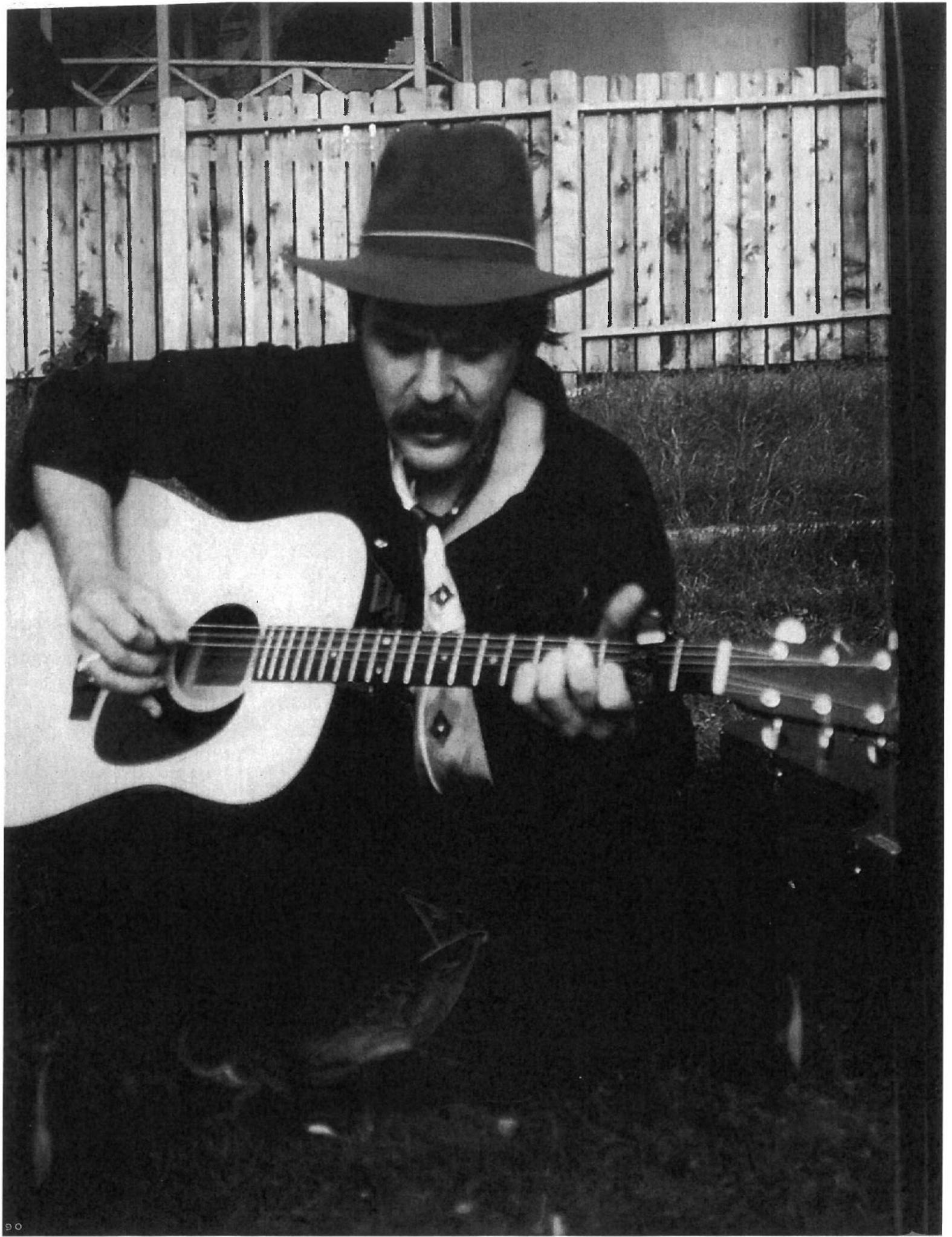


AIN'T IT
A COLD,
COLD
WORLD?

The collected stories
of Blaze Foley

BY DAVID RAMSEY



1. Tried for a long time but I think I can't win

"He's only gone crazy once," Townes Van Zandt said. "Decided to stay." Blaze Foley was thirty-nine years old when he was shot and killed with a .22-caliber rifle, seven years younger than I am now, though as far as I can tell he looked a good deal older than I do now every day of his life. As an infant in Arkansas he had polio and one leg wound up shorter than the other, so he just kind of dragged his foot behind him. Merle Haggard found this particular detail heartbreaking. Sometimes Blaze slept on top of pool tables, or underneath them while the balls ricocheted above him. Sometimes he slept in dumpsters. You know the dumpsters with the blue BFI logo, outside of businesses and the like? Foley said it stood for "Blaze Foley Inside." He was a sweet man and a bad drunk. He idolized Van Zandt, or maybe it's closer to the truth to say they idolized each other. "Not only [Van Zandt's] songs, but his lifestyle," according to one of Blaze's close friends. They took turns being poet and muse. Everywhere they went, they wrecked everything. "He started drinking vodka, Townes's drink," the friend said. "Sometimes it got out of hand."

