

IRVING STETTNER

Up in Vermont, Brattleboro,
going West. Morning
i run from the swanky
hotel room (only one
i could find), like
waking up inside
a plastic ice-cube

Go & watch
20 mins. the thick
charcoal mist-fog on the
Connecticut river lifting,
in long smoky puffs, rolling
off like tumbling clowns, Don
Quixote, Fairy horsemen
trouping..

But where the
hell is the Bus-stop
in this town?

"Other side -- 3 miles,"
say one, two Natives:
"But--bus? What for?
Just get on the road &
stick yr thumb out!"

OK
so with my 40 lb. back-pack,
i walk to the outskirts
of town

& edge of road
stand with my thumb out..
Swizz! Swizz-zz!
new Chevy Impala, Buick,
Coupe de ville, Mustang,
GM 2-ton truck.. 10 min.
15--20.. Hey, you guys, you're
suppose to *stop!* didn'y-ya'-know
that? *Swizz-swi-swizz!*
o hell with them!
i start to walk

i'll get there,
if i have to walkwalkwalk
my ass off!

Besides it's 9 bells & the silver mist
is on the meadow and the sun handspringing
up its laughing gold eye laughing at me &
crickets are songsoliloquy-rhapsodizing and
the sky is a soft morning Botticelli blue and
walking past a field new-cut hay -- O smell sweet
O honey sweetsweetsweet! O who the hell wants
to ride in a stuffy ole' car anyhow!

& there by the roadside, a bright purple
flower..nodding in a sudden breeze. One-you-
never-saw-before!

and suddenly i drop my back-pack
& start to roll in a patch of silksoft grass, roll
over & over & over, laughing out loud in crazy
glee..

When exhausted face down
i peer into damp shade weedgrass-roots &
see dewdrop'd cobweb and 2 russet spiders
fight, punchin', balling or caressin', i
don't know which but suddenly one drops
to the ground, on his back, & falling off
and apart one of his long 2-inch antenna
legs..which still moves, jerks, twitches..
5 minutes or so..

Then high-tail it, i hit the road again.
'Cause i have to be in Cherry Valley before
nightfall.. Visit my poet-pal Charley..

Up a way rickety bridge
& behind clump of tall willows
pass a farmer work tending a large
corn field.. he glances up at me..
& i'm tempted to walk over and ask
him for work.. Another Why i'm up in
this neck-of-the woods.. Hell, back
in NYC looked for work, job -- carpenter,
typing, messenger etc, any jazz --
2 whole weeks.. And no luck --
no A'way..

Hike 5 miles & it's noon
top of a hill and wooden
shingled Inn
cafe,

into which i drop
for a cup of java

empty
except for grey-mustached owner
and an elderly man & boy
seated near the cash register

the owner brings me a coffee
and "Quarter," he says;
i fork it over &
he catches it before
it hits the counter

And 2 Campers in a brown Pick-up,
tarpaulin-covered.. Mab-behind-wheel steps
out & drops the tail-gate for me to throw my
gear in; he is grey-bearded, in shorts, rainwear
hat, eyes clear blue wash'd sky-after-rain. His
wife is grey 50'sh, with red-flower straw bonnet.
We all sit up front, and they talk about first-rate
Camp-sites; the one at Glover washed away by the
last flood.. one near Putney is great, yes, but with
too many teen-agers who play Rock-music the whole
night thru.. "Just have to ask them to pipe down,"
raps Allen, "like i once did, just walk'd over &--"
"What a shame," lady flower bonnet sighs, "all
that racket.. And at night and you can't even
hear the woods.."

Few miles past Bennington, they
drop us off.& right away Allen
has thumb out; "Hell, have to
make it to Troy by 3PM..." 15 --
20 minutes, and a battered '63 Chevy
pulls up.

Allen walks over and opens
the car door, gets in, all without
saying a word. Just as he did before--
i notice, studying his hitchhiking
technique.. *Don't stare a Gift horse
in the mouth!*

All words, directions,
chit-chat can come later, like --
"I can take you over the State line
anyhow," says the driver, a heavy-set
walrus-mustach'd guy, about 35: "Shit,
what a day! Have to get out of here --
just no work around.. Like today when
i went for this Job-interview in Brattleboro,
the manager of this Dept. store,
know what he-had-the-nerve to offer me?
3 days a week -- and at \$2.50 per hour minimum!
Fuck, how can i live on that?..
You from Newfane, heh, any jobs
up there?" "Not much," Allen says, "&
whatever is, you can't make a living
at it." "Rough, Man. Just have to get the
fuck out of these parts.. Maybe i should
go to Ohio, Indiana..just West?.. Hell,
anywhere -- but here! Can't be any worse..
O Hell, i'm tired -- tired and bored.."

He lets us out 5 miles
over the new york State line..
As he drives away, i can't help
but see, read the sign on his back
fender, in big red letters:

'1976: HAPPY BICENTENNIAL, AMERICA!'

So we hit the road again,
my new buddy & i." "See those
beer cans?" Allen says, pointing
to a few lying bottom of a ditch;
"you don't see that in Vermont; there
they have 5¢ deposit on each one.
New York State.. and here they can
arrest you for hitchhiking..
Well, out in the open country like
this not too likely.."

Next is a grey Step-van. Back of it
filled with iron chains, full-tool boxes,
shovels & a big Diesel fuel engine.. "Yep',
that's 500 h.p.," says the mechanic-driver,
burly, rimless-glasses, soft-spoken: "and
'cause too cheap to change the oil, that
company back in Bennington, it will
cost them 1500 Smackers! would-ya'-believe-
it? Have to strip it right down; change
cylinder head, crankshaft, piston bearings..
Yep' i'm from New Hampshire, Nashua, working for
a Contracting outfit there. But don't know
how much longer.. This Diesel job, first one
in 3 weeks.. Things are really slowing
down.."

