port St. Joe where the High School Football team was The Fighting Reddish. I love that name. Lucy and I went out to a local bar and hung out with the bikers. The owner let Lucy inside and she got to do her sit on the barstool trick. The next day was a long hot ride with a hangover and a high of ninety eight degrees in the shade. I was going through about two gallons of water a day and had to be careful not to run out. I found that one very reliable source of drinking water in the south is churches. The deep south has a Baptist church at least every ten miles and they always have a garden hose so they can water the grass and flowers. Unlike private residences they never have dogs or guns. Usually there was no one around and I could fill up the water bottles and splash down Lucy.

The bugs were awful. I have a five B theory of Florida which states that if you cannot handle any of the five B's you should not be in Florida. They are: bugs, blacks, Baptists, beaches, and BBQ. The south is chock full of all of the above. I was starting to find a lot of ticks on Lucy. Especially on her neck where she could not reach them. It is amazing how large they get after filling with blood. I could never figure out how they survived after they became engorged and dropped off. The ones I picked off Lucy I would feed to the fire ants. The fire ants were awful. They are the dominant ant species in the south. They are small red ants that defend their nests



Horsefly Camp

with great ferocity. They bite with the head mandibles and then reach back and inject poison from the posterior. It produces a really painful bite that will turn into a nasty pustule in a few hours. They would swarm over the dishes at night at if I went out of the tent at night they would swarm over my bare feet and then twenty or thirty of them would bite in concert. I had to cook from inside the tent because of the dog flies. Dog flies look just like ordinary house flies except that they have a really vicious bite. It is much worse than a horse fly. Dog flies are some sort of creature from hell. They are the most tenacious, vicious, nasty insects ever created. Even when wounded they would crawl across the tent floor and continue to bite. They were so persistent that they would follow me through the zippered opening of the tent. It was easy to get five to ten in the tent within an hour of setting up. As they built up in the tent I would take a pillow and smash them repeatedly against the walls of the tent. Often they would get knocked out or have damaged wings and then crawl across the tent to bite me or Lucy. I never saw anything like it. On the outside they were extremely fast and persistent. When running on the beach it was nothing for a dog fly to follow along for three to five miles. I could out run them on the bicycle if we were on level ground and there was no headwind. They mostly stayed near the beach around rotting piles of seaweed. They made the mosquitoes look like punks.

We passed through the fishing and oyster town of Apalachicola and had a great seafood dinner. The waitress kept sneaking Lucy pieces of steak as she waited at the front door. Lucy was getting really good at waiting at the door while I went into various businesses along the trip. Some places are very dog friendly and some are not. I did not want to get any business owners in trouble with the health department. She would wait very patiently by the front door and then greet me as if she had not seen me in weeks.

Why are dogs better than women? Because the later you get home the happier the dog is to see you. The one thing she had trouble with was the automatic doors in large super markets. As she approached the doors they would open automatically as she entered the detection field. She would see the door open and think someone was opening the door for her and come on in. I would be all the way at the back of this huge grocery store and there would be Lucy running down the aisle followed by a worried looking store manager. I would take her out to the front of the store and yell, BAD DOG-STAY. She usually stayed after that.

Chapter Two

Miracle in Mexico Beach

I was looking forward to the Wal-Mart in Panama city. The sixteen inch tires on the cart were wearing out fast and one of them had a bubble on the outside. I did not think it would last another hundred miles. We camped that night right on the beach just outside Oak Grove, Florida in some high grass and palm trees. I could get out to the water but it was very tall brush and I saw a large snake near the beach.

That morning when I woke up Lucy stayed at the back of the tent. When I began to pack up the tent and told her to get out she did not move. I reached into the tent to get her and she was completely paralyzed. Her back legs would not move at all. She was conscious and her eyes were alert, but she could not move her back legs at all. I freaked out. I wracked my brain to try and think of what could have happened to her. I could not think of anything that would have caused her to be paralyzed. We had gone to a semi-sleazy biker bar that night and I wondered if she had eaten or been fed some kind of drug, but her eyes were clear and alert; she did not look drugged. I examined her head to toe there was no obvious swelling or discoloration.. No bite marks, nothing. She did not seem to be in pain, but it was really sad to see her trying to walk. Her back legs would not move at all; she just tipped over. It was really pitiful. I sat down on the bedroll and cried.

