

TRANS-CANADA HIGHWAY REVISITED

HOLIDAY '72

Nate Jones

I

Of all the trips I have made across this great country called Canada, the one that stands out from all the rest was the one I made in 1972. I really discovered myself in the months it took me to complete it — as if during this period I jumped right out of my shell and became the kind of person I am today.

I had been out of work at this time and on unemployment for about six months. I was sharing an apartment with my very best friend and his girl. My old lady was also living with me there. Of course my partner and I were into all kinds of little gaf trips and making a fair living. My girl was just too much though. She thought her only duty to me was to feed me and be under the sheets when I got home from wherever the hell I'd been. To try and get her out of the apartment was a trial in itself. I can't understand why any woman in her right mind would just sit around all day and do zero. Personally, I got tired of that shit. I couldn't stand living with someone who was afraid to walk beside me and try to be equal to me.

(It's incredible the trips I put my mind through sometimes. I never thought I could sit around and think how dull a dull person could make me feel.)

Now that I think of it, it was real funny how I got off on this trip. I was sitting watching T.V. with my friend and my girl. We were watching the afternoon football game when I got up and went into the bathroom. I hadn't been there looking at the mirror ten seconds when I started packing my shaving gear in an old C.N. rail bag I owned. At the time, I had approximately \$350. and an old thirty-two caliber revolver I had bought a few months back. I finished

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packing and told Jerry that I was going out for a case of beer. HA! As I walked out the front door, there was my old lady in the window screaming at me not to forget to get smokes.

She had some look on her face when I finally returned about six months later. I've pulled the old "I'm going out for a pack of cigarettes" routine a few times.

Well, here I was on my way with my thumb out. I could have flown or taken the train, but I wasn't really very sure where in the hell I was going or where I would end up. The one thing that there wasn't any doubt about was that I was headed west.

My stop for that night was to be Toronto, so I made my way up to Decarie and took a number seventeen up to the Metropolitan. After a half hour of waiting in front of Parkway Auto, my first lift picked me up. I'll never forget this woman because she was a strange one. (Come to think of it, I don't think anyone could have been picked up by any stranger characters than I was throughout this whole trip). This woman started gabbing the minute I sat on the car seat. She had apparently driven down from Toronto the night before due to some beef she had had with her old man who happened to be in Montreal on business. Nothing strange about that. But then she started to tell me about what a good car mechanic she was, and how her father was some kind of big-shot car dealer in Toronto. Then I got the whole family-tie routine about how good mom and dad were and how much love there was in the family. Then came the big switch-over. She started telling me how frustrating it was being skinny and having no tits. Well, I was sure that was it and she was out of words, but not so. She had to top it off with the Paki thing. She told me about how sleazy they were and dirty. The poor kid was turning purple while she was talking about this. She then got on the subject of books. I thank God today for the moment when she gave me one to read and quit chewing my god-damned ear off. Well, I just kept my eye on the book until we were saying good-bye at a downtown Toronto metro station.

I arrived in Toronto at about eleven o'clock and decided I would spend a day or two with a very good friend of mine in Hamilton. Whenever me and this guy get together, all hell breaks out. It's out with the booze and non-stop until I leave. Lovely attitude for a Protestant minister, eh? I spent three days with him and was on my way again. He was the last person I would know anywhere west of Hamilton.

That day I arrived in Sudbury, or the Rock, which is what I call this town. There was just no way I was going to spend any time at all in that city. The cops must have driven by me five or six times as I was walking along on my way out of there. There's something about a place where you don't feel comfortable and all you want to do is get the hell out of it. Also I was carrying my pal tucked under my left arm, and naturally, wanted to avoid any contact with the pigs.

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I don't remember what time it was, but it was dark and I found myself on Mars in the darkness. What the hell, that's the only time a person can really get down to thinking about anything — when he knows for sure that he's the only one standing there. If a god-damned bear came out of the bushes, one would just have to hope that the legs could go as fast as the mind was functioning at that time. At any rate, the pea-shooter I was carrying wouldn't stop the bastard.

I feel good at these times because of the challenge, I guess — the challenge being the weather or whatever might come bounding down the highway or out of the dark bushes. The snow falls earlier up in northern Ontario than in southern Quebec, and when it starts falling, you start hoping you're somewhere rather than nowhere. A few places where I ran into problems come to mind. The first was just outside Sault Ste Marie.

I was hitching at a cross section about five miles outside the city when a dude picked me up. We introduced ourselves to each other and went through the obvious bullshit. We'd been driving for about fifteen minutes and were in the middle of nowhere when the trip came down. The guy asked me where I was from and when I told him Montreal, he gave me the "You've come a long way" crap. Then he started asking me about the ladies who pick up hitchhiking men on the road, and asking me whether I had got it on with any of them. I told him no, that so far I hadn't been fortunate in that particular area. So then he started telling me about all the certain things and possibilities which could come about. Then I got the play — the fucker was a fag. So he said to me, "What would you do if a guy who swings picked you up?" and I was out with the hardware in a second. Thinking I was going to dump him right there, the shit nearly had a heart-attack. I threw him out of his car and drove myself down the highway about five miles. I didn't want to give him no chance to pull a shot on me. Mind you, I made sure any cars approaching me after that weren't the pigs.

