

LINDA MAHOOD

Thumbing a Ride

*Hitchhikers, Hostels,
and Counterculture in Canada*



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Youth culture is an essay in ... the mini-politics of rebellion against obscure social forces. During a brief period, youth step outside the stark reality of industrial society to explore a symbolic identity, to celebrate being young, optimistic and joyous – a moment all too brief in personal biography.

– *Mike Brake, Comparative Youth Culture (1985)*

When you give a lift to a ragged boy he is, perhaps, a potential Prime Minister, an unlikely Trudeau in blue jeans, in hope or in despair.

– *“The Young in Summer,” Winnipeg Free Press (1971)*

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Get Your Motor Running

Risk, Ritual, and Rite of Passage Travel



Hitching in Saskatoon, n.d.

Local History Archive, CFQC qc42091, Saskatoon Public Library

In July 1970 a young man named Gary Barclay sent a protest letter to the Vancouver weekly the *Georgia Straight*. Under the headline “Hitch Bitch,” Barclay listed the negative consequences of the mayor of Vancouver’s efforts to prohibit hitchhiking in the city and other parts of British Columbia. Barclay called Mayor Tom Campbell’s hitchhiking ban “fascistic” because it would harm the environment, the young, the poor, and the students, “who must travel to and from school.”¹ A month later, a young man in Faro, Northwest Territories, wrote directly to the mayor. Rik Morgan drew a peace sign on a piece of paper and wrote, “Dear Mayor Campbell ... several of my friends told me that for some ‘moralistic reason’ you were going to clamp down on hitchhikers?” Morgan was also offended because the mayor called people with long hair “undesirables.” He said, “I am, as you would say, a hippie, but I work and I support myself as all my long haired friends do.”² For young people in the late 1960s and the 1970s, the struggle over the right to hitchhike epitomized more than just a struggle for access to a cheap means of transportation.

To open the mayor’s “mind” to “different perspectives,” Morgan enclosed a cartoon by Dave Berg from *Mad* magazine with his letter. The first frame of the cartoon showed a scruffy hitchhiker in blue jeans, headband, and sandals. In the second frame, a middle-aged motorist in a suit and tie pulls over to give the hippie a lift. He shouts, “Hop in!” and the bearded young man cheerfully replies, “Thanks,” as he scrambles in beside the driver. In the remaining frames, as the car accelerates, the camaraderie between the men vanishes. The anxious motorist thinks, “What am I doing, giving a lift to this perfect stranger? After all, I’m a father and a husband! I’ve got responsibilities! He could be a dope fiend! He could hold me up, or bash me over the head, or ...” The nervous hitchhiker is also thinking, “What am I doing asking for a lift from a perfect stranger?! After all, I’ve got my whole life ahead of me. He could be some kind of a nut, or pervert! He could have a knife, or ...”³ Berg’s references to dope fiends, nuts, and perverts illustrate the contested meaning associated with hitchhiking and the underlying risks, tension, and fear it produced on both sides of the so-called generation gap.

Teenagers of the baby boom era were not the first generation to hitchhike. In *The Hitchhiker’s Field Manual* (1973), Paul DiMaggio says the first “automobile begat the ride-beggar, who begat the hitchhiker, who

discovered that thumbing down rides” was quicker and safer than hopping freight trains.⁴ “Hitchhike,” originally “hitch-hike,” is an American term that appeared in the 1920s and is believed to have evolved from older terms like “ride beggar” and “hobo-hike.”⁵ There were approximately 1 million automobiles in Canada in the 1920s. Automobile ownership doubled between 1945 and 1962 and had doubled again by 1964. Half of householders owned a car in 1953, and by 1960 two-thirds had a motor vehicle.⁶ The more cars on the road, the more likely a thumb-traveller was to get a lift. The most avid hitchhikers prior to the Second World War were girls and boys looking for rides to the beach or the ball diamond or simply seeking the novel experience of riding in a car.⁷ College students thumbed to campus, and universities had hitchhiking clubs and contests. During the Depression, entire families were on the road thumbing toward greener pastures.⁸ Wartime servicemen and women hitchhiked to military bases and munitions factories. After the Second World War, the Trans-Canada Highway neared completion. The beatnik subculture and folk music scene constructed hitchhiking as an activity for “hip youth,” and the rituals of hobo “thumb-travel” were embraced by young adults wishing to reject consumerism and materialism. This generation linked hitchhiking to membership in the “radical youth scene.”⁹ In 1970 Barclay and Morgan were correct that due to the so-called hippie sensibilities of free love and anti-establishment nomadism, mayors, town councillors, community groups, and motorists called for a nationwide clampdown on hitchhiking. The hitchhikers fought back. They equated hitchhiking with liberty and freedom. For them, the hitchhiking ban was an undemocratic attempt to “deny the people freedom to help one another.”¹⁰

