

# Chapter Twelve

## Brownie Eats the Onion Grass

The rumble of wagon wheels and Brownie's clip clopping hoof beats were now something permanently etched in my mind. It had been only three days since I'd crossed the long sought after "Sunshine State's" border line. It was the day after Christmas now and it had taken me 67 travel days to go the more than one thousand miles from Intercourse, PA. I had been out about four months.

I was feeling pretty proud of myself as I rolled onto the black top heading for White Springs. If somebody asked me where to after that, I wouldn't have had an exact answer. I thought maybe St. Augustine, but beyond that my mind wandered in many different directions. It was all very exciting to contemplate, but that wasn't what was causing the queasiness in my stomach. I was coming down with the stomach flu. That great big Florida orange ball sun that so promisingly rose on the eastern horizon that morning was slowly fading out under a slate grey overcast sky. By noon the mild upset in my stomach had turned to full blown nausea. I found a grassy area along the shoulder of the road to pull off on and unhitched Brownie to let him have his lunch, while I lost mine. Once there was no more to lose I hitched back up and continued on. I suffered all the rest of the day. My misery was further exasperated by the steadily deteriorating weather. The cool breeze out of the North had become a brutal frigid wind. It buffeted the side of the wagon and swept across the wagon seat and me. The clouds had thickened to a dark swirling carpet descending ever lower. I wondered if I might see snowflakes next. I shouted to Brownie, "What next Bubba!" By late day I was chilled to the bone. I was shaking all over. I couldn't keep my teeth from chattering and I had developed a bad case of the hiccoughs.

It was getting about that time of day when I needed to find a place to light for the night. I had been traveling through what seemed like an endless desert of pines and palmetto thickets on either side of the road. Finally up ahead I saw what looked to be a farm of some sort. My hopes began to climb. There hadn't been much traffic passing me that day, but then along came a big black sedan. It zipped past me but quickly put on the brakes, came to a stop, and backed up towards Brownie. I stopped before the impromptu road block. The driver, all smiles, got out and walked back to me in the middle of the road alongside the wagon to chat and admire my rig. He was a traveling salesman, dressed in a light business suit, tie loosened up, collar open, and not seeming to be affected by the cold. I on the other hand, had on long under ware, flannel shirt, wool socks, heavy denim overalls, winter coat, and felt broad brim hat with wool scarf tied over top of it and under my chin, granny style. I was shaking with chills. That farm up ahead pulled and taunted at me for what seemed an eternity as I sat beneath this nuisance shower of questions, praise and even expressed envy. At long last, after a shaky good-bye and nice to meet you through my clicking teeth, he was on his way and out of my way. Minutes later I was going up a long gravel

driveway to the modest white clapboard farm house. Behind it sat a large low barn and lots of fenced in empty pasture. I pulled up by the side door of the house, looped the lines round the wagon brake handle and told Brownie to stand. I also took the scarf off from around my hat and chin so I didn't look too crazy. The old farmer answered the door and I put my usual evening request before him for a place to park and pasture my horse for the night. I was doing the best my feverish mind could to be as courteous and polite as possible. He, in turn, just as politely told me he had no room for a horse on his place and I would have to move along. I apologized for bothering him and turned to go back to the wagon and to go on to I knew not what. But, up the driveway came a station wagon car. It pulled up. Out popped a young woman, two small boys and an older lady. They were all smiles and friendly as could be and full of curiosity and questions. I mentioned I had to be moving on to find a place to camp for the night. The old lady insisted I wait till she got her camera so she could get some pictures. The two boys were lined up on either side of me for some snaps. I sensed a thread of hope, and knowing that giving can often be contagious, I offered to give the two boys a ride on the wagon. The boys beamed at the suggestion and mom and grandma happily consented. I put the little lads on the wagon seat with each holding a rein. I lead Brownie down the driveway and then back up to the house. After the boys were safely on the ground, their mom and granny told them to thank me. I told them not to thank me but to thank Brownie which they walked up front and did. By then grandpa was out of the house and he had melted. He saddled up close to me and said he guessed he had room enough in his pasture for my horse. All he had to do was shut a couple gates. I could park my outfit behind the barn. His daughter quickly invited me over to her and her husband's house for a nice hot supper. She pointed to a large new yellow house across the highway and just a short distance down a dirt road. Then, looking at me with a concerned look, she asked if I wasn't feeling well. I told her I had come down with something like the flu that day. She said they had a guest room I was welcome to and I could take a nice hot bath. Also, she would throw any dirty clothes I had in her automatic washer and dryer. Wow! It was just what the doctor ordered. I couldn't be more grateful to these nice folks. My hiccoughs vanished that night.

The next day after a hearty farm style breakfast and feeling stronger, I hitched up to leave. Grandma loaded me down with home canned goods, fruit and cookies. After a few more snapshots and fond farewells, I continued on east towards White Springs and what the map showed to be the Stephen Foster Memorial State Park and Folk Art Center. Maybe I could do some tintype portrait business there, I speculated.

