

Bob Stockdale - Autobiography

I was born and raised in the paradise that got paved. Growing up in Los Angeles in the fifties was a rare privilege. A booming economy based on plentiful, high quality farmland, plenty of water, and lots of easy to get oil kept the crime rate low and paid for the best schools. The kids ran free in the neighborhood, but still spent real time with their parents. From as early as I can remember, I went wherever I wanted, just be home for dinner. It gave me the chance to grow up well educated and very independent. The smell I remember about LA was the smell of oil.

The Los Angeles I grew up in is gone now. We thrived and multiplied and we covered it in asphalt and concrete, flimsy little houses, bright green lawns, and lots of people. It was a sweet piece of cake and we ate it. The oil and gas under Los Angeles made the asphalt, baked the cement and powered the cars and trucks. The houses were built with the West Coast forests. The bright green lawns were watered with the snows of the Sierra Nevada and the Rocky Mountains. Los Angeles was fresh and new. Around 1970, I was standing with my father, 45 stories up above downtown LA, looking out the window to the west, when he said "When I went to UCLA in the '30s, I used to walk from here to the beach through the bean fields". Now the concrete and glass disappeared into the smog in a few miles, but I knew that the big buildings gradually faded into a sea of houses till they met the beach. Today, almost all the oil has been pumped, almost all the forests have been cut, the houses are getting old, and climate change has taken much of the water.

Many of my earliest memories are the times I lived with my grandmother in Tustin in the 1950's. She lived in a stately old mansion surrounded by a wondrous garden in the middle of Southern California's orange groves and avocado orchards. Her second husband made good money building houses for LA's rapidly expanding baby boomer families.

Down the wide front steps in the middle of the veranda and past the circular driveway, across the street to the south, the sidewalk in front of the school was lined with sycamore trees. Within the circular driveway, on the east side were a fish pond and a large star pine that grew thick to the ground. On the west side was a grafted citrus tree with navels, valencias, lemons, and tangerines, and an arbor of pomegranates over the drive. Across the drive from the citrus tree was a large light purple jacaranda tree. On the west side of the house were the rose garden and vegetable garden. The west wall of the house was covered with bougainvillea that grew all the way up to the roof. On the east side of the house were two large avocado trees, a nabal and a fuerte. Avocados never ripen on the tree. They're big and hard when they fall, so we didn't play under the avocado trees. Further east, was the blackberry patch along the brick wall of the outdoor kitchen with a picnic table and barbecue. On its south side was a persimmon tree and more vegetables. In the northeast corner was the lapidary shop behind the garage.

The downstairs ballroom was filled with showcases of gems and minerals and fossils from all around the world. One day my sisters and cousins and I found a big chunk of schist full of little garnets. Schist being a soft rock, the obvious thing to do was pick out the garnets. Our granddad was quite pissed. The dining room table would seat a dozen people and was often full. We only used the fireplace in the living room where we'd roast chestnuts. Upstairs, we'd run and slide down the hallway on coyote skins and then slide

down the banister. The staircase had just the right dimensions for a slinky. The upstairs bedrooms were often filled with sisters and cousins. Mine was the large front room.

The orchards are gone now, paved and covered with people. The last time I saw the house, it was a state historical monument; a stark white house surrounded by bare dirt.

In the early fifties, I played in my dad's large vegetable garden. I learned to run a shovel early in life. I was quite young when I learned that the more work is play and play is work, the better life is. The only things I remember about first grade were that we drove there, the nuns sucked, and one day on the playground, way high in the sky, two planes collided and we watched a parachute taking a long time to drift down. L.A. smog was bad in the fifties. It was black and stung the eyes.

When this new thing called television came out my dad got us one. A few months later it was out the back door. Frivolous waste of time. It was many years later before we got another one and it was very restricted.

From as early as I can remember we ate a lot of fish. Several times each summer my dad would spend a day on a sportfisher out of San Pedro harbor and fill the freezer with tuna. I remember getting up one morning to find a marlin on the front lawn. From the fifties till now, the volume of fish in the waters off the California coast has dropped by about 90%. Now it's hardly worth the diesel to go fishing for tuna and they all contain a bit of mercury and cesium and plastic and all kinds of other byproducts of the industrial revolution.

In the late fifties I roamed the L.A. foothills. A good public school was a fifteen minute walk. I still have the porcelain snack tray I made in second grade. Out the back gate were endless miles of Southern California chaparral to hike in. Now it's all suburbia.

In the early '60's my grandfather had a stroke and died soon after. My grandmother sold the big house and moved to a little house way out in the desert. Apple Valley was empty Joshua Tree desert with a few little houses a mile or two apart. It was about a half mile hike from the house to the Mohave River. Polliwogs and tadpoles, forests of reeds, and cold water in the middle of the hot desert. A wild river in the desert was a fun place for kids to play. Where the cold, snow fed waters of the Mojave River flow out of a deep canyon into the desert there was a trout farm. One day my grandmother took me and my sisters and cousins only to find out that the ponds were drained and they were about to dredge them out. No trout. But what about the bull frogs? Back to the house quick to rig for bull frogs. Brooms and mops and pots on poles; anything to slide under the frogs, flip them up on the bank, where another kid would catch them or run them down. By the end of the day we had dozens of big bullfrogs. A lot more fun than trout for a bunch of kids. Now, Apple Valley is a big city with over a million people.

Through the sixties it was a five minute walk to the beach. The front window looked out over the slough at the mouth of the Tijuana River, and beyond it, the border monument about four miles down a clean, empty beach. Back then it wasn't really a river. There wasn't even an empty stream bed for miles up the valley. The slough was full of wildlife. Lots of birds, lots of clams. I found a pearl in one of the clams. I was careful to give the nesting site of the Plovers a wide berth. Later on, it became a wildlife sanctuary, but now it's full of trash and extremely polluted as most of it's watershed is paved and the floods of climate change have filled it with Tijuana's trash and sewage. My dad and I kept the family in as much fresh fish as we cared to eat and often the neighbors too. We spent many evenings on the beach watching the sun set on the ocean. Now there's so much

pollution in all of Southern California's inshore ocean that I wouldn't eat anything that came out of it. I flew the nine foot kite that hung on my bedroom ceiling with a rod and reel that held a quarter mile of line. A fishing rod with a conventional reel is an excellent tool for flying a kite. As always, I roamed free. My shoes were off at the schoolroom door. Home for a snack, grab a couple of rods and head for the beach. Fish from the beach, fish off the jetty, fish off the pier, or maybe run the beach for clams. Come home with dinner, do my chores, clean up, read till the wee hours of the morning and catch up on sleep at school. There was always a class or two worthy of an hour's sleep. The Southern California school system in the fifties and sixties was fresh and bright, generally well stocked, well-staffed, and well-funded, but there were always a few duds.

My main chores were fishing and burying the compost. The fishing part was easy, the digging part was hard. When we moved to Imperial Beach in the late fifties, the dirt in the back yard was so hard it wouldn't grow a weed. It took hours to soak up an inch of water so you could get a pick in a few inches. Most of the compost was fish guts, just about the best fertilizer there is. Day by day, year by year, we gradually turned it into a lush ¼ acre edible jungle, filled with squash, corn, beans, lettuce, carrots, tomatoes, asparagus, figs, pomegranates, nectarines, oranges, lemons, loquats, kumquats, guavas, and even a mango tree. It was a good lesson in hard work and patience.

We had the hole for the new septic tank about four feet deep when the city decided they could afford a sewer line, but I kept on digging. I hit the beach at about 11 feet and the ocean at 15. With a good solid roof and a foot of dirt, I had my own invisible subterranean room in the back yard. It had a completely different sound environment. Sound travels quite differently underground. It was silent; isolated from the surface noise, but I could hear the train three miles away that I'd never heard before.

About a half mile to the south was the runway for Ream Field, the largest helicopter base in the world. It was a training base, so there were always helicopters in the air. The sound of helicopters was so constant that it was the kind of background noise that never entered your consciousness. Except one day when we looked up to see the crew looking down because the engine quit. They didn't make it.