This book examines youth mobility, risk taking, and the rite of passage of travel in Canada. Popular wisdom regarded the desire to travel as a normal part of adolescence, so picking up a young hitchhiker was perceived as an act of paternalism, an investment in the next generation, or in the case of female hitchhikers, chivalry. The focus of this research is how “hitchin’ a ride” and youth hostelling during liminal moments in early adulthood came together in the 1970s when the so-called “transient youth movement” was formed in response to the intervention of social workers and government programs.¹¹ Archival research and oral history

narratives with baby boom youth not only highlight the pleasures and dangers of alternative travel but can also be read as key biographical moments when understandings of landscapes, national identity, and citizenship in Canada were formed.

Wanderlust: Wandering Theory and the History of Adolescence

The wandering child has a unique place in the settler history of Canada. The equation of travel with colonial discovery, adventure narratives, and greater global awareness has long been associated with youth and nation building. The Dominion of Canada, as historians Neil Sutherland and Susan Houston point out, is a nation built by tens of thousands of travelling apprentices, abandoned orphans, juvenile migrants, and refugees for whom the transition to adulthood is marked by saying goodbye to hearth and home, both psychologically and geographically, in order to seek their fortune, immigrate to a new country, marry, wander with a youth club or alone, or run away.¹²

Historical forms of youth travel include numerous class-based coming of age rituals. In the eighteenth century, affluent families believed that educational travel provided their children with important cultural capital. Wealthy parents sent their children on “self-improving” tours to study high culture and architecture in European cities. The Grand Tour was an elite rite of passage that marked entry into the ruling class.¹³ Descending the social ladder, craft guilds, teachers, and professional fraternities sent students and apprentices off travelling in search of scholarship or training.¹⁴ Working-class boys and girls travelled from town to town in order to attend hiring fairs and look for seasonal work in factories and agriculture. A “readiness to tramp” was taken as a sign of a young person’s “readiness to work.”¹⁵ Along the way, they developed their own traditions and rituals, learned about life, and mastered the skills needed for their trades.

In the late 1890s, a unique recreational travel game called “tramping” was developed by the children of the new industrial bourgeoisie. Well-to-do youth did not copy the highbrow Grand Tour. Instead, they copied the migrant labour traditions of apprentices, hoe-boys, and fruit tramps, which were dwindling due to railway construction and urbanization. For affluent Victorians and Edwardians, it was fun to rove the countryside

masquerading as tinkers, vagabonds, and hobos. “Tramp Trips” and games enabled them to play with contemporary codes of social distance, experience the daily lives of working people, and explore landscapes in ways that were off limits to members of the better-off classes to which they belonged.¹⁶

Around the turn of the century, politically conscious students, feminists, socialists, and artists took the cross-class masquerade from the countryside to the city. Young suffragists, journalists, and social workers went “slumming” in urban spaces dressed as tramps.¹⁷ Well into the twentieth century, slumming provided an educational, temporary release from stifling social class, gender, and family expectations while preparing future pillars of society for careers in social service and politics. Dressing below their social class enabled them to sleep in cheap lodging houses and to receive the handouts that were normally reserved for the poor. English essayist George Orwell described the experience of living in cheap lodging houses disguised as a tramp in *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933) and *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937). In the latter, he wrote, “I was very happy. Here I was, among ‘the lowest of the low,’ at the bed-rock of the Western world! ... Down there in the squalid and, as a matter of fact, horribly boring sub-world of the tramp I had a feeling of release, of adventure.”¹⁸ In *The Autobiography of a “Newspaper Girl”* (1902), American journalist Elizabeth Banks told of disguising herself as a flower girl, crossing sweeper, laundress, dressmaker’s apprentice, strawberry picker, and servant to live and work among the poor, for whom she discovered deep empathy. She wrote,

I could even feel myself growing, growing in grace, growing in charity, putting aside such narrow creeds and prejudices as had been a part of my up-bringing ... Life! Life! Seething life was all about me. The life of a great city, its riches, its poverty, its sin, its virtue, its sorrows, its joyousness – there it was, and I was in it.¹⁹

