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untitled 2 [forteen days and, poem]

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we were in Washington, part of the largest anti-war demonstration yet organized. A month later we said good-bye on a warm morning in San Francisco. I don't know if she ever saw her father again.

In the comfort of memory, it is easy to forget the pain of that era. There weren't just love troops massing in the hills. Charles Manson was no aberration, but a real example of the dangerous and seamy side of Trans-Amerika. Anyone on the streets in those days could point out some Manson type on every block; mystical, power-mad gurus using drugs, sex and youthful rebellion to control their disciples. Madman Jim Jones came out of the sixties using anti-establishment rhetoric and paranoia to prey upon alienated liberals, Blacks and poor people. There were heroin deaths at Woodstock and the Hell's Angels terrorized Altamont. Trans-Amerika was not clean.

There is no place where myths of the sixties mingle so freely with memory as in my reflections of life on the road. The drifter has been acknowledged in song and story as a free person. The drifter comes and goes at will, bowing to no one and living by a self-imposed code of honor. As a hitch-hiking freak, I had my pipe, my blanket and my freedom and wanted nothing more. My solitary campfires nestled comfortably away from the straight world remain memories of home. I have ridden my thumb through almost every state in the country, as well as parts of Canada and Mexico, and a thumber's freedom is still the most exciting rush I know. I have fallen in love in the mountains of West Virginia and I have shared a bottle of rotgut with a wino on a stoop in Oakland, California. I have watched the sun set in glorious splendor in the Pacific and have seen the autumn leaves in New England. Who I was and who I am have been shaped by thousands of miles of highway.

The road is addictive and like any addiction it costs. The memories of a sunny day spent making love on a California

beach or the beauty of a Montana night make it easy to forget what the road demands. Solitary freedom also means a life of being the solitary outsider, at best a welcome guest, at worst an enemy. Love found along the way is all the more precious because it has its own way of drifting into the wind like the smoke from my campfire. Freedom can be way lonely on a cold, rainy night when it seems the rest of the world is safe and warm in their homes.

From the comfort of my small house, and my mid-thirties, I look back on that era, a time of memories, both painful and warm, floating ever farther into the distance. The highway stretches off into a receding horizon and back to yesterday. Somewhere along that road of memory and mythology I spent my youth. ■

fourteen days and.

match flying towards
—beer full pitcher
filled ashtray—

where

they ask looking honestly.
smiling

wondering.

there

she

pointed

knowing

unknowingly where.

—michael swanson

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