2. The wind keeps blowing somewhere every day

Willie Nelson, fed up with Nashville, decamped for Austin in 1972. "There were long-haired cowboys and short-haired cowboys, and the air smelled different," he recounted later. "I noted that everyone was getting along." Willie grew his hair out long. Others followed and stumbled onto the truth that "redneck" and "hippie" can be two bad tastes that taste good together. This got called the outlaw movement, which is kind of confusing because that suggests a certain biker-bar affect that some of the musicians associated with the movement were happy to oblige (David Allan Coe, Hank Williams Jr., etc.). But musically, the outlaws favored a traditional sound considered old-fashioned in Nashville at the time, along with introspective, poetic songwriting. So the outlaw movement was really a temper tantrum by persnickety auteurs, but it sounded like it was all about being a badass. Both suited Blaze Foley just fine. He settled in Austin for good in 1981 and soon enough got kicked out of every bar in town.

3. Blaze Foley according to Lucinda Williams

*Some kind of savior singing the blues
A derelict in your duct tape shoes
Your orphan clothes and your long dark hair
Looking like you didn't care
Drunken angel*

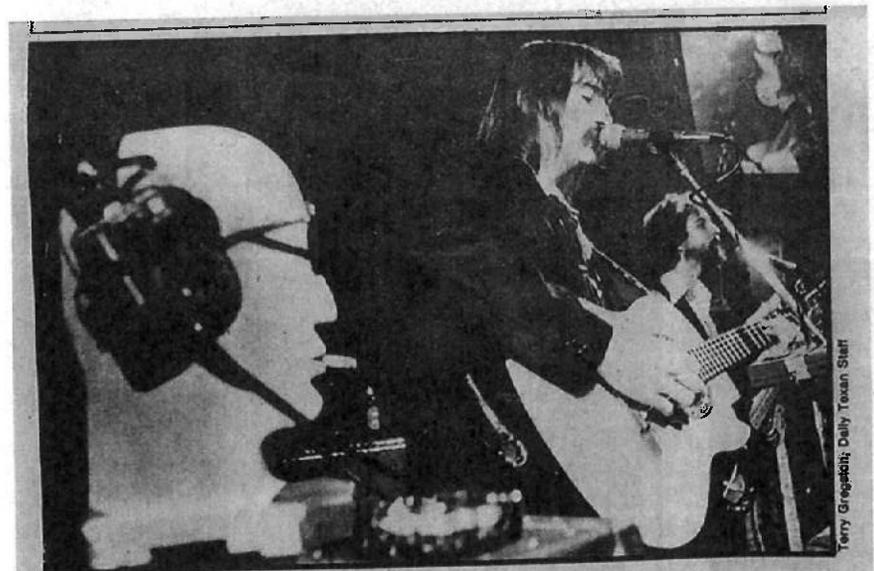
4. The life and times of Michael David Fuller

Once upon a time, a boy was born in Malvern, Arkansas. He grew up mostly in Texas. His family was Pentecostal and as a youngster he sang with his mother and a sibling in a family gospel trio, the Fuller Family. Sometimes they went from church to church in the family car, singing for food or a place to spend the night, paid in eggs or canned food as often as cash. According to Blaze, "Mother'd tap her foot and play the ukulele and Daddy'd sit out in the station wagon and drink Ripple. Then he'd sell all the canned goods we'd earned for another bottle." This was all before he was Blaze, though; he was Mike. His mama, Louise, taught him three chords on the guitar and that's all the musical instruction he ever had. His daddy, Edwin, was violent and unpredictable. And a mean

drunk. "We had a pretty rough life with him," Louise said in *Duct Tape Messiah*, a 2011 documentary on Blaze Foley. "I put up with it for thirty years and we had some good years. Some." Every time she tried to leave him, Edwin would find a preacher to visit her and convince her to take him back. One preacher apologized later. "I'm so sorry," he said. "I was trying to help that man and I still would, but he's crazy." When she finally left for good, they moved around trying to keep away from Edwin, but he kept finding them. Mike dropped out of high school his senior year and drifted around for a while, eventually landing in Memphis, where he had family. Edwin soon showed up banging on the door of the rundown trailer where Mike was staying, and Mike left town and never came back. He got used to staying on the move.