As Ellen Ross notes, charitable work by genteel ladies in London slums took them into places “exotic and unknown enough to the reading public before 1918 to enable these women to be thought of as real ‘travelers’ ... Their close contact with ‘the natives’ ... solidified this image.”²⁰

Despite the occupational and educational value of travel, youth mobility patterns have long been a concern of civil society. In the eighteenth century, young aristocrats misbehaved on their European tours, which caused their parents and tutors to order them to return home. Middle-class parents worried that their daughters' attraction to cross-class "slumming" encounters could ruin their chances for marriage.²¹ The British colonies were dumping grounds for the "inconvenient children" of libertines and paupers who posed "social problems" for the church and state. On long voyages aboard dirty, overcrowded ships and in urban settlements, itinerant and abandoned boys and girls banded together and clashed with the authorities over appropriate moral codes and public decorum. Child savers lamented the loose morality of roving seasonal agriculture gangs, especially the sexual behaviour of working-class girls.²² Under the authority of the Indian Act, Aboriginal children were confined to Indian residential schools, and the mobility of young adults was restricted by the pass system.²³ Missionaries, Indian Agents, parents, and police feared that an "addiction to travel" could cause juvenile delinquency.²⁴

In the early twentieth century, youth mobility became the focus of new research in the psychology of adolescence. In 1904 American psychologist G. Stanley Hall wrote his authoritative two-volume text *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relation to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education*. Hall said that adolescence was a biologically driven "stage of life" when all young people went through some degree of emotional and behavioural upheaval, called "storm and stress," before establishing a more stable equilibrium in adulthood. Between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four, adolescents experienced an array of restless impulses characterized by "ennui, malaria, space-hunger, horror of familiar environments and habitual duties, and spring fever."²⁵ Behavioural disruptions included the need for constant excitement and the desire to test one's self in risky, sensation-seeking situations and in conquests that challenged intellectual and physical strength. Hall's scientific grounding of the "instability" of this vulnerable age group dovetailed nicely with early-twentieth-century social reformers' protective measures to replace youth labour with a longer time in school and more leisure time supervised and structured by adults.²⁶

G. Stanley Hall's theory of adolescent restlessness and sensation seeking influenced other experts. In the 1920s German psychologist Eduard Spranger called "wanderlust" the internal restlessness that manifested itself in young adults' desire to get away from home and family and be on their own. In the teen years, boys and girls consciously began to seek out role models and peer-based activities related to a striving for emancipation.²⁷ The creation of the "modern or psychological" adolescent is part of what French philosopher Michel Foucault calls the nineteenth-century regulation, disciplining, and policing of individual bodies, or "biopower."²⁸ Biopower enabled experts to discover, categorize, and observe groups of people, including children and teenagers. Through the "discoverable adolescent," cultural theorist Hans Arthur Skott-Myhre says, "modern youth work was born."²⁹ Today, popular attitudes, professional counsellors, and various social policy initiatives still regard adolescence as a "traumatic" time of storm and stress. Neuroscientists believe that the "unstable" adolescent brain is incapable of assessing risk and danger or making sound moral judgments. In effect, the "teen brain" is more likely than ever to make teenagers a risk to themselves and others.³⁰

In the second quarter of the twentieth century, theories of wanderlust were associated with teaching children and young adults impulse control, rational decision making, and ways to guard their personal safety. In the 1930s child psychologist John B. Watson traced juvenile delinquency back to the parental mishandling of early childhood fears. He believed that children had very few natural fears and that delinquent youth had therefore learned to use aggression and bullying to conceal their terror. Watson told parents not to frighten children with stories of "the old bogymen" but rather to encourage them to face psychological and physical challenges with bravery, rationality, caution, and confidence.³¹ Neither Hall nor Watson called fearfulness a feminine characteristic, and popular fiction for Edwardian girls showed them hiking, cycling, swimming, and playing team sports. Brave girls did not run away screaming at the sight of spiders and snakes. Instead, "modern girls," like "new women," demonstrated habits of self-discipline, emotional control, a business-like respect for order, and bravery.³²

