



**OCTOBER IN THE RAILROAD EARTH**

Title taken from the prose poem by Jack Kerouac. Jack recited it on the Steve Allen TV show, on a jazz record, and parts of his recitation appear on Tom's record *Hotwalker*. Jack's prose (and this song) highlight Kerouac's time working as a railroad brakeman in San Francisco. Bill Kirchen plays the freight train/truck driving Telecaster parts here. Jack's books—most never published in his lifetime—are called out in the outro. He died with 62 bucks in the bank.

And the freight trains still roll  
With their cannonball soul  
From Chicago to the stockyards of Fort Worth  
All the way to Frisco's "end of land sadness"  
October in the Railroad Earth

Jack Kerouac getting high on a fifth of cheap Tokay  
Skid row alley, near Howard and 3rd  
A shadow on the shades near the Southern Pacific Station  
October in the Railroad Earth

Old bums with tattoos from Singapore  
Boxcars, iron and wood giving birth  
Drowsy afternoon flophouse of "old warped  
wood America"  
October in the Railroad Earth

Jack's Bible on the desk next to the peanut butter jar  
Tattered notebook—Beat poetic words  
Raisin bread and oatmeal, coffee on a hotplate  
October in the Railroad Earth

Jack hits the morning alley with a brakeman's lantern  
Stares at a hooker in a polka-dotted skirt  
Three eggs for 26 cents, and lumberjack stew  
October in the Railroad Earth

October in the Railroad Earth  
What's the thing called fame really worth?  
Light a candle for his soul in some  
Old Mexican Church

Jack bottoms out in Big Sur, in Ferlinghetti's cabin  
Tries to hitchhike, drivers swerve and curse  
His wife is taking in sewing to pay the bills and bar tabs  
October in the Railroad Earth

He was *Gone in October*, sixty two dollars in the bank  
Buried near the place of his birth  
Gettin' beat up outside of bars, passing out in cars  
Left his blood soaked in the railroad earth

*On the Road, The Dharma Bums, Tristessa, Visions of Cody, Mexico City Blues, Maggie Cassidy, Big Sur, Book of Dreams, Dr. Sax, Lonesome Traveler, Some of the Dharma, October in the Railroad Earth . . .*

*Desolation Angels, Satori in Paris, Visions of Gerard, Town and the City, The Subterraneans, Dr. Sax, Visions of Cody, And The Hippos Were Boiled in their Tanks, Old Angel Midnight, The Vanity of Dulooz . . . so long, Jack*

**SMALL ENGINE REPAIR**

An older song of mine I hadn't recorded, although a radio performance is on *Museum of Memories Vol. 2*. Scottish actor Iain Glen (*Downtown Abby, Game of Thrones*) sings a snip of it in the movie *Small Engine Repair*, based on my title. I wrote this about the man who fixed my lawn mower in El Paso . . . funny it ended up as an Irish film. You can hear Glen singing it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zdEP6ETXCE4>

I work right out of my own garage,  
I keep my own damn books  
My wife's up there in the trailer house, mister,  
she's 46, but keepin' her looks  
Your lawnmower's needin' it's carburetor cleaned,  
your air filter ain't suckin' air  
Leave it over yonder and call me in the mornin',  
small engine repair

Weed cutters and leaf blowers  
Chainsaw rotors and lawnmower motors  
One day turnaround, prices are fair  
Small engine repair

I worked ten years for the water department,  
ditch rider on a big white horse  
Turn that wheel, you got irrigatin' water  
from the mouth of the mother source  
Catfish heads and windblown apples  
blowing 'cross the cotton fields  
Back when farmers worked ten hour days  
and lived off their yearly yield

And if a man's heart was like a lawnmower engine  
I'd a done pretty good in my time  
Change the oil and keep the carburetor clean  
And mow down all the problems of life

I was born right here on the edge of West Texas  
'bout a mile from the Rio Grande  
Yeah, I done time, I can see you starin'  
at the skull on the back of my hand  
Now time ain't nothin' but a box of old parts  
on a busted-up cement floor  
Time ain't nothin' but a muddy old river,  
rollin' out my back door

**T-BONE STEAK AND SPANISH WINE\***

A few years ago I drove up an old canyon in Northern California and re-discovered a steakhouse and bar I'd played in over 40 years back. Nothing had changed. The dinner special on the outside sign remained the same over the years. I sat down with the owner for a glass of wine and we sang the old songs and escaped into the past.

