



The Professor has ciphered his time allocations for writing this Hults' thing and figures he'll "double-dip" one or two more of these pieces to maximize his time at the machine. If I give my readers another snippet of quasi-historical stuff, I can sandwich it into that opus I'm hacking out for the Arts folks. Pardon my sloth, gentle readers, but I'm frail and computer-screen weary.

I thought I'd have a peek at hitch-hiking this time. In my youth days, hitch-hiking was a way of life. Some old rattle heap invariably broke down, was stolen, or simply didn't exist. As a teen-ager, some event or diversion demanded attendance. With no wheels, the thumb provided the only solution to a pressing problem. One could hitch-hike in another day. Honest, clean-cut youth gypsied the roads without fear of social stigma. Now only Road Indians, Meth freaks, wine wasters, and the homeless take to the macadam.

Oh, there was a mild degree of incipient danger and social sneering that attended thumbing in the older time, I'll grant you that. But civilized people could participate. Now only huggler muggers and scum balls lurk the highways. Would you pick up one of those skulking dogs? No.

We had techniques. Wearing a baseball uniform helped. A soldier's uniform virtually guaranteed a ride. 50's and 60's people remembered Norman Rockwell. Hitch-hiking was Middle American and A-okay. That wouldn't work today. Martha Steward doesn't like hitch-hikers, that's obvious.

We had tricks. Some kid would grab his parents' car and drive a bunch of us to the Cannon Beach Junction. We'd park the car by the old Union 76 Station and pop the hood; the kid who needed a ride to Portland or other parts sat in the car. A few heads leaned into the motor cavity and feigned motor repair. One earnest, tidy, glib sort (usually Norman Wilcox) stuck his thumb out and waited for a sympathetic driver. When a motorist stopped, he would spin a sad tale of motor trouble and the poor kid in the car who desperately needed to visit a dying relative. Shamefully, this ploy almost always succeeded.

Hitching had its bad Juju even then. One time Alvin Hyde and I teamed up to thumb to Cannon Beach from The City. We walked to the cemetery at Sylvan. In the early '60's everything west of Sylvan was the country, fair game for hitch-hiking. The day was lazy and spring-like. Alvin stuck out his thumb, and Bang! an elderly gent in a '49 Desoto coupe took the bait and ground to a halt by the side of the road.

We ran up to the car, opened the door, and scrambled inside.

"Howdy, boys," a grizzled old duck greeted us. "Ain't this a fine day!" A whiff of Dago Red and bad underclothes permeated the air. "I'm takin' this here car to the coast to unload her. Haven't driven in fifteen years since I lost my license! This old girl's been sittin' in a field for ten years. Look at that grass growin' in there. Say son, (to Alvin), could you reach under the seat and reach me that wine. I'm powerful thirsty."

Alvin glanced at me and tightened his chin, giving me "the look." He hauled out a gallon of Famiglia Cribari in a big paper sack and handed it to the driver. The old boy slung it over one shoulder and gulped for the better part of ten minutes, slaloming the car down the highway in both lanes. Oncoming cars honked at him.

"There's my friend Jake!" he'd say as some irate motorist layed on the horn. "Boy, I've got a lot of friends! You boys ain't scared, are ya!"

"Jesus," Alvin whispered to me, "we've got to get out of here!"

The old boy lay down the bottle and commenced gumming and drooling over a Pall Mall straight.

"Here, light this for me, would ya? I'm havin' some trouble here."

My innards gave a peristaltic twinge as Alvin lit the spilted smoke.

Just before Oney's Restaurant we squealed through that long hairpin curve above the Nehalem River in the oncoming lane. A loaded log truck ground down on us from the other direction.

'Good Christ!' yelled Alvin, and grabbed the wheel just in time to save our lives.

When we got to Oney's a mile down the road, my jellied knees and fibrillating heart nearly failed me.

"I'm going in for a beer and some grub. You boys comin' in?"

"We live just over there," I told him. "Thanks."

Alvin and I scrambled out like two rats from a house afire and headed for the drainage ditch and the timber beyond.

"You boys ain't scare, are ya?" Alvin yelled hysterically. "That was somethin' crazy."

My friend Violet Thompson died Saturday. For the past thirty years, Vi and her husband Don occupied the Wave Crest Hotel, a place of refuge for a vast and scattered assemblage of guests and friends. Those who were fortunate enough to spend time in that special place cherish the memory as I do.

Their conception of the hotel as a gathering place, a place for sharing ideas, flights of imagination, good food and good fellowship persisted throughout those times. My gratitude to them both is without bounds.

In her quiet and thoughtful way, Violet influenced by example, illustrated with humor, piqued curiosity with query. "Why is that," she would insist. Vi had scant time for sloppy thinking, far less for contemporary conceits and superficialities. She has been a confidant, teacher, sounding board, and the best of friends--truly the finest kind.

"Just because you find yourself in the minority," she would tell me, "that doesn't mean you're wrong! Lots of people out there who make the decisions are idiots, that's obvious. Stick to your guns. There are lots of ways of doing things, but most of them aren't the right way."

Vi's interests ranged wide. She read two or three books a week, kept abreast of contemporary issues, challenged one to engage in considered action. A vast repository of information, she served as a keen intellectual resource when questions of history or philosophy arose. She rarely erred.

"If you had only one day left on earth," she would ask, "what would you do?"

I would confess some confusion about those matters.

"Why, plant a tree, of course," she would tell me, smiling gently.

Violet didn't have the opportunity to plant her beloved Sitka spruce trees this spring. For those of you who knew her, I would suggest taking her part this spring and planting a spruce seedling in a place close to your hearts.

"That's just fine," she would say.

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