About an hour after this, a guy stopped and gave me a lift. Where he'd come from wasn't hard to guess. Christ, he was all over the road. I remember his name was Frank and he invited me to his home for the evening. When we got there, he introduced me to his old lady and opened us both a beer. We both sat around bull-shitting for an hour or so. The next day he gave me a lift back out to the highway.

Once in a while one does get lucky and meets somebody half-human. I had a fairly good day started by a ride I got within five minutes. The guy left me off at well-known Wawa, Ontario, where a friend of mine once spent two days waiting for a lift. The guy was gone for about a half an hour when he returned to pick me up again. He was some kind of travelling salesman, I guess.

Our next stop was Terrace Bay with, I'm sure, a population of ten. A very small place. Small as it was, it took forever to walk through it. The red-necks

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gave me the look-over when I stopped in at the local cafe for a pack of cigarettes. Then, walking past the out-skirts of the place, some fucking Indians all liquored up started howling at me like wild animals. I was glad when another guy stopped to pick me up.

He was driving a green panel truck loaded to the roof with samples of water from the Lake Superior. He told me that once a year he had to drive all along the lakehead collecting samples of the water. I had a lift all the way to Thunder Bay with him and I got off in downtown Fort William. It was time for a good shower and a shave. A change of clothes was also in order.

I got myself a room in some dive hotel and got cleaned up. The only thing I was interested in doing that night was getting drunk and then grabbing a needed night's sleep. And that's what I did.

When I started on that old beer, I didn't stop until I almost couldn't see anymore. I did sit with a couple of old-timers and played a bit of pool with them. These old bastards you meet on the road are pretty interesting sometimes. They're always full of old tales from a-way-back-when and they're the best company for a few laughs. That helps a person get comfortable among strangers.

The next day was a bitch-and-a-half, though. By late afternoon I was only about fifty miles out of Thunder Bay. Finally, this Indian fella picked me up in an old beat-up truck. He was going about a hundred miles to a little joint called Ignace. This place is in the middle of nowhere, so once you arrive, you push on and if you don't get a ride, you might just freeze to death with your fucking thumb out. This place had a motel and a hotel for truckers passing through and — I almost forgot — one provincial police station.

I got there at about eight at night, having stopped off first at a greasy spoon with the Indian dude. I figured eight was still early and I could make it to Kenora by midnight if a trucker gave me a lift. But at about ten-thirty I called it quits and was about ready to get a room for the night. Now, of all times, the cops showed up. Since I weighed a few pounds heavier on the left side, I had to bluff my way with the pricks to keep from being searched. I also prayed to God that nobody in the area had been murdered with a thirty-two lately. The cop took my I.D. cards, jotted down a few notes, then fucked off.

Five minutes later I saw him come tearing around the corner heading back towards me. I said to myself, "Fuck this shit! If I end up in jail in this crazy little town, I might get myself hanged the next day." So I took off running through the woods and through a freight yard. The son of a bitch was screaming behind me at the top of his lungs to stop or he'd shoot. I didn't think he'd shoot because he couldn't have had anything more on me than a few lousy tickets I hadn't paid.

But the shit opened right up on me. I was running through Christ knows where, and into Christ knows what, hearing bullets fly by my head! The only

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way out of this sleazy joint now was by freight. I had to get on one soon or freeze my ass right off if I didn't get it shot off first. Well, one finally came chugging through about midnight and I hopped on the last diesel. I got the hell out of there and didn't get off until I arrived in Dryden.

That was another small town, but at least it had a few factories and a hell of a lot more people to blend in with. It smelled like hell in this place though, and I don't know how people could put up with that god-damned smell. I hoped it wasn't like that all fucking day long. I marched on out to the highway from the freight yard and was picked up in no time at all.

A few hours and a few rides later, I finally arrived in Kenora, Ontario — about seventy miles from the Manitoba border, and about a hundred and thirty miles from Winnipeg. I went through my usual routine of getting cleaned up in a dive hotel and then went down to the bar to relax over a hot meal and lots of beer.

I left the next day with two Frenchmen who picked me up on their way to Edmonton. We were ten miles out of Kenora when an old lady of about eighty tried to pass us and lost control of her car. She must have flipped over four times. How she was still alive when we jumped out and ran to her car, is beyond me. The old broad had a lot of scrapes and bruises, but that was it. We helped her up into the car we were in and drove her to the hospital in town. The old girl was crying all the way in to the hospital, but not because she was hurt — because her car was ruined. Well, we got rid of her and hit the road once more.

When we arrived in Winnipeg, the guys offered me a ride all the way to Edmonton, but I had to decline because I needed to get a room and relax for a few days. Being on the road all that time gets tiresome. Also the dollars were getting low. It was time to do a little unlawful business with my pal just to replenish my dwindling finances.

I took up a room at the Imperial Hotel on the corner of Main and Logan. Main Street is very well-known all through Canada for all the shit that comes down there. I wouldn't trust a nun if I saw her walking down Main.

The next day I boogied on downtown to look for my victim of unusual circumstances for that evening. When evening came, I went to the bar downstairs from the hotel to get blasted. I'm sure if one wanted to find a dirtier sleazier hole, he'd have to go to Mexico.

