

1948

In the *summer*
of 1948 I was
14 and my *brother*
was 18. *Our father*, who had *been*
terribly poor after
he got off the boat
from Europe and
went to work at 7
years old, was very
sharp and lucky. He
had an exotic belief in
spoiling children in very

deep ways. Our father could also be a very just, stern, silent man.
He was as tough as *nails* and he was also one of the few people
I have ever known *who had* a real star twinkling in the corner of his
eye. This summer, in one of the very last special creations of his special
twinkling indulgence, *he gave* us each \$250 and drove us out onto a New
Jersey highway. My *brother* and I hitchhiked to the west coast and back in
two months. That *summer I* saw many things I never dreamed I would ever
see: The Rockies, *San Francisco*, Kansas wheat, Yosemite, and many more
things I had never *known* existed. And so many of those kind decent people
who had been *on the* road exhausted and hungry through the Depression gave
us so many *fabulous* rides and went so far out of their way to be so kind to
my brother and *I that* to this day I easily believe that people who hate me like
me. And in the luck of the road that brings all things that can
come to those who stick out their thumb.

One August day we were hitchhiking from San Francisco to Grand Coulee Dam. We got a ride in an old car from two rather strange fellows. One was big and scruffy and mean and the other was little and scruffy and mean. Their story was that they had just escaped from prison and were driving to Alaska. They asked us if we wanted a ride to Alaska. Such was the largesse of the road in those days. We said no, we were going to the Columbia River. "Assholes, Mother Fuckin Jerks," they muttered. Their teeth were like dog's teeth. The big one stopped the car, grabbed an ax from under the seat, and with wild curses ran into the woods, as he screamed it, "To take a lousy shit." I'd dined in all kinds of fancy restaurants, had eaten caviar and sour cream and drawn butter at the Russian Tea Room, Pinzas as Mephistopheles at the Met, talked to a robot who was smoking a cigar, climbed up on Rodin's Gates Of Hell, saw Joe Dimaggio hit home run, was indulged in all kinds of fancy stuff before I was 7, yet the ax instead of the usual toilet paper impressed me immensely. All that night we drove slow up the California coast in the profuse Pacific fog. They had insisted that my brother drive. Route One wound dangerously on ocean side cliffs. Turn after turn we reached the bottom of a hill in a dense fog pocket and my brother, his eye-glasses just touching the windshield, had to slow the car to a crawl to see the road. They would take their whiskey flasks out of their mouths just long enough to scream fiendishly flashing their sharp teeth about how they were going to kill us in the woods if we didn't drive right. The next morning we saw the beautiful Oregon coast's huge rocks and crashing surf. Then we cut inland through a few towns, which we had to drive through at least two times each as our patrons gleaned endless pleasure out of leaning out the car window, rolling their red eyes, and giving every woman they saw the finger yelling shrilly, "Whoooo! Whoooo! Fuckeeeee!" It soon became evident to us that Mr. Big and Mr. Little had exhausted themselves screaming a long night and were hung-over tired to rob, rape, or kill us. They soon let us out of the car complaining bitterly about what fucking horsesasses we were for not wanting to go to Alaska where a man can say whatever he wants. On reflection, I now believe that to Mr. Big and Mr. Little, my brother and I must have appeared to be two ruthless peculiars who did outrageously affected bizarre things such as read books, wash, say please, thank you, and who could go for hours without saying anything no matter what was screamed at them. Our father's stern silence probably scared them more than their fathers' rustic hysteria if indeed us.

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fir forest in the middle of nowhere. Within 15 minutes a giant truck cab pulling 3 gigantic tree trunks chained on huge back wheels driving 70 miles an hour screeched stopped in the heavy rain and picked us up. Such was the luck of the road in those days. After we answered the usual, "What are two little kids like you doing three thousand miles from home," we asked the usual, "How did you get here?" The man who picked us up told us his story. He and his family had lived in Pittsburgh and they were sick of blacksoot and cinders covering everything in their house. He hated the steel mills in his lungs and heart. They packed up everything they owned in a truck and drove to Oregon. Everyone they knew said they were crazy. The man invited us to dinner. His home was a small black tarpaper covered shack on a wet mud lot in the woods on the side of the highway. He had a wife and seven children. One little girl was brain damaged. They all wore rags. Their *russe of English* was worse than Mr. Big and Mr. Little's. They were all very warm, kind, and sweet to each other and to us. The food we stranded, exquisitely spoiled Jew boys from New Jersey were given for dinner was a thin soup of pork gristle in flour and milk. It was the most delicious dinner I have ever ate.

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So ends the first part of the life of David Daniels