

Rock 'n' Roll Country Soul

A northern boy's trip south in search of America's great music

A true story by Dave Jaffe

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Introduction

In the spring of 1972, as a longhaired 17-year old, I left my home in Ossining, New York, to hitchhike south. Spending some of the time with my traveling companion, Ray Gildea of Columbus, Mississippi, I traveled throughout the South, hitting Mississippi, New Orleans, Nashville, Memphis and Macon, Georgia. For me it was an incredible experience, to see the places where the great music of the South – rock ‘n’ roll, country, R&B – came from, to experience a region just a few years into integration, and to meet a lot of good folks. In a second trip a few months later, I went back to Mississippi and New Orleans, and added Muscle Shoals, Alabama and then spent a week backpacking in the Great Smoky Mountains of Tennessee. I came away from these trips with increased self-confidence, a much better understanding of our country, and a lifetime’s worth of stories.

These are the stories from those trips. In the telling forty plus years later I might get a detail or two wrong but basically everything you are about to read happened pretty much the way I’m about to describe.

This is dedicated to my kids, Dara and Gary, for always asking me to tell them these stories.

Dave Jaffe

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Rock 'n' Roll Country Soul

As far as I can remember I've loved country music for as long as I've loved any kind of music, which is weird since I come from Ossining, N.Y., a Hudson River town with no country bars, 30 miles from New York City which didn't have a country station when I was coming up.

I fell in love with rock 'n' roll music when I first heard *Satisfaction* in 1965, when I was 10 or 11. But even then I knew about country music, about Johnny Cash and Hank Williams. I knew that the Beatles' *Act Naturally* had been done originally by Buck Owens. When *Nashville Cats* by the Lovin' Spoonful came out the next year, I nodded my head and said, "yeah I know about the pickers in Nashville".

I love all kinds of country music, especially the classic country sound of the aforementioned artists, plus Merle Haggard, Willie Nelson, Lefty Frizzell, George Jones, the great female voices of Dolly, Emmylou and Loretta (I'm on a first name basis with all of them!). I love the emotion, the honesty, the straightforward lyrics. I love the guitars, fiddles and especially the pedal steel guitar. I love when they make it cry! I love country rock (we have a Gram Parsons hoot night every year here in Austin on his birthday) and the progressive country or longhaired redneck music that grew up in Austin in the early 70s after Willie grew his hair long, smoked his pipe, and moved back to Texas. I love bluegrass, outlaw country, alt country, even some of the stuff coming out of Nashville these days. Back before NYC got a country station (around 1970) I used to tune in WSM from Nashville and listen to the Grand Ole Opry on Saturday nights.

My love for soul music and rhythm & blues came a little more naturally. In the 60s we had all that great Motown soul music, the Phil Spector wall of sound girl groups, the Ben E. Kings and the Drifters. Later on I got turned on to the Stax sound out of Memphis, largely through Frankie Crocker on WMCA from New York. You see, back before the advent of FM radio and specialized programming, you listened to all forms of pop music on AM. WMCA would play the Beatles, Stones, Frank Sinatra, bubblegum, the Doors, Motown, Aretha, all mixed up. Frankie Crocker slipped in a lot of Sam and Dave, Booker T. and the MGs, and my favorite, Otis Redding from Macon, Georgia, all on Stax Records. Even though I knew many of his songs, I didn't connect them all to Otis until the night he died, in December 1967, when Frankie Crocker played a set of his hits. I then went out and bought all his stuff. I used to buy my R&B records from Herbie Smith, who opened his own shop in Ossining after running the record counter at Abelon's for years until it closed.

In my mind rock 'n' roll was born in the summer of 1954 when Elvis fused country and R&B by recording Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup's *That's All Right, Mama* backed with Bill Monroe's *Blue Moon over Kentucky*. You can argue that Bill Haley was out first or that black R&B had already nailed the elements of what became rock 'n' roll but to me it was that southern mix of black and white music that was (is) the essence of rock 'n' roll. You can hear that influence in the Beatles, more in the Stones, and just about every other band in the 60s.

Toward the end of that decade, after the psychedelic craze, there was a strong return to guitar-driven, soul-fueled roots rock 'n' roll. White southern singers like Leon Russell from Oklahoma and Delaney and Bonnie from Mississippi and Arkansas created joyful rock 'n' roll with a strong gospel influence, fronting

large bands with horn sections and backup singers, influencing rockers like the Stones, Eric Clapton and Joe Cocker.

In Macon, Georgia, home of Little Richard and Otis Redding, the Allman Brothers Band merged the blues singing and keyboards of Gregg Allman with the country-influenced vocals and guitar of Dickey Betts, powered by the majestic slide guitar of Duane Allman, and basically created what is now known as Southern rock.

I especially love when the influences overlap. Gram Parsons and the Flying Burrito Brothers covered a classic soul tune recorded by Aretha Franklin, among others, *Do Right Woman, Do Right Man*. Otis Redding, a fellow Georgian, writing his last and greatest song, *The Dock of the Bay*, with the white Stax guitarist and producer Steve Cropper, created a classic that would have made a great country song:

*I can't do what ten people tell me to do
So I guess I'll remain the same*

Gram called this music cosmic American music. I call it rock 'n' roll country soul.

Growing up in Ossining it wasn't enough just to hear all this great music. I felt the need to go to these places, to feel the air and the soil, to find out where all this great stuff came from. So the first chance I had, that's what I did.