I also went out the next day to look for my second victim of unusual circumstances. I planned to hit the road again the day after. I call these people "victims of unusual circumstances" because it's not every day that someone walks into your store to take all the money you made for that day. I'm glad these people are insured because I feel good knowing they'll get their money back from a government-operated agency. I'm sure some of them don't mind helping out a poor soul such as myself, especially since I insist on it.

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Well, I finished my good deeds for those couple of days, and I'm sure the city of Winnipeg was glad to see me on my way. If not the city, a couple of small shop owners, for sure. Leaving, I found myself standing among the OR-BIT trash cans along Route One leading out of Winnipeg. It was real funny the first time I saw trash cans evenly spaced along a major Canadian highway. It was also here that I got picked up by the craziest son-of-a-bitch I'll never forget.

II

This dude was just too much. It almost seemed like he came from some other planet. A "real raving religious fanatic" would simply describe this guy. This was one of them times I was glad I was carrying more than my balls. The asshole wasn't going very far, but at the rate he was driving, it took forever to get there. He didn't take long to lay his trip on me. It all started by his telling me every sin he'd ever committed and, of course, how the Good Lord had finally saved his soul. Every ten minutes or so, he'd jump into some hymn, and he must've sung "Amazing Grace" five or six times.

While he was carrying on and performing, he was always looking over at me. I was catching him from the corner of my eye, but I just kept on staring at the road — which I'm sure he forgot he was driving on. Then he turned to me and asked me straight out if I had ever stolen anything in my life. I told him I'd stolen a pencil from the local shopping center when I was a kid. I had explained to him earlier that I was an Anglican, but he pointed out to me that I couldn't just go to the Lord in prayer and be forgiven. No, I had to go back to the shopping center and pay for that pencil I had stolen probably twelve years earlier. What a fucking joker, eh?

Then he asked me if I had ever gotten a girl pregnant. At the time I had a two-and-a-half year old son, but I told him "No." Who knows what the creep would have tried to do if I'd said, "Yes."

I'm sure he knew I was lying, anyhow.

From what he told me, we were approaching his home about twenty miles up the highway, and he invited me to stay the night with his old lady and two kids. What I wanted to do was tell him to go fuck himself. I wanted to tell him that I was tired of all his bullshit, but — what the hell — I accepted. It turned out that the turn-off for his home was twenty miles up the highway but another forty off the highway.

We arrived at a house in Christ-knows-where. From what he told me, he never got it on with his old lady because it was such a sin unless it was to have children. To be truthful, if I'd had his old lady, I'd have wanted to adopt. (I'm terrible, eh?)

His kids just sat there staring at me. I wonder if they had ever actually seen

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another human being besides the old man and his wife. I was glad they all went to bed early because they were the most boring fuckers I had ever run into. The whole time I was there, he didn't say three words to his wife. Needless to say, I didn't sleep a wink that night. There was just no way I was going to close my eyes on those weirdos.

After breakfast the next day, he gave me a tour of the town. This consisted of three houses that I could see, and one post office and a grocery that were in the same house. I also got a tour of the local church. The damned thing was the size of two class-rooms. How the hell anybody could live like that is beyond me.

We then drove out to the Trans-Canada where he let me out with a lunch his wife had packed for me, and with his address. He wanted me to write him to let him know how I made out. As soon as he drove out of sight, I threw his address away. The lunch, too. I thought maybe it could be my last meal — very suspicious of me.

I got a lift after waiting about twenty minutes. The guy who picked me up was my kind of man. He was me to the till, except he was driving. He was driving an old '65 Chevy that was falling to pieces beneath us. He'd apparently left Toronto a couple of days earlier with that old car and a couple hundred bucks, and he was on his way to get together with an old girl-friend.

The guy was the size of a lumberjack. There was nothing but empty cigarette packages and beer cans all over the floor — and was he cut! All the way to Regina, me and this guy drank beer and shot the shit. On the way we picked up another guy who had fuck all. The guy sat in the back bumming smokes off us, and food. He just wasn't shy, he had no manners, and he looked like he had had a shower the year before. We put up with him for about an hour or so, then pulled over and threw him out in the middle of nowhere.

We were both going like hell by now, laughing like sons of bitches. We arrived, loaded, in Regina and decided we'd stop at a hotel for a couple of more beers before we went our ways. We ended up splitting on a room — him too drunk to arrive at his girl's in that condition, and me too drunk to walk. I needed a little cleaning up at that point anyway.

The next morning we went downstairs for breakfast, this consisting of two beers. Then, he went his way, and me mine. Since the hotel was just a mile or so from the Trans-Canada, I walked back out to the highway.

This old guy of about sixty or so picked me up, and you know where he was going? Just to the next exit. He started right away about how rough it could be for a young man on the road, and about how a couple of extra bucks could help out. Then he came right out and said that if I'd let him do my joint, he'd give me five bucks. He was too old to beat the hell out of, so I told him to pull over right away so we wouldn't have any trouble.

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I really think most people who see you hitching feel you're a nut, a queer, or a homicidal maniac. Me, that's what I think anybody who picks me up could be. Anyhow, I was just out of his car half a minute when the car coming behind us a distance pulled over to pick me up. This guy explained to me later that it wasn't a habit of his to pick up hitch-hikers, but he had seen me get out of the other car, so he figured I couldn't be dangerous.