It was Saturday morning in a really small town. There was no vet service in town and it would be very unlikely that one would be open on a Saturday. Even if there was one open I did not have the money to pay for expensive veterinary care. I packed up the gear and headed towards the next town, Mexico Beach. When we got into town, I checked the phone book and found a vet about forty miles away. I called the office, but there was only an answering machine with no pager number information. I hung up without leaving a message. I called my roommate Pete who had given me the dog and he said that he had a dog with the same symptoms

and that it was surely tick paralysis. He said to check her neck for ticks. It sounded like nonsense to me, but I did check her for ticks after I hung up, and found two big ticks under her collar. I pulled them out with no immediate effect. I set up camp in some woods just outside Mexico Beach Florida. Lucy was pitiful. She was so sick that she could not sit in her trailer, she kept falling out. I had to strap her in with a bungee cord. I pulled into a Seven-Eleven and some of the locals started making fun of Lucy. They assumed that she was so lazy that I had to strap her into the cart to keep her from falling asleep and falling off the cart. I was much too disheartened to argue with them and I rode away feeling really bad. As I rode off to camp the left rear trailer blew out. The bubble on the side of the tire let go with a large bang. Now I was really screwed. A really sick dog and no way to carry her. I was about two hundred fifty miles from the house at this point. I started thinking seriously about quitting. I could call my roommate and he could pick me up. I hated to think of quitting so early in the trip but this really sucked. I picked up a pint of Vodka and headed back to camp. By now it was early Saturday evening and there was not much I could do. I made Lucy as comfortable as I could back at camp. She kept trying to walk and it was really pitiful. Her front legs were fine, but there was no response in her back legs. I tied her up in a shady spot near the tent and made her as comfortable as possible. She drank some water and ate half a hot dog which was encouraging. I checked her again for bite marks or anything that would have caused her to be so sick. I could find nothing. I made her a little bed in a shady spot and decided to go into Mexico Beach and see what was happening. Mexico Beach is a small, colorful, water front town. There was no vet service or bike shop. I figured I could ride or hitch-hike in Panama City to get a new trailer tire. By this time it was Saturday evening and there was not much I could do about any of my problems. There was an oyster bar called the Lagoon. It had a one acre pond in front with a seventy foot boat that someone had dragged over from the Gulf, it was an amazingly large boat to be sitting in such a small pond.

In spite of the surroundings I was really bummed out. There was no way I could travel with Lucy being that sick. If she did not get well soon I was going to have to do something. I figured the most merciful death would be to take her out in the gulf and slit her throat while holding her under water. It would be quick and relatively painless at least for her. Or I could dump her in a nice neighborhood and hope someone would take care of her which was unlikely for a dog that sick. It was a bad situation all the way around. And to make it worse the bike trailer was still flat. I met a local named Mike and told him my tale of woe. He had a house close by and said I could stay there while Lucy recovered. He also said he could give me a ride to Panama City for new tires. I decided to take him up on his offer. At least

Lucy would be inside in the air conditioning and I could sure use the ride to the tire store. Panama City was big enough to have a bike shop and a Wal-Mart.

We hooked up that morning at a local coffee shop. Mike was an interesting guy. He had done a bike tour across north Georgia and so we shared that bond. There is something about people who have done long bike tours that makes them empathetic to other riders. I guess it is like hitch hiking—once you have been out there doing it, it gives you some sympathy for other people. Mike was a former drug addict who used to rob drug stores by cutting holes in the roof and dropping in. He was never caught or had to shoot anyone and his theory was that he had to do a lot of good things to make up for his past life. I was just glad to get help no matter what the motivation.