The weather started out still cold, breezy, and now drizzly. I was soon getting chilled again. Also, the hiccoughs returned. They lasted off and on for four more days, a record I have yet to match. Yes, it was misery again, but I consoled myself with the fact that I certainly would be feeling a lot worse if I hadn't been invited to stay at the nice people's place the night before. My Roman Catholic upbringing made me wonder if that traveling salesman who blocked my path in the road with his big black car for what seemed an eternity had actually been my Guardian Angel. If it hadn't been for him, or if I had told him to get lost

as I was in no frame of mind to chit chat with anybody, the timing would have been off enough that I would have missed the angels of mercy and been sent down the road by the old farmer in my agony, to perhaps spend a freezing miserable night in the palmetto bramble alongside some god forsaken road. I shuttered to think.

By late morning I had crossed under I-75 with its roar of south bound, near bumper to bumper traffic, and gone through the quiet little by-passed town of Jasper. The clouds had parted and some warm rays of sun finally peeked through. I spotted a descent spot off to itself with large lacy moss covered live oak trees and some grass near them for Brownie to munch on. It was an ideal spot for a lunch break. That is, until a new pickup pulled over and a big bellied middle aged guy walked over to check my outfit out. He seemed to have an extra special interest in Brownie and his fine condition and wanted to know, in a north Florida southern drawl, if I would be interested in selling him to a good home. Some people might have reasoned at that point that this was a golden opportunity to bail out of this currently cold and miserable lifestyle. I could have easily declared my grand adventure a total success right then and there and gone back to a nice warm existence and much more predictable way of life in good Ol' Orlando. But, I was not one of those people anymore, and never would be again. I told the guy, my good friend Brownie absolutely was not for sale at any price. The cracker, as it turned out, was not another guardian angel, perhaps just the opposite. He gave a sadistic laugh and went on to tell me he was a buyer for the horse meat packing plant just down the road apiece. Sensing, correctly, that the friendly conversation was at an end, he got back in his truck and peeled on out.

Brownie and I continued on. We went by the aforementioned horse slaughter house. Horses were in a corral on one side of it, and some were fine looking animals. On the other side, at the office entrance was parked a new big custom Cadillac. No doubt the cold blooded money grubbers were catering to a lucrative European market. A big fancy sign with landscaping around it said, "Perfecta Internationale Inc." I shouted, "Bastards International!", as we went by. Brownie seemed to pick up his pace.

As the day wore on, a friendly local stopped and offered to let me stay overnight at a migrant labor camp set-up he had that was unoccupied at the moment. He said I could sleep in one of the trailers. I thanked him but decided to continue on and make a few more miles before the light of the day gave out. I didn't get far before a pretty young reporter gal from the Jasper News stopped me for an interview and picture. How could I refuse? I gave Margaret Smith all the vital information, posed in the picture with Brownie, and ended it by inviting her to come and see me make tintypes at the Stephen Foster Memorial that coming weekend. She said she would try to and would bring me a copy of the paper.

# The Jasper News

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## Old Fashioned Photographer Passes Through

John A. Coffey, a traveling photographer of "the 19th Century" passed through Jasper Wednesday afternoon. He and Brownie (his horse) started their journey in

Lancaster County, Penn. about four months ago in the covered wagon.

He plans to continue his journey on to Central Florida.

Mr. Coffey works solely with antique cameras and the methods used back in the 19th century to produce tin-type photographs that were so popular at that time.

The prospect buoyed my spirits up and I went on in confidence. They were soon dashed when I failed to find a farm or anything like it to make camp on. It had gotten fully night time. All I could do was pull off on a wide shoulder between a barbed wire fence and the edge of the road. I unharnessed Brownie and tied him to a fence post and pretty much went sleepless till first light when we could head on again. I berated myself for not taking the proverbial bird in the hand offering of the migrant labor camp. But, at least there hadn't been any traffic to speak of, the weather was improving, and I had a gallon of milk I had gotten in Jasper to drown my sorrows in. The next days would be better.

"Look there, some green grass," I called out to Brownie, and just back from the grass patch was a convenience store that probably had some chocolate covered little donuts and fresh whole milk for me. I parked the wagon by the thick carpet of green and staked Brownie out on it. After I got my goodies in the

store I looked out the window and noticed that Brownie was standing there in the grass, ears back, head up, and not eating. I commented to the store owner that it was odd that my horse wasn't eating any of that lovely grass. I sure hoped he wasn't sick. The man laughed and said that's wild onion grass, boy! I went out and pulled some up and sure enough, it smelled just like onions. The donuts? Stale. But, things would indeed get better.