Well into the twentieth century, wanderlust was a recurring theme in child psychology. Wanderlust was assumed to be a natural expression of romantic individualism, bravery, confidence, and the collective, youthful gang instinct.³³ Psychoanalyst Erik Erikson associated teenagers' wanderlust, restlessness, and risk taking with identity exploration and lifestyle experimentation, which included the formation of cliques and gangs where collective behaviour, values, and ideals could be expressed.³⁴ Youth workers and guidance counsellors urged parents to become involved in the day-to-day management of childhood environments and to pay close attention to the emotional development of older children, especially middle-class children. Adults sought to channel the traditions of youth mobility for their own purposes and to harness the supposed "gang" instinct of teenagers through games that tested moral and physical strength, fraternity, and natural leadership.³⁵ In the 1950s and 1960s the parents of baby boomers who followed the "child-centred" advice of Dr. Benjamin Spock freed their kids from the premature pressure of adulthood by treating youthful impulses as healthy, innocent, and pure.³⁶ This focus resulted in the expansion of sports activities, recreation clubs, the Boy Scouts, the Girl Guides, the YMCA and YWCA, and Junior Red Cross Lifesaving programs. Participation in communal and individual outdoor activities and recreational programs became shared experiences for thousands of Canadian youngsters and "important contributors to the evolution of a nation-wide youth culture."³⁷

Wandering Youth: Automobility and Rites of Passage

Throughout western Europe and North America, G. Stanley Hall's "stage of life" theory was complicated by the commercialization of youth recreation and leisure activities. For this reason, sociologist Stanley Cohen says that the youth of a generation are rarely remembered in terms of a particular chronological period but rather for their unique "fads, fashions, crazes, styles or – in a less ephemeral way – a certain spirit or *kulturgeist*."³⁸ The commercialization of youth subcultures involved the "innovative marrying of high culture and folk culture," which occurred organically and spread by word of mouth, music, dancing, film, intellectual discussion, and domestic and international travel.³⁹ Each generation embraces social change by adjusting to technology and consumerism in order to

create a unique style of life. In the 1920s, dance halls, cinemas, sports, and automobiles excited the generation that came of age in the aftermath of the First World War.⁴⁰ For anyone who could afford one, the automobile was equated with luxury, status, freedom, and the good life.⁴¹ Following the Depression era's road-building relief programs and the Second World War, the federal government passed the Trans-Canada Highway Act (1949), which provided joint funding to build roads that would unite the nation.⁴² Numerous postwar youth subcultures equated status with consumerism, and youth were preoccupied with clothes, hair, music, the cars they drove, and what "constitutes being 'cool.'"⁴³ In the final quarter of the twentieth century, new roads were incorporated into rite of passage rituals that opened new avenues for teenagers to explore automobility and travel.

Historian Tamara Myers notes that baby boom children came of age just in time to "collide" with automobility.⁴⁴ Metaphors of automobility reflect sociologist Mimi Sheller's observation that people make powerful "emotional investments" in cars that exceed any rational economic calculation of ownership. One does not have to own a vehicle to experience the pleasure it provides. Teenage passengers and drivers absorb a tremendous emotional, affective, and libidinal energy from "dwelling" in cars, which are key status markers that advertise individual and collective mobility potential through what Sheller calls "automotive emotions."⁴⁵ Beat generation novelist Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957) employed "the metaphor of motoring" to explore youth alienation from society.⁴⁶

Youth subcultures may be distinguished by their various elements of style, dress, demeanour, and argot, as well as by the modes of automobility they use or lust over.⁴⁷ These could be Vespas, Volkswagen Microbuses, Jeeps, Chevy vans, or hot-wired cars. For youth, old jalopies, choppers, pickup trucks, and even skateboards become extensions of the ego formation of the apprentice traveller and shape the forms of automobile-related rituals and coming of age. In the case of hitchhiking, the rite of passage began by slinging on a backpack and thumbing down the road in search of a good ride.

Traditionally, the youth subcultures that became social problems were the ones that appeared to be hedonistic, irresponsible, and threatening to collectively shared social values.⁴⁸ In the age of automobility,