But a small incident did happen as we started off, that changed his mind for a moment. I had gotten into his car, closed the door, and we started going, when he asked me if I were dangerous, or did I carry a gun? I could see that he wasn't really serious though, because he was smiling when he asked me. Before I could answer him, he went on to tell me that if anyone ever pulled a gun on him, he'd give him the car and his wallet and just ask to be let out.

Well, I think you know what I did next. I mean, I just had to. I said, "In answer to your question, chief, yes, I do carry a gun" which I pulled out at that moment, "and yes, I could be dangerous, given the circumstances." The poor dude just went white as a ghost when he saw the god-damned gun.

People's minds do work fast at the right moments. He started carrying on that he had a wife and kids and all he wanted was to give me everything and let me be on my way. I had to tell him to hold on, hold on a second. I said, "Man, I got my own money if I need to eat or take a bus or a train or a plane to wherever I'm going." I told him that just as he could never be sure about who he picked up, I could never be sure about who picked me up. I went on to explain about the old bastard whose car I had just got out of.

He calmed down right away once he realized he wasn't in any danger from me. He then went on to tell me his life story, and it was a pretty interesting one. He wasn't near as boring as some other assholes who have given me lifts. The guy was some kind of real-estate salesman and he stopped in three little towns along the highway to check and see if past customers were satisfied with new properties and residences.

He came out of one place where he said he told a woman she would be receiving some sort of rebate. He said she was ready to take him to bed. I told him that if he wanted to, he should get the hell back in there. I'd be glad to wait.

The guy was funny as hell with all the god-damned tales he layed on me. We laughed all the way to his turn-off, and he even offered me his home for the night if I wanted to stay. It was only about nine o'clock and I declined because I wanted to try and make it to Calgary that night. He did drive me about five miles past his turn-off, however, where there was a small motel with a cafe. I could slip in there and get a coffee if it got too cold for me waiting on the highway. He gave me his address before I got out and told me if I ever passed by his way again to stop in and say hello or spend a night with his family. A real good person, one of the best I met along the way!

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I got a lift some fifteen minutes or so later from a young guy going to Calgary, but I got out of his car in Medicine Hat because the guy was a dud. I'd try and start some conversation and he'd just nod or grunt in agreement and that was that. I couldn't stand another hundred and eighty miles with the fucker.

I never could break through with people my own age for some reason. I guess that's why a great majority of my friends are fifteen years or more my senior. I was picked up earlier on my trip by a young girl my own age, but I asked to be let out about ten minutes later. She started laying all kinds of bullshit on me that I had no interest in listening to mile after mile. I only put up with the religious fanatic for so long because he was not to be believed!

Anyway, in Medicine Hat I dropped into this truckers' cafe and made the rounds asking who would be going into Calgary that night. I got a lift with an old guy who was leaving after his coffee.

When the old guy finished his coffee, we went outside and hopped into his rig. It was a big bastard GMC with god-damned ladders on it to get up and into the fucker. Those trucks take some getting used to. I mean I wouldn't want to drive three thousand miles in one of them. This guy was hauling a truck load of steel girders that just about pulled it off the road on every turn. I guess he was used to pulling shit like that all over the country, but me, I was wondering when the whole load was going to spread itself all over the bloody highway.

One wonders how these guys ever make it to their destinations. For Christ's sake, they talk and smoke and pop bennies and never shut up ever. If you've ever taken bennies, you know you've got to talk to whoever is with you or talk to yourself. These guys just never seem to have their eyes on the road. I felt like I guided us from Medicine Hat to Calgary. Anyhow, nothing serious happened along the way, and we arrived in Calgary in one piece about three hours later. The driver I was with was going on through, but I jumped out because I wanted to drop in on an old friend who had moved out there a few years earlier.

I gave him a call the next day and we arranged a meeting at the Airliner Inn, a large tavern in southeast Calgary. We never thought we'd be getting together for beer once more. He had been my best friend before he moved out that way, and we really tied one on for the old times. He was doing zero in the way of work, so he gave me a lift to Banff for the hell of it. We stopped in at the King's Arms Tavern for a few beers and then he split and I hit the road once more.

In the Rockies, the god-damned pigs are just too much. They're always stopping you and warning you against the bears and other wild animals. They must think anybody up in the mountains is out of his mind for hiking through them. The animals were there, and I knew it, and saw quite a number of

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them. If one gets you, its all part of the game. My finest catch of the eye was two cougars, probably a male and its mate, making their way up the mountain-side. I don't think they saw me, and if they did, I guess I just didn't appeal as a good dinner. I saw a moose and three bears, but they just split into the woods when they saw me walking on the highway. I wouldn't count on a grizzly running away, but they're quite rare on the lower ranges.

Nothing much really happened going through the Rockies. The mountain people are very quiet and don't have very much to talk about, but they're probably the friendliest people in the whole country. When you stop in at a cafe, or just about anywhere, they ask a lot of questions about where you came from and how it's gone so far. And they'll wish you the best when you're on your way again.