I found tires at the Wal-Mart and had one mounted at a local bike shop. The cart takes sixteen inch tires which are basically kids bike tires. They are an unusual size and I was glad to find them. We headed back to Mexico Beach and I packed up camp and moved over to Mike's house. He had just moved in and there was no electricity yet. Which was a real disappointment. As I was loading my gear into the house a power company truck went by and I flagged him down. He had a woman in the truck and he seemed very uneasy. I think he was having a tryst in the truck and did not want anyone to know. Whatever he was doing he hooked up the power in just a couple of minutes and sped off. Mike and I powered up the AC and the fridge which was nice to have. We got some beer and headed for the beach which was only a block away. It was a beautiful day. I carried Lucy down to the beach and dipped her gently in the water. She seemed to like it. In spite of her paralysis she seemed very alert; if a little scared. Mexico Beach is really pretty. The Air Force owns twenty-eight miles of undeveloped coastline just north of town and you can walk for miles without seeing any people or houses.

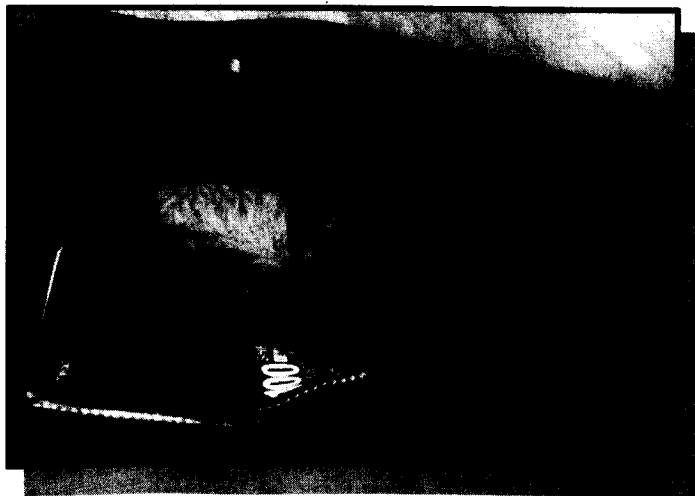
I kept Lucy as comfortable as possible. She did not seem to be in any pain and she could eat and drink. There was not much I could do until Monday anyway. Mike and I went to the Lagoon Bar that Saturday and stayed out late. There was a SWAT team meeting going on and I kept buying the cops drinks and trying to get them to teach me how to make a truck bomb. I would hate to buy all that fertilizer and have it fizzle. The cops thought I was a little strange, but who cares? They're cops; just glorified garbage collectors.

The next morning Lucy could walk!! She was not cured, but it was a notable improvement. She improved rapidly every hour and went from stumbling around to a slight stagger by late afternoon. The next morning she treed the neighbors cat and I knew she was cured. Mike and I declared it "The Miracle of Mexico Beach," and had a party with some of his

friends. It was great. I had been worried sick about Lucy. I was getting attached to the little mutt and I felt really bad she had gotten so sick. I never saw a dog get that sick and survive. I never found out what caused her illness. The general consensus from country people was that it was tick paralysis. She was better by Monday and I never took her to the vet. I could not see spending a bunch of money to have some medical school drop out tell me my dog had been sick but was better now.

Lucy and I stayed almost two weeks in Mexico Beach. It was great. Mike had an extra bedroom and enjoyed the company. I had a stack of books to read. The best of which was, "Den of Thieves" about the Michael Milken, Iven Bosky, scam. What a great story. At one point they make about twenty two million dollars on their first deal, and at the company party they get so drunk that they throw over a hundred thousand dollars worth of computers out the window of a high rise office building onto the roofs of the fleet of limousines waiting out side to take them to the company party. It is a great story and a well written book.

I did a lot of hiking of the beach. It was possible to ride the bike north on Highway 98 into the Air Force base and then cut over to the beach and hike back. That way I did not have to walk all the way up and then back. Some days Lucy and I would cover ten miles or more. Lucy liked to chase the seagulls. She never caught one, but she liked to see them scatter. She was completely healed by now with no residual effects of her illness at all. I took her swimming in the gulf every day just for luck and Mike named her Lucky Lucy, a name she would truly earn by the end of the trip.



Lucy sleeping on the journal

Chapter Three

Down and Out in Destin

Real Horror Show

- A Clockwork Orange -

We pulled out of Mexico Beach on a Monday. It was a great stay. I met a lot of Mike's friends and we partied at the Lagoon bar almost every night. It was a great layover, but it was time to move on. We had a lot of miles to cover. I was getting a lot stronger than when we started; also I was getting the gear a lot more organized than it had been, which made setting up camp a lot easier. It always amazed me how much stuff I could misplace. I was always looking for something important like a lighter or can opener or an article of clothing. Something was always missing. With all my worldly possessions spread out over a mere twelve feet, one would think it would be hard to lose stuff, but I did it constantly, although I usually found it later in some weird and unexpected place.

