Again, I had left Springfield. Although I was the class of 1953, working, trying to support myself, and the promise of more adventure on the road led me to decide to be a bum again. It was over with my dad. I remember spending a week in New York City ... and then broke, hit the road, panhandled, begged at restaurants, stayed at Sally's, and used my thumb for transportation.

Meeting Red Skelton, Whispering Jack Smith, the Train Boss, the Veterinarian; and working and living in Newport Beach, Southern California was great adventure! Well worth being a bum, and young!

1. I traveled across the USA, and wound up in Seattle, WA. There, I picked up a job with the Ringling Brothers Circus, and after Seattle and Portland, played the Cow Palace in San Francisco. The show ground on, and we played Los Angeles, San Diego, and back to Los Angeles where I quit.

There, a old guy named Whispering Jack Smith [5] and I quit the show, and hit a Sally (Salvation Army) and I worked in their mattress Factory [10] for a few days. More about Jack later. to Newport Beach [11], and worked on a converted mine sweeper (Yacht) [12] where I hurt my back in an accident. [10]

2. Cecil B. DeMille directs this 1953 Best Picture Oscar-winner, a splashy, three-ring epic about Ringling Bros. Barnum and Bailey Circus. Charlton Heston is the respected circus manager who keeps the show together -- not an easy job, considering all the clashing egos involved, including that of a daredevil trapeze artist (Cornel Wilde) and his fellow performer (Betty Hutton). Jimmy Stewart plays an undercover clown on the lam from the authorities.

The people I met in the Circus talked about the filming which took place in 1952. The actors were a pain in the ass ... and there were two versions of the movie ... One the public saw, and a raunchier version.
3. This photo shows the "Wagon Flats", where we loaded all the wagons onto the flat cars. As at "Pole Boy" (see below # 8). In the rail yards, I walked my ass off hooking and un-hooking the hook and bar in order to get around the telephone poles and their vertical obstructions.

You can see the tractor that the cable was attached to in order to pull the wagons on and off the flatcars. It usually took around four hours as I remember to completely on or off load the "flats." It was important to go quick, as the whole midway and such could not set up and get started until you were finished.

4. Well, this was my home away from home. This particular photo was one of the entertainers' car. There was a unspoken caste system on the Circus Train(s). In order ... (1) Performers, (2) Support people (Managers, cooks, technical, lighting, etc .. ) and (3) US ... Grunts .. Laborers. Our cars did not have windows, and not much ventilation. Inside our pullman car, the beds were 4 levels high, and not much head space. There was an area we could sit in, but not much space. It was pretty dreary, but the excitement (For me) of "Being with the Circus", made up for it! I remember, when it rained and we came in after a loading or unloading, the "Train Boss" would give us ... one at a time and out of the same jigger a drink of whiskey.

5. Whispering Jack Smith when I knew him was working for the Circus ... in the same capacity i was. Apparently, his career described below had failed, he was old, and at the end of his life. For him, this was the bottom. He took a shine to me, and kinda watched over me. We would roam the Midway together, and he kept the rowdies away.

Smith was born John Schmidt. He had a very distinctive style which was a combination of singing and talking in a very "intimate" way using the microphone very effectively as opposed to "belting" the song out. His "whispering" style of singing was a result of a World War I injury from poison gas that kept him from singing at full volume.
He was a pianist at a radio station when he got his singing break substituting for a singer who failed to show up. He made the "whispering" style popular, and there were a number of imitators. Smith took to the relatively newly invented microphone, and it was singers like "Whispering" Jack Smith and the early "crooners" who developed the use of this "modern" technology.

6. Jack and I used to roam the Midway and watch the crowd enjoy themselves. When we played Los Angeles, we ran into Red Skelton. He was all alone, just walking on the Midway ... and smiling that great smile. Dressed casually, I thought he was rather tall.

We walked up and Whispering Jack said, "Hey Red .. you remember me?". Red said, "Yes ... sure do Jack" Jack said, "Let me introduce to my buddy Tom Kennedy. He plays Clarinet." Red made small talk ... but kept good eye contact as I remember. You knew he cared about you. What a thrill !!! Gave Jack a $20 dollar bill. Not the last celebrity I would meet in my life's travels. Perhaps the funniest, and the most personable.

7. In 1872 the P.T. Barnum Circus had grown so large, that it was decided that they would only play at large venues, and that they would travel by train. P.T. Barnum had two of his partners, William Cameron Coup, and Dan Costello, to come up with a system to load the circus wagons on to railroad flat cars. Using a system of inclined planes, called runs, and crossover plate between cars, they developed a system of ropes and pulleys, along with a snubber post to get the wagons on and off of the flat cars.

They used horses to pull the wagons up the run, then would hitch a second team to pull it down the run cars (flats). It was in 1872, that when they first moved by train they used Pennsylvania Railroad flatcars. This turned out to be hazardous, since the Pennsylvania Railroad's cars were in poor shape. It was decided in mid
season that they would buy their own cars, and when the P.T. Barnum Circus left Columbus, Ohio, it was on the first circus owned train. On the train, there were sixty cars, forty-five being flatcars, carrying about one hundred wagons. The off loading was much the same as loading, but a snubber post was used to help break the wagons' descent down the run. The system that was first used in 1872, is still used today by the RBBBC although through more modern methods.