I didn't really look for adventures on my way through the Rockies. I just wanted to enjoy the small luxuries the mountains had to offer — just to breathe the freshest air and drink the freshest water in the world. Water pouring down from the glacier is fantastic. Sometimes I just felt like taking a piece of land and building a cabin where I could live the rest of my life away in peace, and live off the land like man was supposed to — instead of living off each other.

Rides in the mountains are only for short distances, so I made a sign just for the next town of any major size. I wanted to experience as much of the mountains as possible because each mile was so different from the one before.

Maybe the day will come when I won't feel committed to living in the city, and my way of life and I will go off into the wilderness to die like all the other animals in the world. It's a place where a man can live off a rifle and on a fishing rod, where the only thing that resembles the evil dollar is tree leaves.

I'm very glad for one thing, that is, that I took my time to go through the mountains slowly and to enjoy all the peace and quiet and the freshness of it all. I'm glad because I finally had to come down from them on the last flat stretch of road leading into Vancouver. When I arrived there, I was back in the big city again, and in my position, all hell had to break loose. It did.

III

I spent approximately the next four months in this city doing a number of things. Of all the cities I've been in, this one tops the list. It makes Montreal seem like a picnic. The city of Vancouver seems to be a mixture of Toronto and Montreal with a bit of Seattle, Washington put in. I don't mean the people, of course, but just the whole trip, and all the bullshit that comes down there. As far as the people are concerned, one couldn't find friendlier or in some cases, more disgusting people anywhere.

This is all just my personal point of view, mind you, and others may not agree. But who gives a fuck, eh?

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When I got into town, I was, of course, scraping the pit, also known as my pocket, for bread. I was short, and naturally, it was time to get down to business. Late one night, I approached a sports supply shop which I assumed to be doing sufficient sales. The only problem was, there were two cash registers, one in the front of the store, and one way in the back. I have one thing on my mind every time I get down to business, and that's to leave with everything from all registers or to leave with nothing. This damned place was loaded with people, actually, too many to keep under control, so I guess that's why it attracted me. To see if it would come off nice and quietly would be a small adventure in itself.

Well, enough thinking of all the pros and cons, I went on through the door. I walked right up to the front cash register and came straight out with the hardware. Throwing the bag at the dude, I told him to put all the money in the sack.

No shit, the guy just stood there looking at me and smiling. I reached over and pulled him across the counter, shoved my piece in his face and screamed at him, "Man, I'm for real!"

That was it, all hell broke out among the customers. Some were diving behind counters, while others tried to sneak their way to the door. I fired one shot through the front store window and changed their minds right quick. The guy from the back of the store came running up to me with the bread from his register, begging me just to take it all quick and go. I grabbed it and looked at the other dude. "You, for being so stupid, put your wallet in there too!"

The asshole should have realized that you just don't fuck with nobody holding a gun on you.

Out the door and on my way I was. No cops, no problems. That was that. I trucked on down to East Hartway Street and took a room at the Blackstone Hotel, a local dive hotel right across from the bus terminal just in case I should have to make my way out of the city nice and quietly. I would spend a lot of time down in the tavern playing pool and drinking beer with the old fishermen and loggers. Pool was my game, and I would drink all night and buy rounds of beer, but still leave having spent next to nothing. I had to keep the fucking Indians and whores off my back all night long. They see you winning on the pool table and figure you'll be buying them beer all night. Then at the closing of the tavern, the ladies of the evening will try to take you for a hundred bucks for a piece of ass. The dose comes free.

One night after I guess I had been there for three weeks or so, I was sitting there drinking beer and minding my own business. A couple of the local Indians came up to me and asked me to buy them all a couple of beers. I told them sorry, but I couldn't afford it, and I didn't know them — so why should I cater to them?

The sons of bitches jumped me and started kicking the shit out of me. A

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couple of waiters came over and broke it all up. Those fuckers had smashed my face up some, but nothing sensational. Me, I was asked to leave — naturally, because they were regulars and I was a sort of stranger.

I don't go for that shit for one second, the two on one, and then being asked to part. I got up off the floor and looked at those two bastards to make sure there'd be no mistake the next night when I planned to make my re-entry. I went up to my room and slept it off and just stayed there all the next day, ordering my meals by the shabby facility they called "room service".

About nine that night, I took my piece and walked into the tavern, and — sure enough — both of them fuckers were sitting there. Me, I was tripping now, because I was gonna set them up, and it felt so great. I walked over to their table with my hand out and I started apologizing for last night. I told them how unfriendly it had been of me not to buy them a couple of beers — if there were no hard feelings, I'd gladly join them right now and buy a round.

I sat down and ordered a round, and when it came, we all started sipping, and they were patting me on the back and thanking me. You know, laying the usual snow job on the white man. I was really going by now. I mean I was cracking up inside. I really couldn't believe that these bastards were playing God because I was kissing their asses.

That was it. I jumped the fuck up at that moment and screamed at them. "You fucking bastards!" And they saw my piece. It all happened in a second, but that was time enough for me to see the looks on their faces. The look on a man's face is so strange when he thinks he's about to die. I could see that they wanted to beg or give anything at that moment just to have me sit down and not do it. But they just never had the time, because I pulled the fucking trigger on both of them two times and just walked out of the joint like nothing had happened.

The people inside were quiet because by-standers just go into shock when something like that happens — not that I came back to find out. I always check into these places under an alias for the reason that one just never knows what's going to come down.

