ROBERT LEWIS
FORCE, JR.

The way it all finally worked out, at one time or
another I was the youngest in a family, the oldest in
a family, an only child, a bachelor child, and a boarded
child, and now I can lay claim to nineteen half- and
stepbrothers and sisters. But at seventeen, I moved
out on my own and began intensely spending $500
for wine that retailed for no more than $1.19 a fifth.
Between then and twenty, I tried college, drugs, sex,
and travel, in that order.

Eleven days before turning twenty, I won $18.50 in
a poker game, decided it was time to learn how to
play music, and went and bought a dulcimer from an
Austrian immigrant violin maker who said he got the

In the next five years I got married and divorced,
hitch-hiked 150,000 miles through forty-four states
and seven foreign countries, taught myself to play
the instrument, and set about communicating what
I had learned to others.

My constant companions for the last three years
have been a pack, sleeping bag, dulcimer, two
changes of clothing and twenty-five pounds of notes
and notebooks. My not-so-constant companion has
been Al d’Ossche. We met at the 44th Annual North
Carolina Fiddlers’ Convention through the mutual
discovery that out of the 50,000 people in attend-
ance, we were the only dulcimer players. Together,
we’ve played on television and radio, at folk and
bluegrass festivals, coffeehouses, colleges, street
corners and subway stations.

During these times, people have asked us to show
them how to do what we do. So we hauled out the
twenty-five pounds of notes, analyzed them, boiled
them down, analyzed ourselves, got boiled ourselves,
rote, rewrote, changed, added to, wrote, and re-
rote this book.