5. Feed the pigeons some clay

Blaze Foley was six foot three and looked like trouble. He thought people with silver collar tips on their shirts were ridiculous so he made his own with duct tape. He put duct tape on his cowboy boots. And on his guitar strap. He made himself a duct tape tuxedo. It was a fitting signature: A prankster trying to mend the broken parts with grit and half-baked ideas. "What I lack in sense, I make up for in zeal," he said. A 1979 article on Blaze in the *Daily Texan* was headlined "Strange singer debuts in Austin." The reporter said he looked like a "cross between Lee Harvey Oswald and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar." He had a preacher's way of singing. His voice was low and full and spooky, and paired with



Blaze Foley

Strange singer debuts in Austin

By Mark McKinnon

When he kicked off his Austin debut Thursday with a song titled "I Want to Go Home with an Armadillo," the

running the gambit from poignant laments ("If I Could Only Fly") to absurd parodies ("Love Is Like a Waterfall or any large body of water except perhaps the Dead Sea" — a takeoff on Barry White, sung while wearing a neck brace, which Foley explained was the result of falling off his high-heeled shoes at a disco).

the hillbilly-groovy finger picking on his guitar, he sounded like a weary traveler from the nation's dingy, haunted past. There was a tenderness and a violence to the way he sang. He wrote songs about cheeseburgers and celestial Cadillacs. He hated Ronald Reagan. He briefly went by Tex. His carpentry skills were adequate. "I'm no Jesus but I can pass," he said.

6. Big brown eyes and a faraway stare

Okay so it's the fall of 1974 and Sybil Rosen, an actress a few years out of college, is living in Atlanta. She gets a part in a play to be staged at an old yarn factory, Banning Mill, forty miles out in the sticks in Carroll County. In need of props for the performance, she gets busted for shoplifting at K-Mart. In jail, she meets a woman who tells her, "I stabbed my husband in the butt with a potato peeler." The bail bondsman offers her acid but she declines; opening night is two days away. Sybil decides then that the life of crime is not for her. She is not that sort of bohemian. Still, a part of her wonders if there is a wildness hiding in her body.

Now it's spring and Sybil's back home in Roanoke. She hears from a castmate from the play: Does she want to come help start a proper theatre at Banning Mill? The mill, perched in a hidden gorge near the Chattahoochee, had stopped operations in 1971 and been converted into a boozy bed-and-breakfast (in a dry county) and a hippie artist colony. Sybil's friend tells her about the scene: a warlock jeweler who claims to have been banned from seven counties, a traveling troubadour of unknown provenance named Deputy, etc. That sounds all right and Sybil heads down to Whitesburg, Georgia. The vibe is as advertised. The warlock jeweler goes panning for gold in the creek and welds on the third floor. At one point, he pulls out a gun and everyone goes running. Sybil and the troubadour wind up hiding in a closet of the old stone millhouse. They haven't spoken to each other before, but once they start talking and giggling, they can't stop. "I love your laugh," he tells her. "It's carbonated."

7. Overheard (banter, chit-chat, lyrics, suchlike)

Just remember: You don't always get what you go after, but you do get what you wouldn't have got if you hadn't gone after what you didn't get. Don't seem that crazy to me. When I woke up this morning, I was

BLAZE FOLEY WAS SIX FOOT THREE AND LOOKED LIKE TROUBLE.

wondering where I'd be when the sun comes up tomorrow. But nobody answered me. Sometimes I think I ain't glued together right. Saw a dancing young lady who worked in the bar. The moon quit shinin' when the sun comes up. That's all I can remember but it's quite enough to keep me warm when I'm too old. One more sad old country song. The waitress was spinning, my head was ajar, and I should have been home with you. The times we aren't together are the hardest times it seems. Gonna have a party when the boat gets here, try to have some food and a thing of beer. Try to hide my sorrow from the people I meet and get along with it all. Dance with the people that we live near. Well. It shouldn't be a-bothering you. The autumn winds for now are still. Can't believe I used to be scared of that. Everything passes, what's passed will remain. All wild things are shy. One of these days you'll get yours a-plenty. Can't stay anywhere for too long, even when I feel good. Might go back down to Texas. Might go to somewhere that I've never been. Ain't it a cold, cold world?