As I rolled on into White Springs and the Stephen Foster Memorial grounds, the welcome mat had already been laid out for me. The head maintenance man at the memorial had stopped me earlier in the day. He had read about me in the papers and wanted a tintype made. He told me his name was Dave, and it would be just fine for me to make camp in their folk arts and music festival area. He'd have a couple bales of hay waiting for Brownie too. I had the grounds all to myself that night. There was lots of real grass there amongst the extraordinarily long limbed giant trees for Brownie to enjoy along with his hay. It was serenely quiet, aside from a couple of distant owls calling to each other. I had no trouble falling into a much needed long deep sleep. The next morning, I awoke to clear blue sunny skies and the melodic chimes of the world-famous Stephen Foster Singing Tower appropriately playing I Dream of Jeannie With the Light Brown Hair. Dave, the chief maintenance guy, came by and pointed out where the administration building was and that the superintendent would be there to talk to me about setting up my Tintype Gallery for a few days. He was in fact expecting me. Dave was hoping I'd be able to stay, as he wanted a Tintype of himself and his brother. So, after cleaning up as I could, giving myself a much needed straight razor shave, and putting on my best clothes, I walked to HQ with my scrap book and one very important large brown envelope under my arm, to see the bossman. Jim was as cordial and friendly as anyone could be. But, before he would give me permission to stay for my requested week, he'd have to see a letter of approval and recommendation. The folks back at Georgia Agrirama were sure thinking ahead for me with that letter of recommendation they had typed up with their official seal on it. Also, they had given me a fancy diploma looking certificate that they presented to folks who volunteered. I laid out these all important papers of introduction and instantly I was John Coffey, V.I.P. There was something all very antebellum about this. It could have been 1861 and I had papers of introduction from General Beauregard for Jeff Davis himself. Not much different.

Jim immediately gave me a tour of the grounds, the classic white colonnaded southern style mansion that was the main museum building, and the incredible inner workings of the near-by singing tower that played a Stephen Foster tune on the hour, 9 to 5 everyday. Also, he introduced me to every staff member in sight and told them I would be staying with them for a week. I could camp anywhere I wanted, even on the manicured lawn directly in front of the museum, and Brownie could graze wherever he liked. I elected to set up on the lawn bordering the path between it and the snack bar. I could easily catch the attention of the visitors going between the two. But, what visitors? I was soon to find out. This place was one of Florida's greatest hidden treasures. It clearly did not make the list of must-sees for the average vacationer in beautiful sunny warm Florida. I was told repeatedly that I should have come in October when

they had their huge folk arts and old time music festival. Of course, I would often be in the wrong place at the wrong time as far as such things, and even the weather would try to tell me that. Half my time there it was miserably cold and rainy. It even spit snow one day. But, when the sun was shining and the breeze was out of the South, it could be in the 70's and lovely.

I did manage to do some Tintype business despite some bad weather days. Be it known, the Tintype process has a mind of its own and it can all too often throw you some curve balls when you don't need any curve balls. This time it had to do with color issues, in more than one sense. Like the day two young women who were sisters decided it would be fun to have a tintype portrait made together. They had been in the sunnier warmer parts of Florida awhile and this was their last stop before heading back north for home. Unfortunately, one of them had gotten a serious sunburn. The other had somehow avoided that, and wasn't flaming red in the face. In the ten dollar tintype I did of the two of them side by side, the non-burned one looked as Caucasian as she was. But her red faced sister looked nearly black. Instantly, I knew what had happened, and explained this quirk of the process to them. Tintypes are only blue light sensitive and certain colors such as red come off dark unless you over expose for it, I elaborated. Blues tend to go white. As a matter of fact, I went on to say, a photographer confronted with the situation we were in may have insisted on powdering the reddish complexion of the sunburned face with light blue talcum powder. Miss Fun-in-the-Sun was glad I did not have any blue face powder. Actually she wasn't interested in any tintype history or tech talk. She just knew she looked like Aunt Jemima or one of the Stephen Foster Memorial's diorama singing darkies and that was it. The sister who came out fair skinned in the image took it light heartedly and wanted the tintype anyway. But if she hadn't, I had a satisfaction guarantee policy (and still do). The next day one of the employees came to have her tintype made in a big hoop ante-bellum style ball gown. She was not sunburned, but the off the shoulders dress revealed a fine Florida suntan. Meanwhile the dress was light baby blue with white trim. I had to expose the plate for her complexion or risk her looking of another race. As expected, the dress pretty much blew out white with the white lace trim disappearing into it. Again, I explained how tintypes were extra sensitive to blue light and that it was common in the day for sitters to be instructed to wear dark clothes when having a likeness made. Despite the loss of detail in her fine dress, the nice lady paid for the tintype and took it anyway. By the end of my stay I had grossed a solid \$180 and 75 cents in sales. Every penny counted with the budget I was living on.