Every summer, the family would spend a few weeks on my uncle's cattle ranch. He ran a seven section spread in the foothills of the Sierra Nevadas. Uncle Champie was a cowboy. Rodeo team in college; horse cavalry in WWII. If he wasn't on a horse he was in an old Jeep. The hills were full of deer and there were several small lakes full of bluegill and large-mouth bass. My dad would get a deer while I caught as much fish as we could eat. The San Joaquin River ran through one corner of the ranch. It was a jeep ride, then a long hot hike down to the river, but once you were there, it was a very remote and wild bit of paradise. Crystal clear ten foot deep pools full of big, hungry bass and trout. My dad and I fished while the girls swam in the seventy degree water.

Junior High was a mile and a half walk every morning. At the beginning of seventh grade US history, the teacher gave us the textbook. I took it home, read it, and came back the next day only to find out that she planned to spend the semester reading it, so I pulled out a library book and started reading. When she took it away, I just pulled out another book. I could read half a dozen at a time. It was only a few weeks till I had my own desk in the back corner where I could read whatever I wanted; just pass all the tests. Piece of cake.

I had a study hall every day at the library which was very well stocked with all the best science fiction. Read for an hour, take it home, finish it, bring it back the next day, put it back, and start another. By the time they realized that I never bothered to waste time checking out a book, precedent was set and not a word was ever said. Or maybe they never even noticed. I often read a book a day during the school year for several years.

Eighth grade woodshop was a complete new shop with all the tools and lots of quality wood. If you chopped some fingers off, tough luck. Good example for the class. No one did. I still have both my woodshop projects.

Ninth grade metal shop was also new, well equipped, and well taught. Lots of forges and welders and a variety of steel in stock. We built little electric motors from scratch, and I still have the rock hammer I made.

One period every day, I picked up a movie and a projector and showed a film to some class. Those were the days of reel-to-reel celluloid. I always made an effort to get there first for the best choice and I got to watch lots of good educational stuff.

In high school my reading changed from science fiction to the classics. I was still often reading several books a week.

Tenth grade biology class had a hands-on teacher and a great lab where we spent most of the semester looking through microscopes and watching things grow.

My senior year in high school, a group from a think tank in La Jolla picked thirty kids from a school of three thousand, stuck us in the cafeteria, split us up into groups of three and gave us ten very complete countries to run full time for a week. Each country had its own different size, population, economy, resource base, political structure, and military. It was a very well designed and intricate game. It offered many insights into politics and human personalities. By the end of the week, there were only nine countries left. War came quickly to our little world. It was a great hands-on lesson in government.

My senior year, just about everything I turned in, including term papers, was done in poetry.

In all my years of school I never did homework unless it was something that interested me. School was over at the schoolhouse door. It took an immense amount of stubborn to convince my parents, but I had plenty of stubborn.

When I entered high school, I was five foot seven and weighed 90 pounds. I was a skinny kid and my ears stuck out, but our pole vaulting coach worked us hard, and three years later I was two inches taller and 60 pounds of muscle heavier.

My seventeenth and eighteenth summers, I worked on the local sportfishing boats. Long days and low pay, but I got to fish a lot. Up at three, walk a mile to the pier, put the skiff in and go get the boats moored a half mile off the beach. Get home about seven in the evening. Occasionally, I'd just sleep on the boat.

Loading passengers was adventurous when the swells were big. We power docked against a spring line alongside the pier on the open ocean. Power up the swell, coast down the back side. Up and down, forward and back, and in and out was as much as 6 feet. We would load and unload up to 40 people three times a day. One day I found myself holding on to someone's head while the guy on the dock held his feet and the fat guy in the middle held his big ice chest. We all waited to see what the ocean would do and everything turned out ok. It was only a few years after I left that the insurance companies found out what was going on and shut it down, but it was fun while it lasted.

Twice a day to the Coronado Islands to catch yellowtail, barracuda, bonito, bass, the occasional tuna, and lots of sculpin. Sculpin were tasty little critters, but they were covered with sharp spines surrounded by a very painful poison. A bad prick was worth a trip to the hospital. One day a rowdy little kid was running wild around the boat and fell on a gunny sack full of sculpin. Jay didn't hesitate for a moment before calling the Coast Guard. 'Get a chopper out here and get this kid off my boat'. After that, we were more careful. All the sculpin got a haircut before they came aboard.

One day when the bite at the islands was nonexistent, there was a report of some albacore about five miles further out. For a half day boat, it meant we'd get in less than two hours of trolling and fishing time. It was a long shot, but the passengers were up for it, so we gave it a try. We found them and were busy catching fish when suddenly this humongous submarine surfaced about a hundred feet away. The skipper was pissed because he was stuck fishing the islands all summer and never got to fish tuna and the sub had blown the bite to hell and gone, so he pulled out the twelve gauge and broadsided the sub. Purely symbolic. The sub was a wall of steel about 30 feet tall. The guys looking down from the sub went below and they left.

In the evenings we made a three hour run to the Tijuana kelp beds to catch mostly bass, bonito, barracuda and the occasional halibut. One nice warm evening we found ourselves with a boatload of moms and kids in the middle of a hungry school of 24 inch squid. Squid are the jets of the ocean and every time a kid would pull one to the surface they'd catch a cup of water in the face every few seconds till we got it aboard, or maybe someone on the other side of the boat would catch it in the back. Everyone on the boat was soaking wet. It was a very fun evening.

Sometimes I'd work the tuna boat, mostly galley. The Sea Scout was a sweet boat. She was 50 foot, lightweight, with an open bridge, very shallow drafted, very maneuverable, quite seaworthy, and from the forward end of the bait tank aft to the stern, the deck was about 4 inches off the water. She'd do 12 knots and burned about half as much fuel as the rest of the boats in the fleet. The galley held about six people; everyone else slept on the cold wet deck and the engine cover, so most of the passengers were dedicated, competent fishermen and sometimes women. She was a fine fishing boat.

They don't put headlights on boats. One morning, headed west about 20 miles out, under a moderate marine layer, just before false dawn, I had wheel watch while everyone else on the boat was fast asleep. Wheel watch amounted to sitting on the life raft on top of the boat just aft and above the wheel in total darkness except for the running lights and the aft deck light while the autopilot took us where we wanted to go. It was a nice quiet time. Suddenly I found myself diving headfirst for the wheel and spinning it hard as the big drift log disappeared under the bow. I never saw it again, as I was busy making sure I hadn't dumped anyone overboard. We missed it by inches. It would have sunk us in seconds. I saw it in the reflection from the running lights. I was glad it was me at the wheel. I had excellent night vision and very quick reflexes, and the Scout had a very shallow draft and a big rudder. The true demise of the Titanic was its tiny little rudder, although a rudder big enough to actually maneuver the long, skinny, very weak ship would have likely ripped it in half.

Before albacore season, we ran the Sea Scout ¾ day to the islands. One day, anchored at Pukey Point, the skipper was working on something in the engine compartment when he dropped a wrench across the battery and blew it up, which meant that we had no

electricity on the boat, not even for the radio. Those were the days before cell phones. Lynn ran up some flags and after a while the Malahini came over to see what was up. The Malahini was an old converted PT boat that navy recreation used as a sportfisher. Tall, skinny, rolling tub of a boat. Lynn asked them for a tow so we could start the engine. ? 671, straight six, 2 stroke GMC diesel. While we were waiting, Lynn had pulled the valve cover and we shimmed the valves open with dimes to take the compression off the engine. It was a neat trick. We strung out two lengths of good half inch nylon rope and the Malahini took off. I immediately saw what was about to happen and made a run for the stern just in time. She was going way too fast. The nylon rope stretched a lot before it snapped and two fifty foot lengths of rope ended up embedded in the forward bulkhead. Next time they were more careful, and sure enough, as we picked up speed, the engine started spinning, we pulled out the dimes, and we were under way. Sure beat a 12 mile tow into the harbor.

Pukey Point was so named because the underwater ridge that ran out from the north end of the Coronado Islands pushed up a tall steep swell. It was where the big yellowtail hung out. There were usually three or four boats there. One afternoon when Lynn said 'Hey Bob, pull the hook and lets go home', I threw a few wraps of the anchor rope around the capstan and we tugged for about a half hour this way and that till Lynn said 'Tie it off. It'll come or it'll stay.' It came, and when we got it on deck it was hung on a solid 4 foot ball of nylon fishing line.