8. The life and times of Deputy Dawg

Young Mike Fuller started hitchhiking across the country. He brought his guitar with him and began learning songs by Hank Williams, Merle Travis, and the like. Mike was adrift, penniless, and corpulent. Later, he told people he used to eat a full stick of butter as a snack when he was a kid, which probably isn't true; he also told people he was miserable back then as a fat kid with a limp, which probably is. (One of his early songs, "Fat Boy," recounts these blues—"You don't have to move over 'cause I can get through / I won't be a fat boy anymore"). When Mike picked up a job as a roadie for a bluegrass band, he was well beyond 300 pounds and wore a big flat cowboy hat. The band nicknamed him Deputy Dawg after the cartoon character from the '60s. Being the Deputy unlocked something in him. That's what people called him, mostly: Deputy, or Dep. Which is understandable. If ever there was a man for whom the Dawg in him is implied, it was him. If you pronounced it the way it was spelled, he'd correct you: "Depty." When Deputy Dawg got to Whitesburg, he had lost 150 pounds and nobody knew who Mike Fuller was. He told Sybil he lost the weight from Thorazine, a strong antipsychotic, which may or may not be true.

Deputy and Sybil fell in love. He called her "little onion" or "Vidalia." They hung out at an abandoned fish camp overlooking the Chattahoochee, an area they called the Waller because it was so laid back all you wanted to do was hang out and waller like a hog. The homesteaders who set up residence along the river in teepees or makeshift shacks might be hippies or anarchists or hillbillies, but it all blended together after a while. They all dropped acid and got high and got drunk, though it didn't occur to them that some in their number might keep at it forever and get stuck in the hurting kind of oblivion. They were young. After a time, Deputy and Sybil got tired of crashing on couches or sleeping by the river and moved into a nearby treehouse a friend had started building in the woods. There were no walls at first, just three wooden platforms at different heights, surrounded by pines. They kept their beer and provisions cool in the creek. Deputy had started writing his own songs, and he played them for Sybil, no one else around but the butterflies and spiders and whippoorwills and chickadees.

They got on food stamps and got a dog named Betsey Ross. They had a propane stove and baked potatoes at night. They wrapped them in towels to use as foot warmers while they slept. Then they woke up in the morning and had hash browns.

After nearly a year in the treehouse, they flipped a coin one day and it came up tails. Deputy picked up Sybil and shouted, "Austin, Texas, here we come!" It's hard to be a legend if you're blissed out in paradise, or at least that's how Deputy seemed to see it at the time. In the story he had in his head, Austin was his destiny, the place where his songs were meant to sprout. He had something to say and there would be no compromise. Like Hank Williams, he would conjure his own myth. He was just about ready, he thought. Even had a brand new name.

9. What they talk about when they talk about Blaze Foley

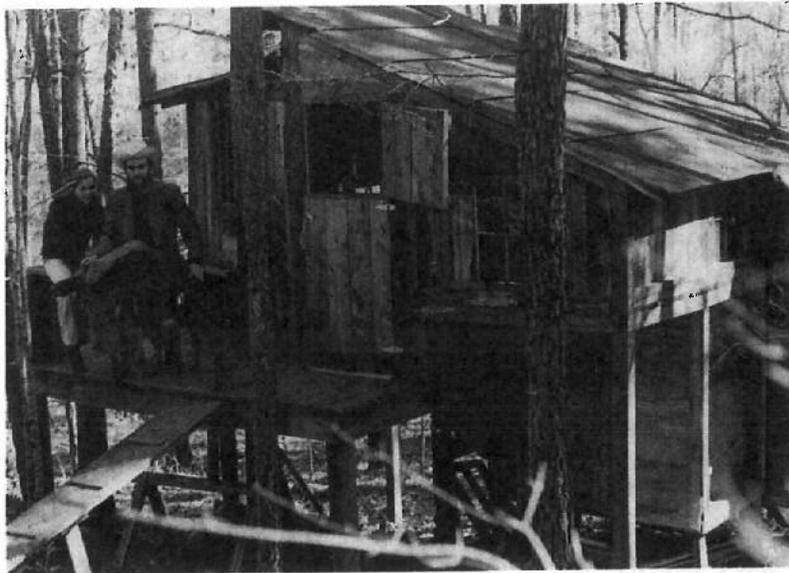
Long after Blaze's death, when Sybil returned to Austin for the first time, she was walking along the Drag and passed a homeless man sitting against a building. She asked him if he knew Blaze Foley. "He's dead," the man said. She asked whether he had known him, before. "Foley was the Nazarene," the man said. "A nobody from nowhere."