The quiet time off from the road gave me a chance to catch up on things that needed fixing and letters that needed writing. I wrote my friend Gary. He and his new wife Shelly came up from Orlando for a day visit that really charged my spirits up! I also had a chance to meet some nice informative folks who worked there at the memorial, and a few interesting tourists, as well. A couple of different people had been on the legendary 1976 Bi-Centennial Wagon Train. One guy said he ruined a fine team of Belgians he drove on it. He said they pushed the horses way too hard with too many miles per day. Another lady who had seen the Bi-Centennial Wagon Train when it camped there on the grounds

was in awe of Brownie's fine condition, considering how far he had come. She said the horses on the wagon train were worn down terribly with lots of really bad harness sores. I explained to her that I let Brownie be Brownie and go at his own pace. We didn't have any schedule to honor, nor did we have to keep up with the group. That was the difference. She had convinced me right then and there, Brownie and I would never join up with no stinkin' wagon train.

And how did I get a copy of the JASPER NEWS? Not from any fair damsel reporter but rather from one of the matrons who worked at the Memorial, who bought a copy for me. I guess I was just a little too off beat for that particular news reporter girl. I consoled myself with the old adage: there's a lot of fish in the sea. Enter Marie. A gorgeous, mid-twenties single gal, slim like a super model, with the longest fine brunette hair I'd ever seen. She worked at the Memorial on some sort of grant as the Folk Arts director. She did reporting for the Memorial's newsletter, also. Lucky me, she wanted to do an interview for an article. On one of the nice days she came to my camp and did the usual reporter quizzing and seemed especially interested in my upbringing and the years before I went out on the wagon. I told her about my growing up in the desert kingdom of Las Vegas, having a father who was a stage hypnotist and nobody's man but his own, and who often quoted Jules Verne to me: *WHAT EVER THE MIND OF MAN CAN CONCEIVE, HE CAN ACHIEVE*. I told her about my Florida scuba diving and surfer years, being a mono-rail driver at Disney World, high school marching bands and karate school portrait photographer, and assorted other off the radar gigs and interests. After some frantic writing on her yellow legal pad she blurted out, "And so, you have always been weird! I mean, you weren't working in an office or something and just flipped out one day." I proudly assured her I was weird to the core, had always been breaking my own trails, and probably always would. She seemed to find that exciting, which in turn I found exciting about her. Later, Marie invited me over to her place for a vegetarian supper. She lived in what had been a 1920's vintage gas station/store next to the entrance to the Memorial. I'm sure it had been a thriving business before I-75. She said people sometimes walked into her place thinking it was still the original store, asking for a coke. Now it was full of indoor plants, hanging naturally dyed yarns, drying plants for the dyes, herbal teas, and basket-like things with fresh edible sprouts of all sorts. She was definitely a hardcore vegetarian. I ate the meal she so graciously prepared for us but, as often happens at such all-veggie meals, I went away hungry and had to down a tall mug of milk when I got back to the wagon. I also had to console myself that there was little chance for any romance with this sweet thing. The chemistry was wrong, not to mention she had a boyfriend she told me about in glowing terms who was touring Europe on a motorcycle at the time.

On one of the coldest nights of my stay, Marie invited me to sleep on her couch, which I was grateful for. Going back to my wagon in the morning, I noticed that the fancy rock fountain at the entrance of the park had turned into a massive ice sculpture. I think some pipes had burst, as water was spraying out onto the road creating a large sheet of ice that I could have skated on. I was told later the temperature had gotten down into the low teens. It soon warmed up and with that, no more invites to sleep on Marie's couch.

Meanwhile, Brownie had been acting extra itchy, and especially so around his throat area. I scratched him there, and feeling some small appendages, I took a closer look. Ticks! I pulled as many as I could find out and squashed them. Running my hands over him and checking all his nooks and crannies, I discovered he had a lot of them. Yes, those beautiful long bowed trees in the park were no doubt jumping off platforms for the warm blood seeking vermin. What to do? I had heard somewhere that ticks died quickly in kerosene. I tested that by putting a couple of live ones on a jar lid and dabbing them with a little kerosene on a rag. They quickly shriveled up and died. I wiped Brownie down all over with more kerosene on a rag. The next day there was not a tick to be found on him aside from some dead ones. Before I left the Memorial I discovered a couple of ticks had attached themselves to me, as well. I tried the old Boy Scout trick of touching their posterior with a red hot match head tip. Supposedly, that would make them back out of you and you could then dispatch them without risk of infection. Nothing doing, they weren't going anywhere, no matter how big a hot foot you gave them. I ended up pulling the bastards out of me as best I could and then I put some tincture of Iodine on the spots. I learned later that my friend Gary had gotten a lone tick attached to him during his day visit with me. He went to the emergency room and had it surgically removed. My way was much cheaper and ultimately just as effective. It could have been worse had it been a warmer time of the year. I figured every tick in the county must have been at the Memorial's October Folk fest, raining cats and dogs off those tree limbs on everybody.