\*CD bonus track, does not appear on the vinyl release.

I took a detour on a California run  
Searching for a joint I'd played in 1981  
Up a rugged canyon, there's the steakhouse, there's the bar  
Where I played three sets a night with my old D-18 guitar

The owner she smiled and said, *It's been a long, long time  
How you doin', cowboy?* I said, *I guess I'm doin' fine  
I see the special on your chalkboard sign  
Same old T-bone steak and glass of Spanish wine*

She smiled and said, *Hell, not much is new  
Sit on down and I'll have a glass with you  
This ol' canyon's been torn apart by wild fires now  
We cater to as mostly older, sober, retired crowd*

*The music ain't like what it used to be  
When you could tear our hearts out in any song in any key  
Now it's all just background noise to me  
The T bone Steak and the glass of wine's on me*

Then I looked deep into her eyes,  
and saw my reflection as a much younger man  
The Minstrel Kid, clawing a pathway  
across this old honky-tonky land  
Then she closed her eyes and we hummed  
that old "Scotch and Soda" song  
The she said *Ah, to hell with the past, kid  
I hope you brought your guitar along*

T-Bone steak and a glass of Spanish wine  
The Daily Special served from 5 'til 9  
Carved in stone on that old chalkboard sign,  
I played "Goodnight Irene" at closing time

And the crowd was drunk and always sang along  
I took requests for them old cowboy songs  
'Til Last Call! And the barkeep banged the gong  
*Goodnight Irene, folks—time to move along*  
Then I sang a verse of  
"Ain't It Funny How the Time Slips Away"  
She laughed and said,  
*Cowboy, you just took me back to a thousand yesterdays*

One last glass, I headed for the door -  
She said, *So long, you ragtime troubadour!*  
I said, *I'll circle back here somewhere down the line  
For a little T-bone steak and Spanish wine*

## ISADORE GONZALEZ

A Tex-Mex *corrido* based on the true story of Isadore Gonzalez, a Mexican *vaquero* (cowboy) who appeared in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show in the late 1880s. He died in a horse accident when the show was in England, and he's buried in Bristol in an unmarked grave. He tells his story with the Grammy® Award-winning Texmaniacs (Max and Josh Baca) providing the music.

*Voy a cantar un corrido,*

About me and Buffalo Bill

A song from my bones in a graveyard in Bristol

'Neath an unmarked grave on the hill

We crossed the great waters a long time ago

With cowboys and wild buffalo

Two shows a day for the folks of old England

In this thing called a Wild West Show

Ai! Yi! Yi! Hang and rattle, caballero!

Spur wild, while these foreigners cheer

Close the fairgrounds down, ride a bronc into town

Get drunk on their strong English Beer

Shouting, "Isadore Gonzalez is here!"

On the last matinee on the final day

My bronc, he fell he on his side

I tried to roll clear, but he kicked my right ear

Then rolled on me twice and I died

Now it's a long, long way from Monterrey, Mexico

To a *cementerio* on a far Bristol Hill

*Mi nombre* is Isadore Gonzalez, *amigos*

And I rode broncs for Buffalo Bill

They laid my bones in Old Bristol, England

'Neath an unmarked granite, grey stone

My pistol is in their museum

They buried my boots with my bones

I flew as a raven to Monterrey, Mexico

Now I'm perched on my old window sill

*Mi nombre* is Isadore Gonzales, *amigo*

And I rode with Buffalo Bill!

## RED OAK TEXAS

A sad but true tale of twin boys from Red Oak, Texas, who were rebels and delinquents in high school but straightened out when one joined the Army and the other the Marines. They were sent to the Middle East and became heroes, but they never adapted to regular life once they returned home. One twin locked himself in his room for a year and read the WWI poetry of Robert Graves, a famed English poet. Graves may have invented the phrase "War is Hell." The Red Oak, Texas twins lived it. I left out the grisly parts.