There was an eloquent little poem in the head on the Sea Scout. "Be a man, not a kid. Hit the pot, not the lid."

Seasickness is a constant on a sportfisher. Seasickness is a sort of stress reaction to the argument between your eyes and the vestibular system in your inner ear. For those prone to the affliction, there are tricks to minimizing seasickness. One is to maintain an awareness of horizon. The horizon agrees with your ears. Below deck is just for sleeping. Sometimes I had to work galley. Just after first light, running diagonally into a five foot swell, down in the cabin full of cigarette smoke, serving coffee and frying bacon and eggs, what kept me from serving my own breakfast was the little window in the port bulkhead that let me see the horizon. Another trick is never get on the boat with a full stomach. If you take a motion sickness pill, take some the night before and more a few hours before you get on the boat. The trick for dealing with an obnoxious passenger was to get a live anchovy from the bait tank and eat it in front of him to see if you could get him hanging over the rail for the rest of the day.

There's an art to fishing that only a few are really good at. The only person I knew who could out fish me was Jimmy Darland. Jimmy even caught a silver salmon in Mission Bay. The only reason he caught more yellowtail was that he was quicker to switch from jigs to bait when the bite changed. With an eight inch solid aluminum jig, 40 pound test line, and a rod that can bounce a 25 pound fish without waiting for a gaff, you can put a lot of fish on the boat in a hurry, but sometimes they just like bait.

Some days they don't like anything. No one really knew why sometimes the fish just wouldn't bite. It wasn't a local event, because it usually encompassed similar ecosystems for hundreds of miles and could change overnight. That's when you see who can really fish. One day, when the chatter on the radio was that not a boat in the fleet with almost a thousand people fishing had even a single fish, Lynn parked us over the sand spit on the windward side of South Island. It wasn't a common place to find fish, but it was a nice

place to sit and soak bait. There was nothing to do, so I was up in the bow yo-yoing a big white jig just off the bottom. It wasn't something you'd normally ever do. The hours went by in boredom till just about time to go home when I got bit. 30 pound yellowtail; maybe the only fish in the fleet that day. It was a good lesson in life. When nothing's happening, try something different and have patience.

Sometimes fishing was for food, sometimes it was just for fun. One day out on the pier, I dragged this old broken piece of fishing rod off the bottom. It was just a four foot piece of cheap fiberglass, but with some paper clips and tape for guides and a one dollar reel [no free spool, no drag except your thumb, about fifty yards of 15 pound test] it turned into a toy to play with the little fish at the kelp beds. One evening at the Tijuana kelp beds, we're catching a few little calico bass and some little barracuda, when suddenly I'm bit and I know right away that I've got the fifty dollar jackpot if I can get it on the boat. Feels like a big bonito. With only my thumbs to slow it down, every time it made a run, if I was in the stern were I could reach the water, I was over the side hanging by my knees so I could get the reel underwater. I still blistered both thumbs and it took a long time, but an 11 pound bonito is a lot of feisty fish, and fifty bucks was a lot of money back then. There are still fish around the islands, but only a small fraction of what there used to be. The heyday of the sport fishing fleet is over now. It's not worth the diesel to chase the few little fish that are left.

When I was 16, my grandmother bought a '62 Volkswagen Bus. Very clean, very stock Westfalia. That summer my dad borrowed it and we took a family vacation up the east side of the Sierra Nevadas. We spent a few days camped at Lee Vining Creek. I was hooked.

The next summer I caught a ride up to Yosemite and took off over Tioga Pass on my ten speed. Coming straight from sea level, 50 miles of extreme up and down at seven to ten thousand feet was my introduction to exertion at high altitude. The east side of Tioga Pass is several miles of very steep, twisting, narrow road blasted into the side of barren rock. 10 thousand to 6 thousand feet in about 6 miles. They were just prepping it for its first pavement and it was all gravel. A bit challenging for a loaded road bike. About half way down, the brakes went out, so I laid the bike down and waited for the rims to cool so I could adjust the calipers. Caught a ride up the hill on the way back.

The next summer, fresh out of high school, I loaded up the pack I'd built from the pieces of a broken fiberglass pole vault pole and took off for the high country. After delaying a week at my uncle's cattle ranch just south of Yosemite waiting for the snow plows to clear Tioga Pass for the summer, on the 15'th of June I headed into the mountains west of Mono Lake. A few miles up Mill Creek from Mono Lake, Lundy Lake sat in a deep canyon at 2,395 m [7,858 ft.] A hundred years earlier it had been a town of around 3,000 people supporting the silver mine another 2,000 feet up the mountain, but almost all traces of the town were long gone. Above the lake, the beaver had terraced the valley into many acres of continuous beaver ponds full of brook trout. They left just enough trees for shade. The beavers had a beautiful home. After a day catching all the trout I could eat, I took off up the mountain and spent the next few weeks mostly above 10,000 feet; climbing mountains, catching a few trout, and freezing my ass off every night.

In the late sixties, the trade winds coming off the pacific at that altitude were sometimes so clear that, if you were at the bottom of a deep canyon, you could still see a

few stars several hours after sunrise. That was before industrial China. The night sky was many thousands of stars in a multitude of individual colors. When it's dark and clear enough, the night sky is not black. It's a very far away, pale white.

The bluff southwest of Lundy Lake was about 3,000 feet of almost vertical cliff overlooking the beaver ponds. One afternoon, I sat out on the edge watching two golden eagles about a thousand feet below, circling above the beaver ponds checking out lunch. From high above the valley you could still see the outlines of the stone foundations of the old town.

The top of Mt. Warren has a beautiful view. At an elevation of 3,757 m {12,327 ft}, it looks out across the caldera that's Mono Lake, the cinder cones to the south of the lake, and out across the Nevada desert to the White Mountains in the distance. Mono Lake, the valley to its south, and under the bowl at Mammoth are one of the three largest volcanoes on the planet. The 1,000 foot cinder cones south of the lake are only hundreds of years old. One afternoon, boulder hopping down the side of Mt. Warren, I jumped onto a ten by twenty foot slab and it promptly took off down the mountain. It was an exciting ride for about forty feet.

On the third of July, I came out to highway 395 just north of Mono Lake and spent the afternoon watching guys and their chicks headed for Reno at 70 mph. The next morning, I got a ride to Bridgeport in the back of a pickup with a bunch of Native Americans from a local tribe. Bridgeport was a very isolated, rural town, mostly ranchers and some tourist trade. Bridgeport Lake had big coldwater trout. Their 4th of July was greased pigs running all over town and a hundred dollar bill atop the greased flagpole next to the courthouse. There was lots of good homemade food, drink, and music, and a good time was had all around. It took the kids all day to wear the grease off the flagpole.

That evening I got a ride up to Twin Lakes and in the morning I was back up the mountain. After a steep 2,000 foot climb I came out on a snowfield that stretched for miles. A summer snowfield can be a treacherous place to travel. Every little bug wing or piece of bark or pine needle melts a hole in the snow till you find yourself hopping from ice hummock to ice hummock with a half meter ankle twister in between. This is when I learned that anything with color converts sunlight to infrared and melts snow. By midday I was in the trees where the shade kept the snow softer and flatter, but it was too deep to tell where the stream was. I had to cross it, so I moved out slow and careful, and when I fell through, I was ready for the six foot fall into the creek. After a brief rest and lunch on the divide, I dropped into the West Walker River watershed. I was soon below the snow line to where the mosquitoes live. Mosquitoes in the Sierra Nevada are quite small and are done with their life cycle in just a few weeks after the snow melts, but during those few weeks they can just about eat you alive. You can find yourself taking a dozen bites a minute just on your face. Since I was barefoot, bareheaded, and barehanded, walking was no longer an option, but a steady jog kept the bites to a minimum and after about 4 miles I was below them.

The next obstacle was the headwaters of the West Walker River, which was in full flood. I had to cross it, and when I found a log jam about 20 yards across, it was easier than I thought. The next crossing a few miles downstream was a different story. The log over the gorge was just barely above the raging torrent, and it was wet and very slick. Slow and careful and lots of adrenaline. I kept moving until dark and slept well that night. I'd covered about 25 miles that day.

