

Weekender

Thursday, November 6, 1980

America on Wheels

By BILL FIELDS

THE white-haired, bespectacled driver hadn't gotten the Greyhound bus 10 miles down the interstate when a pothole interrupted my dozing.

The bus had left the downtown Richmond, Va., bus terminal at 2:30 p.m. and now moved up Interstate 95 toward Washington, D.C., my next stop.

Sitting on an aisle three rows from the front of the bus, I had started napping after a lull in a conversation with Barton, a 26-year-old fellow from Switzerland.

My eyes opened, and I smelled food—salami. "On the bus?" I thought. "Didn't we leave the snack bar at the terminal?"

I glanced toward the other side of the aisle to see a middle-aged man from Germany—I had spoken briefly with him as we waited to leave Richmond—pulling out a loaf of 100 percent wheat bread and a package of Oscar Mayer salami. Not one sandwich, but enough food for all 38 passengers aboard. All he needed was a jar of mustard.

"A little snack," I said, trying to keep a straight face.

"Excuse me," he said in a thick accent.

"Having a little snack," I repeated.

"Ah, yes. A little snack."

I went back to sleep and dreamed about the sandwiches. About 30 miles up the road, I woke again.

I turned toward the rear of the bus, not at anyone in particular. But I couldn't miss the big eater. The package of meat was empty and the loaf of bread was half gone. He was washing the meal down with a quart of A&P chocolate milk.

I looked at his untied purple tennis shoes and tried to doze off again.

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My friends had promised I would meet some interesting characters if I took a long bus trip during fall break.

Now, 1,787 miles later, looking at my soiled seven-day Greyhound Ameripass, I can say my friends made good predictions.

They said I was loony to go. One person, who travels only on airplanes, called me crazy. When I told her where I was going, she was ready to call the psychiatric ward.

"You're going to Detroit to see an old roommate," she said. "Why Detroit?"



Cover by Tom Westarp

"He lives there. I've never seen that part of the country before.

I would see more than Detroit. My chosen route, which avoided most one-horse towns, took me through Petersburg, Va., Richmond, Washington, D.C., Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Toledo and Ann Arbor, Mich., where I would spend a day before arriving in Detroit.

I had not planned a detour to New York—467 miles' worth—but when I left Michigan I decided I wanted to see New York City, if only for two hours, until the next bus left for home. And if I wanted to compare bus terminals, everybody said I had to see the New York-New Jersey Port Authority.

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