My seven days were up and it was time to leave these fine environs for points south. Brownie was itching to leave too. But, there was one last thing that needed to be done before I swung up on the wagon seat and released the handbrake and rumbled on down the shady lane out of the park and back onto the open road. A letter of recommendation. With a smile and a handshake, Jim the superintendent handed me a fine one in their official envelope.





BRUCE A. SMATHERS  
SECRETARY OF STATE

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DIVISION OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

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January 8, 1979

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

Mr. John Coffey and his traveling photographic van was a guest on our grounds from January 2, 1979, to January 8, 1979.

He displayed courtesy and professionalism to our visitors and staff. He maintained his area set-up in a neat and orderly fashion. He created interest and added color to our existing facilities. The uniqueness and novelty of his vocation was indeed an asset to the Memorial during his brief stay.

I recommend him to anyone who enjoys the unusual.

Respectfully,

*James E. McDuffee*  
James E. McDuffee  
Acting Director  
Stephen Foster Memorial

FOLK ARTS

FLORIDA'S CENTER OF  
CRAFTS

PERFORMING ARTS

With fond farewells to Dave, Marie, and others who had been so kind to me, I jumped aboard and let Brownie choose his own gait and we were off at a brisk trot. Perhaps Camp Town Races was being chimed by the Singing tower, I can't recall for sure.

We went by the ruins of the old White Springs health spa along the fabled Suwannee River. I had been very apprehensive for weeks about what was just up ahead. It had all started with Bob Cobb back on the Georgia/Florida line, when he told me I would need a current health certificate and Coggin's test to show to the inspectors at any of the roads crossing the Suwannee. I had no idea about this paperwork stuff. He told me I would have to quarantine Brownie for thirty days before I could have them issued. Brownie quite possibly was the healthiest horse in America or pretty close to it. I would not be waylaid by government bureaucracy. Quarantine simply was not an option for me. I insisted there had

to be some quiet road and bridge over the river where there would not be an inspection station. He insisted there was not. Probably he had tried more than once himself, which wouldn't have surprised me the more I got to know him. But, he said, not to worry, as he knew a veterinarian on the take he could get papers from. They would be from a dead horse that sorta matched Brownie's description. He figured ten bucks is all it would cost. Out of desperation I agreed to it and the next day I had myself a set of felonious papers. I still figured there had to be a back road way across the Suwannee and I would never have to show anyone any dang papers. Would this crossing be it?

I had gotten a late start that morning and it was already about noon. This proved to be fortuitous. Brownie had, as expected, quickly settled down to his usual slow walk. Just ahead was a narrow two lane wooden bridge across the Suwannee. I turned south onto it. There was no traffic to be seen or heard. The lily pad strewn water moved beneath the bridge at a lazy pace. It was indeed a tranquil setting, but a tense situation. I noticed a Florida State Inspection Station shack in the middle of the bridge. Dratts! I took a deep breath as my outfit came up alongside it. Looking down from the wagon seat I could see the whole inside of the shack. Nobody was home. I sighed with relief and smiled as Brownie plodded on. After a few minutes we had crossed the bridge and had gotten down the road a good distance. Then a lone official looking light green sedan approached, coming toward me in the left lane with two men in khaki uniforms in it. They just waved and never slowed down. Likely they were the inspectors and were perhaps coming back from lunch. "Have a nice day", I said as they went on their way, never to be seen again. Brownie and I rounded a curve in the road out of sight of the river. We'd done it.

Finding a place to make camp for the night proved easy for a change. I noticed a young woman in a small pick-up pulled off in a wayside along the road. She had a nice big friendly smile as she leaned out her window to get a good look at my outfit and me. Maybe she's a local, I reasoned to myself, and might know of a farm I could make camp on for the night. After a little small talk I put my request before her. She seemed to perk up even more and said she would drive ahead and find me a place. Off she zoomed and Brownie and I plodded on. I didn't put much weight in her promise. In less than half an hour, she was back with good news. She had inquired at a small farm just ahead, not too far. They had a pasture for Brownie and I to camp in for the night, and they were waiting for me. I thanked her, she said she was glad to help and then just drove off, never to be seen again. It had gotten extra cold that night. A layer of ice was in the water bucket in the morning. I had to wash dishes, which was painful in that frigid water. I was still hacking, coughing, and blowing my nose from the cold I picked up towards the end of my stay at the Stephen Foster Memorial. (Yes, sick again).

Going into Lake City was one extra frigid, windy, and grueling stretch of highway, with lots of heavy car traffic on top of all that discomfort. Then the local newspaper reporter stopped me on one particularly busy wind-swept section. I wasn't in much of a mood for an interview, but it was by now a part of my job description to be stopped by any two bit newspaper's reporter, anyplace, anytime. She said she would send me a copy of the paper. I told her: General Delivery, St.

Augustine and I meant it.