I picked up the paper the next day after having checked into the Royal Hotel. They had a small article and picture of those two shits being carried out of the Blackstone. They were both apparently in hospital with serious holes in their chests. The amazing thing was that they were both listed as "stable". I couldn't believe it when I read it — I mean I was two or three feet from them when I opened up! Two very lucky people, if I don't say so myself. If I had had a forty-five, there wouldn't have been any question of their whereabouts the next day. They would have been in the morgue.

Don't be thinking I'm some sort of crazy, now, because I put it down very simple here. If a man comes to me and beats the hell out of me one on one, then he's the winner and that's that. But when it's two on one, then they

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deserve the worst I can give them. A rather sad affair over and done with, so what the hell? Maybe next time they'll buy the beer.

I spent the next few days just roaming around town, having a beer here and there and eating some good food. Good food is a must with me — I don't like to boast, but I have yet to come across a better cook than myself. Food is art and preparing it is an art I perform well. One day, maybe you'll come to the house for dinner.

I spent a lot of time just walking along the beaches of the English Bay. You run into all kinds of happenings on the beaches. Parties and things are always going on even into the winter months. It's just nice though, to sit on an old washed-up log and watch and listen to the tide come in and go out — more or less a place to go and think it all out. All the shit that happens — a person has to think about how it will all end.

I wonder about things like if I'll get shot coming out of a store one night, and if I do, what'll happen to my body? I don't carry any identification, and nobody knows where I am or what I'm doing. There's nothing I can do about it, but my mind just wanders into such thoughts when I find myself really alone.

Well, I was feeling dragged and I needed a little cheery atmosphere to perk me up a bit. I figured I'd walk on over to Rovair, a little club on Fourth Avenue but with lots of action and noise. That's just what I felt would do me good at that moment.

I walked in, paid the cover charge and sat in a booth — I can't stand chairs — besides, to meet people you have to sit where you know a crowd will be joining you sooner or later. But wouldn't you know that three guys and their girls would show up and ask to share the booth with me. Stupid me, I said "Sure" and moved into the center of it. Now I was trapped when they all sat down, and I was feeling like an asshole just sitting there with my I.D. I banged off a couple of drinks and excused myself with little having been said between any of us. They were there to have a good time, and they didn't want any part of any strangers, I guess.

I decided I'd head on back downtown and I stopped in at the Alexandria. I was just going to have a few beers and play a little pool for the hell of it. I walked in and put my name up on the chalk board to play when my turn came up, and I ordered a couple of drafts.

After I had been playing pool with them for about an hour, the people at the next table invited me to join them. A young lady who was sitting there had only been in Vancouver for a few months and she had moved there from Pierrefonds. It was nice to meet somebody from close to home — we sort of got off on each other. Well to make a long story short, we were sharing an apartment two weeks later — which we held together for the next three months.

Final

The three months I spent living with her were the best I'd ever spent with any woman. We did everything together except what had to do with the way I made my bucks. She had her trip, which was just going out to work every day. She accepted the fact of my trip and was almost able to live with it permanently. But one night there was trouble at the apartment door involving guns, and she was gone the next day.

I couldn't really expect her to live with people coming knocking on the door with pieces and that kind of shit coming down. That would be expecting something from somebody who just didn't have it. Besides, if guns start going off, somebody totally innocent could end up with undeserved injuries.

Well, that was it. My mind was made up to get back on the road again. Trouble was in the air, and to keep myself from putting on a total performance, I felt I'd best hit the road. I'm not one to back away from it, but the odds of trouble coming out on top were overwhelming. The whole problem was that I had been asked to do something I could do, but felt was no concern of mine. I don't mind handling my own personal problems, but to handle those of others takes careful consideration. I had been asked to pull a trigger on someone I had only met once before, and to do that would have been out of character for me.

So that was it for me and Vancouver, and I hit the road. I decided to take the bus to Chilliwack before I'd make my first attempt at hitch-hiking once again. I felt like flying back, but I just had to go through the Rockies once more because they were so beautiful.

After a long trip I'm kind of dragged. When I got a lift with a guy and his old lady who were heading on all the way to Edmonton, I decided to accept the offer of staying on with them until we reached that city. We drove straight through except for a few stops to take some pictures. They had a lot of smoke on them, and we were blowing pipes of weed all the way there. I'm sure that other than introducing ourselves, we didn't say more than a small paragraph between the three of us. I guess we were all into our own trips just enjoying all the scenery, so why break in on each other's worlds? You can take it that nothing interesting happened during this part of my trip back to the one-and-only Montreal. I don't know about them, but each time I got high, I just wanted me and the mountains to be blasted out somewhere into space so I could have them all to myself.

I was tripping on the thought of meeting Eve and starting a new world all over again, a world with no apple tree and no serpent to tempt us to eat of it. It would be a place where making love would be our hardest labor and afterwards, we'd hold one another and savor our reward — not like today, where people just fuck, and then reach over to the end-table for a cigarette. They're total strangers like two passing cars on a dark freeway. Anyhow, trips and

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dreams are what you can make of them; opinions are personal.