Ossining

Before we head south just a few words about where I'm from. Ossining is mainly a working class Italian town. When it came time to move to the suburbs in 1959 to a house big enough for three boys my parents selected Ossining and our neighborhood because the elementary school was integrated. We grew up with a bunch of Italian and Polish kids; my father was the only one on the street who commuted to a white collar job in the city.

As much as I love the Hudson Valley, as I got older I started to have my doubts about growing up in the suburbs. Neither city nor country, working class although I wasn't, my suburban town just didn't provide the kind of geographical identity I heard in the music coming from the South. You can hear the Mississippi delta in B.B. King's voice, the hills of Appalachia in the Carter Family. These folks were from a **place**.

Politically my parents were very liberal so we grew up supporting the Civil Rights movement and later the antiwar movement. So I was aware of the struggles of black folks in the South (but I also knew racism, discrimination and segregated schools existed in my own Northern suburb).

I guess high school is hard on most kids but I especially had a hard time of it, especially my junior year. The late 60s was a horrible time in this country. The assassinations of Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy took two of my heroes. Nixon got elected promising to end the war and then another 21,000 American kids died over there, for what? I love this country (still do) and I was outraged that Nixon was

trying to turn the country against people like me. I didn't have a lot of friends, didn't have confidence in myself regarding girls (being a year or more younger than my classmates didn't help with that). My academics were slipping and I hadn't made the baseball or basketball teams (my dreams of being the shortstop for the Yankees dying hard). And worst of all I was tone deaf and couldn't keep a beat.

So I retreated into my records and a vivid fantasy of being a guitar player traveling south and meeting all kinds of cool chicks.

I was only 16 when I graduated from Ossining High School in June 1971 so I asked Yale to defer my matriculation for a year (they didn't even have the term "gap year" back then) and went to work in a factory in Ossining. Taking that time off helped me sort of catch up with myself. I was hanging out with the older guys at work, visiting my high school friends at their colleges, listening to all the great music of the time. I even had a girlfriend!

That fall I met Ray Gildea from Columbus, Mississippi, at Vassar College while visiting my buddy Rowland Archer. By time February rolled around I had made enough money so I bought a backpack, loaded it up with camping gear, and made plans to hitchhike home with Ray on his spring break in early March.

For a mental picture of me in 1972 think of John Fogerty: medium long hair, flannel shirt, jeans, work boots. I wore a black cowboy hat but usually pulled the brim down into a slouch hat. And oh yeah, I went by the name Detroit Willie (but that's another story).

Heading South

We left Ossining on a beautiful early spring Sunday morning so naturally the song we were singing was

*Good old Sunday morning, bells a-ringin' everywhere
Going to Carolina, it won't be long till I'll be there*

The rides were coming fast that morning. We made our way out of New York and down through New Jersey. Then we got to Delaware where the interstate split and our driver wasn't going the way we needed to go so we got off and were walking down the highway to get to the next exit, when the Delaware State Police stopped us. They ripped our backpacks apart looking for drugs and didn't find any but took us in to the Wilmington police station anyway. Ray, being 18, was able to pay his fine right away and get out. But they would only release me to my parents so they put me in the lockup while my parents drove down – a 5 or 6 hour drive.

My cell was a basement cell with just a small barred window near the ceiling. The only furniture was a steel bunk bed with no mattress or blanket. They took my belt and my shoelaces so I wouldn't hang myself. With plenty of time on my hands I went to sleep on the cot and dreamed that my girlfriend had come and was sawing the bars off the little window to free me!

When my parents arrived they were pretty steamed at me, but more at the cops. After all I had left their house with their permission; they knew where we were going and how we were planning to get there. They let us continue on our trip but bought us bus tickets to Columbus. Our bus left that night and got to North Carolina by the next morning. So my first experience of the South was stumbling out of a Greyhound in the early morning at a bus terminal somewhere in North Carolina.

But that beautiful air! Warm and fragrant. And the breakfast in that truckstop! I mean, I had eaten grits before (we could get them in Ossining) and eggs over easy, but that breakfast was special.

And it didn't escape me that some of my biggest heroes, the young black and white men and women known as the Freedom Riders, may have come through that very bus terminal on their historic ride for desegregation just 11 years earlier.

Then back in the bus and on to Mississippi. But first a little Johnny Cash:

*Hey porter! Hey porter!
Please open up the door.
When they stop the train I'm gonna get off first
Cause I can't wait no more.
Tell that engineer I said thanks alot,
and I didn't mind the fare.
I'm gonna set my feet on Southern soil
and breathe that Southern air.*

Mississippi

We arrived in Columbus, in northeastern Mississippi, late that day if I remember correctly. Ray's house was only a few blocks from downtown. I think Ray's family was equally intrigued and amused with this long haired Northerner rolling in with their son. Ray's parents, Ray and Trudy, were both originally from the North and were liberals on civil rights. I met Ray's sister Patti, then 15, and his two younger brothers, Brian and Barry.

We spent about a week in Columbus just hanging out, seeing Ray's friends, driving around the area. One time we walked across a railroad trestle about 100 feet over the Tennessee Tombigbee River. If a train came we would have to jump. We went swimming in a gravel pit, where Ray met his future (now ex)wife Susie Reeves.

By now it was mid-March and full spring in Mississippi. Columbus was a small city and all around it was green countryside. I learned a new word, kudzu, referring to roadside vegetation that apparently had been planted to control erosion but now grew wildly and was all over the place.