I set a new personal distance and speed record on this stretch of road going forty two miles one day and holding an average speed of 11.2 mph over a ten mile stretch. I always tried to run fast the first ten miles of the day. I had a Cateye Mico bike speedometer which gave average speed, current speed, highest peak speed, odometer, and clock. It was always a challenge to see if I could beat my previous day's speed record for the first ten miles of the day. After the first ten miles I tended to slow down and take it easy. Florida is brutally flat. The highest point in the state is one hundred forty three feet above sea level, which occurs at a big hill near Tallahassee. Otherwise the only hills are the draw bridges over the inter-coastal waterway. There was never a breeze until mid afternoon so the only limitation on bike speed was my own ability to peddle faster. I loved the mornings. I usually smoked a bowl in the tent just before leaving and put on a good traveling tape in my cassette. The miles would just float by. Later

in the day it got tougher as the heat and fatigue increased. But often for those first ten miles, I do not know if I have ever been happier.

Our next scheduled stop was Destin, Florida. It was only about a hundred mile ride. I had a place to stay with an old friend of my Mom's who had a beautiful home right on Loxahatchee Bay. We camped that night just off a bike path outside Santa Rosa, Florida. It was brutally hot. It was September twenty-second my forty sixth birthday. I bought a cheap bottle of wine to celebrate and was sitting in the tent when Lucy began barking furiously. I peeked out the tent flaps to see a sheriff's deputy approaching the camp. Apparently one of the local residents had seen me pushing the bike into the woods and called the cops even though we were so far back in the woods it was impossible to see the camp. The cop had followed the bike tracks through the soft Florida sand. It was a real feat of police work. He told me I had to move on even though I had the camp all set up. It was a real pain. I was tired, hot, and pissed off. He told me there was a campground about twenty five miles ahead. Like I could really ride another twenty five miles starting out at six o'clock in the evening. I did not tell him this. He ran my ID on the radio and let us go. I was way too hot and tired to ride very far and I soon found a logging road with a big chain stretched across it that I could maneuver the bike under. I set up camp all over again and finished off the wine. By now I was hot and pissed off. I left Lucy in camp and rode into ~~to~~ Santa Rosa and stopped at a convenience store and bought a pack of Pall Malls and some matches even though I do not smoke cigarettes. I retraced my route up the bike path and when I got just upwind of my former camping spot I pulled over and got out the cigarettes and matches. I lit a Pall Mall and tucked it into the book of matches and left it in a pile of bone dry grass and leaves in the woods near my old camp. I rode hurriedly back to the new camp and went to bed. Later that night I smiled broadly as I heard the sound of the fire trucks.

I reached Maurice's house the next day about noon. I set up camp in his back yard right on Loxahatchee bay. He had a dock and of course I threw Lucky Lucy into the bay for good luck. Maurice was in his late seventies. He had been married briefly to my mother and I had always liked him. He had an interesting history. He was a machine gunner in World War Two. When he returned from the war he found his wife in bed with someone else. He shot both of them to death on the spot and did twenty eight years in the joint. In spite of his background he was one of the nicest, most mellow people you would ever want to meet. He was living with another ex-wife named Sue and her boyfriend. I had never met Sue before and it had been years since I last saw Maurice. He looked old. He had had a heart attack and was recovering. Sue was acting as his junkie nurse. She was heavily into downers and had that sad, pissed-off look of someone that

was a heavy barbiturate user. I had not been there but a few hours when she and Wayne got into a big fight and she broke into tears for an hour after he left. She was popping pills like she owned a drug store.