North American youth incorporated increasingly efficient and affordable automobiles into their mobility rituals.⁴⁹ Unlike the worst years of the Great Depression when unemployed youngsters took to the open road in search of work, in the late 1960s when thousands of self-styled “freaks” were spotted hitchhiking and sleeping in parks and ditches along the Trans-Canada Highway, motorists from the Atlantic to the Pacific complained because they could not see “any difference between the long-haired lazy and rebellious bums who live off welfare,” young people looking for jobs, and student travellers out enjoying themselves.⁵⁰ Moreover, due to the values of rock lyrics, which seemed to denounce “the Establishment” and to promote drug use and sexual freedom, it was hard for many older Canadians to understand where fashion trends stopped and true rebellion began.⁵¹ It is not known how many youth took to the roads. In 1971, under the headline “Canada’s Great Trek,” the *Vancouver Province* proclaimed, “Hitchhiking has become a national phenomenon.”⁵² The public spectacle of youth hitchhiking and complaints about moral indecency in the youth hostels – which were under the auspices of the Secretary of State via the National Hostel Task Force, founded in 1970, Transient Youth Services, and Opportunities for Youth from 1971 to 1977 – resulted in surveillance, resistance, violence, and finally the multigenerational collaboration of travellers and locals in cities and towns all over Canada.⁵³

In this research, youth mobility and alternative travel are conceptualized as a rite of passage that sometimes occurred in retreat or isolation from the community but inevitably marked the transition to adulthood. Travellers develop what tourism scholars, led by John Urry, call the “tourist gaze,”⁵⁴ which from an anthropological perspective is a new way of sightseeing. Jane Desmond says the tourist gaze is “always performed in contradistinction to everyday looking.”⁵⁵ The romantic form of the gaze emphasizes solitude, privacy, and a personal semi-spiritual relationship. The other type of tourist gaze is the “collective” gaze, which necessitates the presence of large numbers of other people and takes on a feeling of “carnival.” It is “the place to be” – in other words, what the young in the 1960s called making the scene.⁵⁶ Both gazes emphasize the visual and bodily nature of the tourist performance.⁵⁷ In his work on youth travel, cultural anthropologist Victor Turner and others use “liminality” and

“*communitas*” as analytical concepts that make up rite of passage travel. Liminality begins when the ritualist decides to separate from home and community, and it lasts until one’s reaggregation into society.⁵⁸ According to the rite of passage heuristic, a ritualist’s wanderlust or escape is driven by the desire for authentic, spontaneous, and communal experiences beyond the tourist bubble, which creates a collective “drifter culture,” or in counterculture jargon, a “trip.”⁵⁹ The “anti-structural” state of being “betwixt and between” consecutive stages in a social milieu is called “*communitas*” (togetherness); it is where honesty, sensuality, openness, and lack of pretensions are sought and valued. In *communitas*, co-ritualists join together and undergo deep personal experiences and seek out and share family-like feelings of solidarity with peers.⁶⁰ At any point in a journey or quest, betwixt-and-betweeners are vulnerable to long-term negative consequences of risk taking. However, when a journey is successful, rite of passage travellers return home having discovered the secrets and traditions of the culture.⁶¹ Both physically and metaphorically, then, coming of age travel is the time when the young citizen apprentice embarks on a quest and undergoes a series of tests prior to rejoining society as a responsible adult. The completion of the journey is tantamount to the completion of the self.⁶²

The profound psychological impact of rite of passage travel for young people is well documented in literature, poetry, and folklore, but the historical origins of how backpacking, hitching, hostelling, and trekking off the beaten track came to be regarded as cultural capital for citizenship in the late twentieth century are largely unknown. As we shall see, adventure, quest, and risk are inherent parts of every journey. In this book, risk is conceptualized in four ways. First, risk is a very real part of good and bad holiday travel, as commercial package tours, insurance waivers, accidents, illness, and crime rates indicate. Second, facing the dangers of the unknown enables travellers to construct new self-identities, heroic personas, and exciting autobiographical travel narratives.⁶³ Third, historically, unwanted tourism poses risks to travellers, especially to those whose quests take them beyond the beaten track. Darya Maoz’s anthropological study of Israeli backpackers in India shows that in the eyes of locals, backpackers have embodied “the most negative characteristics of Western culture.”⁶⁴ Locals create boundaries between the community

and unwanted guests through surveillance, veiled resistance, and open aggression; this negatively affects how guests treat hosts and increases risk for everyone.⁶⁵ Finally, adults' perceptions of youth mobility and risk-taking behaviour have been a barometer of emergent social ills. The interplay of the social structure with real and imagined youth behaviour tells us more than one story about the adult construction of normal and abnormal risk taking and communicates broader cultural imperatives for society to protect, monitor, and sustain youth.⁶⁶ This research examines coming of age in the twentieth century, the "transient youth problem," state and civil society intervention in youth culture, and the surveillance of youth mobility. It scrutinizes adult-led judgments, authority, and control respecting what constituted acceptable and unacceptable risk exposure largely for girls and boys of the late baby boom who were in transition to adulthood.⁶⁷

