

Toll Of The Open Road

Ed. Note

The Salemite is happy to be the first "publisher" of the works of these budding pen and ink geniuses. Jane Parker was the winner of the Freshman prize with her essay on "Frogs I Have Met." George Melville won the short story prize for his "Toll of the Open Road." We hope that the future will bring more work from these two winners and other Salemites.

by George Melville

A man and a boy watched the heavy, oppressive dusk of a June evening engulf them as they waited for the train. The boy caught the thin high-pitched whine of the rails.

"Here she comes, Ben!"

His companion nodded. Far down the track they made out a speck and watched it relentlessly grow until it took on the proportions of a train. Ben gripped the boy's shoulder.

"She's slowing down, kid. You hop the first one. Take off!" The boy ran a half-dozen steps, judging the speed of the train; then threw himself up and over in time to grab the rear ladder of the car. Wind ripped through his clothes and tore at his hair. Looking back he saw Ben clinging to a ladder a few cars behind. He grinned and started up.

On top, he straddled the rear brake rod, legs dangling over the edge of the car, and waited for his companion. In the dusk he could barely see him balancing with the sway of the train and making his way along the narrow foot rail that ran across the top of the car. Ben . . . The name seemed to fit the guy, thought the boy. Sort of short and quick like he really was. That was a break—meetin' a guy like Ben. Be no trouble to learn the ropes now.

He looked up as Ben made it to the end of the car, and made room for him to cross over and sit down. Neither of them spoke. The train lurched slightly, picking up speed. The click-clack of the wheels and track blended into a roar. Cinders nipped at the back of the boy's neck. He pulled the collar of his jacket up. It was dark now, and the boy looked at the stars, trying to pick out a few of the constellations he knew. Over in the east he could see the glow of the still hidden moon. It would be a clear night. The train rocked along, swaying and shifting its weight. It's whistle screamed defiance to the night. The beat of the wheels seemed to keep time with the boy's pulse. It gave him a feeling of power.

He grinned at Ben and shouted. "Can't beat the road for life, can you!"

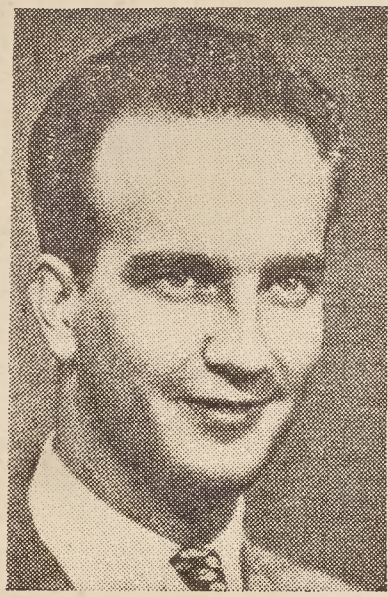
He caught Ben's answer above the roar of the wheels. "It ain't bad when you're lucky!"

The boy laughed to himself and became silent. There's a character for you, he thought. Always looking on the dark side of things. The road ain't bad, huh? Just try pulling a guy like Ben off it. Just try stickin' him in a town like Crumpville if you want to see it blown wide open. Heh! Imagine pinning Ben down in a class room with some goofy teacher ridin' him all the time. The boy grinned as he thought of his mother saying, "Now, Ben. You be home by ten-thirty." He saw Ben lean towards him.

"She'll stop to take on water about ten mile up the road. We'll grab a box then." The boy nodded to indicate he had heard. Be okay with him. Be gettin' chilly directly.

Ben was right. Before long the train lost speed, and the boy gripped the brake rod tightly. The crash of car on car jerked him backwards, but he held on. The train ground to a full stop. Ben spoke. "Okay, kid. There's an empty car up the line. Saw it as it went by."

On the ground they trugged up the track, Ben leading the way. The boy stumbled on the ties occasionally but offered no complaint. The car Ben had seen was the third behind the engine. The hiss of steam was



all the cover they needed. Ben gave the boy a boost and, a moment later, was in the car beside him.

The boy stuck his head out the door and looked towards the rear of the train. Far down the track a brakeman had set out a warning flare. The distance and the red glow gave the man a gnome-like appearance. Ben seemed to catch his thought.

"Looking at the brakeman?"

"Uh huh."

"We call 'em Satan's angels."

The boy turned back into the car. "He looks like Satan himself."

Ben stretched out on the floor. The boy sat down, his back against the side of the car.

"You ain't been on the road long have you, kid?"

"Just a few days. What made you think so?"

"The kick you get out of it. I was your age once."

"I'll always get a kick out of it," said the boy. "There's something about the road that gets under your skin."