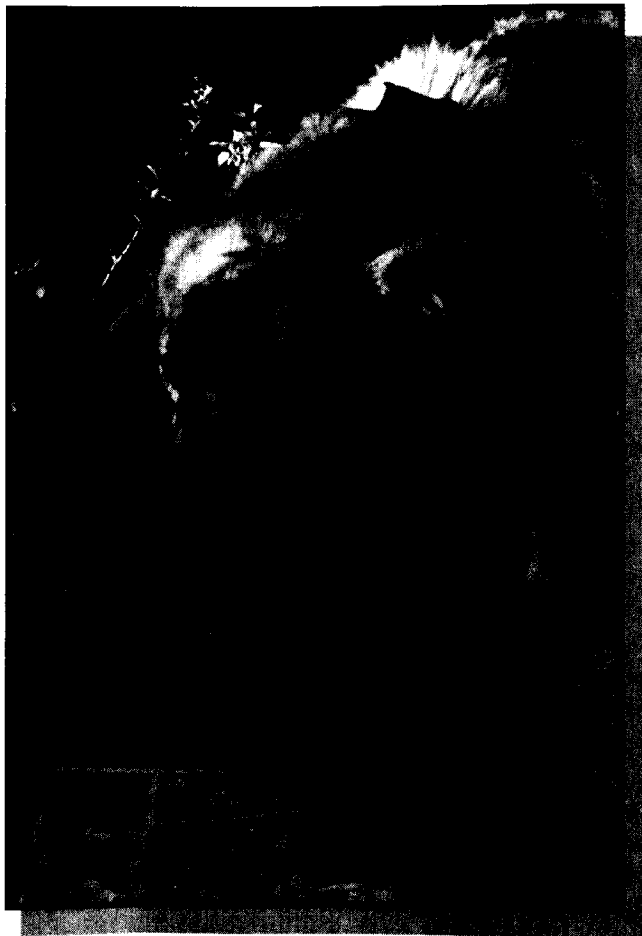
They had patched things up by evening and they took me to a local biker bar that had pool and Ping-Pong. I am a really good Ping-Pong player and I started playing the locals. I was rusty and got down ten to one in the first game, but came back to win twenty one to eighteen. My opponent thought it was luck until I beat him five straight games. I was playing for beers and there were a lot of players in the bar. I held the table for three hours winning thirty two games and losing none. Then I noticed the locals starting to get pissed off about me winning so many games. I got a little drunk and started twirling the paddle in my hand and yelling, "There is a new gun in town." It was a pretty rough crowd and I remembered that great scene in *The Hustler* where Paul Newman gets his fingers broken by the locals for winning too many pool games, and I backed off and took a break. I smoked a joint with Sue and Wayne in the parking lot and savored my victory. I had not played Ping-Pong in a while, and it felt good to play and win. I was getting in such good shape that it was easy to run down the toughest shots. Sue was getting really wasted on downers. She had gotten all dressed up and put a cast on her leg even though she could walk just fine. She was a pretty girl and was drawing the attention of a beautiful Air Force Officer lesbian. It was a very strange evening. I could walk back to camp and did not care what they did. I was just there to have fun, but I could see this crowd was real trouble.

We left about one to go to the Taco Bell for take-out and then we were going back to Maurice's house. Sue was driving and Wayne followed in his car. Sue was slurring her words badly, but she drove slowly and cautiously. We sat in the drive through window of the Taco Bell for what seemed like an eternity. I started to wonder what was taking so long when I saw the first cop. He was in the bushes next to the drive through lane. Suddenly there were two sheriffs cars in the parking lot and there was a cop at the car window. He told Sue to drive forward and park. Sue was a real mess by this time. She could barely get out of the car. She was not that drunk, just really stoned on downers. I stayed put in the car and kept my mouth shut. Lucy was in the back seat barking at the cops. They had no reason to bother me and I knew I could walk to camp if I had to; it was only a few miles.

Apparently what had happened was that the people in the Taco Bell had called the cops because Sue was so fucked up. I thought, what a loser, how can anyone get so messed up that they cannot order take-out from Taco Bell without getting arrested. It was almost two in the morning and most of the people getting food are coming from the bars. This is definitely not rocket science, all you have to do is order some damn tacos.

Apparently this was a little too much for Sue to handle.

