

SITTING ON THE STEP

by J. M. Hirsch

Under normal conditions (read as never), I love long road trips. At your fingertips, you have command of a half ton or so of steel and plastic capable of unnecessarily high velocities with endless miles of road stretching out before you, awaiting exploration. Sadly, my quasi-Star Trekcum-Kerouac fantasies usually lack the romanticism I describe them with.

These days, my trips are mostly taken with my debate team -- and one simply has not lived without having spent long hours trapped in a small, moving vehicle with a group high school students whose hormonal systems are set on permanent overdrive. It would seem that the gas station attendant who sold them the latest swimsuit issue clearly had no understanding of the difficulties involved in getting this age group to concentrate on philosophical arguments under ideal conditions, never mind those involving scantily clad women.

This most recent journey found me forging Vermont mountain ranges in a rented sub-subcompact on route to Albany, New York. I first recognized the signs of trouble when Matte failed to locate any radio station not blasting bible banging epithets at the hordes of heathens infiltrating our government. Though this served to amuse the team for a short while, I knew trouble was brewing. I rely heavily on the sedative effect hard rock has on teens. It seems to hold the most promise for my sanity on these long treks and I knew all hope was lost without it.

Our vehicle, we named it Sartre due to the existential nature of mountain climbing in a Hyundai Excel, was a rather in-

hospitable little shoe box, lacking both seat belts and functioning windshield wipers -- neither of which led to the relaxing sort of road trip I always envision these experiences to be. Sartre didn't care for hills, regardless of which direction we were headed on them. During the upward trip, he groaned and threatened to burst gaskets with every foot we climbed. On the downward slide, and I mean slide in the graphic sense, most relevant control features, such as steering and breaks, deadened and retained all the sensitivity of an old Atari arcade game.

By far, the high point of this trip came when I could tolerate driving blindly no longer. As the dirt and road mush spitting up onto my windshield had formed into a thick caking no amount of "windshield juice" could penetrate I found driving a slight challenge. Pulling off to the side of the road, we frantically searched for a suitable windshield rag. Due to our keen survival instincts and brilliant foresight, we had nothing. When this became apparent, I began asking the team for extraneous articles of clothing, forgetting of course that they were decked out in their best business suits and were unwilling to explain to their parents why they let their coach clean a car with their silk ties and Armani sport coats. Becoming desperate, I did what any rational individual would in a time of crisis -- I ordered one of my students to go into the woods and remove his underwear -- that being the most expendable and least expensive item of clothing I could think of.

As one might expect, Matte had a bit of a problem following this order and I can forgive him

for questioning my judgement. Thankfully, there were no other people present to witness this odd exchange.

"Matte, go into the woods and remove your underwear. We need them," ordered the exhausted and strangely embarrassed coach.

"Remove my what?" asked the equally embarrassed and rightfully exasperated student.

"It's dark, cold, snow is coming, and we are stranded with a Matchbox car in the middle of Vermont! Now give me your underwear!"

I think you get the idea. You might be interested to know that the underwear did a mighty fine job at cleaning the window. I dare say, I have never seen a car window look quite so clear. Visibility for the remainder of the trip was fantastic. I'm not sure what all this means, but it frightens me.

Lest you think all my road trips involve me demanding that high school students wash cars with their underwear, I feel compelled to assure you this was my first undergarment/road trip related experience. I assure you, any item of clothing would have sufficed. I would have happily settled for Brion's Mickey Mouse socks, but he would not surrender them.

I guess the moral of this odd tirade is to never travel through Vermont mountains without a spare pair of underpants. Now if you'll excuse me, I feel an unexplainable urge to send some money to the Arch-Christians for Pure government and Saving the World from Heinous Heathens fund.

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