10. Cause I'm about to chew my fingers to the bone

Blaze Foley got what seemed like his big break in 1979, when his first 45 was released by Zephyr Records, an offshoot of Zephyr Oil company, which apparently had cash to blow on boutique record labels during the oil boom. Zephyr sent him to New York City for a slate of shows opening for Kinky Friedman at the Lone Star Cafe. While in the city, Blaze met one of his songwriting heroes, Townes Van Zandt. They got along just fine indeed and Townes moved into Blaze's room at the Gramercy Park Hotel. They holed up and got wasted, ordering tequila sunrises and cheeseburgers from room service and putting it on Zephyr's tab. At his final show at the Lone Star, the place was packed but Blaze was too drunk to operate. Kinky, or maybe whoever ran the club, had enough and fired him mid-set. Zephyr Records folded shortly thereafter.

Blaze always wanted to be a legend, not a star. He wanted people to tell stories about him—like this one. Be that as it may. There is a part of me that wants to reach out to the great beyond, or reach out back in time, and shake him. "Quit being such a dumbass," I want to tell him. I want to stare into his big old blue eyes and tell him there is no special poetry in oblivion. You can inflict enough damage on yourself that the hurt feels adjacent to some sort of truth, but there is no revelation on the other side. There's just a mess is all, and someone's got to clean it up. I want to tell him that

HE WASN'T SURE
ABOUT HEAVEN
BUT HE KNEW THERE
WAS A HELL.



there are things worth keeping, and things worth nurturing. Like his own life, as one example. But I can't do that because he's dead. He was baptized twice. He told Sybil he wasn't sure about heaven but he knew there was a hell.

11. Both a little shaky with the other sometimes

When Sybil first took Deputy to meet her parents, he rightly worried that she had not altogether prepared them for the Deputy Dawg experience. They knew he wasn't Jewish and that Sybil lived with him in a treehouse. But when they finally got a look at him, it was a lot to take in. A long-haired giant with a handlebar moustache was towering over their daughter. He was wearing an IUD she'd recently had removed as an earring. Her mother immediately turned, walked to the bedroom, and began sobbing. But she came around—he was polite and funny and sang them songs. Later, in Austin, when Sybil told them they planned to get married, her father wrote a sincere letter to him that began "Dear Deputy" and asked him to convert to Judaism. This seemed unlikely to Sybil, but Deputy was touched by the letter and said he was game. "Do I got to wear one of them marmadukes?" he asked. They met with a rabbi, who provided a stack of books to study. Deputy Dawg was many things but a religious scholar was not one of them. There was no conversion and they never got a marriage license, but they were husband and wife as far as their friends at the Waller were concerned. They went back there on the Fourth

of July and gathered a hundred guests and jumped over a broom together, which the locals said counted as marriage and then some. That was good enough.

12. Blaze Foley according to me

I got a little Dawg in me, a little Depty, but I mostly keep it on the leash. Got a wife and two kids and at the time of this writing regrettably own a house in Fort Myers, Florida, where we do not live and never will again, inshallah. We live in Lexington, Kentucky, now. If we can sell the old house and pay down some debts, we'll buy a new house. We've got a little treehouse in us, but we mostly keep it under wraps. We haven't been out to see live music just the two of us since the kids were born. Sometimes we schedule a block of time in advance to have an adult conversation. It's very funny when we have to reschedule. Our kids are getting better at swimming and it makes us feel proud, which doesn't exactly make sense but it does. Both of us teach at a university, a job that will remind you how old you are when you forget. We have two storage units in Nashville, Tennessee, full of my parents' lifetime of belongings. My father passed away three years ago; my mother lives in an assisted living facility ten minutes from us. Sometimes she has good days. We keep meaning to deal with the storage units.

There's a joke I read somewhere and retell all the time: "When you become a parent, you can't break *all the way down*. It's in the fine print on the birth certificate." Maybe that's not a joke, exactly. What I love best about Blaze Foley songs is that they are sad, but also a good hang. For all of Blaze's roughneck affect, his songs are as cozy as they are boozy. They are late-night huggy. Sometimes when I am trying not to break all the way down, I take a walk through Lexington with Blaze in my earbuds. I stop at the history markers—the site of Henry Clay's law office, the oldest gay bar in Kentucky, a church that Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln visited one Thanksgiving, the spot where Colonel Breckenridge's Cavalry Battalion routed regiments from the Ohio Cavalry. "Ain't it a cold, cold world?" Blaze sings. And who could argue the point? Still, it's a sozzled comfort to hear him sing it. His voice, perhaps, or maybe just the fact that somebody somewhere noticed and said so.