I was glad to get past Lake City and back onto a far more quiet country road heading for the oldest European settlement in the continental U.S.A. I reasoned it had to be warmer near the ocean with the Gulf Stream just off shore.

About quitting time I spied a new looking place with a big fine barn by it. A guy came out on the porch and waved. I decided this must be the place to land for the night. The owner was real friendly, and as it turned out, was into antique buggies. He had two nice restored ones in the barn. He hadn't quite moved into his new little farmette, but I was welcome to stay there. Brownie got a nice big stall in the barn and all the deluxe hay he could eat. I got to sleep in the heated house which was a welcome turn, as it was going down to twenty that night. The owner left me there to myself and went back to town, where he was currently living. I spent a restless night due to my cold but sure was glad to be in the

warmth. The next morning after I had fixed myself breakfast and washed the dishes in some clear looking water in a gravelly culvert area by the side of the road, the owner arrived back. After a little conversation he told me he worked for the Department of Transportation as an engineer. Then he asked if I had shown my horse's health certificate and Coggin's test papers when I crossed the Suwannee. With my fingers crossed behind my back, I said, "sure, you wanna see 'em?" As expected, he didn't, and on Brownie and I went.

Going through the little wide spot in the road town of Lulu, a guy I had talked to the day before came out of a bar and wanted to buy me a drink. Like I was in old Dodge City, I tied up and sauntered into the saloon and had a nice tall one, a 7-up. Great medicine for my cold! Afterwards, I got a few grocery items at the little general store next door. I needed toilet paper bad with all the nose blowing I was doing. My cloth toilet paper bag had apparently fallen off the seat and onto the road side and it was gone, real gone. A couple of boys outside were petting Brownie. One of them gave Brownie a popsicle. Clearly, it was treats all the way around in Lulu. I guessed the popsicle hadn't hurt Brownie, but he did have funny orange lips for awhile afterwards. Up ahead was the much larger town of Lake Butler. We rolled into it, which shut the town council meeting down, or so it seemed when we went by the nice new town hall and everybody seemed to be at all the windows watching us go by. Soon after one of them, who also was president of the local saddle club, stopped and invited me to their place for the night. Hot shower, delicious roast beef and mashed potatoes with gravy, and all the hay and sweet feed Brownie cared to eat were lavished upon us. Life was very good at that moment. But, Murphy soon had something to say about that. Before I turned in to have a good sleep in their guest room, I went out to check on things at the wagon and get my tooth brush. I found that Murphy, or at least that's what I decided to call him, their cute little pony, had pulled my burlap grain bag out of the wagon and helped himself to much of it. Not stopping there, he had also pulled my bedroll out of the wagon and onto the ground. I separated him out of the pasture and into the barnyard before he could do anymore mischief. I slept well that night and was treated to a fine breakfast. I was fully reenergized. The weather had gotten milder and my cold was about gone. I had two newspaper interviews that day before making camp in a large well fenced pecan tree orchard the other side of Starke. The grazing wasn't all that good so I gave Brownie an extra helping of horse sweet feed. I had bought a bag at a farm store that day for \$4.38. I had a lovely peaceful night to myself, looking up through the silhouetted pecan tree branches, wispy silvery bright clouds passed before a full moon. Did those clouds mean rain soon? Unless someone along the way told me what the weather forecast was, I had no idea what the next day or days weather would be like. By the age old method of observe and remember, I was learning to decipher the "signs" as best I could, like most everyone in the 19<sup>th</sup> century did.

The next day it rained most of the morning. I tried to stay as dry as possible, putting my long black rain coat over my legs and feet as I sat on the wagon seat playing my harmonica to pass the time. I was pleased that I had moved on from Stephen Foster songs to a pop tune: Mr. Bojangles. The lyrics seemed to dovetail with my lifestyle at the moment. I took a lunch break at an

open spot near where a dirt road headed into the bush. I noticed a couple pickup trucks parked down the dirt road apiece. Soon a woman, who at first I thought was a man, walked up from them. She suggested I would be wise to move on out of the area. She explained that there were about a hundred deer hunters out on that particular track of land. Their mission was to kill all the deer they could find. Why? I asked. She said a mining company was about to clear cut the land and strip mine it for phosphate. I said I thought that was horrible. She just chuckled and said I best just be worried about my horse being mistaken for a deer. I quickly finished my lunch and hitched up and went on.

A guy driving a garbage truck stopped me to talk. He said he had seen me interviewed on Jacksonville TV. He seemed awful sure about it despite my insistence I had not been interviewed by that station. I started to wonder if there wasn't somebody else paralleling me on their own horse-drawn wagon journey.