The next morning I caught a ride over Sonora Pass down to Yosemite Valley in the jump seat of a Porsche Speedster. After a good hot shower, I spent the evening with my sister who worked in the valley and got used to civilization again. The next morning, I went over to the employment office at Curry Company. It was a long shot, as the waiting line to work in Yosemite was generally many months or even years, but luck was on my side. The dishwasher quit. That afternoon I was back in the high country washing dishes at the coffee shop at Tuolumne Meadows; elevation 2,600 m [8,600 ft]. Twenty stools around the counter, two sets of dishes, hand wash.

My one year in college came during the middle of the Vietnam War. Some of us majored in political radical, smoked a lot of pot, and ate a lot of LSD. The war in Vietnam was becoming a very obvious mistake. The U.S. was on the wrong side of a proxy war. We were a constant pain in the ass for the very conservative college administration. One day Jack walked into the student union building at lunch time with a baby carriage and a big doll and napalmed it. Another time some friends from the Dada Club asked for my help in sabotaging the dean of student activities who was acting as a dictator over the student council. They wanted me to run for homecoming queen. I got as far as the group photo, dressed in my usual college attire of long hair, sport coat, blue jeans and slippers, which made the front page of the county's biggest newspaper. At that point, the dean of student activities went so ballistic he got himself canned. The ploy was a complete success, so I quietly dropped out. It was good for a laugh. I didn't have much use for college and after a year we parted by mutual consent.

During my year in college my grandmother gave me the Volkswagen Bus. One of the first things we did with it was take it out to the sand dunes west of Yuma. We found ourselves driving down the long steep canyon on the back side of the mountains east of San Diego in the middle of a winter wind storm with 60mph winds howling down the canyon. We'd stop every time we were about to cross the canyon and everyone would line the wall to windward. By the time we got across, the wind had pushed us to the far side of the road. The next morning we got up, ate a good breakfast, dropped a thousand mikes of acid, smoked a whole lot of pot while we came on, and went off to explore the dunes. After the night's cold dry windstorm, the dunes were fresh and very fluffy. The lee sides were unclimbable. You could walk into the sand till you were in past your waist, but you wouldn't go up. There were only three sand buggies out that day. The first one we came across was a tiny VW powered machine. Early 1960's bug stripped to just the drivetrain, center tube, two fiberglass seats with parasols, and disk wheels and skids to steer with. It didn't have much horsepower; they'd have to spiral out of the doodlebug holes, but it was an extremely inexpensive and low impact way to travel the dunes. That evening we hitched a ride on a five passenger sand rail powered by a mid engine 426 Chrysler Hemi driving big dual tires. There were four of us and two of them, so I rode the back of the roll cage with a good view of the whole show. It was my first introduction to rocketry. They'd put it in high gear and dig into the lee side of a big dune. When enough tons of sand were going down, we went up and climbed the dune. With 600 horsepower and straight pipes spitting fire into the night, it was a fun show. The total epitome of pure waste. Now the dunes are covered with sand toys by the thousands.

Driving through the canyon in a windstorm made it obvious that Volkswagen hadn't put enough rubber under their vans. The first of many modifications was to cut out the wheel well covers and put on larger rims and tires.

As I moved into the bus, it was quickly obvious that the Westfalia camper stuff used up about a third of the interior, so I stripped it to the bare shell, built in a permanent bed, and everything became modular. Those were the days when a joint could get you a few years in the pen, LSD could get you 20, and long hair was sufficient cause for a strip search, so a well designed stash spot was a necessity.

On weekends we'd head for the mountains and trip in the woods, sometimes in my VW bus, sometimes in Jack's old panel truck. A day in the woods was often climbing a mountain, sitting on top for a while, then running down.

One weekend it was Cuyamaca peak. The San Diego River basin fans out to an escarpment overlooking a good part of Southern California. At its apex is Cuyamaca Peak, elevation 1,985 m [6,512 feet]. Sitting on the edge of the escarpment, in a little stand of windswept cedars, we watched the Swifts playing with the updraft from a steady west wind. They'd ride the updraft way up out of sight, then power dive down and streak through the trees almost too fast to see, climb back into the updraft, and do it again. Visibility that day was more than 500 miles. From just north of the Mexican border, we could see the entire Sierra Nevada range till it dropped below the horizon in Northern California, but all we could see were the peaks, because there was a strong inversion layer over all of Southern California. From Ensenada to Santa Barbara, it looked like the surface of a completely opaque, completely level brown lake. Palomar Observatory, elevation 1,712 m [5,617 feet], was about 200 feet above the surface of the smog. Felt sorry for the millions of people down there choking on 90 degree smog.

Later in the afternoon, we took off running down the mountain. Running down the mountain on a lot of LSD and pot is only for those with young healthy bodies and strong bones. LSD, in combination with a lot of pot, allows a control of the human body and an awareness of environment far more enhanced than normal human consciousness. Consciousness is focused in the moment. You can run like a deer. Dangerous, but a lot of fun if you don't screw up.

Rounding a corner on a little deer trail, I encountered a large oak tree recently fallen across the trail. Stopping was not an option, so I picked the first opening in the leaves, which was about eight feet off the ground, did a tight little 360 tuck and roll through the opening and hit the ground running. A bit further on, a family of four hiking up the trail watched four of us appear out of the woods, cross the trail in front of them in single twenty foot bounds, and disappear into the woods again. The day being warm and dry, we got thirsty, so we found some water. It was just a little seep spring, but the half inch of water between the mud and the green scum was clear and sweet.

One fall weekend, Brad and I took off to explore Mt. Palomar. Mid morning, sitting under an oak tree smoking a joint, when suddenly Brad jumped up as the fire in his lap almost exploded in the dry oak leaves. No flames, just shimmering heat and black ash. We grabbed our jackets and beat it down in just a few seconds, but the black spot was about six feet across. Later in the day, higher up the mountain in the conifers I found myself about fifty feet above the trees looking out over the mountain and down to the sea. Don't know where Brad was, but our bodies were lying down there under a tree.

Next summer at Tuolumne Meadows I worked at the lodge where we put up about a hundred people a night in tent cabins without electricity. There was a generator for the kitchen; everything else was kerosene lamps and Coleman lanterns. I worked two nights as night watchman, two afternoons as evening porter, one morning as morning porter,

slept in the mornings and skipped one. It gave me an extra day every week. I'd take off for the high country when I got off work at midday and spend the next few days fishing the high lakes and climbing mountains. Or maybe I'd head for Reno or San Francisco.

The only permanent buildings at the lodge were the kitchen and the showers. The dining hall was a tent on a slab, everything else was wood floored tent cabins. With a typical snow pack of about 20 feet and a lot of wind drift, a permanent building wasn't worth the effort. All the employees bunked in tent cabins and ate at the side hall, but I lived in my bus and had my own kitchen. I was vegan at the time.

All food at Tuolumne Meadows that wasn't bear-proofed belonged to the bears, and bear proof ain't easy. One day, some of the employees were playing cards in one of the tent cabins, when a bear walked in and took the cookies off the table. Cars are not bear-proof. Broken windows and mangled doors were a common occurrence. The bears certainly knew that I had a full kitchen in my bus, including an open five gallon can of honey, but they left me alone.

There were lots of bears living around Tuolumne Meadows. Because I was nocturnal and worked outdoors two nights a week, I spent a lot of time around the bears. At the lodge, the bear's turf was focused on the trash cans and the dumpsters, and we kept respectfully to ourselves. My light stick was a leather clad six volt sealed beam slung over my shoulder. One morning, a bit after first light, I was running around finishing the nightshift's chores when I ran into a bear just as I was rounding the corner of the lodge. Literally. Surprised us both. Bears have incredibly fast reflexes and extreme acceleration. They can go from zero to twenty in about a second. The bear was already leaving by the time my brain had processed the event.

The best place to watch the bears was the campground in the morning. The bears would hang out in the woods, just out of sight, sampling the menu until breakfast was served. The next best place was the dump. If you hitched a ride on the garbage run, you'd find yourself standing on a little flatbed truck surrounded by a half dozen or so very large bears.

Somewhere in the world I have a twin. One afternoon, a pretty girl came around the corner of a tent cabin, ran up, jumped right on and gave me a hot passionate kiss. When she finally realized I wasn't who she thought I was, a gracious thank you eased her embarrassment.