(Auto)Biography Methodology: Oral History and Road Stories

The social and historical construction of childhood and youth should not, as historian Cynthia Comacchio says, divert us from remembering that growing up is a deeply personal experience that we all share.⁶⁸ The catalyst for this book comes from my students' astonishment when I told them I had hitchhiked with my friends in the late 1970s and early 1980s. My hitchhiking days ended over thirty years ago, and I fully appreciate why getting into cars with strangers is risky – but at the time, hitchhiking was a mode of ride sharing that made sense to Canadians of all ages, and it received a great deal of attention in the press, which indicates acute public interest in both good and bad road stories.⁶⁹ This book uses hundreds of articles from Canadian newspapers and magazines published between 1924 and the late 1980s. Newspapers and magazines provide a valuable encapsulation of attitudes and sentiments about hitchhiking and serve as living catalysts, influencing future attitudes. Although it may not be the best source of unbiased fact, the popular press provides us with "ephemeral feelings" that capture the mood of the moment.⁷⁰

Another insightful printed source of information about hitchhiking was written by hitchhikers and published by the newswire service Canadian University Press. Founded in 1938, Canadian University Press distributed the stories written by its student journalists to local campus

newspapers. Due to the ample room for “free expression” that university administrators gave student journalists in the 1960s, James Pitsula says the scanning of articles and editorials enables historians to “re-enter their world and get a feeling for the emotional penumbra” of life on university campuses.⁷¹ For the past seventy-five years, the campus press has been an agent for social change. Charles Levi argues that there is no “controversial cultural subject that has not been written about in a student newspaper.”⁷² Campus administrators, municipal leaders, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police monitored student papers for information about campus events, student opinions, and the names of political activists.⁷³ Contemporary hitchhikers also published advice manuals and guidebooks.⁷⁴ These sources are the textual medium that comes closest to diaries and conversations.

In addition to contemporary written accounts, the hitchhiker’s perspective is rounded out by open-ended interviews and email correspondence with thirty-six women and forty-two men born roughly between 1946 and 1965. To enlist the assistance of hitchhikers of the baby boom generation, I created a snowball sample of interviewees. I used Google to locate former youth hostel and Transient Youth Services staff members who were quoted in contemporary newspaper reportage. Following public talks and press interviews that I gave on the topic, many hitchhikers contacted me to offer their travel stories from the 1960s and 1970s. In the interviews, I asked hitchhikers to recall where they went and with whom, what they packed and ate, and where they slept, as well as to describe good and bad encounters with motorists and in youth hostels and the circumstances surrounding their decision to leave home to travel. The lift-givers provide us with the motorist’s side of the story, which is inferred from oral history, mainstream and university newspaper accounts, and government and police reports.

When I began my interviews, I had no idea what I was going to hear. Some road stories, like the one about the hitchhiker who waited so long for a ride in Wawa, Ontario, that he married a local waitress, are told so often that they have acquired the status of urban legends. Other stories were shared for the first time. There were a lot of gasps, laughter, knowing silences, and in a few cases, tears. Recorded interviews were conducted over the telephone, via Skype, or face-to-face in Nova Scotia, Quebec,

Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia. Former hitchhikers usually met me for coffee. Special thanks to Branca Verde for organizing a brown bag lunch and to Kim Hunter and Arleen Rainbow May for hosting a potluck to swap hitchhiker stories. In compliance with the protocols of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the wishes of interviewees who requested anonymity, I have not used names or other identifying information, unless otherwise indicated.

Shortly after I began the archival research, I came across a series of social work reports about hitchhiking by the Canadian Welfare Council. They reminded me of Stanley Cohen's warning in 1985 that scholars should "imagine" a time when "a complete cultural dummy – the Martian anthropologist" – found social work reports, client directories, and field studies written in the 1970s. How would they interpret the new "social action" experiments developed by the baby boom generation? How would they explain the "anti-social-worker"? How would they understand community care models and networks of paraprofessionals, semi-professionals, students, and volunteers in state-funded drop-in centres and hostels?⁷⁵ I became this Martian when I read the CWC's reports and others by middle-class professionals and senior bureaucrats who used words like "groovy," "far out," and "hassle-free" to describe federal government programs for youth. On the face of it, in 1969 the Department of Health and Welfare gave the council a grant to investigate why an excessive number of youth were hitchhiking on the roads and highways in the summers of 1967 and 1968. The first report, called *Transient Youth: Report of an Inquiry in the Summer of 1969* (1970), is 142 pages. It includes three appendices with graphs, tables, and questionnaires, a twelve-page scholarly bibliography, and submissions by over 250 academic experts, governmental and nongovernmental agencies for youth social services, urban-planning councils, city hospitals, church groups, local charities, and graduate students. A few months later, the council changed its name to the Canadian Council on Social Development, and three supplementary reports appeared: *More about Transient Youth* (1970), *Transient Youth, 70–71* (1970), and *Youth '71* (1972).⁷⁶ In the summer of 1970, the Liberal government funded an "emergency" youth hostel program to help youth on the road. The following year, Opportunities for