We arrived in Edmonton and said our good-byes. I checked into a sleazy joint on 105th Street late at night. I had to move two old drunks off the steps to get in through the door. I didn't use force on them or anything, I just bent down and leaned them up against the wall in a sitting position. These guys were really out of it — no doubt on the cheap shit one buys in green bottles — that Niagara Falls crap that's passed off as wine and sherry.

I had a good night's sleep and split early the next morning. The same two dudes were still out there, but they were coming out of their stupors. They hit me right away for the price of a coffee, but I knew they'd be at it all day just trying to get the price of a bottle. Anyhow, I thought I'd save them a day's work and gave them each five bucks. I guess I'm just a modern-day Robin Hood. They both thanked me a hundred times, patting me on the back and shaking my hand.

I told them to have a good day and was on my way out of the city. I imagine they were on that same door-step that night, but they have as much right as the rest of us to a small portion of this earth. I took a bus out to the Trans-Canada north and stood at the side of the highway until about nine-thirty that evening. What a drag it was getting a lift out of that god-damned city!

A guy and chick finally picked me up. They were going all the way to Toronto, but after reaching Winnipeg, I couldn't go on with them any longer. Me and him took turns driving, and there was a pipe of shit burning constantly in the truck. I was just burned out from it all. We nearly killed ourselves ten times driving wrecked like we were. Besides, we made only one stop along the way for meals — we stopped in Saskatoon at the place of some of their friends and did nothing but smoke, drink and get sick. I'm sure they were content with just wasting themselves, but I wanted to arrive back in Montreal resembling a human being — not something the cat dragged in.

Well, we finally landed in Winnipeg — in one piece, I might add. They gave me a lift to the corner of Portage and Main where I rolled out of the door almost lifeless. I needed a good rest after those two characters, so I checked into the Winnipeg Inn for two days. I'm sure they weren't really interested in giving me a room there, but I guess my money was almost the same as everyone else's.

It's one of the classier places in that city with all the plastics moving around trying to find themselves and each other. The looks I got from some of them when I went into the bar wearing blue jeans and a jean shirt! I pulled up a stool. I actually heard one old bitch say to her old man, "Do they let people like that come in here?" I was ready to pay for their drinks and meals just to show them they weren't any better than I was, but I said to myself, "To fuck with them all."

NATE JONES

Now I know why they build classy joints for those kind of people: They don't want the phony shits outside in the real world where they'd shock themselves to death.

Two days went by, and having done some business the night before, I was ready to be on my way again. In fact, I was anxious because this place was driving me up the god-damned walls. I was making my way out to the highway, but was on foot when I came upon the freight yards. I made a decision right away: I'd give them freight trains a whirl!

As an experience, it was fine, but I wouldn't care to go through it again. I was wandering through the yards, checking out all the trains that were going east. I wanted one with about three or four diesels so I could get on the last one without anybody in front knowing I was on it. Well, I got on a train and off it went, but I forgot one very important thing. Water. I had food in my sack but forgot to get anything to drink.

That train took about four days to reach Sault Ste Marie and I didn't have a drink until we got there. Sure, they made many stops, but in places where I would have been screwed royally if I had gotten off. The train kept stopping in joints with no motels or stations — just little places or shacks, rather. Every time it came upon a town of any major size, the fucker would boom right on through, going too fast for me to get off. Sometimes, when the train was going through the mountains in northern Ontario, I'd look at the speedometer and see that it was going along at a rate of ten miles per hour. Other times it would reach forty or so.

In the day-time it was nice to look at the scenery but Christ, was I thirsty! There was water in a drum because these diesels have toilets in them, but I guessed it was only for washing and didn't want to take a chance on drinking it.

At night I had to sleep on the floor, but sleep was rough because of the noise from the engine room. I also had to be careful I didn't bang any of the controls in my sleep. Who knows what kind of disaster that might have caused?

Well, like I said before, when that train arrived in Sault Ste Marie, I was dying of thirst, and I was as black as coal. It was heaven to get some water into my system along with some fresh country air. I checked into a motel for a much-needed shower and change of clothes and stayed for about twelve hours of sleep. When I finally hit the road again, it was about three in the afternoon.

I was feeling very refreshed and in good spirits, so I decided to leave at that time and travel at night. I was also getting very anxious about ending this last leg of my trip. As far as I was concerned, my trip had come to an end when I got off that god-damned train! I wasn't expecting anything else of any interest to happen for the last seven hundred miles or so that I had left to travel.

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I got a lift with an old farmer to the outside of town and got out at a truck stop. I was hitch-hiking while asking truckers at the same time if any of them would be going on down to Toronto. Suddenly this guy comes to a screeching stop and says he's only going two miles. I told him I'd try somebody else, but he explained that I'd be right at the spot where the highway breaks away from all the other city-limit roads. So I jumped in.

Only one look told me the guy was a fag. He was putting along at about twenty-five miles an hour, and he started talking to me. He was explaining to me that he was on his way to his ex-boyfriend's farm to get back the ring he had given to him. They had apparently had a terrible fight and had broken up. I was just sitting there nodding in agreement with all his statements. Then he lets on to me that he's queer — as if I had no idea of it yet.