"Well, you're better off in New Hamp',"
chimes Allen, "than we are in Vermont; all
we have is paper mills and tourists.."
"Ya' know why?" tallies the mechanic, "in
New Hamp' we have Governor Meldrim Thomson Jr.,
& he's for Real in my book.. did ya' know
they voted to give him a raise recently --
& he refused it? Yep'!" ..And out the van
window the sky is an afternoon Botticelli deep
blue.. *Must mail the post-card..* And i wonder
*what she is doing now-- this minute, this
second? O i love you to complete distraction
abstraction, madness..* "Maybe," Allen says,
"but up in Newfane, i work for a Mental Insti-
tution for Teen-agers; & the patients, why
is it most of them come, are sent from
New Hampshire? If it's such a rich State..
If it's such a rich State.."

He drops us off
right in the center of Troy.
Allen splits, hurriedly. &
i walk thru the town till i
hit outskirts
again, open road,
Highway route 9

Hike, hike.. 3 o'clock and the hot sun is beating down like a hot tom-tom.. My throat feels dry, scorched, aching like a heavy steel rasp.. In Nowadhibou the Hottentots are humming their love songs.. Uba-uba-uba! In Paris the rag-pickers are waking up & trudging off to work.. The streets smell burnt incense. Above around the *Sacre Coeur* a flock of turquoise angels are flying ass-backwards.. In new york the Go-Go girls are going hot ga-ga, it's also a beaut' of a day, the stock market is booming, toasted marshmallows and purple orchids are falling from the sky, and new yorkers are still walking along sad-assed dumpy-slumpers. 'X--Narrow Road Ahead' X-lax taxi parataxis..ibis, a white ibis flying over Okinawa O sweetsweat abacus-road of prayer.. Jump for the stars -- willy-nilly, they, the stars always bite your ass. On the Wonder trolley, the Love Bridge, heart-beat gold moment-to-moment on the invisible Tightrope-walk from star to star, anguish to ecstasy. After all, Brother, it is 1976, the Tibetan Year of the Tiger, and/or also the Happy Birthday Bicentennial of Death, and you better believe it, Brother; 1976 years of the unhappy search for J. Christ and the gold-flaked rosebush in the Vagina.. 702 years since Dante first saw Beatrice.. 307 years since the beginning of the slaughter of the American Indian tribes, 127 years since the hanging of John Brown, 103 years since Arthur Rimbaud first penned his *Season in Hell*, 59 years since the murder of two Italian immigrant shoemakers, one named Nikola Sacco and the other Bartolomeo Vanzetti.. the Atom Bomb falling on Hiroshima, the Chicago Riots, Wounded Knee, the Attica Riots..

& the hot sun beats down like the Hottentot's hot tom-tom beating out their hot slushy humming bird love songs.. i think back to new york city and Rhoda's flat on East 6th st., near Avenue A; her 5 cats, her living room an unholy mess, an Obstacle-course to get to the John.. Both of us in bed, or walking on the ceiling, high on Acapulco red; making love to her Rhoda and all the time think thinking it is A., half-making believe it is always Anna.. Over & over, finally exhausted falling asleep and at night her 5 cats, every hour or so, one walk tip-toeing over on my chest, legs, groin.. And mornings Rhoda going Uptown to Madison ave. and work as a waitress in that slickswank acrylic restaurant, running her ass off her legs down sweating to bring sizzlin' T-bone steaks to hang-over'd halitosis'd Advertising-executives \$200 seersuckers, 5-inch pastel cuffs, gold watches; running her back & forth 'cause the steak isn't quite medium, for more duck sauce, French dressing, refills on coffee, real cream instead of milk, Sweet'n Low etc.

Swi-Swizh-SwiiiZZH! O there is more Kindness in the world than-you-think.. More -- or less, more much Less than More? Suddenly i hear Gaton screaming.. From new york city, near Avenue B.. My painter pal Gaton Ferreraer.. Screaming as on that night it all happened, when Gaton is returning home, & opening his door, putting the key into the lock of his apartment -- some bastard steps up behind him and puts a shiv' knife in his back, & sends Gaton away forever .. Gaton screams now, screams so long & loud, painful, blue murder -- i almost stumble to the ground, back-pack and all.. True, Gaton is drunk, habitually, almost daily, drunk with all the beauty outside and in he will never be able to capture put on canvas in a 1000 years 1000 lifetimes.. So rub him out, yes, rub him out quick you crazy jealous bastard -- whom they still haven't found -- who put that knife in him into a wheel chair 2 months & potter's field & Bye-bye Gaton, everever; Sweet Bye-bye, sweet pal.. Yes, rub him out quick, America, one & all, because Gaton is dangerous -- yes, dangerous with his magic talent you could never buy, love-a'-allmoney, Gaton with his magic talent you could never understand, Gaton with his magic big enough to capture all your lies..

And i see all my poet-pals in Frisco, Los Angeles, New Orleans, all standing on a street corner & begging for their supper.. Only there is one who is spared that fate, Tommy Trantino; instead he is in a cell in Leesburg State Prison, there for the slow death of serving out a lifetime sentence -- the greatest poet and only saint in America forced to spend a lifetime behind bars for a crime he did not commit..

Swizz! A slick Coupe de ville sedan swishes by, and again i read on the back fender: 'BIG YEAR OF THE BICENTENNIAL!'

And do you know what i say, then & now, say, think, feel?

KISS MY ASS, AMERICA

September 18, '76