I drove into Waxahachie, stopped off to drink a beer

The old barkeep put his book down, he said:

*Hello stranger, you're welcome 'round here*

*I'm just sittin' here readin' an old war poem, he said,*

*A kid from up in Red Oak lent the book to me*

*There's a Robert Graves poem about a soldier*

*who finds a body propped up against a tree*

*A kid from Red Oak*

He handed me my beer and said:

*You want to hear real stories? Forget the TV news*

*It's just opinion and commercials, hell,*

*I'd rather hear Elvis singin' "Blue Suede Shoes"*

*You want some local color, son?*

*drive on up north, keepin' yer ear to the ground*

*Drive on up to Red Oak, ask about them twin war heroes*

*from that Texas Town*

*Red Oak, Texas*

*Twenty miles south of Dallas,*

*Where the Cape Myrtle trees do grow*

*24 empty beer cans, lyin' on the bedroom floor*

*One twin locked himself in there for two long years,*

*Reading this same book of poetry from Robert Graves*

*Oh they learned how to fight, but not to heal*

*'til there was no minds left to save*

*In Red Oak, Texas*

He said: *You know the heat up there in August*

*carries the taste of fried catfish on the wind*

*You may need a shot of whiskey to hear 'bout those Red Oak*

*boys, they went to the war, never come back again*

*Oh, they come back in their bodies, mister,*

*but something in their spirits had broke on down*

*Yeah, them two twin boys from North of here,*

*rebels in a little Texas town*

*Red Oak, Texas*

He said: *They're buried together in The National Cemetery in*

*twin heroes' graves*

*"That's how they come into the world," said their father, "and*

*that's how they left—same old way"*

*And to you who'd read my songs of war,*

*and only hear of blood and fame,*

*I'll say' it again, and you've heard it before,*

*"War is hell!"—that's from Robert Graves*

*Here's to Red Oak, Texas*

So go drive on up to Red Oak

where fried catfish rides the wind

Say a prayer for the boys who went to war,

never came back again

Where propped against a shattered wall

a great mess of things unclean

A mind unwound that shattered and broke,

blood-drenched shirt but a face now serene

In Red Oak Texas

## BACK STREETS OF LOVE

My GPS (Global Positioning System) love song. Where are we now, who are we anyhow? I've never adapted well to the idea of taking map orders and directions from a satellite, or a voice screaming: "Proceed to the route!" My global position? Artist and musician, sir.

There's a hawk, high above the interstate

He's the Lord of all things down below

And here we are, babe, trapped down on the Interstate

Guided by a voice from a telephone

*Proceed to the route!* Her voice keeps demanding

She's taking orders from a satellite above

We've made all the right turns, but the something is burning

We're lost on the back streets of love

Where are we now? Who are we anyhow?

Now that push has finally come to shove

We laid down a trail of pebble stones that would

lead us back home

But we're lost on the back streets of love

There's a hawk, high above the forest

Looking for movement down below

Deep in that forest, on the road not taken

We're gearing up for the second show

Our global position? Artist and musician, sir

Driven by a signal in the blood

Like every poet in the game, our direction

stays the same

Lost on the back streets of love

Where are we now? Who are we anyhow?

Now that push has finally come to shove

We've exhausted every prayer

But there's a God somewhere out there

When you're lost on the back streets of love



## HAND-RAISED WOLVERINES

Years ago I was touring in Canada and my booking agent was a friend named Louise. We had a few days off on the tour and I challenged her to find us something interesting to do. She booked us into Edmonton Maximum Security Prison for a concert, and the next day took us out to a private game park where a friend of hers let me inside a cage with semi-tame wolverines, the fiercest animals, pound for pound, on earth. I use that experience as a metaphor for modern times.

I'm going back to Texas, Mama

The taste of brisket and honky-tonk music in the air

The pueblo spirits have flown away from us in Santa Fe

A few Indians selling jewelry in the square

And the lady at the bank keeps asking me:

*So, how's your day going?*

*I say: Some days wild and other days serene*

*I avoid the news, ma'am, cause it feel like*

*you're locked in a cage*

*With hand-raised wolverines*

Lord, I wish I could bring back those Sundays in Juarez,

Drinking margaritas in the old Kentucky Bar

But the past is a foreign country to me now

They speak another lingo, we don't live there anymore

But I can bring back that afternoon in Edmonton

My agent said: *Cowboy, I'll show you some things you've*

*never seen*

Then she set up a show in Edmonton Maximum Security

Prison

Then a Game Park, in a cage with hand-raised wolverines

They ripped up my brand new leather jacket

They are pound-for-pound the fiercest

animals on earth

The zookeeper said they were as tame

as they would ever be

She said she'd raised them five from birth

We got out of there alive and we went on

down the road

Another honky-tonk, another show, different scenes

But somehow the bottom line is still that

afternoon in Edmonton

Eye to eye with hand-raised wolverines

Now its snowing down in Florida

And Niagara Falls is frozen

And rhetoric and craft beer morality is everywhere

Lines coming at us, cheaper by the dozen

But I've forgotten what the hell I meant to

say here, lady

Or what any of all this means

But I'll never forget that afternoon in Canada

With hand-raised wolverines

I've seen the face of Christ in old cathedrals

And Marlon Brando starin' down at me

from the silver screen

But I've never encountered fear so close,

like you can taste it

Inside that cage with hand-raised wolverines

Yes, I've had my love affairs and dalliances

Now I'm married to a princess named Nadine

But I'll n'er forget the bottom line of doubt

and fear and metaphor

Was in that cage with hand-raised wolverines

## HIGHWAY 46

A nod to the '50s and '60s music out of Bakersfield. I heard Bob Dylan on the radio in 1962 the same night as I heard Buck Owens. I thought it was all the same; hillbilly/folk music with voices that cut through the fog. Buck Owens, Merle Haggard, Wynn Stewart . . . voices from a Wurlitzer jukebox. Telecaster guitars and pedal steels. Searing treble. Highway 46 runs from the California Coast towards the San Joaquin Valley—the road where James Dean died in a car crash.

I wonder where Spade Cooley is tonight  
Is he wanderin' 'cross Death Valley, deep in flight?  
Or is he somewhere down in Purgatory  
For the murder of his wife?  
Oh, I wonder where Spade Cooley is tonight

Where were you on the day Merle Haggard died?  
Did you pull off of the road, break down and cry?  
I drove down Highway 46, I sang a verse of "Mama Tried"  
Where were you on the day Merle Haggard died?

Highway 46, an old California road  
Headin' for the San Joaquin  
Where the onion fields do roll  
Towards Bakersfield and the honky-tonks  
With those jukebox flashing lights  
Oh, I wish I was in Bakersfield tonight

I wonder where Wynn Stewart is tonight  
He sang: *That's a lot of heartaches for a dime*  
He wrote "Sing Me A Sad Song" for Merle  
It's on the jukebox, A 29  
Oh I wonder where Wynn Stewart is tonight

Highway 46, listening to an old Buck Owens song  
Near a shrine there on the road  
Where James Dean went out, head on  
Ralph Mooney on the pedal steel  
Don Rich sings harmony high and tight  
Oh I wonder where Buck Owens is tonight  
Pedal steels and Telecasters the treble  
turned up bright  
Oh I wish I was in Bakersfield tonight

## PASS ME THE GUN, BILLY

Back in the mid 1960s I was living with my cowboy brother, Pat, on his ranch on the edge of San Luis Obispo, California. He was watching TV one night when he heard gunshots in the far pasture. "Poachers," he yells. Someone was shooting at his cows. Pat was always ready for a Wild West adventure. And, kids, we got our adventure. Big time. It reminded me of something out of James Dickey's novel *Deliverance*.

I was living with my cowboy brother, Pat,  
out on the end of Edna Road  
His ranch was way the hell and gone,  
outside San Luis Obispo  
One night he shouts: *Pass me the telly-phone Tommy!*  
*Gotta call Billy on down the road, someone's in the pasture*  
*poaching our cows—I just heard their guns explode!*

Tell Billy to cut the road off,  
before they make it into town  
Gonna teach those crooks a lesson,  
gonna run the bastards down  
Then we drove on out and we pick up Billy  
but them poacher boys ain't in sight  
They took the side road towards Okie Flats  
and disappeared into the night

So it's: *Pass me the bottle, Billy,*  
*put the pedal to the floor*  
*We'll run 'em down in Oso Flaco,*  
*out where the wild Pacific roars*  
*And pass me some courage, will ye,*  
*at 90 miles an hour*



We could see their rearview, weasel eyes,  
*boys, this thing could turn sour*  
We caught 'em a back road in Okie Flats,  
they pulled off into a wild flower bed  
Then they stepped out with their shotguns raised,  
aimin' at our heads

Pat screams: *Pass me the gun, Billy!*  
Billy yells: *Pat, we ain't got no gun!*  
I hit the floor and talked to the Lord,  
ain't cowboys and Indians fun?