"Yeh," said Ben dryly. "Dirt!" The boy looked around the car. There was enough straw in a corner to make a bed, but it was probably full of fleas. Dirt. Huh. A lot Ben cared about dirt! A lot Ben cared about anything!

Ben's voice broke through his thoughts. "How come you to hit the road, kid? Trouble with the folks?"

Not exactly. Just got tired of them telling me what I could do. I got sick of going to school too." He paused, searching for words. "My grand-dad never went to school a day in his life, and he used to say if a man knew his way around, he's learned plenty."

Ben grunted indifferently and said nothing.

For awhile neither spoke. The boy mentally compared his companion to his friends at home. Nobody in his league back there. Hard and quiet—that's what he was. He'd stand a town like Crumpville on its ear. Shows what the road'll do for a man. He thought of the kid at school that had backed out of coming with him. No nerve. Well, let him wind up bowin' down to some two by four boss. He'd take the road. Be through enough to make the breaks you need—That's what put you over in this world. He straightened his shoulders at the thought.

Ben's voice broke the silence.

"Ever left a rolling freight, kid?"

The boy shook his head.

"Know how its done?"

"I could make it."

"You'll have to. They'll be combing the yards of the next town. There's been a murder there."

"How far's the next town?"

"Little over fifty miles. The train won't stop until she's in the yards, but she'll slow down to about forty to make the curve just this side of there."

"And that's where we leave it, huh?"

Ben nodded. "There's a cinder bank there that'll break our fall."

"Think we can find the curve in time?"

"No trouble there. It's right on the other side of a tunnel."

The engine sent a long chain of

jerks through the cars, finally getting underway. Ben got up and rolled the door shut; then lay down again to take it easy. The freight was rolling now, rocking from side to side. An occasional lurch pulled the boy's shoulders from the side of the car, then slammed them back again. He rose, caught his balance, and went over to the door. He rolled it back just enough to let the air blow in across his face. He liked to hear the unmuffled roar of the wheels. Going, going, going, they seemed to say. He turned the word over in his mind. Well, he was going all right. Going high and wide and when he went back to Crumpville, people would point to him with pride. He went over to where Ben was lying and stretched out beside him.

"Think this town'll be unhealthy, eh?"

"Maybe. The law'll need some suspects. Bums are their easiest meat."

"Fat chance they'd stand if pinning anything on us," said the boy. "We ain't been near the place." He looked confidently at Ben.

Ben didn't immediately answer. He fished a half empty sack of tobacco from his pocket and rolled a cigarette in silence. The flare of the match made him squint, lending an additional gravity to his already serious face. His cigarette lit, he held the match in front of him and watched it slowly burn itself out.

"Bums can't prove anything, kid. Cops can kick our teeth in anytime, and they don't need much excuse either."

"But we have a right to a defense."

"You listen to me, kid. The only defense we've got you can sum up in one word—Run. It may not seem right, but nothing ever comes free. You might call this the toll of the open road."

The boy waited for him to continue, but Ben said nothing. Maybe the guy knows something, he thought. What's a few hard knocks though? What's the use of being scared of what's around every corner? He looked at his companion. No—Ben wasn't scared. Ben wasn't scared of anything. He just knew, that's all. The boy felt suddenly uneasy, suddenly tired. Slipping off his jacket, he made a pillow of it under his head. The roar of the train lulled him to sleep. He awoke with a solid wall of sound in his ears. It was a moment before he realized they were in a tunnel. Abruptly the roar ceased, and the steady drone of wheels and track continued. Ben was at the door, rolling it back. The boy rose and slipped on his jacket.

"We're almost there, kid. The light from the cab'll be all we need to see by." The train was losing speed as it neared the curve. The boy saw sparks fly from the wheels as the brakes were applied. Ben slapped him on the shoulder and pointed towards the opposite near corner. "Over there, kid. When I hollar, hit the door running."

The boy obeyed. He felt a little sick. The train was still going fast.

"Now!" Ben yelled. The boy charged the door. Gotta be right, he thought, What if—What if! He hurtling through space. He put his head between his knees and turned two flips before he landed. He hit rolling. The shock knocked the wind out of him and loosened the ball he had made of himself. He was rolling sideways when he reached the foot of the bank. He got to his feet, gasping for breath. His legs trembled involuntarily, and there was a feeling of weakness in his stomach. Brushing the cinders from his clothing, he looked around for Ben.

Abruptly he dropped to the ground. Men were shouting up ahead! Cops, he thought. They got Ben. He lay still, silently cursing the moonlight. This second shock almost got the better of him, but he managed to fight down the panic that threatened to overwhelm him. The men were heading his way . . .

