

## Hobo trio saved by knights of road

TRAINS from Page 12

border. Nowhere near North Platte. Another funny coincidence, this train doesn't slow down much in Beatrice.

A quick check of the Backpack of Necessities reveals a quart of Yukon Jack, a jacket, a Donald Duck storybook, and a cigarette lighter. And a knife. ("What the hell's that for?" "Uh, protection. I guess we can maybe kill a rabbit for food or something.") Seeing no rabbits on our car, the "or something" isn't even contemplated.

Some trains later (still dark, but barely), the train seems to slow going around a curve. ("Now it turns west.") Two things to remember here; one, try rolling when you hit the ground, and two, be careful of bottles in your backpack.

There seems to be a city a couple of miles south of us. Do we go there, or do we take our chances going back north. After trying each about three times for a couple hundred yards or so, we amble North. I keep remembering some song about "North to Nebraska, the gold rush is on," but I'm not sure that was ever really a song.

Soon it becomes light enough to see that there is a highway less than a mile to our left. It turns out to be Highway 77. Kansas Highway 77. (Some where in Kansas with no travelers checks. What will you do?)

At this point we decide that calling our friend in North Platte is out. We also decide calling anyone at all is probably not a good idea. At daybreak Sunday morning, any of our friends getting a call from Kansas would probably just laugh and tell everyone before we got back. At least that's what I'd do. Parents, from nowhere near Kansas by the way, probably wouldn't laugh, but, well, you know.

Truck drivers have long had a reputation for being quick to come to the rescue of their fellow travelers in distress. They are sometimes called the knights of the road and not without good reason.

The truck driver who picks us up is wearing a blue shirt that says "Ned" on it. "I don't usually pick up hitchhikers, not since that guy with the knife, but you two look too stupid to do any real damage," says Ned. "Thanks," we reply.

Ned is a pretty friendly sort of guy once you get to know him, and he tells us all kinds of things. Ned tells us about his ex-wife, he tells us we're in Manhattan, Kan., he tells us about how happy he was to get out of prison, he tells us about the gun he carries, he tells us some grisly tales about what happened to a couple hitchhikers he knew of, ("but don't say anything to anybody. The drivers were friends of mine,") and many other fascinating tales of the road, our common bond.

Anyway, we had to part company with Ned at Marysville. Ned tells us at a coffee shop that he's going to follow the border on west. Something about cheaper gas tax or something.

However, our luck is with us. The same luck we'd been having. A nice traveling salesman named Ken offers to give us a ride, since he's going to Omaha anyway, and Lincoln's right on the way. He must have overheard us.

Anyway, our journey ends with Ken dropping us off at the U-Stop on 10th street. It wasn't quite the wild bar chase through North Platte that we'd hoped for, but we did save a bundle on gas money, and nobody's car was damaged.

It could have been worse.

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