Our truck swerves off as brother Pat's cursin', *Billy where in hell's the gun?*

*We never had no gun in here, says Billy,*  
*and now it's us on the run!*

So I said: *Pass me the bottle Billy,*  
*my tongue's gone mighty dry*  
*Someday this might be funny, boys,*  
*if we ever get out alive*

Now its pass me the guitar, Billy,  
I'm gonna write me a song  
About a bad night in Okie Flats  
went it all went to hell and gone  
Now it's pass me the Bible, Billy,  
songs of fire and ice  
I'm gonna talk to God and up the odds  
that we make it out alive

Well the cops caught them Okie boys,  
said they'd robbed two liquor stores  
They'd shot a deer, and maybe a steer,  
and ran 'em a string of Okie whores  
*Now you boys take our advice, the cop said,*  
*pointin' with his thumb*  
*Next time you go to chasin' poachers,*  
*you might wanna pack you a gun*

## WHEN THE ROAD GETS ROUGH

We were stuck in heavy traffic somewhere in England and the guitar player was complaining about his cold hotel room, the driver was coughing and chewing aspirin, and the cafés along the rest stop route didn't offer much in the way of cuisine. We'd been out for two weeks and spirits were raw when my wife, Nadine, turned to me and said, "That's when the road get's rough." Then we wrote this song.

Somewhere north of London,  
traffic backed up for hours  
The driver starts to coughing bad,  
the guitar player's wine turned sour  
He sighs: *my cheap room was cold last night,*  
*I've almost had enough*  
Nadine turns to me and laughs and says:  
*that's when the road gets rough!*

Bring on the rock and roll,  
a little folk, a little ragtime soul  
Then sing a ballad now,  
then rip one wild and loud  
Come on, baby, pack our stuff,  
let's find out if we're tough enough  
Let's go out and call their bluff  
down every road that's rough

You don't get paid for being on the stage,  
singing old songs to the brood  
You earn your pay on eight hour drives,  
bad hotels, and dodgy food  
The straight folks say *ain't that romantic,*  
*but ain't the travelin' tough?*  
But the alternatives ain't attractive, folks,  
so bring on the road so rough

Somewhere south of Holyhead we stop  
at the Brigand's Inn  
Those wild green hills of Wales  
where the brigands killed three men  
Old war stories, a lunch of fish and chips  
in this life lived off the cuff  
The magic outweighs the difficult days,  
bring on the road that's rough

## WRECK OF THE OLD 97

One of the first songs I learned to play on guitar. I heard it on Johnny Cash's first Sun Records release: *The Hot and Blue Guitars of Johnny Cash*. The song tells the true tale of the wreck of a Southern Railway mail train en route from Monroe, Virginia, to Spencer, North Carolina, on September 27, 1903.

Well, they gave him his orders at Monroe, Virginia  
Sayin': *Steve, you're way behind time*  
*This is not 38, this is Ol' 97*  
*Put her into Spencer on time*

Then he turned around and said to his black,  
greasy fireman:  
*Heh, shovel on a little more coal*  
*And when we cross that White Oak Mountain*  
*Watch Ol' 97 roll*

It's a mighty rough road from Lynchburg to Danville  
In a line on a three-mile grade  
It was on that grade that he lost his airbrakes  
Shoulda seen what a jump he made

He was going down a grade  
making 90 miles an hour  
The whistle broke into a scream  
He was found in the wreck with his  
hand on the throttle  
Scalded to death by the steam

Now all you ladies, you'd better take a warnin'  
From this time on and learn  
Never speak harsh words to your true-lovin' husband  
He may leave you and never return

TOM RUSSELL: vocals, backing vocals, acoustic guitar

BILL KIRCHEN: electric lead guitar

MARTY MUSE: pedal steel guitar

MAX BACA: bajo sexto

JOSH BACA: Tex-Mex accordion

ELIZA GILKYSON: harmony vocals (6, 8)

DAVID CARROLL: electric bass

RICK RICHARDS: drums

MARK HALLMAN: percussion, bass (6),  
dobro (9), backing vocals (10)