It was an incredible education being in Mississippi in 1972. Integration was coming, slowly. The black high school had been closed, with all students attending one high school, but whites were already talking about moving their kids to private schools. The black side of town, still referred to as "N*****town", stunk. I guess they hadn't gotten around to putting in sewers over there yet. My ear

caught comments that I'm sure none of the kids we were hanging out with noticed. One time they were explaining to me how car service at a burger joint worked: "you just honk your horn and a n***** comes out and takes your order". Still, the sense I came away with was a begrudging acceptance that change was happening, and that giving black people their rights was probably the morally correct thing to do.

It was an interesting time for the white kids too. They were ready to experience the youth culture that the rest of the country was going through, having been held back by the conservatism of the South. So they revered me for what I represented, with my long hair and musical knowledge and all. I think we went to a high school dance once. All these kids, with their dress code-restricted short hair, many of whom were actually older than me, came up to me and gave me the thumbs up power handshake and treated me like a god.

For me one of the best parts of Columbus was hanging out with Patti, a cute blonde. One night the Gildeas loaned me their Cadillac to drive to the Naval Air Station in Meridian with Patti, where Brian was playing sax with his hot rock 'n' roll band. What I didn't expect was that the booze was going to be so cheap (something about not collecting Federal taxes on a military base). So I was drinking double Jackie D's for about \$0.75 each, having a great time with Patti while Brian and his band rocked out.

I'm sure I was over the legal limit as I drove back but I was driving carefully and slowly. That is until I reached over to put my arm around Patti and swerved a little bit. Damn, a state trooper pulled me over! A black one at that! I was torn being admiring the pace of integration in Mississippi and fearing I was going to end up spending the night in a Mississippi jail. I must have passed the drunk tests and he let me get away with a warning.

On another date I took Patti to see The Godfather at the local theater. We loved the movie but got so confused at the end when "the Corleone family pays off all the family debts" as to who was killing whom. When I got back to New York I picked up the novel and then sent Patti a long letter explaining what had happened.

(Four years later I went back to Columbus to help Ray fix up a house he bought after college. I would spend all day painting the house with Ray and Brian and then all night hanging out with Patti. Good times!)

Musical Interlude: Creedence Clearwater Revival, Green River

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L5V9nK7-OkM>

Creedence is from California, not Mississippi but what I love about John Fogerty is his ability to imagine himself as a character in a place and time, whether it be a busker playing a washboard on a corner as Willy and the Poorboys or a broke down country singer stuck in Lodi again. So as I passed those days in Mississippi I was singing this song:

*Well, take me back down where cool water flows, y'all
Let me remember things I love.*

*Stoppin' at the log where catfish bite,
Walkin' along the river road at night,
Barefoot girls dancin' in the moonlight.*

*I can hear the bull frog callin' me.
Wonder if my rope's still hangin' to the tree.
Love to kick my feet way down the shallow water,
Shoe fly, dragon fly, get back to mother.
Pick up a flat rock, skip it across Green River.*

*Up at Cody's camp I spent my days, oh,
With flat car riders and cross-tie walkers.
Old Cody, Junior took me over,
Said, you're gonna find the world is smouldrin'
And if you get lost come on home to Green River.*

(These are the Google lyrics, so I guess they are “official”. I always heard the second line as “Let me remember things I don’t know”, which really captures the magic of Creedence, that you can create yourself through your imagination.)

New Orleans

*Busted flat in Baton Rouge, headin' for the train
Feelin' nearly faded as my jeans
Bobby thumbed a diesel down, just before it rained
Took us all the way to New Orleans*

After about a week in Columbus we hitchhiked down to Jackson where Ray was going to have a reunion with some of his high school buddies. However, the trucker who picked us up was going all the way to New Orleans, just like Kris Kristofferson’s song, so we dropped off Ray in Jackson and headed south.

Sometime in the middle of the night the trucker pulled into Hattiesburg, Mississippi, where we moved a bunch of poultry from his “reefer” (refrigerated truck) to a smaller one. That was awesome. I’m standing in the smaller truck while he’s throwing these wooden crates full of frozen chickens down at me. I’m grabbing them and stacking them as fast as I can.

We pulled into NOLA around dawn. He dropped me off right near Bourbon Street. He noticed I was yawning as I was getting out so he reached behind his seat and pulled out this huge black pill, I believe it was a “Black Beauty”, amphetamine. I took it and was up for most of the next three days!

First I went to the bus station and stashed my backpack in a locker and got cleaned up. Then I walked around the river and ended up on Bourbon Street that night. I met a couple of guys from Worcester,

Massachusetts, on the street so I started hanging out with them. They were into strip clubs so I started going with them. There was this one club, on a side street, and I was chatting with one of the dancers, she still had her clothes on, and she was very nice, a little bit older than me, but not too. The Worcester guys wanted to go somewhere else so I put my black slouch hat on my new friend's head, I think her name was Kathy, and told her that I would be back later to reclaim my hat.

When I walked back in later (by now it must have been 2 or 3 AM), pretty drunk, I saw Kathy dancing with my hat on and nothing else. She was awesome! For me at 17 I was blown away.

On my second trip south in May of that year I looked up Kathy at the same strip club and even went home with her. It was weird. The girl who normally gave her a ride home after their shift wouldn't have anything to do with "dudes" so we had to take buses to her house. I thought I might get lucky (my relationship with my jail-breaking girl back in New York, which was pretty much over at the time of my first trip south, having ended) but I ended up sleeping alone. At least I got a place to crash (not having the benefit of a Black Beauty on that trip). I found out that Kathy was really close to her dog. She told me she tripped acid with him. He did seem pretty mellow.

New Orleans has so many good musicians – Dr. John, Professor Longhair, the Neville's – but we're going with Antoine "Fats" Domino for the musical interlude!