He looked at me to see if I was going to jump out of the car in shock, or at least, that's what I think he was expecting. I just told him that if that was his bag, who the fuck was I to say anything about it? Then he started talking about his mother and his father and about their different attitudes towards his choice of sexual direction. He was getting all shaken up now and I was sure he was going to break down and cry or something. I was beginning to see him as a real neurotic. He just kept carrying on and I felt that any moment he would be driving into a tree to end it all — one of those suicides that don't go alone, but have to have someone to go with them. I was feeling I might be his chosen subject, but it all ended by our arriving at his turn-off to the farm he was going to.

He asked me if I wanted to go on to the farm with him. I wasn't surprised because I figured he'd lay that shot on me sooner or later. I declined and he pulled over to let me out. After we had shaken hands he split. I guess I could say he was one of the more straight-forward queers I've met — not the kind who wiggled around like a snake trying to pick the right moment to put the shot to you.

I got a ride within two minutes with a guy my own age who had apparently been driving for the last twelve hours or so. He said he was going to Toronto and if I wanted to take the wheel right away, I was welcome to go with him. Otherwise, he would be stopping at a motel until the next day. I told him I'd be glad to take over for him. He told me to just wake him up when we got there, and he was fast asleep in a matter of minutes. The guy had told me to also wake him up when the gas got low so he could pay for it, but I didn't bother and just payed for it myself.

I was kind of glad to have the opportunity to drive and not have to talk to anybody. I just cruised along the highway looking back on my whole trip and all the small and large incidents that had taken place. I can say that I wasn't sorry for any of it, because it was all a part of the whole trip, a sort of battle. At the same time, it was a sort of relationship between me and a country of large

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cities, long highways, and different people. It was all an experience of day-to-day happenings and situations that arise in all those different places. I had come out on top, and I knew that because I was still me and hadn't changed a bit. I looked upon myself as an animal like all the rest I'd seen travelling across the country. I saw that being called "human" was just a label placed upon me by man himself, by men just like me.

My thoughts went back to that night in the Blackstone Hotel in Vancouver. I still think about those two Indians today. I'm not thinking in the sense of remorse — I don't feel that. They were wrong by my own laws and rules in the game of life, and I was right. Everything happened as it should have during the episode. The only flaw which still lingers in my mind today is that they should both be dead for making the mistake of choosing the wrong man to try and defeat. That's what would have happened among the real so-called animals of the world. I thought back on many more things of my journey up to the point of where I was driving along on the highway. I could think of more things in an hour than I could write down in a few months.

Well, we arrived in Toronto late that night. I took a room in a motel just up the 401, so when I got up the next day, I'd only be a hop, skip and a jump away from the final three-hundred-fifty miles of my long holiday. (I'll stay with "trip" or "holiday" because I feel they're simpler to write. It was really so many things, who could give it a definite name? If not me, then nobody.)

I hit the highway the next day and after four or five rides I was only in Belleville, Ontario. Rides along the 401 always seem to be short little ones, thirty, thirty-five miles. All kinds of shit like that.

My last ride was the one I really enjoyed the most. A young woman driving a little red Datsun came along, and can you believe where she was from? Vancouver, British Columbia! When she was pulling over and I caught a glimpse of that license plate, I nearly pissed myself laughing.

I got in and we started talking. She was on her way to Halifax to visit some relatives and she said her trip so far had been a god-damned bore. Then she started asking me where I was coming from, so I laid the whole shot on her except for the major incident. I didn't want her thinking she'd picked up some trigger-happy maniac. I gave it to her from start to finish. She asked me why I had made the trip. She just couldn't believe me when I replied that it was all for the hell of it. I told her I had made the trip just to see what it would all be like.

She was good-looking with one of those refreshing smiles that I like to see on all women. When we arrived at Kingston it was pretty late, so I guess you know how long I had had to wait for some of them rides. The woman I was with had been driving for quite some time that day and asked me if I'd like to stop in Kingston for a drink — if not, she said I could take the wheel to Mon-

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treal. I told her if she was in no rush to get to Halifax, I was certainly in no rush to get to Montreal.

We both broke down laughing like hell, knowing what the other had in mind, of course. Well, we drove into Kingston to a small bar — and so as not to get too personal — I'll say we only managed to leave the next day. But in the short time we knew each other, we became like real close friends.

Some people take time trying to feel each other out in all those phony ways that people tend to go about. But when we were in that bar, we were laughing like hell, sharing funny stories. Some of the other occupants were staring at us as if we were nuts. But it was almost as if we had known each other for years.

Anyhow, we arrived in Montreal early the next afternoon, and I got out at St-Laurent just off the Metropolitan. We exchanged addresses and told each other that each of us was welcome at the other's place anytime we found ourselves in the neighborhood. We gave each other a little kiss and went off in our own directions.

Up until the time I came Inside, we wrote one another every few months just to say hello and wish each other well. I thought it was really great to have a good friend like that, someone I'd only known for a brief period of time, but kept in touch with. I guess we were a little more than pen pals, too, because we'd actually spent a night together.

Well, I was back in Montreal and I jumped in a taxi and headed for the South Shore. When I arrived at the apartment, there was my partner sitting out on the balcony having a beer. He didn't notice me until I yelled up at him, "Hey, open one of those up for me, will ya?"

The trip was over, and you know what? I felt so good about it, I guess I said to myself, "A hell of a lot has happened" — and I wondered why things happen the way they do.

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