13. Laughing in the woods in the trees

Blaze Foley had a number of other major love interests, including a woman called Fifi Larue who backed out of an engagement with him in Houston the day before the wedding. But Sybil was the only one who wrote a memoir. There's a lot of good material! But that's not why she's a character in these stories. By far his most productive songwriting period seems to have been the time he spent with Sybil, the prime mover for his creative inspiration. Quite a few are directly about her or the everyday charms and disappointments of the time they spent together.

But being Blaze Foley's muse was rough going for the muse. Things got gnarlier when they left the treehouse, first to Austin, then suddenly to Chicago when Blaze got an itch. Perhaps his most famous song, "If I Could Only Fly," was written as things were falling apart. They cried together when he played it for her and he would cry years later when he performed it (a sound engineer who worked with Blaze in 1988 said the song was difficult to record "because every time he would sing it, about halfway through, he'd break down in tears"). A couple years after Blaze and Sybil split up, they had a brief reunion in New York, where Sybil was living when Blaze came up to do those shows with Friedman at the Lone Star Cafe. She was thrilled for him—she thought he had finally made it, finally realized the dream. But then she went to the show. "I really couldn't

stand to see him pull the rug out from under himself," she said. "So I left. I never saw him again."

That's what happened. But this is a story and we can do whatever we want. So let's go back to the treehouse for a spell. Deputy is trying out one of the first songs he ever wrote. It starts like this:

*Met a kinky little woman with
crazy hair
Big brown eyes and a
faraway stare
Mamas wouldn't think we'd
have made a pair
But we're living in the woods
in the trees*

*Some folks think we're a
little deranged
That's the way it is, probably
never will change
We don't care 'cause you gotta
be strange
When you're living in the
woods in the trees*



From left: Blaze Foley, Townes Van Zandt, and Jon Emory during Jon's birthday, Austin Outhouse, 1986, by Chuck Lamb

14. The Death of Blaze Foley

In 1987, Merle Haggard and Willie Nelson's cover of "If I Could Only Fly" made it to #58 on the country charts. That put a little more money in Blaze's pocket than he was used to. After years of periodic homelessness, Blaze rented a room in South Austin. Down the block lived a Thunderbird-drinking old-timer named Concho, and the two became buddies. Concho told Blaze that his son, Carey, was stealing his benefits checks and physically abusing him. Blaze warned Carey he'd better quit. Carey said he didn't want his dad hanging around with a "peckerwood." The feud periodically blew up enough to land one or both of them in jail.

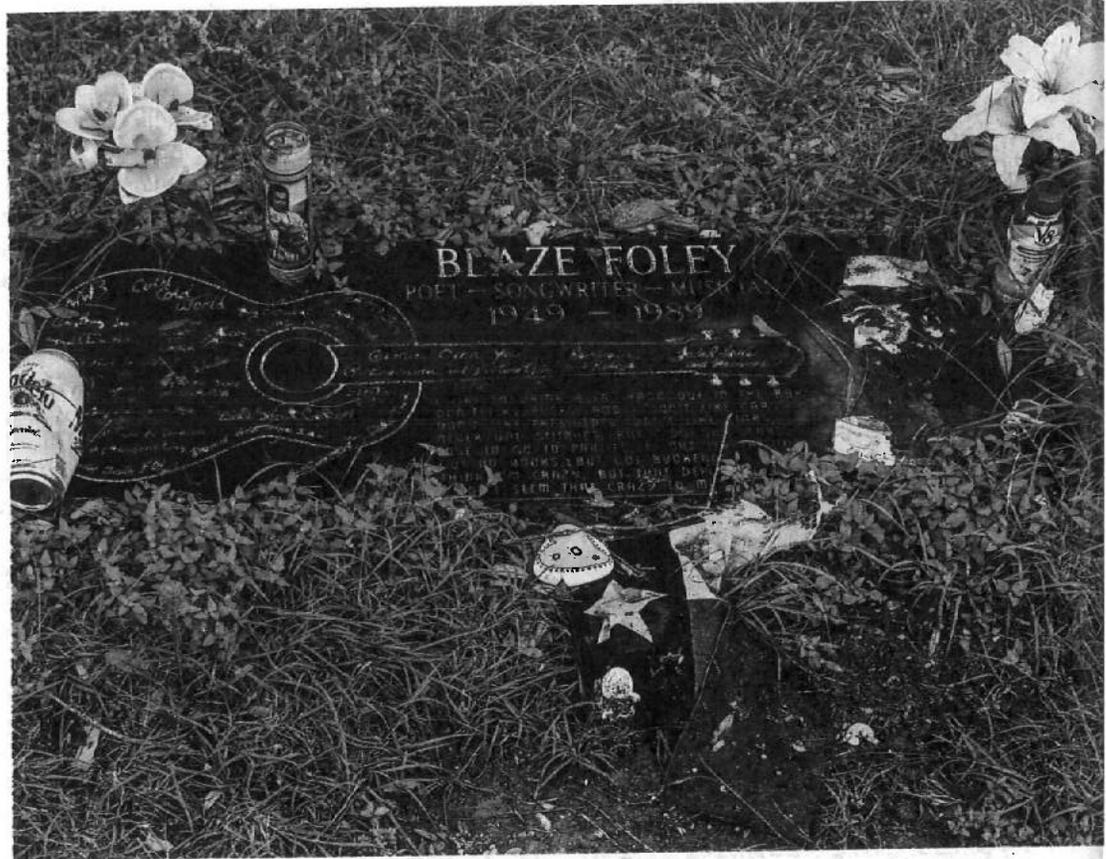
On a Tuesday night, January 31, 1989, Blaze played a show at the Hole in the Wall, then went to the Austin Outhouse, where he got kicked out after an altercation with someone who made a racist slur. Then he went downtown to Sixth Street and bought a chrysanthemum. The story goes that he stood on the sidewalk for more than an hour preaching whatever wisdom came to mind and twirling the flower with his fingers. If that's not true, I wish it was. Since the benefits checks arrived on the first of the month, Blaze showed up to Concho's place at five in the morning to make sure Carey didn't try to steal the check. He found Concho in bed with a ladyfriend and the three of them, probably all already drunk, got to drinking. Eventually this woke up Carey, likely also drunk, who was in the back bedroom. When he saw Blaze, he yelled, "Get this peckerwood out of my house!" and got his rifle. Just what happened next depends on who you ask, but Carey shot Blaze Foley, who stumbled out of the house and collapsed face down in the grass. They say that white lilies later bloomed where Blaze lay bleeding. If that's not true, I wish it was.