Musical Interlude: Fats Domino, Ain't That a Shame

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PwBilRdz67Q>

After three days I hitchhiked back up to Jackson, met up with Ray, and headed back to Columbus. After another day or so Ray flew back to Vassar and I headed east through Alabama with the goal of reaching Macon, Georgia that night.

Two things of note happened that day.

The first ride I got out of Columbus that Sunday morning was with a guy who looked in pretty bad shape, totally hung over, glassy eyes. I immediately started looking for a chance to get out when he started drinking from a bottle in a paper sack and rubbing his crotch, but he didn't stop until we were over the state line, where he stopped at a roadside park. As I was thumbing for my next ride I saw him running around the woods there with his dick in his hands, frantically masturbating. Yeah there were a few bad rides.

Party at the Lake

The second thing of note that happened that day is actually something that didn't happen. Somewhere in eastern Alabama, with a good chance of making Macon by dark, I got a ride with a couple of young Alabama folks, a guy and two girls. Maybe somebody's boyfriend couldn't make it or they had just broken up. They were headed for a party at a lake for a couple of days with a cooler of beers in the back seat (one of the best words to hear when you get into a ride is "Hey buddy, you thirsty? Why don't you jes reach back behind the seat and grab yerself a cold one outa that cooler?"). The kids were pretty cool,

the girls were attractive, and after a beer or two the guy, who was driving, glanced at the girls and they invited me to go with them to the lake.

But I, with nowhere to be until September, in a car with a nice guy and two pretty chicks, heading to a lake in this beautiful Alabama countryside, had already decided I was going to Macon that day so I declined.

In the movie version of this the next scene will be me, soaking wet from the storm that came up not long after they dropped me off, crawling into my sleeping bag late at night under an I75 overpass 100 miles from Macon.

Be willing to be flexible, a good life lesson.

Macon

Once again the first thing I hit in Macon was the bus station, to stash my backpack and get cleaned up, but this one was special: Little Richard was washing dishes there when he was discovered. Wop bop a loo bop a lop bam boom!

Macon is the hometown of Otis Redding and also where the Allman Brothers lived when they broke out (they were both managed by Phil Walden). The group photo from their first album was taken at Otis's widow Zelma Redding's farm.



I might have gone to a record store or two but for the most part there wasn't much connected to either the Allmans or Otis that I could go visit. But just being there in this beautiful mid-March weather, smelling the air, feeling the breeze, eating the food, gave me a feel for how this soulful music arose from this town.

It's hard to describe the impact the Allmans had on my life and that of my high school buddy, Rowland Archer, during our senior year. Starting in January 1971 we saw them every chance we could. Rowland

had a car and the Allmans were touring like crazy behind their second album, Idlewild South, so we saw them several times at the Fillmore East (Bill Graham anointed them America's best band) and elsewhere around the Tristate area. While we weren't there the weekend *Live at Fillmore East* was recorded we saw them there before and after and that record certainly captures the Allmans at their peak.

It turns out that Bill Graham decided to close the Fillmore on the weekend we were graduating, in late June 1971, and booked the Allmans along with Albert King and the J Geils Band to close it. So we drove down for the late show after graduation. It was a special night and the Brothers did encore after encore. When we walked out daylight was breaking over the East Village!

And Rowland and I were also together that day in late October when we heard the news that Duane Allman had died the night before in Macon. He had driven his motorcycle into the back of a peach truck. We were devastated but the band continued on and so did our love for them. For Rowland it has been a lifetime involvement. He built the Allman's first and biggest website and knows the band personally. A highlight of my musical fan life was when he introduced me to the band at an Austin City Limits festival years later.

The coolest thing I did in Macon involved food and, while it was a complete, shameless setup, it was worth it.

Among the back cover credits on Idlewild South, is a thanks to a Louise for vittles. Well Rowland had driven to Macon earlier in the year and reported back to me that Louise worked at a restaurant frequented by the Brothers, the H&H.

So my first morning in Macon I went to the H&H for breakfast. I sat at the counter, where a small black woman took my order. The only other person in the restaurant sat at a table toward the front. After the waitress brought me my eggs and grits, she and I struck up a conversation. I told her I was from New York and I was in Macon checking out where the Allman Brothers were from. She said, "The Allman Brothers? Why, dere my chirren! That's one of them right there". She pointed out the guy at the table, who happened to be legendary ABB roadie Red Dog. This is where I pulled my act, which I have never regretted. I said to her, "Wait a minute, are you Louise? You're on the album cover, you're famous!" She beamed and beamed!

Musical interlude: The Allman Brothers, Blue Sky

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wwyXQn9g40I>

*Walk along the river, sweet lullaby, it just keeps on flowing,
It don't worry 'bout where it's going, no, no.
Don't fly, mister blue bird, I'm just walking down the road,
Early morning sunshine tells me all I need to know*

*You're my blue sky, you're my sunny day.
Lord, you know it makes me high when you turn your love my way,
Turn your love my way, yeah.*

*Good old Sunday morning, bells a-ringin' everywhere.
Goin' to Carolina, it won't be long till I'll be there*

*You're my blue sky, you're my sunny day
Lord, you know it makes me high when you turn your love my way,
Turn your love my way, yeah, yeah*

As many times as I've heard this song it still makes me stop. The easy flowing of Dickey and Duane's guitars (one of the last songs Duane is on), Dickey's soulful country voice.

The Great Epiphany of My Life

After Macon I hitched up to Nashville but we need to pause for a moment so I can describe The Great Epiphany of My Life, which came to me on the road into Nashville.