8. I was hired as a "Pole Boy". You see, there was this steel bar 1/2" round, with a hook on the end. It was attached to a steel cable which was pulled by a yellow tractor. My job was to come to scratch whenever the train pulled in and hook and un-hook, and re-hook the cable and tractor to the big steel rings in the corners of the circus wagons.

This was the "Modern" way to get the circus wagons off and back on the flatcars. It was fun, and you got to get all the rest of the time off to enjoy the circus or to do things on your own time. I remember I still had my clarinet with me but curiously did not want to play in the circus band. Boy, they were really good .. but then again, so was I.

9. The outstanding memory I have was when I infected my right hand forefinger. It got worse and worse, and was throbbing pretty severe. Whispering Jack, or someone else advised me to go to the Vet. The Doctor was no damn good. I finally went way after I should of. It had apparently gotten infected from a steel sliver from the cable.

I had to wait, as he had a long rubber glove on, and was cleaning out an impacted Elephant. As I waited nervously, the unhappy elephant was making obscene noises at both ends, and finally the Vet got to me. We stood in his wagon alongside a big fish tank filled with some kind of disinfectant. It had a blue light. He said, "Let's see this", and held my infected hand in both of his. I don't know where the scalpel came from but he was fast. He lanced it, and there was blood and pus all over the front of both of us. Then with one sweeping motion, he dunked my hand into the tank up to my forearm, and swished it around."Come back in 2 days", he said ... after he dressed it. I lost a good bit of skin where the infection was. Treated by a Vet ... What Next ? He did a great job!
The 84-car Circus train would usually arrive in the wee hours of the morning in four separate sections and settle down on a siding in the nearby Pennsylvania Railroad Yard and unload onto tractor-trailers for transport to the Circus site for set-up.

The tent set-up was done by roustabouts -- unskilled laborers who traveled with the circus and participated in the tent set-ups when the circus was being assembled. During the show, they performed numerous other menial chores like moving props and cleaning up after the animals.

10. This is a photo of the interior of a Navy Minesweeper undergoing conversion. When I left the Circus I hit a Sally in Los Angeles for about a week. They did run in the same building a Mattress Factory where they would recondition and remanufacture mattresses. Hey .. they paid $4.50 a day, and three hots and flop! No adventure though. Needed to move on

Jack and I had a falling out, and I would up hitching down highway 101, and landed in Newport Beach. What a great place to spend some time. Broke, I picked up a job with the Paramount Oil Company as a wood refinisher and clean up guy on the minesweeper which was being converted into a Yacht.

I hurt my back. I was working outside on the deck, when a scaffolding fell on me from above. I was paralyzed from the waist down. Found out all about Chiropractors, and my back has given me problems for years ever since. I used to take the Bus from Newport Beach up the hill to Costa Mesa for treatments. Spent a lot of time on the beach recuperation for the next eight weeks. Then moved on.

11. A little history about Newport beach ... In August 1906, residents in the booming bay town voted to incorporate. Back then, bay front houses sold for as little as $500. Today, the median price of homes in Newport Beach is approximately $545,000.

Residents identify closely with their "villages" - including Corona del Mar, west Newport and the Harbor, Lido and Balboa islands - rather than Newport Beach itself. Homes are separated from busy commercial areas such as Lido Village, Mariner's Mile and Newport Center. Note ... I remember all these locations, and hung out all over them. (California Girls and Mariners Bar!)

One hundred years after the McFaddens built what is now Newport Pier, the city still revels in its ocean roots. Back then, only a few dozen summer cottages could be rented, and a few dozen people called Newport home.
12. Beginning her life as a minesweeper in 1942, this vessel saw action with the Canadian Navy in World War II. In 1965, she was purchased and renamed the Wild Goose by legendary actor John Wayne. Converted into a luxuriously appointed yacht, the Wild Goose served as a backdrop for celebrity events, family vacations, and infamous poker sessions with such luminaries as Dean Martin, Sammy Davis Jr., and Bob Hope. Measuring 136 feet long with 25-foot beam, the vessel still sports the brass plates installed by the Navy to protect her prow while hunting for mines.

Small world? Another track in life? This minesweeper in the foreground may have been the one I worked on could have very well been the one owned by John Wayne. Sure does look like it. He used to hang out up north in Sequim, WA (Where we now have our summer accommodations), where a marina was named for him. He also used to put in at the harbor in Anacortes, WA, where I have entertained in the Yacht Club in 1982.

John Wayne often portrayed bigger than life men who were quintessential heroes in white hats. He was esteemed by fans and peers. Duke loved the sea and bought the yacht in 1964. The Wild Goose was a converted mine sweeper from the era of World War II with luxurious staterooms and required a six man crew. About a month before he died, Wayne sold the vessel to Lynn Hutchins, a lawyer.