

Take a Sip by Mark Anthony Given

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By : The King of Montana

Hitchhiking stories.

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Kids, when their imagination bids, hitch-hike a thousand miles to find the Hesperides that's on their mind.
â W. H. Auden

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RIDE #77

Interstate 55 North, Picayune, Mississippi, April 7, 1977 2:07 PM ET

NOT A CLOUD in the aquamarine, powder blue sky as usual along the Gulf Coast all year round. The Interstate is built above the marshy flat no mansâ land until finally leveling out at about the twenty six mile marker, and the quarter mile length exit ramp ends where I begin. Standing across at the Entrance Ramp hitchhiking with just a simple day pack in flip flops and T-shirt, I looked like the kid next door with a Florida tan and light brown hair streaked by the Sun. I never waited ten minutes anywhere it seemed, I had people wrecking their cars pulling over for me. As long as I kept my self clean and new clothes and a big smile, the party never stopped when youâ re young, hot and rambunctiousâ !.not to mention a set of â Balls of Atlasâ .

I wanted to be a writer since I read The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain, when I was ten, and I knew I needed characters. Where do you get characters? Like many great writers before me, I Hit the Road. Kerouac, Jack London, Charles Dickens, I could go on and on. I hitchhiked from one end of this country to the other a half a dozen times. I can walk into any town in America, maybe most places, without a penny in my pocket or a friend or foe, and Iâ ll be just fine. That is a very rare and marvelous ability. I could fill volumes with the stories of the hundreds of rides I have had, a couple come to mind when I look back on this time in my life; and Ride #77 is at the top of the list. Ninety nine percent of what I write is true, but to tell you the truth, Mark Twain said, â When I was younger I could remember anything, whether it happened or not.â I heartily subscribe to that as well, because I can hardly divide what happened from what I made upâ !. it is otherwise known as â Literary license,â and I invoke it hereâ !

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I WISH THIS GUY never stopped for me as soon as I got in the car but it was so hot outside, I was hoping for some blowing air at least. I was excited to jump in this ragged out, 1963 Chevrolet Bel Air like it was a new Lincoln but that didn't last long. An Old Man in a farmers bib with no T-shirt about sixty years old. It looked like a work car with tools laying everywhere and fast food rappers, he pulled back onto the long Entrance Ramp, and by the time we got to the Interstate he was doing all of forty five miles an hour and never went any faster. Cars were blowing right past us at sixty or seventy miles an hour and I thought I was in a time warp. He had an old fashioned small Coke Bottle with the white lettering worn off between his legs with what looked like water. He asked me where I was going and I told him the same thing I told them all, "As far this way as you want to carry me. I'm just traveling." Often they'd just look straight ahead in silence a few minutes, having never heard of that place.

"You ever drink any Moonshine boy?"

I glanced down at that bottle and say,

"No Sir."

"You want some?" he said excitedly.

"Not really."

I seen a look of disappointment comes over his face and he stared straight ahead like he had been slapped. After a long moment he glanced at me fiercely and leaned forward and started fumbling around under the front seat, just barely looking over the dashboard between the steering wheel and he was all over the road. I kept looking behind us thinking we were going to get rear ended by a barreling tractor trailer hauling ass. Finally he whipped out the biggest damn pistol I ever seen. It was a Smith & Wesson 22 Model of 1917, and looked like Target Pistol with a long barrel. Time stopped and I thought I could hear the Atomic Clock Seconds ticking away as he swung that big bastard up over the front seat and pointed it right between my eyes.

"Take a sip, boy."

He took his other hand off the wheel to hand me the little faded green bottle and I suddenly remembered all the admonitions I heard when I was a kid about hitch hiking. I looked at it for a second and then looked around to see if anyone was looking in case this was my last swig...



I TOOK JUST A SIP of this stuff that looked like water and tasted like it could have melted the chrome of a car bumper and burnt a path south in my intestines. Just then the "Balls of Atlas" part kicked in and I took another good swig off this nasty shit like I meant it. Time to Man up. I thought I seen a slight ember

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of happiness dim his fierce blue eyes and he started to lower the big gun that look like it covered the length of the bench seat in the old car. A sense of warm recognition came over me and I felt like I was in my grandfather's old car going fishing. A sudden whiff of Gulf of Mexico, this might not be a bad ride after all even with sitting on toolls and a screw driver sticking in my back. The old guy nudged me with the barrel of the big gun bringing me back to reality and handed me the gun and said, "Now you hold it on me while I get a sip!"

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