I landed a good place to stay for the night and a good breakfast with my hosts in the morning. The day turned into a sunny warm one and a very interesting one as well. It was a lovely day to be out on a wagon and even a bicycle. In fact, a couple of folks with their tight spandex bright colored outfits and plastic helmets had passed me, hardly noticing me beyond a weak wave as they sped past. But, then, wait, coming up behind me was yet another bicyclist. This one looked all together different. For one thing he was coming up on me much slower. The rider wore no loud colored clothing and had no helmet but rather an Aussie style floppy bush hat on. Soon I could tell he was wearing leather lace up boots. The bike was heavily built and had large pack panniers, tools, and spare parts strapped to it and a small pack over the handle bars. The bike had full fenders. Clearly this guy was long distance. The young man had a full beard and hairy legs showing out of his baggy khaki shorts and a baggy fatigue style coat with a wool scarf around his neck, none of which did anything for fluid aerodynamics. He did not zoom by like the other bikers had that day but stopped and wanted to know what I was up to, and I likewise him. We talked as he cruised along slowly by the wagon or just held onto it and let Brownie do the towing. This was Mr. David Wells, 31 years old and on the last stretch of an around the world bike tour. He had been out over three years. He began his journey from his home country of England and had been through thirty different countries. To get from continent to continent he had worked on tramp freighters as a deckhand. He had ridden his bike the breadth of Australia and the length of New Zealand. We swapped stories for a couple hours and, as one might expect, his were incredible. We had much in common. Neither of us was sponsored by anyone or anything. Nope, we did not have a squad of National Geographic photographers and film makers following us, or any lucrative book deals in the works. David had been employed as a corporate level salesman in London and had saved the equivalent of about ten thousand dollars to finance his grand adventure. He had built up his own bike. It was all steel, for the ruggedness he knew it would need. He had in fact been hit by a truck in Burma and somehow both he and his bike survived. David disliked the world's addiction and dependence on the automobile as much as I did. Also, his adventure, like mine, had changed him permanently. He was certain he would never work in the corporate world again. Yes, there couldn't have been two more kindred spirits

ambling down a sunny country road that day than us two vagabonds.

After a stop at a wayside convenience store I got a copy of the Jacksonville newspaper I was featured in. I showed it to David. He was impressed. I wasn't. They had made several errors. More than usual. David said he was rarely interviewed by the press, which suited him just fine. But, as much as David Wells and I were alike we had our differences in our chosen technologies and lifestyles. He was amazed at my slow pace. He said he would sometimes get going as fast as 50mph on a long downward steep grade. When it came time to make camp he would just slip into some woods or isolated place at near dark, and make an inconspicuous camp with no campfire. He would cook simple meals using a very compact little stove that burned pressurized kerosene. He had a sleeping bag and a nylon tube tent. He'd be on his way at first light before anyone knew the difference. I told him that was impossible for me with an outfit the size of mine. I pretty much had to get permission to camp on any private property or I'd be courting trouble.

David went on ahead of me to get some film for his 35mm camera (another difference between us. I had no small modern camera on board, just my big wooden 8x10). He said he would catch up with me later. In the mean time I had to cross the St. Johns River on a busy narrow two-lane bridge that was over three and a half miles long. Part way across it a black guy stopped and yelled at me that I was going to get somebody killed. I just smiled and waved as my stomach churned with anxiety. He shook his head and sped on. Soon a motor boat approached with a group of folks yelling and waving, "Hello! John and Brownie!" They circled under the bridge a number of times with their cameras pointed at me and then quickly disappeared on down the river. I recognized them as the people I had camped with a couple nights before. I hoped they had gotten a few good snapshots before I died. At the bridge's highest point and its middle, I was shocked to come upon a fifty-yard section that was all open steel grid decking. It was like one big ass very long cattle guard. There was no turning around and no going back. I jumped down and lead Brownie. His shoes clanged against the steel. You could clearly see the water down below us through the steel matrix which made things even more frightening. I gave Brownie as much soothing talk as I could muster. Thankfully, he kept his head together enough and didn't bolt and get away from me. The deadly traffic zipping past my side seemed to be a small detail at that moment. We made it past the steel and I slung up on the wagon and we plodded on but not out of harm's way till we finally reached the end of the bridge/causeway. It had seemed like an eternity. After a mile or so, a black, loud, smoky, full size Chevy sedan pulled over with a full size middle aged guy at the wheel who wanted to talk to me. He said he owned a circus. Perhaps he was a clown in it. His funny comment to me was, "Boy, you are about to become rich." I told him I doubted that. But, maybe I could contact Harrah's Club in Reno and put a banner on my wagon, "Harrah's Club or Bust", and head for there. They would surely pay me ten thousand for that. He agreed they would do that in a heartbeat. I was only teasing. Fact is, I valued my personal freedom too much to sell my soul out like that, and perhaps as a result I've never gotten rich. He said he and his wife were staying at an attraction on the edge of St. Augustine called Ft. Bengali and I should overnight there if I wanted. I told him I

would stop by.

