

**IN SEARCH OF AMERICItA – PART 1**  
**A Reefer Trilogy in Nine Parts**

One early spring morning,  
We loaded the van – a VW bus –  
With everything important to us  
And headed out on the highway ...  
In search of America.

Now, to get from here  
To anywhere of interest  
Meant going south and west.

Due west meant Kansas, Colorado, Utah, Nevada  
I don't know ...  
That just wasn't very appealing.  
So, off we went – out 44, the old route 66 - thinking ...

we'll pick up hitchhikers  
crash where we want,  
set up shop, a new home, wherever the mood struck us.

We had no sooner crossed the Maginot Line

that outer ring highway which carries millions of suburban suicide seekers  
at a thousand miles an hour in endless circles to nowhere ...

Sorry ... we had no sooner crossed I-270  
when there's this couple - hitchhiking.  
We stopped, picked 'em up.  
A quiet pair  
40-ish  
Not hippies, not at all.  
In fact, as it turned out, migrant workers.  
Not Mexicans – Iowans  
Iowegians, I call 'em - a different breed altogether.

They were headed south.  
An early spring ritual  
To work the fields  
Follow the season, work their way back north with the spread of good weather  
'til they were home again  
where they'd stop  
stay  
work their own place  
'til it was time to start all over again next year.

We might as well have been in the Amazon.  
We were that stunned.

Where's your stuff, I asked.  
They had nothing with them.  
No stuff?  
You gotta have stuff.  
The bus was full of stuff ...  
The woman was sitting in my favorite rocking chair,  
The man on my small, old oak whiskey barrel.

They had clothes, they said,  
But they were wearing 'em  
All of 'em  
Three layers, at least ...  
She pulled up her skirt to prove it.  
Another skirt. You could see the hem of another underneath that.  
No telling how many more there were.

Stunned, like I said.  
At Springfield they got out.  
Said thanks. Bye. Safe journey.  
Chapter closed.  
Didn't even know folks like this existed.

But that was cool.  
And in no time  
Another rider  
Young guy  
A long-hair  
Heading home,  
His brother's house,  
Harrison Arkansas  
Invited us to say.  
Look around, settle down.  
Nice area, he said, mellow.  
Eureka Springs.  
Ok, we'll give it a try.

Had a job in less than a day  
Building the fanciest darn doll houses  
Some rich guy from Nashville  
Had a heck of a business  
Designing and selling these ...  
... creations

With wall paper  
Fixtures  
Everything  
Perfect!  
And he sold them for big money  
Not to kids – mostly old ladies, still girls in some ways, I suppose.  
Lived in an amazing Victorian  
On a cliff-side  
In Eureka Springs  
The Switzerland of the Ozarks  
Something like that.

And he found us a place to stay,  
Big funky apartment over an antique shop in the heart of town.  
I mean,  
In no time,  
We leave urban madness  
And bam  
Got a job  
A home  
A whole new rationale  
... only thing is  
That isn't what we wanted  
Not that quick  
Maybe not there  
Maybe not this at all.  
So before the day was out  
We had said thanks  
But no thanks  
And him,  
Being this strange, gentle soul,  
Suggested we stay out on the Buffalo River  
Think it over a bit ...  
Won't regret it, he said.  
Beautiful, peaceful, tranquil place,  
Sweet-sounding synonyms  
He was right.

Met this trio or foursome  
Hard to say.  
Couple guys  
A gal or two  
Living in a camper shell  
On a big lazy bend in the river  
Across from a tall cliff wall

Built a beautiful bonfire that night  
Sat on the ground  
Talking  
Telling stories  
Singing  
One had a guitar

They'd been there two years now.  
Sort of a celebration  
An anniversary, they said.

Where's the truck?  
Sold.  
Long ago.  
That's how they lived.  
Cannibalizing themselves.  
An odd job now and then  
But not their cup of tea.  
They'd started stripping long poles for a teepee ...  
The camper shell was next to go.

Us?  
Oh, just moving on ...

We woke the next morning.  
Made coffee ...  
          a coleman burner - everything important to us ...  
And off we went.