

STAMPEDE

Hitchhiking, as a mode of transportation, has virtually disappeared in my lifetime. Seeing the culmination of the Calgary Stampede (July 15th) on TV got me thinking of this. In the early sixties, as a student, I worked one summer timber cruising in the far forests of Peace River country in Alberta. Because we were so far out in the bush, there was nothing to do on the weekends so we worked. The government wouldn't pay us for a seven day work week though, opting to give us ten days off in the middle of the summer....Stampede week, as it turned out, and I thought I would go to Calgary to see it.

The first leg was to hitch to Edmonton. My luggage was a change of clothes crammed into a cardboard lard box secured with a string. I wouldn't have picked up a scruffy bum like me on a bet. I don't remember the rides, but it seems to me I got to Edmonton pretty quick. One incident in the Edmonton bus terminal sticks with me, though.

I was in the terminal to get a bus to the city limits because there is no point in hitchhiking in populous areas where drivers have many options and exits. I was also there to clean up, having slept the previous night on some guys floor. The men's room was a large cavernous echoing marble and stone affair, where men were performing their morning ablutions. A few were rubby-dubs as we called bums, unshaven and dirty, while others were bus travelers on their way to Red deer or Calgary or anywhere. These men were shaving, shrugging on a clean shirt, brushing their teeth and so on. All seem to perform their morning toilet without inhibition....and one guy set the world's record for lack of inhibition. A single toilet was mounted on a raised platform without walls of any kind, a true throne. The toilet paper was on a metal rod beside it. The device appeared as though a manufacturer was advertising toilets, all it needed was to slowly rotate as an automobile might in an auto show. Still, it afforded a magnificent view of the room. There, perched upon it, sat a man with his pants down. He was content to watch the passing parade of travelers, utterly relaxed. It was explained to me that each men's room must have one toilet that wasn't a pay toilet and the proprietors had thought to dissuade vandalism and inappropriate use by making the toilet visible. It worked, I guess. I sure didn't use it, though, even though I had little money.

On my last ride to Calgary, the driver and I exchanged information as hitchers and drivers do. He asked me where I was staying in Calgary, and I responded

that I hadn't any idea. I was sure I could get a hotel or something. He said, "Son, it's Stampede Week, and there's a bus strike. I'm a bus driver and I can tell you that there isn't a room to be found in the city. I have an apartment in the basement that my brother-in-law uses. He's not in town now and you can have it for nothing. My wife won't mind."

Can you imagine? The guy had never met me, would never see me again, I looked like some kind of wretched criminal, and he offered me a room. Not only that, but his wife cooked breakfast every day I was there. That's Western Hospitality.

I can't remember viewing any of the Stampede events. I remember bumming food at the outdoor barbecues, getting fooled out of my money (what a rube) on crown and anchor at the midway, and the crushing crowds, but I don't think I saw bronc busting or Brahma bull riding or any of those events. Too busy getting into trouble probably.

One beautiful day I thought I would hitch to Banff to see the mountains. I got a mile or two out of Calgary and then no one would pick me up. After an hour or two I began to get very hungry, a problem I have to this day. When a car appeared in the distance heading west, I'd stick out the thumb. When a car came heading east back to Calgary, I'd run across the road and try to hitch a ride in that direction. Back and forth across the road I sprinted until Dame Fortune saw fit to hitch me back to Calgary. I never saw the Rockies on that trip.

On the way back to the Peace, a man picked me up in a battered Ford, and within moments fell asleep and allowed the car to veer off the road. When we stopped with a shriek of brakes and a cloud of dust, he told me that I had to drive because he couldn't stay awake. But he was

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