I was riding into Nashville with a young guy who passed me a joint. I was grooving on the rolling hills down there in Tennessee, just beautiful land, and the guy was playing the latest Rolling Stones record on his cassette player in his car. And of course I'm totally into that as well. And at first, I was bothered, it was hard for me to connect the two things. How could one person love Tennessee and that whole rural thing and love rock 'n' roll coming out of England at the same time? I mean, undoubtedly there is a connection, the musicologist in me knew how the Scotch Irish brought their music to Appalachia, which developed into mountain music and bluegrass, which mixed with rhythm & blues to form rock 'n' roll, which the Beatles and Stones and others were into and brought back home to us. But at the moment it seemed like I was completely fragmented.

But then it dawned on me, the fact that I, myself, Detroit Willie, was into these two things, that's the only connection that was needed. Maybe others couldn't understand how I could be so against the war in Vietnam but so passionate about Merle Haggard (who sang, "If you're running down this country hoss you're walkin' on the fightin' side of me") at the same time, but it no longer concerned me.

Sometimes the next day you look back at all the brilliant ideas you had when stoned and say, "What was I thinking?", but this one has stuck with me for a lifetime. Just be who you are, love what you love, don't worry about it.

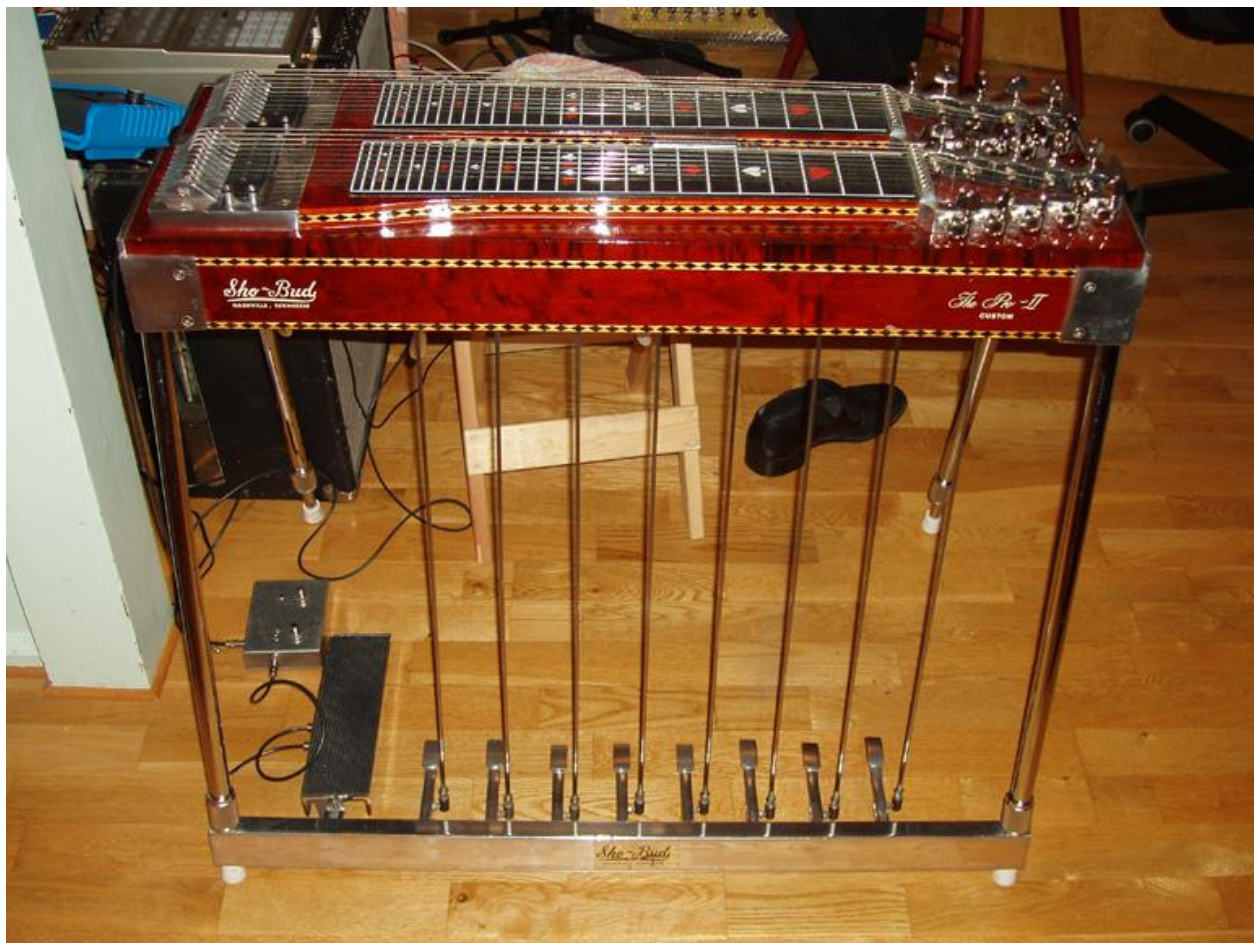
Nashville

Country music was growing and changing rapidly in the early 1970s and so was Nashville. Singer/songwriters like Kris Kristofferson had come to town and infused elements of honesty and simplicity back into music that was being watered down to appeal to a broader swath of America, with songs so good that even country music veterans like Ray Price recorded them and had big hits with them. Alternate hot spots of country music, such as Bakersfield, California, with Buck Owens and Merle Haggard, or LA with the country rock of the Flying Burrito Brothers, the Eagles and others, were gaining

popularity. Around that time Willie Nelson tired of the conservative Nashville climate, grew his hair long and moved to Austin where his arrival catalyzed the growth of progressive country, joining the hippies and the rednecks in a common love of beer, weed and country music.