To be continued

Frogs I Have Met



by Jane Parker

Webster defines the frog as "any of numerous tailless leaping amphibians of the genus 'Rana.'" Reading this, I doubt seriously that Mr. Webster ever came in contact with the frogs I have met. His are merely little "geni Ranae"; mine are personalities. Webster's frog must be the common, medium-sized, gray one, for it leaps about just as described and, of course, it has no tail. But here Webster stops and deprives his readers of all the really interesting characteristics of such individuals as the clown, the introvert, the criminal, the concert artist, and the figurine—all frog types.

Our first friend, the clown, is extremely sociable. He chooses to live near people and delights in frightening them half out of their wits by hopping suddenly into sight from under a leaf or rock. He is the prankster of the frog world, and his wide, up-turned mouth suggests that mischievous schemes are going on in his mind every minute. In contrast, there is the frog introvert. The object of nocturnal excursions, a more timid and better camouflaged creature cannot be found. One may tip-

toe about in order to come upon him unawares or throw rocks to create a disturbance, but either he simply cannot be seen or, if found, he flops into the water and finds a new hiding place. This frog is truly the most unsociable of his clan, but, oddly enough, he is the one most sought after.

The criminal frog is the type found in the biology laboratory, which acts as prison to frogs. The inmates are under-world characters, the mean-tempered outcasts of frog society. But frogs have their good citizens too—the bullfrog, for example. No summary would be complete without mention of his because we are all familiar with his lusty frog-operas presented so often on hot summer nights. He is the artist of the group, quite sophisticated, full of poise and charm, but considered rather snobbish by his contemporaries.

My favorite frog is the little fellow who haunts outdoor showers and damp, open basements each summer. His skin has the most delicate colors imaginable, and his tiny, gracefully shaped limbs give him the appearance of a dainty figurine with shining jewels in place of eyes. But upon close inspection one quickly learns that the figurine is very much animated. It has a mind of its own and several excellently developed hopping muscles, so that when disturbed, it rapidly leaves the vicinity.

There are many more frog personalities; some with amazingly rare qualities, some perfectly useless, and, as with humans, numbers who are mixtures of the two. Each possesses a combination of characteristics which sets him entirely apart from his contemporaries; each is a distinct individual. And what does Webster say? "Any of the numerous genus 'Rana'."

Perhaps so, Mr. Webster, but I think you made quite an omission. And some day if I happen to write a dictionary, I shall certainly make up for your error by devoting chapter after chapter to the frogs I have met.

An Argument . . .

by Maryathon Swift Evans

. . . to prove that the Abolishing of the Honor System at Salem College may, as things now stand, be attended with some inconveniences and perhaps not produce those good effects proposed thereby.

Written in the year 1949

It may be neither safe or prudent to argue against the abolishing of the Honor System at a time like this when all parties appear so unanimously determined upon the point, as we cannot but allow from their actions, their discourses, and their writing. Therefore, I shall handle the arguments with all tenderness.

First, one great advantage proposed by the abolishing of the Honor System is, that it would very much enlarge and establish a liberty of conscience. Salemites love to be free with the lowest objects; and if they cannot be allowed a Student Government to revile or renounce, they will speak evil of the faculty, abuse the Board of Trustees, and reflect upon the Administration; which I am sure few will deny to be of a much more pernicious consequence.

This proposal likewise urges that there are, by computation, on this campus thirty-one Student Government officials whose time and energy added to that of the Faculty Advisory Board would suffice at least ten tables of bridge for a three-day marathon.

Another advantage proposed by the abolishing of the Honor System is the clear gain of free time. No longer would Salemites have to read

parallel, document term papers, do their own homework, make notebooks or sign in or out. Another great saving that could be gained by this proposal would be that of money. Salemites would not have to pay for candy, cokes, seven-ups, cheesits, snaks, crax or other items provided for their convenience.

There is one advantage, greater than any of the foregoing, proposed by the abolishing of the Honor System, that it will utterly extinguish the pious among us by removing those factious distinctions of "Right and Wrong" and "Black and White" which are now so many clogs upon required student body meetings, and are apt to prefer the righting themselves or the wronging others before the most important interests of the school.

'Tis again objected, as a very absurd ridiculous custom, that a set of immature young girls should be subjected, much less elected and honored, to bawl half the time against the lawfulness of those methods most in use toward the pursuit of failing to sign out, over-cutting chapel, and stealing food which are the constant practice of all young girls alive the other half of the time. But this objection is, I think, a little unworthy in so refined a school as ours.

Of course there are arguments on the other side; If the Honor System were once abolished, how could the pious, the strong citizens and the girls of profound learning be able to find another subject so calculated in all points whereon to display their abilities? We are daily complaining of the great decline of honor among us, and would we take away the greatest, perhaps the only gripe we have?

Nor do I think it wholly groundless, or my fears entirely imaginary

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