The biggest part of my job was servicing a fleet of Coleman lanterns and kerosene lamps. The lanterns and the generator for the kitchen ran on white gas from an underground tank. It wasn't till many years later that I found out that the dust from changing many Coleman lantern mantles every day in a little shed contained a bit of radioactive thorium.

One hot, sunny, windless afternoon, in the yard between the kitchen loading dock and the lantern shed, I came across two of the girls from the lobby. One was cranking the handle on the white gas pump from the underground tank while the other was out in the middle of the yard cleaning a paintbrush. Realizing the danger if someone came around the corner smoking a cigarette, I saw my chance as they walked off and did the obvious best thing to eliminate the danger. I tossed a match. The twenty foot fireball drew a lot of attention and I had a hard time convincing the boss that the best thing to do was to not put it out. The girl with the paintbrush went white as a sheet.

One afternoon after work, I took off for Young Lakes. It was about a six mile hike. I could make it in time to maybe catch a few trout before dark. The years I was there, the ice on Young Lakes didn't clear till late August or early September, so the trout were very skinny. As I topped Ragged Pass and looked down on the three beautiful hanging lakes a thousand feet below on the side of the canyon, I could already see and hear the mosquitoes. Plan B. That evening, camped a bit east of the pass, I watched the blue electrostatic fog glowing at the base of the cliff as the sky filled with stars and a full moon. The next morning as I ate breakfast I watched the full moon set alongside Ragged Peak, then headed up the mountain to climb Mount Conness; elevation 3,855 m [12,590 ft], with a 450 m [1,200 ft] vertical west face. The Sierra Nevadas are a very new mountain range. Solid granite; very steep and very hard. Best climbing rock in the world. For me, the west face was for throwing rocks, not climbing. Working in Yosemite, I met a lot of rock climbers, but I never saw the purpose of taking the hard way when going around achieved the same result.

That afternoon, in a little meadow on the divide, I watched a puffy little cloud floating by in the clear blue sky, when, in just a few minutes, it fell as hail and was gone. A bit later, standing in the saddle, looking out over the Nevada desert, I saw two little specs low in the sky. A few seconds later, the grass in the meadow went flat, the shock wave rocked me back on my heels, and two jets went over my head about a hundred feet up at about a thousand miles an hour.

Because of the shape of the range, the Sierra Nevada has very powerful weather. One night, in the middle of June, I needed to get into the water heater shed. This required a hammer, an ice pick, and a torch to get the ice off the lock and thaw it out. One day in July, they had to get out the snowplows to get several feet of hail off the pass. The tops of the peaks are all eroded from many thousands of lightning strikes. The weather can change in an instant. I was sitting on top of an 11,000 ft peak one day under a bright blue sky when, in just a few minutes, the clouds built, the thunder rolled, and I was boulder hopping down the mountain with lightning at my heels.

One afternoon in the middle of June at about 11,000 feet, I was traversing across the lower end of a small glacier in a foot of fresh snow, when I broke through and found myself rapidly accelerating onto an extremely steep sheet of hard blue ice. This was not good. I was going to be doing about sixty when I launched over the ten foot melt face into the boulder field at the bottom of the ice chute. But luck was on my side and about thirty feet from the edge was a tiny patch of rock and dirt and on that little spot of dirt was a little lodge pole pine about six feet tall. I stretched as far as I could off to the side and just barely got my fingers around the trunk. I spun around it 360 degrees and then another 180, but I hung on. From there it was a manageable slide and jump. As I gathered up my stuff, I noticed that my thumb didn't work. My cold hands hadn't felt it yet, but I had driven a little blunt ended twig from the tree trunk right into the joint at the base of my thumb, just like you'd peg a lobster. Thank you Little Tree for saving my ass. Those were the days before sunscreen, so the next day my whole face peeled a layer of sun burnt skin. The glacier is long gone now.

The next fall, I was back in San Diego looking around for something to do when my friend Jack called and asked me for some help starting a craft store in Long Beach. Jack had a hundred bucks, some food stamps and a few friends to help, and I had some gas money [gas was as cheap as 19 cents and the VW Bus got 23mpg]. Jack spent the

hundred bucks on a month's rent on a little real estate office at the edge of suburbia, a half hide of good latigo, and a bottle of dye. We scrounged the construction sites for scrap lumber, scorched the surface, wire brushed it to bring out the grain and built some shelves, got a few paintings and some jewelry on consignment, and cut the hide into purses and belts with pocket knives. Jack carved a sign, and we opened The Artery. It was the right place at the right time, and it took off. So did I. My talents are in creating, not in maintaining, so I didn't stick around.

Long Beach is built on a big mud flat at the edge of the ocean. When they first started to pump the oil out from under Long Beach, it started sinking into the ocean. Their answer was to replace the oil with sea water. Long Beach jiggles just a bit. Good luck when the big one hits. The pervasive smell in Long Beach was oil. Spread out over much of the Los Angeles basin there were oil wells in parking lots, behind the church, in back yards, in the middle of farms, and just about anywhere. Los Angeles still pumps about half of the oil it uses, but it's just about gone.

The next summer at Tuolumne Meadows was another season of hiking the back country and climbing mountains. One evening, I was watching the sun set from the middle of Dana Meadow, just west of Tioga Pass. As the sun went down, the frost line flowed down the meadow turning it white about as fast as a person could walk. I watched the stars come out and as I turned to leave, I dropped a little red and brown speckled pill in the tall grass. Someone had given it to me a few days before. It was a psychedelic somewhat similar to mescaline. It was too dark to find it, so I took my bearings and came back in the morning, picked it up, ate it and climbed Mount Dana; elevation 3,981m [13,061 ft]. Peyote and mescaline were never my favorite drugs, but there were lessons to be learned. That summer I had a nice stash of psilocybin done in very pure little blue pills. Psilocybin is a fun, happy psychedelic. The biggest side effect from psilocybin is a sore face the next day from grinning so much.

That was the summer when I blew my first engine. I'd been down to San Diego to visit my parents and do some shopping. On the way back, I dropped a valve head through a piston in East L.A. at one in the morning with eight bucks in my pocket. It took four days to gather up enough money for a used engine, put it in and get back to work at Tuolumne.

By fall, the Artery had moved to the posh Belmont Shore shopping district, was supporting six people full time, and was sending money north to River Bend Gallery and Studio. Jack and two of his friends from college had bought an old abandoned building a hundred miles north of San Francisco on Highway 101. Forty bucks a month for six years. As best we could tell, back in the thirties when they were building the highway, it had been built as a brothel for the crew. Upstairs had been a dance floor; downstairs was the brothel. Someone had built a four bedroom house on the dance floor and the downstairs had been abandoned. The flood marks were two feet up the walls. Just north of Cloverdale, Highway 101 was built on the side of a deep gorge cut by the Russian River. As the highway came out of the gorge it crossed the bridge over the creek and curved through a little valley that spread out into vineyards, orchards, and woodlands. In the middle of the curve, if you pulled over and parked on the wide gravel shoulder of the highway, you entered River Bend upstairs. The highway was banked right into the building. The trucks going by would gently vibrate the whole building. A few of them were carrying 12 foot diameter redwood logs.

It was a massive building. The walls were 12 inches of poured concrete, 20 feet tall. The dance floor joists were 16 foot 4X12's on each side of a 60 foot 10X10 center beam lap spliced in four sections. The wood was from big, old, virgin douglas fir forest. One day, as we finished stripping the downstairs bare and got ready to pour a slab, I looked up from what we were doing to notice that Jack and I were alone in the building, but there was a small crowd watching from the windows. After stripping out all the little rooms downstairs, the only thing holding up the dance floor, the four bedroom house, the old flat roof, and the pitched roof, were three redwood 4X4 posts. If you put your hand on them, you could feel them quivering. With just a few bottle jacks, we were shoring up the beam and replacing the posts and corbels.