But Nashville was still synonymous with country music when I got there that evening. I walked the streets of Music Row, thinking of Kris and the countless others who arrived there with a guitar, a stack of songs, a burning desire to make it, and not much else. I walked past the legendary Tootsie's Orchid Lounge and saw all the pictures on the wall. I poked my head into the Ryman Auditorium, where they were setting up for that night's Grand Ole Opry. I think I spent the night in a dorm at Vanderbilt, crashing on the floor of somebody I met hitchhiking.

The next afternoon I walked into the showroom of Sho-Bud Pedal Steel Guitars, a company run by two of the best pedal steel players, Shot Jackson and Buddy Emmons. I don't play but I have always admired the beautiful instrument, a horizontal guitar with legs, played with a steel bar in the left hand and a pick in the right, with foot pedals to bend the notes. There were dozens of pedal steels lined up around the room and no customers, just me and one salesman, in a natty suit with sharp creases and a cowboy hat. Hell, it might have even been Shot Jackson.



The salesman asked if he could help me. It never occurred to me that this guy, sitting around bored on a Saturday afternoon with no customers, might actually like to spend a few minutes with a weird longhaired kid from New York who couldn't play a note but loved the music, showing him how to play and the features of the various guitars. But I guess I didn't want to impose, or I was too shy, so I said "No thanks" and made a beeline out of there without really checking out the pedal steels.

Years later, after relating this story to Dara, I said that one of my biggest regrets in life was that I was too shy, too reluctant to ask for things. She told me, "Dad, most people have much bigger regrets in their lives. If that's one of your biggest I'd say you've led a good life". That made me feel better but still, if I had just let the man show me around for awhile...

While we're in Nashville we need to talk about Johnny Cash, another hero. I haven't met too many people that don't like him. That flat Arkansas drawl, the honesty, the integrity. He wrote "Folsom Prison" and "Walk the Line", and covered numerous other artists early in their careers, including Kris Kristofferson. He had a variety show on television for a few summers. In the summer of 1969, with President Nixon trying to split the country with the "Moral Majority" vs the antiwar folks, Johnny had Bob Dylan on his show. When the network powers told him he couldn't have Pete Seeger on the show because he was a Communist, Johnny told them to find another host. They relented and Pete played, singing "Worried Man Blues" with Johnny. If I had a bumper sticker and if I believed in God my bumper sticker would read, "Thank God for Johnny Cash".

Musical Interlude: Johnny Cash, Sunday Morning Coming Down

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ED5s1-Fe9FA>

For our musical interlude we're gonna pick Johnny's cover of Kris's Sunday Morning Coming Down.

*Well, I woke up Sunday morning
With no way to hold my head that didn't hurt.
And the beer I had for breakfast wasn't bad,
So I had one more for dessert.
Then I fumbled in my closet through my clothes
And found my cleanest dirty shirt.
Then I washed my face and combed my hair
And stumbled down the stairs to meet the day.*

*I'd smoked my mind the night before
With cigarettes and songs I'd been picking.
But I lit my first and watched a small kid
Playing with a can that he was kicking.
Then I walked across the street*

*And caught the Sunday smell of someone frying chicken.
And Lord, it took me back to something that I'd lost
Somewhere, somehow along the way.*

*On a Sunday morning sidewalk,
I'm wishing, Lord, that I was stoned.
'Cause there's something in a Sunday
That makes a body feel alone.
And there's nothing short a' dying
That's half as lonesome as the sound
Of the sleeping city sidewalk
And Sunday morning coming down.*

*In the park I saw a daddy
With a laughing little girl that he was swinging.
And I stopped beside a Sunday school
And listened to the songs they were singing.
Then I headed down the street,
And somewhere far away a lonely bell was ringing,
And it echoed through the canyon
Like the disappearing dreams of yesterday.
On a Sunday morning sidewalk,
I'm wishing, Lord, that I was stoned.
'Cause there's something in a Sunday
That makes a body feel alone.
And there's nothing short a' dying
That's half as lonesome as the sound
Of the sleeping city sidewalk
And Sunday morning coming down.*

It doesn't get much more basic than this. Real aficionados know that Johnny's one lyric change was the small kid was "playing with" rather than "cussing at" the can that he was kicking.

Memphis

From Nashville I hitchhiked down I40 to Memphis. By now I was becoming a good hitchhiker, being aware of upcoming highway interchanges and getting off beforehand if necessary. One thing I noticed was that long hairs always picked me up unless I was totally not visible or there was a cop just down the road. Four years later this brotherhood no longer existed: long haired guys would drive past me just as often as short haired folks.

Elvis was still alive when I was in Memphis so I didn't tour Graceland but I did go down there and was amazed that it was across the street from a rundown strip mall. Sam Phillips' Sun Records also launched Johnny Cash, Carl Perkins and Jerry Lee Lewis.



I had some interesting adventures sleeping in Memphis. When I first got into town I was tired and needed a shower and a real bed. For \$3 the YMCA offered both. I put my pack in my room, grabbed a towel and headed to the shower room only to find it full of gay black men clad in only short towels and little hairnet like things. I was shocked. I was pretty naïve about both YMCAs and gay people but I knew the C in YMCA stood for Christian and that in general Christians really didn't accept homosexuality so I couldn't understand why the place was full of gays. (This was years before that Village People song came out). I don't know if I would call it homophobia on my part, but here I was a skinny white 17 year old who had heard enough jokes about not bending over for a bar of soap in jail so I scurried out of there before anyone saw me, found an unoccupied shower on another floor, took the world's quickest shower and then locked myself in my room!

