

The Hitchhiker

—Buddy Foster

(This story won the O. Henry Short Story Award for 1948.)

It was a hot, dry, dusty day. Not the slightest breeze stirred the limp leaves. The sun burned fiercely down on the concrete highway over which heat waves were dancing.

A man was walking slowly along this road. His shirt was stained with sweat and open at the throat. His tie was loose, but tied so that he could, at a moment's notice, tighten it in order to present a more respectable appearance. He carried a coat over his arm.

To him the road grew hotter with each step. He couldn't stop under a tree, because there were no trees near enough to the road to allow him to get back to it in time to flag a passing car. Maybe a little farther down this road I will find a place where there is shade, he thought.

Being hungry didn't add much to his enjoyment. He judged the time to be about three o'clock. It had been thirty-two hours since he had eaten, and then only a sandwich. The reason for this situation was that he was broke.

No, he hadn't always been broke. He had inherited a small fortune, but he had wasted most of it and lost the rest when the stock market crashed. Still he was luckier than many people, because he was able to get a job as an accountant. His small salary fed him, but it did not meet his extravagant way of life; and so he resorted to embezzlement. He was caught and spent a number of years in prison. His mind now dwelt upon those years when he had a chance to learn many other forms of theft from "experts". But he learned something else instead. The "experts" always seem to slip and get caught.

Yes, he had learned his lesson, but still he could not find work. Nobody wanted to employ an ex-convict. He wasn't at all sure that the society which had once condemned him to prison, where he was supposed to reform and learn not to break laws again, was going to allow him to be honest now that he wished to. It seemed as though he would be forced to steal again in order to live.

Perhaps there is another way, thought the hitchhiker. But, no, I can think of no other way that I haven't tried. I've got to live. I'll rob the next man who gives me a ride. There's a piece of iron pipe; I'll use it as a club.

A few miles up the road a car was approaching. The driver was a very successful lawyer returning to his home after a profitable business trip. He and the hitchhiker had been very good friends in high school.

As the car came around a curve and started toward the hitchhiker, he hid the iron pipe under the coat which he was carrying, tightened his tie, and stuck out his thumb.

The lawyer did not recognize the hitchhiker at first, but he took pity on anyone walking on such a hot day and stopped to give him a lift. As the hitchhiker approached the car, he was thinking: This is it; this is the man I am going to rob. But where?

"Jim!" exclaimed the lawyer as he recognized the hitchhiker.

"Al!" said the hitchhiker as he also

recognized his high school chum. He sighed with relief as he entered the cool car while his thoughts ran thus: This brings a new development into my plans. It'll be hard to steal from a friend. Maybe I can touch him for a loan since he is an old friend. No, that wouldn't help. I've tried that. What I could borrow wouldn't be much. After all, it has been a long time since I last saw Al, and you can't expect a guy to lend a person much after so many years; too, soon it would be gone and then it would be the same old thing all over again. Yet if I take his money, he might not have much with him or he might be almost broke at home, and that would leave him in a fix. If he were rich and carrying a lot of money, I could—

"Jim, you don't look as though you've had very good luck," said Al, interrupting Jim's thoughts.

"No, I haven't," replied Jim.

"Life has been good to me since I saw you last. Let me see—you were an accountant then, weren't you?"

Is he just pretending that he doesn't know about—no, I guess the company kept publicity down, thought Jim as he mumbled, "Yes, I was."

"I've been very lucky. I was working with a banking firm last time I saw you. Now I've set up my own law office, been successful too; I've just finished a big, profitable deal."

"Good for you," said Jim as he started thinking: So he does have money. I could take his money and car and drive a distance. I'd have to leave the car before long because it could be traced too easily, and then, I wouldn't want Al to lose his car. I could go far enough to get a new start. The money would most likely last until I got a job. If I get caught, I'll be sent back to prison. Maybe prison won't be so bad; at least I would eat regularly.

"What have you been doing since we met last?" inquired Al.

"Sorry, I didn't hear you."

Al repeated the question.

"Nothing much," replied Jim. "I just spent a few years in prison."

"What! For what?"

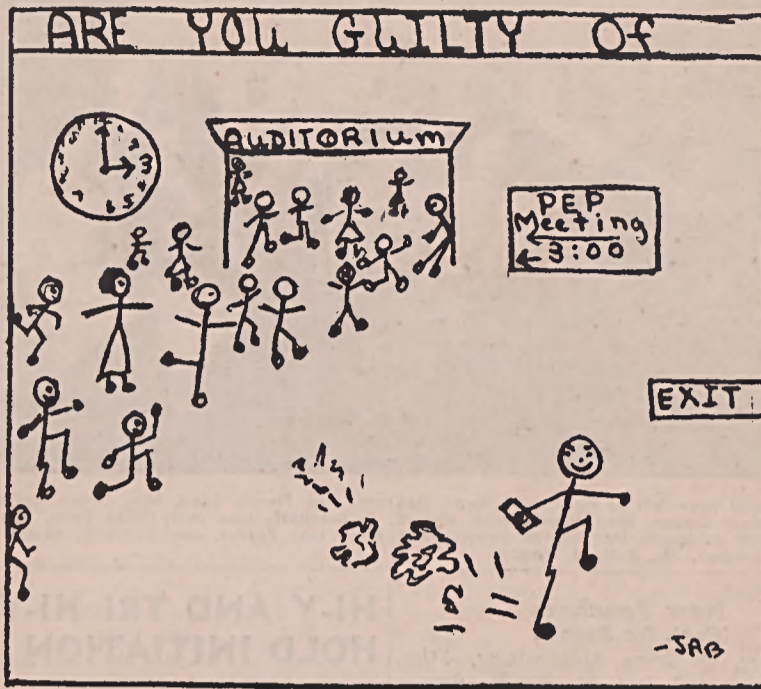
Jim told Al his story; when he had finished, Al said nothing, and Jim continued thinking: That mountain I saw when we reached the top of the hill—the base of that would be a good place for the robbery. I'll hit him with the pipe, take the car over the mountains and leave it. Then I can leave the state, maybe the country. Yeah, that's what I'll do—leave the country. I can go to Mexico and get a new start there. Mountains are getting closer; just a few more minutes now.