We poured the 30 by 60 foot slab downstairs in a 15 by 15 foot checkerboard in two pours. We were up late the night before, finishing the form work, expecting the first truck at 10 the next morning. The first truck rolled us out of bed at 7. We were a bunch of hippies moving into redneck country and they were just messing with us to see what we were worth. As the driver was backing up to a window, suddenly the back of the truck began to sink. The driver was quick with the gears and throttle and barely averted turning the truck into a very expensive piece of yard art sticking out of the long abandoned and completely invisible septic tank with a redwood top in the side yard. He moved over to the next window, stuck the chute in, opened it wide open and walked off, leaving us to handle a full truckload all at once. In seconds, I was two feet deep in concrete, shoveling it out to the wheelbarrow crews. We pulled it off, and the slab turned out excellent. After that we got along ok with the local folk.

By winter, the downstairs studio had a very complete leather shop, three potters wheels, a large glaze lab and a bisque kiln, a variety of sewing machines ranging from little treadle machines to big industrial machines, a loom, a radial arm saw, a wood lathe, lots of woodworking tools, an arc welder and a gas welder. Outside were a forge and a large oil fired kiln.

My role at River Bend was to build things and keep everything operational. Get up about 11am, grab a quick shower, throw a handful of various grains in the flour mill in the pantry, back to the bus for a bowl of hot cereal smothered in honey, and merge with the crew just after their lunch. My lunch came while everyone else was eating dinner. Sunflower seeds, sesame seeds, chia seeds, and coconut, toasted in a pan and smothered in honey. After lunch, I'd socialize with the wide variety of people who were always coming and going. Mostly I'd stand back and watch the human interplay. After everyone had gone to bed, I had the whole studio to myself till sunrise, when I'd watch the sun come up and go to bed. I only ate twice a day and I ate the same amount of the same thing at the same time every day for months. I didn't use money for weeks at a time. If I needed gas money I'd make a pot or a purse and put it in the gallery. On Sunday I'd take a hike in the rolling hills and fast except for the local wild greenery. The rolling hills and oak forest behind River Bend were full of little coast mule deer and in the winter the creek was full of steelhead. I was vegan at the time, but I was also the butcher.

River Bend was an extremely high energy place. The door was open to anyone who cared to pitch in, but most people only lasted about a week before leaving in some sort of severe agitation. The energy level was just too intense.

Richard was a typical 60s chauvinist, always hassling the girls. About once a week, the girls would take the laundry to the laundromat in Ukiah. One day all of Richard's clothes came back pink.

That winter, the Pineapple Express parked over us and it rained sixty inches in three months. It never rained all that hard, it just rained all the time. In the summer, the river was about two feet deep and thirty feet across as it ran through the vineyards and pear orchards on the other side of the highway. That winter, it was thirty feet deep and a quarter mile across. The roar of the river where it entered the gorge about a mile downstream was the constant background noise. It wasn't that unusual. We only needed one row of sand bags. There were flood marks on the walls that were several feet high. The diving rock at the swimming hole up the creek was as big as a house, but in the spring it was in a different place. Life was an indoor affair. With all those toys to play with, I didn't mind.

There was really no way to keep the building warm. It was just too big. The walls were uninsulated and the only insulation in the ceiling was about four inches of bat shit. River Bend had its own bat colony. In the middle of the shop was a nice barrel stove, but it wasn't nearly enough. We got it so hot one day that we melted the stove pipe. It was the dampness more than the cold. I don't remember even a frost that winter.

The open fireplace was the center of the social scene. Jack had hauled a five foot spherical anchor buoy up from Long Beach. We cut it open from the center-line down, leaving a fire bowl and three pillars, welded two tire rims on the bottom and set it in the slab. Climbing inside with the sixteen pound sledge to pound out the dent in 3/8 plate steel was an auditory adventure. The chimney was twenty five feet of eleven inch stovepipe. One day the girls were making candles when they spilled a gallon of fully melted wax into a big bed of hot coals. With flames soaring out the top of the chimney, it was roaring so loud it shook the floor. Fun show, but no candles.

One day, in a little shop in Berkeley, I found a pound and a half of the finest white goose down and a pound of pure indigo. In another shop, I found the rip-stop nylon, baffle netting, and velvet to go with it. I traded the indigo for a little treadle sewing machine and started building a parka. Along with the parka, I started making a pair of hiking boots. Thick, soft, white leather, vibram soles, blind welt. They lasted long enough to wear a set of good vibram soles completely bald. Best boots I ever had.

That winter was when I learned to weld. My first project was a Franklin stove for the bus, made from an old Firestone tire sign. It hung on the bulkhead behind the front seats, so you could sit on the bed in front of the fire. Next came a Franklin style fireplace for my parent's house made from a 55 gallon drum and a refrigerator shelf.

After several years of taking large amounts of many kinds of drugs, I got to the point where I didn't need to take anything. With so much stuff to play with, I didn't have time. Everyone at Riverbend quickly learned to stand back a bit. I was moving way too fast. I never walked. Everything was done on the run. Most people's first impression was that I was on some sort of powerful speed, but I didn't need anything to hold that pace. I gradually wound up to the point where I would forget to eat or sleep for days. There were so many fun things to play with.

By mid winter the fireplace for my parents was ready, so I took off for home. About one in the morning, south of Bakersfield, driving into a cold hard rain, I picked up a hitch hiker. He didn't have his thumb out; he was standing in the middle of the road trying to

wave his arms. He'd been there a while and he wasn't dressed for rain at all. He was just getting into that strange gray-green color that comes with hypothermia. I stuck him in the back and lit the fire, which he appreciated greatly. A few miles further on, at the base of the pass, the rain turned to snow and the highway patrol was parking anyone without chains. It was rather meaningless for me in a Volkswagen with snow tires, but snow in Southern California is a rare event and they were taking no chances. I lay down on the front seat and went to sleep. I was awakened the next day by a knock on the window. I was parked in the middle of an open highway about eleven in the morning. We had slept through half a mile of cars starting up and leaving.

I suppose that for most people, a stove made from junk wouldn't be all that well received, but it was just my dad's style. He grew up in a place where survival dictated that just about anything was useful. It worked well and lasted for many years.

Back at Riverbend, when the rain finally stopped and the river had crested, Richard and I took off in the VW Bus to check out the extent of the flood. The highway was flooded, so we took the old road into Hopland. Over the dike and across the little bridge over the creek at 40 mph, except the creek had back-watered up and there was two feet of water over the bridge. We decelerated to zero in about two car lengths. We were floating level and I was in forth gear with big knobby tires, so I wound up the engine and we played paddle wheeler and swam across. Didn't even get our feet wet.

The flood was a game changer for River Bend. About a quarter mile of the highway where it went through the gorge fell into the river, traffic was diverted to the old road on the other side of the river from Cloverdale to Hopland, and all our customers were gone for many months. Now it's a house on the remains of the old highway in the shadow of the freeway spanning the hilltops.

In early spring, I moved to Eagle Point Ranch, east of Ukiah, where I lived camped in the woods. It was rolling hills and oak groves and thick brush on the steeper slopes. Jeremy had an ounce of LSD, so there was plenty to go around.

One day I took a hike up the mountain. Didn't go to the top; just high enough to look out over the Russian River valley. I stayed late on the mountain and walked a few miles home in the dark. As usual I was barefoot. It was a heavy overcast night on the new moon, many miles from the nearest small town. It was one of the darkest nights I've seen except for underground or at sea, but I had no problem seeing where I was going. In retrospect, I assume that I was seeing mostly in infrared, with enhanced perception in the visible spectrum.

I was back in Yosemite in late spring and worked in the valley for a month before Tuolumne opened. Back then, the population density of Yosemite Valley was about the same as downtown Los Angeles. That was the summer of the Stoneman Meadow Riot between the Hell's Angels and the park rangers, but by then I was back at Tuolumne Meadows. While I was in the valley, I finished the parka. Almost knee length, four inch V baffled on the body, three inch loft on the sleeves and hood, velvet lined hood and cuffs. It was stuffed with so much down that it would stand on its own with the hood up. If I put it on the couch it would freak people out when the person sitting on the couch had no face. It was cut wide in the shoulders and the cuffs were snug, so if I was out hiking and the day got warm, instead of taking it off and stuffing it away, I just wore it behind me hanging on my wrists. It was like wearing a big pillow.