The second night I snuck into Overton Park near downtown Memphis, where Elvis gave his first paid concert on July 30, 1954, two months to the day before I was born. Amazingly I found a nice soft piece of ground, rolled out my sleeping bag and was soon off to a very nice rest.

I was awakened at first light by the sound of things whizzing by my head. I peeked out of my sleeping bag to find that I was camped out on a putting green of the golf course there in the park. Those early riser golfers must have been amused to see a naked young longhaired guy climb out of a sleeping bag, dress hastily, and then beat it out of there!

Stax Records was still operational at that time but that part of Memphis had fallen on hard times after Dr. King's assassination so I didn't hang out there (but I have a vague memory of driving past there, it

was in a former movie theater with the lobby turned into a record store). Stax to me was and is the epitome of soul music. Most of its artists were black but the house band was integrated with white guitarist Steve Cropper and bassist Donald "Duck" Dunn joining Booker T. Jones on organ, Al Jackson Jr. on drums, Isaac Hayes on piano together with the Memphis Horns, Wayne Jackson on trumpet and Andrew Love on tenor saxophone. They were a tight band backing Otis, Sam and Dave, Carla Thomas and everyone else, as well as recording on their own. They didn't use charts, they just learned the songs and played 'em. Otis wrote his own horn lines and sang them to the horn players.

Musical Interlude: Otis Redding, These Arms of Mine

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aUaO50nWnvg>

One day in late summer, 1962 a band named Johnny Jenkins and the Pinetoppers was recording at Stax. Jenkins' driver and sometimes backup singer was a 21-year old named Otis Redding. All day long Otis kept mentioning to Booker T. and Steve Cropper he had a song he wanted to record. To get the kid off their backs, they agreed to cut it after the Pinetoppers' session was over. Otis hummed the melody to Steve, who put together a quick arrangement, and a career was born.

*These arms of mine, they are lonely
Lonely and feeling blue*

*These arms of mine, they are yearning
Yearning from wanting you*

*And if you would let them hold you
Oh, how grateful I will be*

*These arms of mine, they are burning
Burning from wanting you*

*These arms of mine, they are wanting
Wanting to hold you*

*And if you would let them hold you
Oh how grateful I will be*

*Come on, come on baby
Just be my little woman
Just be my lover, oh*

*I need me somebody, somebody to treat me right, oh
I need your arms, loving arms to hold me tight*

*And I, I, I need your, I need your tender lips, to hold me
Together when I'm right with you*

And that was the end of the first trip. From Memphis I shot home on I40 to I81 and then across Pennsylvania to New York. The only incident of note was the truck driver in Pennsylvania who kept asking me about the “gay life” in New York as if I didn’t know what the term meant. Gays in a YMCA, gay truck drivers, what’s this world coming to?

Second Trip

Two months later, after Ray’s freshman year ended, we hitchhiked back to Mississippi together in May, 1972. This time, as experienced hitchhikers, we made it without incident (and props to my mom and dad for trusting me not to screw up again, as I was still only 17). Actually we met another gay guy along the way but before that we had the

Best Ride Ever

Heading to Birmingham out of Chattanooga, Tennessee, we were picked up by a black couple, maybe late 20s, in a Camaro. As his hot girlfriend or wife drove 140 MPH, the guy passed us beers, rolled joints and looked out for cops. What a ride!

Tuscaloosa

Later that night we got a ride out of Tuscaloosa, home of the University of Alabama, by an older guy in a Cadillac. Ray sat in front while I vegged out in the back. It took me a minute to understand, but the guy was propositioning me. He offered me \$80 to go down on me, which would have paid for the whole trip. He said I wouldn’t even know it was a guy. “If you close your eyes you can’t tell!”

I turned him down and went back to not paying attention. He started asking Ray questions and Ray made up a whole story about how we were long lost brothers and blah blah blah. Then the driver turned to me and asked me the same questions, which I answered accurately. He then said to us in his Alabama drawl, “Ah don’t mean to doubt thuh veracity of yo statements, but they suhtainly ah contruhdictry”.

Many years later when Gary was practicing for a part as a Southern gentleman we used that line to train him on the drawl.

Ponchatoula

After we spent a few days with the Gildeas in Columbus Ray and I took off for New Orleans, this time in one of the family cars (a small car, the AMC Gremlin I believe, not the Caddy). At one point we picked up two hitchhikers who turned out to be drug dealers, psychedelics I think. Late in the day, near the small town of Ponchatoula, Louisiana, the road switched back and forth between being a divided highway with two lanes in each direction and a two-lane road. Ray was driving during that part of the trip, and, after the road switched back to a two-lane, Ray was passing cars safely by going into the oncoming lane and then popping back into our lane. At some point Ray must have forgotten he was no longer on the divided highway (and no, we hadn’t indulged in any of the product from the back seat) so

he stayed in the oncoming lane just a little too long, until we saw a big car coming right at us in that lane. Well the three of us quickly pointed out to Ray that it was only a two-lane road but by then it was too late to avoid the head on collision. I still don't know how he did it but Ray was able to go to his left (to the shoulder of the oncoming lane, which wasn't very wide) and manage the collision so that no one was injured. (Actually the drug dealers left so fast we just had to assume they weren't injured).

