



Big Decision

My music partner Lou and I have decided to stop touring nationally. We have one more brief New York slog in April, but then we're winding down, and gigging only closer to home. I find myself reminiscing, and don't know if Whither Zither needs to know about it, but what the heck.

We will miss so dearly the far flung friends, venues, and audiences we have come to love so passionately. The memories tumble: The church basement, storefront, garage, living room, back yard, circus tent, nature preserve, union hall, general store, grange hall, opera house, coffeehouse, restaurant, tavern, museum, library, hay wagon, flatbed trailer, town hall, baseball diamond, barn, office building, airplane hangar, boat dock, health spa, rec room, winery warehouse, polyethylene inflatable igloo.

Down the ancient steps to the legendary Club Passim in Cambridge MA; up the narrow steps to the funky famed Caffe Lena of Saratoga Springs NY; down the crowded steps to the cozy Cornelia St Cafe in Greenwich Village; up the mountain in a steam train to a mountain stage in Fir, Colorado.

Through two terrifying post-gig freezing rains, one in Boston in the 80's, the other in Minneapolis fifteen years later, both treacherous hours-long bumper-car slides back to motels. Hot drive to Omaha in '76 Chevy Malibu we called the Green Banana with cigarette-lighter plug-in fan blown over huge ice block for AC. Pieces of pie in Cozad Nebraska restaurant while waiting for new fuel pump for Nissan wagon on the way to Denver. The first missed gig because of weather, early season blizzard Oct 26, 1987, supposed to be in Kingsbury NY but we spent the night snowed in in Chicopee, MA.

We played Berkeley's Freight and Salvage many times both before and after their big move, and the famed Ark in Ann Arbor in all of their increasingly swank locations. Loved playing the songwriter hotspot of Bellingham WA, the enthusiastic Portland Folklore Society, various sweet venues in

Seattle including the Roadrunner Cafe where we tried the exhausting experiment of two shows in one night (mistake). Played in the cattle town of Dodge City Kansas, where they told us if we climbed a nearby hill we could see all the feedlots in town. Played the wonderful middle-of-nowhere Sangerville Maine grange hall; best pie in the world. Had the honor of Tom Lehrer in our audience on the west coast, Noam Chomsky in on the east coast, and, thanks to connections made by our friend Bob Blackman, folk DJ at WKAR in Lansing MI, the Pulitzer prize winning author and favorite of mine Doug Hofstadter in Bloomington Indiana came to our show, and drove out to our sleazy motel later that night in his old station wagon as we sat in crumbling adirondack chairs waiting to flag him because the lights were burned out over our room numbers.

We played festivals: the Ozark Folk Center State Park Festival of Humor and Storytelling where we were kindly received, which made me feel great because the late Jimmie Driftwood help start the Folk Center, and he's a songwriting hero of mine. Played Kentucky Folk Music Weekend in Louisville where we yakked with the traditional music superhero Jean Ritchie. Played the Big Muddy in Booneville, MO, more than once, and Juel Ulven's labor of love, the Fox Valley Festival in Geneva, IL. We played three Canadian Festivals: Winnipeg, where someone proposed marriage during one of our workshops; Mariposa in Toronto where we had a wonderful workshop with Si Kahn, Oscar Brand, Artisan, and Len Wallace, in old labor hall in Toronto; and the first Stan Rogers festival in Canso Nova Scotia where they shut down the town's canneries for the weekend so the workers could help run the fest. Played the Philadelphia Folk Festival; Boston Folk Festival; Golden Link festival in Honeoye Falls NY where we met the great Sam Hinton; Old Songs Festival near Albany where we had a bizarre workshop with Dr. Demento and Utah Phillips. Played the Festival at the Fort in Omaha; Adams Avenue Roots Festival in San Diego; Hiawatha fest in the UP where we slept in pup tents in a thunderstorm. Had a rip roaring workshop with Peggy Seeger at the Champlain Valley Folk Festival in Vermont.

Memories include helping folk icon Faith Petric, in her 90s, onto the stage to join us at the Freight & Salvage; eating blueberries with Pete Seeger and Guy Carawan in

a motel parking lot in Schenectady. Sitting on the ferry on the way to mainland US from Victoria BC gig fixing Lou's accordion monopod with wire and epoxy; Playing to a sold-out hall in Grand Rapids MI thanks to a newspaper article titled "Divorced Couple Sings Funny Songs."

Live radio was always a nervous treat. Had giggly radio interviews in Boston, Berkeley, Santa Cruz and other places on the mornings of the gigs, or sometimes the morning after; Minnesota Public Radio had us on their Morning Show many fun times; we loved the bucolic drive to Cedar Falls IA and Live from Studio One on KUNI; National Public Radio's Flea Market with Jim Post and Art Thieme in Chicago; KPIG in Santa Cruz, Robbie Osman's show Across the Great Divide from KPFA in Berkeley; Susan Forbes Hansen's Valley Folk on WFCR in Amherst MA, our dear friend Matt Watroba who had us on his WDET show Folks Like Us many times over the years in Detroit and who now is a touring musician himself; Rich Warren and the WFMT Folkstage in Chicago, and many more, including Garrison Keillor's show where we appeared thrice with a twenty year hiatus between the second and third times...

So many marvelous friends opened up their homes for house concerts, such as songwriter and ceramic artist Barbara Svoboda of Catonsville MD, poet Marilyn Robertson of Felton CA, the multi talented Murray Callahan of Havertown PA, trad musicians Anne Dodson and Matt Szostak on the Maine coast, the amazing Cathy Fink and Marcy Marxer in Silver Spring MD, the hilarious Therapy Sisters of Austin TX, old friends from the late New Folk Collective Doug and Mary Olsen of St Paul MN, Woody and Rebecca Fridae of Winters, CA, and so many, many more; the list goes on and on and on and on.

And on we blundered through stage fright, contact dermatitis, laryngitis, colds, flues, cancer, panic attacks, kidney stones, shingles, motion sickness, arthritis, bedbugs, and nocturnal twitches. Here's to the twilight navigation through unfamiliar streets, the search for last minute pre-gig taco or breath mint, the butterflies, the big hellos, the fun of music, the wild laughs, huge coffee pots. The tired good byes, the haunted motels. And now, back to Wisconsin. But not without special thanks to our mentor, Michael Cooney, for talking us out of the state in the first place. --WZ, Feb 2017