In mid summer I went back to River Bend and we got ready to take a tour of the southwest. Jack's father back in New Jersey was about to retire, and we were looking for a piece of land for him. I built a 356 Porsche engine, stuck it in the bus and we hit the road. We got as far as Pixley. Jack was driving when I heard a sound so high pitched it was almost inaudible, but it was loud. It only lasted a few seconds before the rod cap ended up halfway up the oil cooler. The engine kept spinning just long enough to spray most of its oil all over the engine compartment. There we were, along side the highway in the middle of California's hot, dusty central valley farmland. Directly across the highway was a little junkyard with a Volkswagen Bus out back. We bought it, yanked the engine out of an engine compartment thick with dust, carried it across the highway, stuck it in the engine compartment still dripping oil, and took off for the far side of New Mexico. Unfortunately, the engine had a half dozen stripped head studs, so top speed was about fifty. It was a long trip, but we were young. We fixed the engine in an old barn in Clovis, and spent the next few weeks exploring New Mexico and Colorado. When we got to Aspen, some friends of Jack's took us skiing. I grew up in Southern California. I was a teenager before I even saw a snowflake. I'd never seen a ski in my life, but they put these boards on my feet, got me on the lift, and left me at the top of Snowmass to fend for myself. It took a while to get down, but it was a fun challenge.

Jacks parents decided on a quiet and beautiful, but very cold piece of northern New Mexico on the east side of the Sangre de Christos, with an old adobe house, a barn, an irrigation ditch, a few farmable acres, and about 30 acres of scrub pine forest.

On the way back we picked up the VW bus we'd bought in Pixley, towed it up to Jacks Aunt's house in Fresno with a set of tire chains, stuck in an engine, and headed back to Northern California. Jack handed off his share of River Bend, we packed up my bus and the Pixley bus {this included a goat} and took off for New Mexico.

Jack's parents place on the Sapello River was definitely a fixer upper. Much more so after the Christmas tree caught the house on fire in the middle of the night. In the wee hours of the morning, I was standing on some rickety old outside wooden stairs working the fire in the attic. I had a good hose straight off the well and was gaining on the fire when I hit the old magnesium alloy Volkswagen crankcase. Burning magnesium likes water.

I cut and skidded vigas for the new roof while the other guys took off the old roof. When we ran into bedrock digging the septic tank, we went down to the hardware store and bought some dynamite. We didn't have a clue what we were doing, but we drilled some holes with hand steel, packed them full and lit the fuse. Dynamite can throw very large rocks way up in the air.

After around two hundred years of almost total isolation, the descendants of Spanish settlers spread out over the east side of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains spoke a very unique evolution of the Spanish language.

As soon as I was out of school, the draft board gave me a draft number of 75 and requested my presence in Viet Nam. I wrote them back that I wasn't interested. They wrote me back to come take a physical. I politely wrote them back to not waste their time; I wasn't going. They wrote me back to come take a physical. I wrote them back; I know better, I ain't going. They wrote me back with an induction notice. I wrote them back; no way. Then one day two guys from the FBI showed up and stuck me in the Las Vegas NM jail. Henry bailed me out and I ended up driving back to San Diego to stand

trial. At the trial they said go take the physical, maybe you'll flunk it and we won't want you anyway. As slow as the draft board bureaucracy was, all this had taken several years and the war was not going as planned, so when the shrink at the physical asked me how many times I'd taken LSD, and I said I wasn't sure but it was many, they told me to get lost. Never heard from them again.

That spring, a friend from high school suggested that we take a tour. Somebody knew someone in Dallas, so we headed that way. Three guys and two girls. One morning, near a little place out in the country called Millsap Texas, we dropped the top off a piston and were parked alongside a two lane road in the middle of miles of green meadow. In my stash of spare parts, I had an extra piston, so we pulled the engine, tore it down, hitchhiked into Mineral Wells, washed the crankcase out at the car wash, bought some rings, bearings, a gasket set, and some oil, hitchhiked back and put it all back together. By dinnertime the next day we were done, cleaned up and sitting down to an excellent dinner with an old couple who grew everything on the table. The only thing I remember about Dallas was chiggers.

One Sunday afternoon, on the last leg of our tour, we were driving down the San Francisco Peninsula. Off to the left were many acres of apricot orchards. It was fall after a dry summer, the apricots were dried candy on the trees, and no one had picked them. There were three big dozers pushing the orchard to make way for suburbia, but it was Sunday and the dozers were parked, so we spent the afternoon filling the bus with apricots.

Back in San Diego again, when my father asked for my help working a little silver mine in southern Arizona. We rented a little house in Bisbee, but we spent most of our time camped at the mine.

The ore body was a limestone replacement deposit at a limestone-porphry boundary. The original glory hole had been a lump of horn silver about thirty feet across, mined in the 1880s, that was so pure that they put it on wagons to the Gulf of California and put it on a ship around the horn to Wales, unrefined. Silver compounds come in a variety of forms; chlorides, sulfides, bromides, halides, and such. The remaining deposit was mostly silver chloride in very hard silica. Since the silver was diffused through the rock, it took a lot of sampling and many trips to the assay office to determine what was ore and what wasn't, but we quickly learned to recognize the good stuff.

The explosives magazine was a little side tunnel about 50 feet back in the bottom crosscut. There were two rotted old boxes of very old dynamite there that we needed to get rid of. When dynamite gets old, it sweats nitroglycerin. Both boxes were full of sticks of dynamite covered in little beads of nitroglycerin. Dropping one or even bumping one was certain death. We walked them out to the creek and burned them.

We hauled some ore mostly high-graded from the dumps while the price of silver was high and left when it went down.

From there, I followed a girl up to Boulder Colorado. It wasn't long before her drinking split us up. I found a job at a little auto shop in town. One day Sunny dragged an old dead Corvair into the middle of the yard, got in a big old lead sled station wagon destined for the scrappers, took off down the road in a cloud of smoke, came back through the gate doing about 25 and tee boned the Corvair. Shrunk the Corvair by about a third. Broke a headlight on the station wagon.

Over in a corner of the yard was a Karman Ghia gathering dust. Someone had broken off the oil pressure switch in the block and then broken off a screw extractor in the hole. It must have taken an immense amount of alcohol to do it. It leaked and was undrivable. I offered them 75 dollars and I had a clean, stock, 1961 Karman Ghia. I cleaned the leak with some gasoline, stuffed it full of JB Weld epoxy, and the next day it was good as new. It didn't have an oil pressure light, but it didn't leak or burn any oil. The modifications started immediately. First came the roll cage and a sunroof that racked under the dash, a bucket seat, and a big front sway bar. Next I traded the original 36 horse engine for a 1600 single port and swapped the stock rubber for much larger wheels and tires. This required some modification of the wheel wells. Next was the full sized bed that folded out from under the rear window. The seats popped out in seconds and were handy around the campfire.

My VW bus was parked at John's place and I lived in the Karman Ghia. I found a nice spot in the woods with a little spring and a beautiful view.

Then one day, a van load of hippies headed for the Northwest showed up at the shop and stayed for a week or so. I hit it off with one of the girls right away and had a new friend, but as soon as the van was ready, she was off to the Northwest. We kept in touch, and might have gotten together, but then we both came down with hepatitis and headed for home; she in Florida, me in San Diego. Hepatitis is a life changer.

It was a long drive from Boulder to San Diego. Somewhere in Utah, I found a quiet place in the desert to rest, not because I was tired or sleepy, but because I was getting too weak to keep my hands on the wheel. Hepatitis takes all your energy. You get up in the morning feeling like you just finished running a marathon and it gets worse all day. Months of orange eyes and total exhaustion; but with a steady diet of fresh fish, fresh veggies from the garden, and plenty of fresh local citrus, I was back on my feet in just a few months, and we got ready to go mining again.

I'd driven down from Boulder in the Ghia, so I went back to get the VW Bus. I took a bus from San Diego to Tucson, caught a ride to Bisbee, caught a ride with my dad to El Frida where we had a little studio apartment close to the mine, caught a ride with my dad back to Tucson and got on a plane to Denver. It was hot in Tucson, but I got off the plane in Denver in a blizzard. I took the bus to Boulder, caught a ride to Nederland, caught another ride out Magnolia road, and showed up at John's house with a still frozen 15 pound yellowtail. Many, many layers of newspaper insulates much better than styrofoam.

