

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 idea from a 1945 edition of *Popular Mechanics*.

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'Ossché. We met at the 44th Annual North Carolina Fiddlers' Convention through the mutual discovery that out of the 50,000 people in attendance, 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, wrote, rewrote, changed, added to, wrote, and rewrote this book.