The cops kept questioning Sue and then Wayne pulled up in his truck and started arguing with the cops. This was about as dumb as you can get. Wayne was definitely drunk and should not have been driving. He was sure not going to talk the cops out of anything. I wanted out of there. Somebody was going to jail and I did not want it to be me. I got out of the car with Lucy and asked the cop if I could walk home with my dog and they said OK. There was nothing I could do to help Sue or Wayne. If I got back to camp at least I could tell Maurice what happened and he could bail them out. It took Lucy and I about a half hour to get back to the camp behind Maurice's house. It was a beautiful clear night and we walked and



Lucy eating off of a newspaper

the bay. There was a red tide which is caused by an algae bloom and there were a lot of dead and dying sea creatures near the shore. I towed a few of the large rays out to deeper water in the hope that they would be able to swim to deeper water. The red tide depletes the water of oxygen and suffocates them. The rays were fascinating creatures. They had this weird leathery skin with primitive wide set eyes. They had long tails with barbs that were supposed to be one of the most painful stings in the world.

I made it back to camp without being stung by a sting ray or bothered by the cops. A few minutes after I got back Sue and Wayne pulled in with the much sought after tacos. Somehow she had talked the cops out of arresting anyone and made it home safely. She was in a hell of a mood. She kept yelling how she was going to sue Taco Bell for slander. Then she tried to get the president of Taco Bell on the phone at three a.m. I stayed out of the whole mess and chowed down on the tacos. They tasted pretty good after all that effort and it had been a long day. I was sure glad I was sleeping in the tent with Lucy. I had about enough of insane female nonsense for a while.

Chapter Four

Destin, Florida to the Alabama Line

Lucy and I hit the road the next day early, even though there was a light rain. I think Maurice had enough of us and all the craziness. I got some cheap rain gear at K-Mart and the rain ~~ed~~ stopped by noon. We made almost thirty miles and camped in a secluded grove of trees right on the Gulf. We were within a hundred miles of the Florida-Alabama line, which would be a real milestone. Somehow we would have to cross Mobile Bay, which was a huge natural obstacle. The interstate went across Mobile Bay past a retired Navy battleship, and then into a very long, very steep, very dangerous tunnel. There was no way I could get Lucy and the bike through there. Just the carbon monoxide would be an issue. The map showed a ferry across the southern end of the bay, but there were no sailing times or prices listed on the map. Also, the map was several years old and I was not sure the ferry still even ran. Still, the tunnel was not an option and we pushed on to Pensacola.

We camped that night behind a shopping center in Pensacola after a fifty-six mile ride. I wanted to get another trailer tire from a bike shop in Pensacola and pushed hard to get there. It is very tough getting free camp spots in big cites. They tend to see you not as an adventurous traveler, but as homeless. I did not want a replay of getting kicked out of a camp. The spot I chose was in dense woods behind a strip mall in a bad area of town, but no one bothered us.

The next morning I did my first load of laundry on the road while I waited for a bike shop to open. There was a real young kid at the bike shop and he hurriedly mounted a new trailer tire and put the wheel back on the trailer. I did not want to admit it but I really did not know how to change a bike tire. I had seen it done and could probably figure it out, but the truth was I did not really know.

The ride out of Pensacola was tough. I was hurting from the long day before and the bike felt like it was going uphill even on level ground. I

stopped to get a cold drink and noticed that the rear inside trailer wheel was leaning at a weird angle. I tipped the trailer and noticed that the wheel was rubbing against the trailer body. The dummy at the bike shop had put the wheel back on so crooked that it rubbed against the trailer. I had a crescent wrench that I bought in Mexico Beach so the problem was easy to fix, but I kept thinking, "what an idiot." It was my first of many encounters with bicycle mechanics.

22

The next day we crossed the Florida-Alabama state line. It was quite a moment. I was not sure how far I was going to get on this trip and having crossed the state line was quite an accomplishment. The goal at this point was to make it to the Pacific Ocean, but that was so far away I could not really imagine making it. At least if I quit in Alabama I had made it across Florida which was something. I stopped and bought Lucy a pack of hot dogs to celebrate. She was doing much better at staying on the cart. When we would pull up to a stop light I would tell her to stay so she did not get confused. I guess the dead dogs really did scare her. It sure beat picking her mangled little corpse off the road and having to camp alone.