15. Blaze Foley according to Townes Van Zandt

*I got a guitar all my own
I got a quarter for the telephone
I ain't headed down this highway all alone
One two three and maybe four
Honey, they're knockin' on my door
I know I'm gonna miss you when I'm gone*

16. Could go fishing but the fish draws flies

He never learned to swim. He was always quick to cry. He made rings out of tin foil and handed them out to people in Austin. He said they were mood rings. He was funny, and wise enough to know that sometimes when you're down and out you get the giggles. One of the songs he wrote in the mid-'70s has these lyrics: "Brucie Springsteen, Brucie Brucie / Seems as old as 'I Love Lucy.'" That really tickles me. He always wanted to have an all-girl backing band called the Beaver Valley Boys. It was kind of spooky the way the persona he created for himself veered between clown and prophet: a doomsday goofball, a low-church outcast gone rogue in the Hill Country. I'm just



guessing, partly. I'm not always sure what he was on about. Someone once described him as a "homeless homebody," which seems right on. Hearing the old stories, he reminds me sometimes of the sorts of cranks who used to send long, handwritten letters to their local alt-weekly. "He would sometimes seem bitter, you know," Townes said. "The only reason for that is he was brimming over with so much genuine love and caring. To see an injustice sometimes it would just put him over to a frenzy." Children always loved him. He was kind to strangers and furious at the rich and powerful. When he first moved to Austin, a woman locked her car door as soon as she saw him standing on the corner. "Why would anyone be afraid of me?" he asked. Wrote a song about it.

17. The body of Blaze Foley

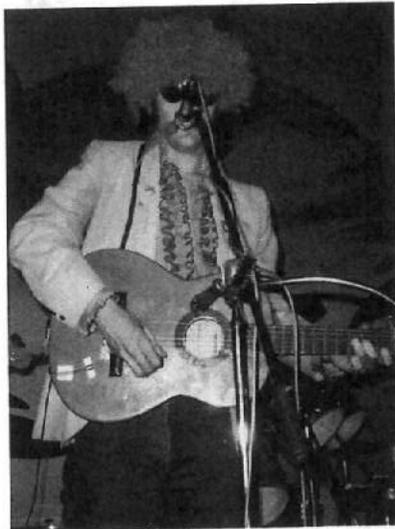
There was talk of duct-taping his body to a bar in town, which honestly might have happened if the corpse wasn't locked up at the funeral home. At the cemetery, around twenty degrees outside, everyone joined in to duct-tape the coffin before it was lowered into the ground. Townes claimed that he went back later with some buddies to dig up the grave, because Blaze had a pawn ticket for