By late afternoon David caught back up with me and took some snapshots of my outfit. He was curious where I would make camp for the night. I told him I couldn't do like he normally did. But we'd be alright and would find a good spot both of us could camp at because of "wagon magic". After a few lazy miles, as the road took a wide curve south, I saw a likely prospect. It was a gentleman farm sort of looking place with nice fenced in pastures. In the driveway I could see some folks standing looking our way. I said to David confidently and pointed ahead, "See that place up there? That's where we are going to stay tonight". He was in wonderment at my confidence. We pulled in the driveway and were soon given the red carpet treatment, hot shower, and chicken dinner with all the trimmings. I was surprised at our hosts being only mildly interested in David's incredible adventure and wanting to know all about my meager in comparison one.

The next morning David and I exchanged addresses and said our farewells. He went on at his much faster pace into St. Augustine. I hoped we would bump into each other again there, but kinda doubted it.



After a lunch stop along the edge of a huge farm field Brownie and I headed on east. We came along a classic Florida roadside citrus fruit stand. The owner flagged me down to give me a big bag of oranges. I told him I was looking to maybe camp for the night at Ft. Bengali. He said he knew those people down there, and they were weirdoes to the max. They had lions and tigers and other big wild cats. It wasn't long before I was there. It looked like a fort alright but clearly had seen better days and appeared to not be open for tourist business anymore. I parked the wagon and went through an entrance door on the side. There was the fat man and his wife and some other carny looking people. They finally noticed me and came out to look at my outfit for a moment and said I could camp there along the outside wall if I wanted. They had to go to the store and would be back soon. I unhitched Brownie and took his harness off and staked him out on some fresh clover and rye grass along the highway right-of –



way. As I did that, I could hear the growling of the big cats somewhere in the Fort. They sounded hungry. These people really did seem like true weirdoes. I began to think twice about camping there overnight. They no doubt were taking so long at the “store” because there was some dumpster diving to do. It takes a lot to keep full grown lions and tigers fed. I didn’t need to wait and find out if Brownie might be on the menu, as well. I quickly hitched Brownie back up and headed on down the highway, luckily, without seeing a trace of my erstwhile hosts again. I figured I may as well get a little closer to St. Augustine, anyway. About a mile and a half on I noticed a place with some grassy land around it and a horse and pony in a fenced in area behind the house. The owners proved to be regular country folks and were glad to have me camp on their place. I got a big sliced pork sandwich from a pig they raised and recently slaughtered themselves. I also got a hot shower, and I was able to give myself a good shave with my straight razor. That night, I slept in the wagon. It got very cold. It was January 14 and it was the coldest night in the wagon I had endured so far. So much for the Gulf Stream effect! In the morning I bucket washed some clothes and headed out with them blowing in the breeze on a makeshift clothes-line in the back of the wagon. The city limits of St. Augustine were just ahead only four more miles. The big gaudy billboards were one after another now, all trying to draw travelers to this or that historic site, tourist trap, or combination of the two. I figured at least one of them would have a spot for me to camp on and set up my Tintype portrait business. Well, maybe. Life has been something I have often had to work extra hard at. As a child, my mother the dedicated school teacher, never said I was a “special snowflake” and the world would fall at my feet cause I was so cute and smart. On the contrary, she suggested that I was somewhat challenged and not all that gifted, but not to worry, if I worked double or triple hard I could make it just fine. One of her favorite quotes she posted in her classroom was from Thomas Edison: *MANY OF LIFES FAILURES ARE PEOPLE WHO DID NOT REALIZE HOW CLOSE THEY WERE TO SUCCESS WHEN THEY GAVE UP.* We often realize in our later years just how right Mom was.

Be sure to stay put on the wagon seat, loyal readers, and join in the struggles and eventual triumphs to come in good old St. Augustine and beyond. Also, who was that shadow wagon traveler I was sometimes being mistaken for?

The following is a view of a page from my dip pen and ink written daily journal shortly before I arrived in St. Augustine.

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I thought I should get a little  
closer to town anyhow.  
About a mile and a half on  
down I noticed a big house  
with a lot of good ground around  
it and a horse and pony in  
the back. A kid came out of  
the house and was watching  
the wagon so I pulled on in.  
So the next thing you know  
I got a place to camp behind  
the house. I had to stake  
Browne out at though but  
as extra I got a big sliced  
meat sandwich made for me  
and also a hot shower and  
I finally got the good stove  
I needed especially for  
tomorrow.

January 15 St. Augustine ~~is~~ cold

Last night was the coldest night  
I have had in the wagon yet.  
I had a hard time sleeping because  
of it.

This morning I washed some  
cloths out and the wagon down  
and headed on out.

On the way into town a reporter  
for the local tourist newspaper called  
the Traveler stopped me and did  
some photos and a brief interview.  
I told them to finish the interview  
when I set up in town.

Traffic was rather hectic all day  
long.  
I went into the heart of