We followed the back route of 292 to 192. It was a really small two lane road running right along the water. I asked every one who was sober and had teeth if the ferry was running and how much it cost. I guess wanderlust does not run very strong in southern Alabama, because no one knew anything about the ferry. They would say something like, "Oh, my cousin he done drove down there one time, but he got arrested for DUI, and none of us ever went back." If I lived on a road that ended in a ferry I would at least make sure I knew what the story was, if nothing else so I could get out of there in a hurricane. But these people were obviously going nowhere. Most of them had never left the county.

I finally found a little country store about two miles from the ferry that knew what was going on. The ferry ran every two hours and it was only fifty cents for a bicycle. We pulled into Fort Morgan Florida just as the ferry was leaving. With two hours to kill, I decided to tour the Fort. Fort Morgan sits right at the southern end of Mobile Bay. It is made of huge stone blocks made by slave labor. It is a truly imposing structure, with massive stone walls and beautifully constructed passage ways leading to ammunition bunkers. There were huge cannons strewn about the grounds. I tried to imagine one actually hitting a ship in the vastness of Mobile Bay. I would bet on the ship, especially at night. According to the exhibit at the museum the huge cannons had a propensity to blow up when fired. They had on display the uniform of one of the former commanders who had been blown up by a misfiring cannon. The blast was so powerful that it crushed the medals on the officers uniform. It was quite impressive.

Lucy and I spent several hours looking over the fort and surrounding

grounds. It was another typically hot day with a light breeze. I was looking forward to the ferry boat ride. It would be nice to cover some ground without having to peddle.

I headed back to the dock when I saw the ferry crossing the bay. It was a good size boat. I pushed the bike off to one side to let the cars and trucks board and climbed up to the top of the wheel house where there was a good view and a nice breeze. The captain was very friendly and let Lucy sit in his lap for the trip across the bay. It was a beautiful ride. We had a great view of Mobile Bay and the surrounding countryside. There was a nice cool breeze off the water and I could see lots of huge white jelly fish pulsating in the brownish water of Mobile Bay.

23

The ferry landed on Dauphin Island, Alabama after a twenty minute ride. As usual, I threw Lucy into the bay when we landed for good luck. There was one of those huge RV parks on the island and I decided to treat myself and pay eighteen dollars for a camp spot. It would be worth it just for the showers. I could not believe they would charge eighteen dollars for a tent spot, but they would not come off the price. I told them I did not even need a regular camp spot just a patch of ground somewhere, but they were adamant about the price and I did not feel like arguing or riding on into unknown country that late in the day, and a shower was sure sounding good.

I got the camp set up and took a long shower. I was still not used to being dirty all the time, but this would pass. I met my neighbors who had these giant fifth wheel campers. They invited me in for a beer. If you have never been in one of these things they are amazing. The interior finish is amazing. Better than a lot of site-built houses. The walls expand and contract with the push of a button. There are gourmet kitchens and deluxe master bedrooms. These people considered it a hardship if they arrived late at the campground and had to camp in a spot where they could not properly align their satellite dishes. It's a tough life. Screw them, they had to go back to work on Monday and I was headed west.

I took another long shower that morning and headed out about ten o'clock. There was a huge bridge running from Dauphin Island to the mainland. It was over ten miles long. The wind was blowing hard and it was a tough ride. I stopped at the fishing pier at the end of the bridge. There were a lot of blacks fishing with cane poles. These were not sport fishermen. Unlike their white counterparts with fancy fiberglass poles and two hundred horse power bass boats, if they did not catch anything, they did not eat. We were in the heart of the deep south, only about fifty miles from the Mississippi State line.

From the Dauphin Island causeway we headed inland to Bayou La Batrie, which I believe is the fictional home of Forest Gump. "Life is like a box of chocolates, you never know what your going to get." How true,

especially when traveling.

We hit Highway 90 and crossed into Mississippi on October Second. It was a Sunday and I stopped at a little country bar. The owner had this huge black male Doberman behind the bar so I let Lucy in figuring it was a dog friendly establishment. The bartender asked what I wanted and I told him, "beer, football, and air conditioning." He said he had all three and so we celebrated another state line, even though southern Alabama is a really small state. The big Doberman's name was Lenny. He and Lucy got along fine and he let her eat out of his food bowl. I told Lucy it was her first dinner date. She wagged her tail.