a guitar he'd promised to Townes in the suit he was buried in. Doubt it. But I hope after the funeral everyone escaped the frigid air and got good and snookered in warm bars and told all manner of stories, some of them even mostly true. The time Blaze got banned from the Kerrville Folk Festival for playing a diatribe against Ugandan dictator Idi Amin, then snuck back in wearing a sundress, a woman's wig, and a bonnet; the many recordings apparently lost at that time, including records supposedly confiscated by the FBI when a producer got busted for cocaine distribution (when the records later turned up in a warehouse in Georgia, Blaze gave them away or traded them for beer); the article Blaze kept folded up in his boot, in which Merle reportedly said "If I Could Only Fly" was the best country song written in fifteen years. Sometimes I'm not in the mood for a crowd at the bar but sometimes I am. Some risk and fizzle, some tall tales, some beer in the belly, some worn-out songs, some bodies together so we feel a little less alone.

18. Cosmic doo doo

It was John Prine's music that got Blaze writing songs: "That's when I knew I got stories to tell too," he said. Prine recorded Blaze's song "Clay Pigeons" after his death, and at the time of this writing, the cover has been played on Spotify more than fifty-three million times, a fact I'm quite certain Blaze would not have been able to fathom. The influence of Prine and Townes Van Zandt on Blaze's songs is unmistakable, but Blaze diverges from Prine's wordy virtuosity

or Townes's textured verse. His songs were more like folklore or lullabies, campfire stories or nursery rhymes. He was starker, more direct, plainspoken, down to the nub of raw emotion. A very American sort of poet, with the American instinct that the truth rings truer if it's unadorned. He was a psychedelic seeker but fundamentally an old-time singer, in some sense closer to Hank Williams than to the outlaws or the progressive songwriters he admired. Hank called his own songs folk



Blaze Foley performing at Corky's, Houston, c. 1979. Courtesy Gurf Morlix

HE TOLD ALL THE TRUTH BUT TOLD IT SLANT.

music and he meant it literally: music for the people. Like Hank, Blaze kept it simple. He told all the truth but told it slant. There's something fearsome in his performance, a backwoods firebrand in a sin-sick land. It was a strange time in America, still is, always was. An early song of Blaze's was called "Cosmic Doo Doo," and it occurs to me that might be a good name for whatever Redneck Hippie genre Blaze's music was. Sometimes righteous and sometimes wrongous. Sometimes he glimpsed the cosmic and sometimes he fell in the shit.

19. Blaze Foley hears a voice

Blaze Foley wakes up on an unfamiliar floor in the winter of nineteen-eighty-something. He runs his hands through his beard and tugs out congealed drool and crumbs from a cake he doesn't altogether remember. It was somebody's birthday maybe. He gets up and it is all right: If a hangover is coming, it's not here yet. He squares himself and finds a door and walks out onto what turns out to be Ninth Street. The rush of sunlight confirms the happy news that he has sobered up plenty but is still a little drunk from the night before. He feels bold and chatty but soft. The right amount of chancy.

He turns to walk north toward downtown, though he has no place to go, and after a time he hears a voice. He doesn't know how he knows this, but he understands that the voice is saying a prayer. A prayer for him. The voice, which is mine, says, "*Now he has departed from this strange world a little ahead of me. That means nothing. People like us, who believe in physics, know that the distinction between past, present, and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion.*" That's what Albert Einstein wrote, toward the end of his life, when a friend of his died. Blaze, *I don't know how you feel about that sort of thing, but this prayer is meant to find you in a past as real as any other time. May it find you full of trouble but untroubled and at ease. May you eat peyote buttons and howl at the moon. Thank you for your songs.*

To respond to the voice will make him look crazy because there's no one there, but Blaze Foley does not care about that a lick. "Don't worry about me," he says. "I'll be all right." The voice that is mine tells him that I have been listening to his songs, a lot, and thinking about his recurrent theme of paradise, along with another theme, perhaps its wayward twin: a longing to be

somewhere other than where you are. I tell him that I always thought the serpent gets a bad rap in Genesis. He promised Adam and Eve they would gain knowledge and that they would not die. He never lied! "Sympathy for the serpent," Blaze says, and laughs, then hiccups. I thank him again for his songs and he thanks me for listening, and for thinking about him. "Take real good care of your ol' lady," he tells me. "Take good care of them kids." Then he adds, "Fucker!"

A gray dog without a leash comes running toward him. The dog isn't housing my spirit or anything, it's just a dog. But Blaze can't know that for sure. The dog licks him on the face. Blaze licks him right back. Then the dog pants and Blaze pants, too. It's cold outside and Blaze can see their breath meeting in the air, and then their breath disappears. 🐕