



john crowley

things that go bump on friday

I don't mind hitchhiking to New Jersey.

I really don't. My parents still live there, my sister with them, and my brother and his family nearby. They're a funny bunch of guys, so usually I try to make it back there for Christmas, when everybody drinks too much and gives me money.

Back in the good old '70s I put a lot of miles on my thumb, so hitchhiking 3,000 miles is no big deal (my record time is 3 days, 3 hours, 11 minutes from Eugene to Rahway, N.J., set in 1978 — and that includes an overnight stay in Dayton, Ohio, with two school teachers from Denver who just insisted. Previous record: 3 days, 8 hours flat, 1976).

Usually, as the holidays approach, my mother will call and ask about my plans for Christmas, and I'll mumble something about having to work this year. Then, with only five shopping days left until Christmas, I'll call up and announce that I'll be there directly. This inspires a new wave of present-buying, I'm sure.

So it's Interstate 5 down to Sacramento, then a quick left onto Interstate 70, a minor course correction at Harrisburg,

Pa., and a short hop to Newark. Piece of cake.

But getting there is all the fun. As we all know, everything after Christmas is depressing and anti-climactic, so while I love to thumb it there, I am loath to return that way.

That's where mom and dad come in — or used to.

So impressed would they be with my marathon hitchhiking feat that they'd announce, usually upon my red-cheeked arrival, that a return plane ticket was waiting for me in the cookie jar. Take it easy on the way back, son. Let me get you a beer.

Little did they realize (and little did I enlighten them) that invariably I'd just stepped out of a 3,000-mile rolling Satyricon and desperately needed some Visine.

This year, however, things will be different. My dad called yesterday with the big news. Times are rough, he said, and the folks can't spare \$270 this year for me to return. Despite being slightly puzzled (my dad is a highly paid bridgetender, and mother makes a living quietly terrifying people into paying their delinquent accounts), I felt slightly miffed. I mean, I never ASKED

for a ticket; I just took off from this end and trusted to Providence, like every good hitchhiker. But even the jolliest hitchhiker scowls at the prospect of having to hitch back through Pittsburgh, Reno and Salt Lake City only to face another term of sleet and procrastination.

So I've decided not to make the trip this year. But I know there's a perfectly good family unit there in New Jersey waiting for a wandering son to return, so I've made arrangements. My friend Big Ludwig has a brother who goes to school at Rutgers, about 20 miles from where my parents live. Rick is a computer science student and plans to attend a wave of holiday parties with his machine, so he's staying put. I called him up last evening and convinced him to spend Christmas Eve and Day with my family.

In return, I shall replace Rick at his family's festivities.

I didn't tell him, of course, about my parents' blinding metallic Christmas tree. The one that revolves and, I suspect, causes eye cancer.

Nor did I warn Rick of my mother's gravy, with which

David might have slain Goliath, had he reached into her gravy boat instead of a pile of stones.

Rick has never met the Crowleys of Rahway, so he'll probably not know how to take it when my sister wakes up at dawn on Christmas Day, slides down the banister and dives into the pile of presents beneath the tree, pausing only a moment to see if Santa ate the cookies she left for him (she's 23).

But Rick's family lives in Junction City, and I already

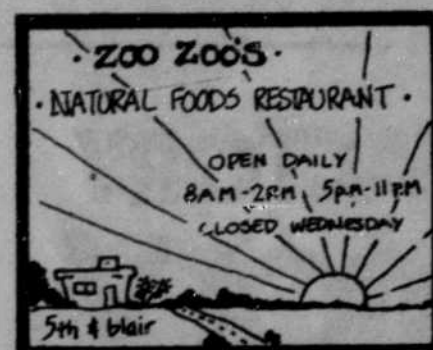
know his brother Big Ludwig, so I'll see one familiar face at the table, anyway.

But I'll miss seeing my old friends, how much weight they've put on, and how many of them are divorced already. And I'll miss going over to Manhattan to see the bright red noses of the inebriated gentlemen icitering in Port Authority bus terminal, one of whom is probably named Rudolph.

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Rights group attacks Lane jail conditions

The Lane County Jail's administration and staff are under attack from a local grassroots organization determined to stop alleged abuses of inmate rights.

People Educating and Organizing for Prisoner's Legal Equality evolved from The Prison Human Rights Review Commission, which held public hearings in Salem last spring.

The PEOPLE group is the local chapter of a state-wide coalition which says its purpose is to educate, organize and effect meaningful change in the corrections system."

The group focuses on the unique and inherent problems of the Lane County corrections system.

Its members say county taxpayers are not hearing the truth about the actual conditions within the jail. Member Ray Lieb, recently released from the Lane County Jail, alleges that jail administration and staff consistently assault inmates without provocation.

Inmates are forced to take prolixen, a mind-altering drug, against their will says Laurel Paulson, a board member of Sponsors Inc., a group which assists prisoners in making the transition back to non-institutional life in Lane County. "Prolixen causes permanent brain damage," she says.

Lieb claims an inmate is given no written rules upon entering the jail regarding what he or she can and cannot do.

Member Jeannie Kester says she has been told by jail administrators the last two years, "We are working on it."

Robert Adams, graduate student in speech and rhetoric at the University, says PEOPLE intends to develop a "speaker's bureau" that will be available to any community group or organization that wants an individual to provide insight into the local corrections system.

PEOPLE meets every Wednesday at 7 p.m. in the Central Presbyterian Church on 15th Avenue and Ferry Street.

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