Lenny was trained to buy sausages and bar snacks. He would go up to the locals and beg. Instead of directly feeding him, they would put a dollar in his mouth. He would carry it behind the bar to the owner, who would put the snack into the dog's mouth without unwrapping it. Lenny would then carry it back to the patron who had given him the money and they would unwrap it and feed it to him. It was a pretty cool trick. We spent the day hanging out at the bar. The beer, football, and air conditioning were great after all those hot nights in the tent with Lucy. The owner let me camp behind the bar for the night. There was a huge thunderstorm that night. The little Wal Mart dome tent did not do well in the rain. It leaked, and it tended to collapse in high winds. I could see that I would need a new tent if we hit a lot of bad weather.

We were headed west on Highway 90 which was a busy four lane road. Mississippi has legalized gambling and the area was dotted with large casinos. It was not a good road to ride on. I had wanted to avoid big roads and big cities as much as possible and I started looking for an alternate route. There really was no other way to go until I passed Gulfport. From there I could head north on Highway 49 and then make my way west on the back roads.

Lucy was doing well at the stop lights. I had her trained with hand signals by now. That was she could tell what I wanted even if there was a lot of traffic noise. I would tilt my palm out towards her and say "Stay." She was really good about staying on the cart at stop lights, but as soon as I pulled into a Seven-Eleven, she jumped off immediately, which was fine with me. Somehow she could always tell the difference. Lucy was one of the smartest dogs I have ever been around.

We camped in a military campground without checking in or paying any money. It was all I could find, as the area was getting really urban. It was a really beautiful campground right on the gulf. A couple of hours later the M.P. pulled up. He said someone complained that I did not look, "military". By then it was starting to rain and he said not to worry about it, and that he would tell the complaining party that I was some kind of wacked-out

Vietnam Vet and not to mess with me. I was sure glad I did not have to move. I hated to break camp after I got everything set up. It was a real pain in the ass to pack all the stuff back on the bike and find another spot to camp. I never knew how far the next spot might be. It could be one mile or ten miles. In a car it does not matter. It is just another few minutes drive time. But on a bike it can seem like forever especially if it is hilly or there is a headwind. I spent the rest of the night at the campground without incident.

We were now between Gulfport and Biloxi, Mississippi running west on Highway 90. It was miserable bike-riding country. There was heavy traffic and no shoulder. Free camp spots were getting almost impossible to find and I was getting really tired of the traffic. There was a big antique car show coming into town and the traffic would only get worse. Also, there was a heavy rain storm predicted, with as much as eight inches of rain expected. It was time to find another route across Mississippi. There was a good road running north out of Gulfport and I decided to go for that. I hated to leave the Gulf, but we did not do cities very well. After a huge truck brushed me with his mirror I decided that was it.

We made Biloxi about noon and passed Jefferson Davis' mansion. I am a history buff and could not resist taking the tour. I left Lucy tied to the bike in a shady spot and found a tour in progress and tagged along like I belonged there. The mansion was great. The main building was remarkably well preserved despite its age and damage from several hurricanes. The mansion was directly on the gulf with an incredible view of the water. It was a large two story house with a huge porch running along the front of the house. Along the interior rails of the porch were numerous hooks which were used to hang hammocks. Apparently after the war the mansion was used to house wounded northern Civil War veterans. They stayed in hammocks on the front porch of the former president of the Confederacy while recuperating. Now that is making defeat personal. Jefferson Davis was given a small apartment on the lower floor of the mansion. I can only imagine the humiliation he must have felt at living in that tiny apartment while his beautiful porch was covered with horribly wounded Yankee soldiers. What would he say to them as he passed them in the hallways of the mansion? According to the guide, he spent many of the years after the war in Canada, and I could certainly see why.

Still there was a wonderful sense of history about the place. It was elegantly furnished in the original horsehair furniture of the time, much of it was owned by Jefferson Davis himself. The interior main floor of the mansion had fifteen foot ceilings with ornate painted wood trim in original condition. There were separate eating facilities for the residents and the servants and it was easy to imagine the comings and going of the most famous of the civil war generals. Imagine General Lee riding up on his horse Traveler for a dinner with Nathan Bedford Forrest and his aides. I can only