But the Gremlin had to be towed so we ended up in a repair shop in Ponchatoula late at night. After sleeping in the car we had them look at it when they opened at 8 the next morning. It turned out they could fix it enough to get us running again, but they didn't have the correct ball joints. The nearest ones were at a dealership in Baton Rouge, over an hour away. Oh and it was Saturday morning and the repair shop closed at noon, and they would need at least an hour to fix the car. If we couldn't get the part in about two hours we would be spending the weekend in scenic Ponchatoula, Louisiana.

At that point Ray and I executed our most precise bit of hitchhiking. Every ride came within a minute of the previous ride, we were in and out of the dealership in 5 minutes, and on the way back we were lucky to get a guy who was in a hurry to get to Memphis take us up to Ponchatoula. So we get out of the car in Ponchatoula, right near the repair shop, right at 11 AM and look at each other. Do you have the ball joints? No, I thought you had them? We go racing back out to the highway waving our hands like crazy and the guy saw us at the last minute and pulled over and handed us our ball joints!

It was around this time that I started developing my theory of hitchhiking karma. Which is, the only way to get rides is to give rides. I always picked up hitchhikers when I was driving my car. You can try to build your karma by doing other good deeds, like holding doors for old ladies, but karma is not transferable.

Muscle Shoals

Muscle Shoals is a small city on the Tennessee River up in the northwest corner of Alabama. For reasons that I never understood it was the home to many very soulful musicians, white and black, and at least two nationally famous recording studios. Maybe it's the beauty of the countryside, or the wide spot on the Tennessee that it sits on, I don't know. The recent documentary *Muscle Shoals* paints a very compelling portrait of the place and the music.

FAME Studios was the first studio there. Etta James, Wilson Pickett and Aretha Franklin all recorded hits there. Duane Allman was discovered there (he turned Pickett onto "Hey Jude" and played lead on it; Pickett returned the favor by naming Duane "Skydog"). Jerry Wexler, the legendary head of Atlantic Records, recorded many of his artists there. No mention of soul music in the 60s and early 70s is complete without mentioning Jerry Wexler, who invented the term, "rhythm & blues".

In 1969 four of the leading staff musicians at FAME, Barry Beckett (keyboards), Roger Hawkins (drums), Jimmy Johnson (guitar) and David Hood (bass), known as the "Swampers", split off to open their own studio, Muscle Shoals Studios. The Rolling Stones recorded Brown Sugar and Wild Horses there at the end of their 1969 tour, between their NYC shows in Madison Square Garden (I went to the one on the day after Thanksgiving) and Altamont on December 6 (there are scenes from the session in *Gimme Shelter*).

I remember hitchhiking into Muscle Shoals late in the afternoon and walking up to FAME Studios. I walked in, looked at all the gold records on the wall. There were several folks sitting around a reception area. Nobody seemed to notice me, I guess folks like me dropping in was no big deal. Once again, though, my tendency to not want to impose kicked in so I turned around and walked out without talking to anyone.

I spent that night in a place called His House which was sort of a crash pad run by evangelical Christians. In exchange for doing some cooking or cleaning up you got fed and a place to sleep and shower. After dinner was a required Bible study group, a bunch of us guys sitting around a table with a leader. One of the guys, I think he was pretty new there, was saying, "You know, I've been reading the Bible and reading the Bible, and as far as I can tell it says that having sex before marriage is wrong! Is that right?? Are you being serious about this?" And I'm saying to myself, "Dude, I'm Jewish but even I know that that's not allowed in the Christian religion." But he was majorly bummed out because here he is on the verge of discovering God or whatever and to find out he had to give up sex, he wasn't ready to take that step. And the rest of the guys are commiserating and encouraging him, like, "It's hard but you can do it man!"

Musical Interlude: Aretha Franklin, I Never Loved a Man (The Way I Love You)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ou2vVeRXO_s

*You're a no good heart breaker
You're a liar and you're a cheat
And I don't know why
I let you do these things to me
My friends keep telling me
That you ain't no good
But oh, they don't know
That I'd leave you if I could*

*I guess I'm uptight
And I'm stuck like glue
Cause I ain't never
I ain't never, I ain't never, no, no loved a man
The way that I, I love you*

*Some time ago I thought
You had run out of fools
But I was so wrong
You got one that you'll never lose
The way you treat me is a shame
How could ya hurt me so bad
Baby, you know that I'm the best thing
That you ever had*

Kiss me once again

*Don't ya never, never say that we we're through
Cause I ain't never
Never, Never, no, no loved a man
The way that I, I love you*

*I can't sleep at night
And I can't even fight
I guess I'll never be free
Since you got, your hooks, in me*

*Whoa, oh, oh
Yeah! Yeah!
I ain't never loved a man
I ain't never loved a man, baby
Ain't never had a man hurt me so bad*

*No
Well this is what I'm gonna do about it*

Going Home

From Muscle Shoals I went into the Great Smoky Mountains National Park at Gatlinburg, Tennessee.
Yep, I was singing,

*Well, it was Gatlinburg in mid-July
And I'd just hit town and my throat was dry,
I thought I'd stop and have myself a brew.
At an old saloon on a street of mud,
There at a table, dealing stud,
Sat the dirty, mangy dog that named me "Sue."*

I loaded up my backpack with food and headed up the Appalachian Trail, which follows the Tennessee/North Carolina border through the Smokies in the park, continuing a lifelong interest in the AT.

And then it was back up I81 and home.

So how did my travels in the South change me? By turning my fantasy into a reality, by actually going South and checking out all those fabled cities, I now knew I had the power within me to create my own life, however I wanted it to be. I came back with increased confidence that I could handle myself in a lot of different situations. I felt I understood the South and its music much better having breathed the air and met the people. And I had some learned some lessons I still carry with me.