Back at the mine, we got our hands on a nice big track loader and an old track drill and started benching a hillside. I'd take the loader and cut a drill pad, the driller would put in as much as 50 ten foot by three inch holes, my dad and I would log the drill chips to see where the ore was, and we'd pack the holes full of dynamite and ammonium nitrate prill; the same stuff as the explosion in Lebanon. We used a few sacks at a time. The explosion in Beirut was a gazillion tons. Dynamite shatters; ammonium nitrate pushes. The trick was to load the holes so it blew the overburden over the hill and left the ore shattered in place. We were working in very hard silica so it took a lot of explosive force. We'd light the fuses and drive off a quarter mile or so to watch. One day, after the last blast went off, I got in the car and drove back to the mine. Just as I got out of the car, a 50 pound rock landed about 30 feet away. It must have gone about two miles up. Another time, two big rocks whistled by about 30 feet over my head in an almost flat trajectory.

Unfortunately, our access to the mine was a sublease. When a few really good assays showed up, papers were forged and the mine was stolen out from under us. We knew we were working a small ore deposit that could make a good living for three or four people for a few years, but they pushed that over the hill looking for a big mine, and, when it wasn't there, they wrote it off.

Next, I landed in Luna, NM. I lived in a little one room cabin at the edge of the woods, overlooking the San Francisco river. Winters are cold in Luna, and it was a very drafty cabin. In the winter I kept a five gallon bucket of ice six feet from the woodstove for several months. The only liquid water was in the well house which was completely underground. I didn't mind.

Sometimes, I wouldn't see another person for weeks at a time. My nearest neighbor was about a quarter mile away on the other side of the river. A trip to town was usually San Diego. The Karman Ghia got 40 mpg at 90 mph, gas was about 50 cents, and the highways were empty in the middle of the night, so a night run across the desert took about ten hours and cost about ten bucks for the 700 mile run.

Work was scarce around Luna. One needed to be versatile. I traded a little work for rent, ate a simple diet, and took any odd job that came along. I made jewelry and Saturday night I'd lay some pieces on the bar, sip a beer, and watch the dance at the lodge in Alpine.

Then Jason got a thinning contract over on the Mogollon Rim. A local crew had been working on it for a year or so and were almost done, when one day they came running out of the woods talking about a golden saucer and a blue ray and Travis was gone. Travis showed up naked behind the gas station in Heber five days later with only a few hours memory of being transferred from the saucer to the main ship.

They weren't going back, so we took over the last of it. We set up camp in the early spring just as a major storm rolled in. We just barely got the tepee set up as it settled in for a long, cold, pouring rain. Everyone was in the tepee, cold and wet, huddled around the fire, when a light wind picked up, blowing directly in the smoke flaps and, as evening approached and the smoke settled down to just above our heads, the drain around the tepee overflowed into the air vent for the fire and put it out. We all went to bed early. In the morning, we looked at our soggy camp and the wet trees, and left.

We came back in a few weeks and finished the contract in 38 straight days; 8 tanks a day. Once a week, we'd rent a room in Heber and watch Saturday Night Live while everyone took a shower.

One clear, starry night, Chuck and I stayed up late talking. As we left the tepee, headed for our respective beds, a brilliant flash of blue light lit everything in sight as bright as day. It seemed to come from directly overhead about a mile up. They took our picture.

The main house at the place in Luna had been abandoned before it was finished. Like the little cabin, it was built with flat stacked reject 2x8s from the local sawmills. With some occasional help from a few friends, I gradually disassembled it and used the materials to add a two story, two bedroom house to the little cabin.

By then, I'd put about 250,000 miles on the VW Bus, and it was in need of just about everything up front; steering box, brakes, tires, cracked windshield, worn out seats. The Karman Ghia needed tires and an engine. I had just about no money, but I had a VW Bug minus the engine and crunched in the back, and a full tank of gas and oxy for my torch.

Got up one morning, lined them up alongside each other, cut them in half and married the front of the bug to the back of the bus. First test drive was out the gate to San Diego. I trusted my work. When I got back, I cut the top off the bus half and turned it into a great little two passenger pickup with a sleeper behind the seats that would go just about anywhere. Chuck called it the Carp, and the name stuck. One day Jesse and I were way back in the woods with two kids in the sleeper when we got caught in a heavy wet snowstorm and the windshield wiper motor burned up. One of the heater control levers, a quick hole in the dash and some bailing wire and we had wipers again. A few weeks later it was good for a great laugh at the expense of two Arizona state cops. Glenn and I needed to go to Phoenix and both our road cars were in the shop, so we took the Carp with the trailer made from the front axle of the bus and a chopped down old Chevy pickup bed. Just outside of Showlow we got pulled over. Hi guys. What's up? Always be friendly with cops. Some of them are mean and nasty, but most of them are good people in a difficult profession. Their excuse was no brake lights, so they did an equipment check. Being an old beater that spent it's time mostly in the woods, just about nothing worked. Glenn doesn't get out. He was a kid in the navy at Bikini and saw two dozen H bombs up close and personal. By now his nervous system had degenerated to the point that he walked with a cane and looked like he's drunk. I see that he's wiggling the fuses in the fuse box on the dash. He understands the problem. Volkswagen had those crappy European fuses that were always losing contact with the least bit of corrosion, so I asked if they'd rerun the equipment check. Now almost everything worked, so when they asked about the windshield wipers, I reached in the window and pulled the little red handle back and forth. Yep. Got wipers. By now, Glenn and I are just about cracking up laughing, but we're nice about it. This is way beyond their scope of experience. They were so flustered that they wrote up an equipment warning for a headlight and tail light out on the trailer.

We did a lot of tree thinning. We had another thinning contract on the east side of Bearwallow Peak way back in the woods at about 9,000 feet. It had been logged a few years back in big timber and we were thinning to 11 inch, so it was very dangerous work. One day I dropped a snake [with good water and nutrition, but crowded and light starved, they can grow very tall and skinny]. There's no way to tell which way they'll fall and nothing you can do about it, so I looked around, didn't see anyone and made the cut. Just as it decided which way to fall there was Blue right in the bullseye with his back to it. I left the saw in the tree, put my shoulder to it, dug in my heels and dug two trenches, but I turned it just enough. Another time I dropped a widowmaker from about 30 feet up. I knew I was gonna drop it and it fell just where I thought it would, but it landed between two opposing leaners that spun it sideways and it came at me about chest high at about a zillion miles an hour. There was no time to get over or under it, but my instinctive knowledge of physics saved my ass. I threw the saw into the air with everything I had and used the inertia of the saw to pull myself over. I ended up in a sustained handstand on the saw.

I slept in my Karman Ghia. It was a cosy little nest. I woke up one morning and it was very quiet. Our first frost was 18 inches of snow. The Ghia was just another lump in the snow. There were several dozen people on the mountain and most of them were not prepared for deep snow, so we piled as many as we could into Jason's pickup and headed down to Uncle Bill's Bar. Since I was busy getting everyone loaded, I rode the top of the load. 40 miles in the snow and my hair was so caked with snow that if wouldn't even

rattle. No big deal. I was young and tough. That night Jason and I went back up to get the saws and guitars and stuff. And the Ghia. Drove it off the mountain down miles of old abandoned logging trails in 18 inches of snow at night.

We were getting ready to thin the next ridge in the spring when someone came up with the idea to sell Christmas trees in Tuscon. Our base camp was at the junction of Turkey Creek and Gilita Creek. Turkey Creek was a steep east west canyon that had been too steep to log. The south facing slope was yellow pines in sand and cactus. The north facing slope was spruce hung deep with moss. In the summer there was a pretty little meadow at the fork where we had a sweat lodge, and Gilita creek was full of Brown Trout. In December it was so cold that we couldn't get the wine out of the bottle. Went down to the creek in the morning to get a pan of water. Turned around and got two steps and it had a full sheet of ice. Cold. The path up to the trees on the ridge was steep through the spruce and deep snow. The only vehicle that would get up there was the Karman Ghia. We'd strap about 16 trees on the Ghia and transfer them down the hill to the 4X4 for the run to town.

Like everything else about that thinning contract, it was a bust. Jason had underbid it and we were barely breaking even.