"See those mountains, Jim?" asked Al. "It will be cooler on the other side of them. It always is. New-some is on the other side; and Doug Newberry, you remember Doug—the boy most likely not to succeed—owns a factory over there now. Doug said he needed an accountant. He would like to have you. It's a fine job with good hours and a large salary; you'll like it."

"Watch your coat! You might drop it out the window. What was that? Did you drop something?" Al asked.

"No, I didn't drop anything; that was a piece of pipe. Wheel must have hit it and thrown it back."

"Yes, probably. I've got to watch where I'm going. I didn't see that pipe."



BOO HOO

—Bonnie Rose Leonard

In school we studied all day long; At night in French we dwell; In English learn the right from wrong— We're doing pretty well. In Chemistry it's 89, An A we almost made, Then all the teachers came along And change the blasted grade.

HIM

—Barbara Ritchie

There is a young lad named Jim, And I have a crush on him; But Mary Jane Is a good-looking dame, And my chances for Jim are slim.

"HERE THEY ARE!"

—Jo Ann Blackwelder

Well, school has begun, and the first football game was a big success, complete with a victory, cold weather, and cheering bleachers, but somehow there seemed to be something missing. I guess it must have been the good ole people who left us to go to college. It didn't seem quite right when one looked at the cheerleaders not to see Betty Ann Wall and Martha Harbinson out there yelling their heads off. Betty Ann is in college at Converse, and Martha is at Woman's College, Greensboro. L. H. S. also lost some extra good football players. Some of these were: Charles Price, who is now in school at Catawba, Pete Clark at Lenoir-Rhyne, Jaybird McCrary and Sam Everhart at Atlantic Christian, Bob Holmes at Davidson, Bill Cook at Guilford, Benny Walser at U. N. C., Bill Blalock at Duke, and Zacky Taylor at University of North Carolina. There surely were a bunch of ambitious people in last year's senior class who left to go to college to further their education. Many have already written Mrs. Hedrick, and from what they say they seem to be getting along fine. Lyniel Beck entered college at Eastern Carolina Teachers' College; Buddy Bender at High Point College; M. T. Brown, Jr., at Catawba; Martha Cox and Ruth Jenkins at Pfeiffer Junior College; John Foust, T. D. Stokes, Tommy Young, Wayne Everhart, Bob Hendricks, Jim Russell, Ronald Smith and Charles Harbinson at the University of North Carolina; Mary Ann Hartzog at St. Mary's; Grace Hendricks at Carson-

I'M NOT TO BLAME

—Lover

I'm not to blame for falling in love with you. I'm sorry I'm to blame, 'cause all I said was true. Can I help it, darling, if you thrill me through and through? So you see, I'm not to blame for falling in love with you.

I hope I'm not to blame for building my hopes so high; I hope I haven't hurt you by loving you 'til I die; You didn't resist or even try to say that your love wasn't true, So please say that I'm not to blame for falling in love with you.

Newman, Jefferson City, Tenn.; Nancy Helmstetler at Mercy Hospital; Mary Allison Martin at Peace College; Shirley Richardson at Baptist Hospital; Charles Rothrock at Virginia Polytechnic Institute; Jane Shoaf at Mary Baldwin; Nancy Waitman at W.C.U.N.C.; and Nancy Witherspoon is at Roanoke, Virginia.

We also lost a few boys to Uncle Sam. Hewey Clodfelter is now serving in the U. S. Navy, stationed at San Diego. John Newell, Jim Poston and Doug Craver are serving in the U. S. Army, and I would like to quote Doug as saying, "On to Moscow!"

To prove that some of the Lexington High School Alumni are really making good, the LEXHIPEP staff received the Ashmorian, paper of the Ashmore Business School in Thomasville, and happily learned that their staff contains a few of Lexington High School's ex-Lexhipep staff members: Adele Tuttle is editor-in-chief, and Johnny Palmer is sports editor, with Jack Burkhart as his assistant. Sarah Everhart will make them a good assistant business manager, while they couldn't have made a better choice than Isabel Essick as subscription manager; and Mrs. Ray King, the former Kathryn Hillard, an L. H. S. graduate, has just been made a member of the faculty.

"Monk" Mathis, "Moe" Gosnell, and Joe Cope are operating Stamey's Drive-In. They say, "Come on out!" Jack Swain has just paid his \$1.00 subscription to the LEXHIPEP. At present he is running the Lexington Silk Mills.

Anyway, Lexington High School wants to wish each of you the best of everything in whatever path you may have chosen.