Youth and Transient Youth Services took over the youth hostels. Some background on these programs appears in a publication by the Secretary of State titled *It's Your Turn* (1971). The Department of Health and Welfare also published a road safety guide titled *On the Road: A Guide for Youth Travelling Canada* (1972).⁷⁷ The federal youth hostel program ran until 1976 when the Independent Hostel Association and the Canadian Youth Hostels Association merged to form the Canadian Hostel Association, founded in 1977.

Additional information on youth travel was found in the archives of the Canadian Youth Hostels Association for 1933 to 1995 at the Glenbow Museum in Calgary. In addition, well-thumbed files titled “hippies,” “youth hostels,” or “transient and alienated youth” containing surveys and reports by local officials and volunteer agencies are kept in public libraries and municipal archives in Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg, Thunder Bay, Windsor, London, Saskatoon, Calgary, Victoria, and Vancouver, as well as in the Ontario Provincial Police Archive at the Archives of Ontario. In the summer of 1970, Patrick Esmonde-White was the National Hostel Task Force’s advisory coordinator. He gave me permission to take notes from copies in his possession of RCMP intelligence and operations files, which describe the youth hostel riots in Vancouver in 1970.⁷⁸ Byron Rogers, former program researcher for Transient Youth Services in 1971, gave me permission to transcribe unpublished hostelling and kiosk reports and notes from meetings in his possession. Interviews with Cam Mackie, formerly of Opportunities for Youth, and with Ken Rubin, an interviewer for the Canadian Welfare Council’s initial report, *Transient Youth*, as well as Cool Aid volunteer and Jericho Beach hostel staffer Teddy Mahood’s vivid description of the standoff there on October 15, 1970, have all greatly enhanced this project.

Hitchhiking stories are special types of autobiography that use methodology from oral history.⁷⁹ The challenge of oral history travel narratives is how to interpret the way people re-create tales over time. In this study, interviewees in the role of the teller-as-responsible-adult were asked to reflect upon their self-imposed rite of passage and the reactions of significant others to their adolescent risk taking. Like letters and diaries, autobiographical stories capture the interplay between the teller’s adolescent “self” and the “other,” including family, friends, and community,

and what it felt like to be a young student or worker in Canada in the latter half of the twentieth century. To convey the full public reaction to the transient youth phenomenon, I compare interviewees' travel accounts with the official version of events that appeared in media coverage, in the reports of social welfare and voluntary youth agencies, and in government and police records. No doubt, in the construction of a generation's coming of age story, some details about "back in the day" when "everyone was hitchhiking" have been romanticized, manipulated, exaggerated, or omitted.⁸⁰

Roadside Rituals: What Is Hitchhiking?

Folklorists and anthropologists regard hitchhiking as a begging ritual that is visual rather than secret like a prayer or a wish. Lift giving is a benevolent gesture that rests on the understanding that the motorist's only responsibility is to provide a lift, not other forms of charity such as a hot meal, money, liquor, or a bed for the night. Hitchhikers, in turn, assume that motorists are acting the part of the Good Samaritan and that they expect nothing in return except good conversation and the pleasure of having done a good deed.⁸¹ By the 1930s provincial traffic laws regulated nonmotorists and motorists and reduced the status of the pedestrian because riding in an automobile was regarded as a more esteemed mode of transportation than walking, cycling, or buying a ticket on public transit. People with access to cars were attributed greater prestige vis-à-vis pedestrians; therefore, automobile historian Stephen Davis says, automobile should not be confused with freedom for everyone.⁸² Conversely, privately owned automobiles drive on public roads provided for them by taxpayers, who regard public roads as communal property and have a vested interest in what happens on them. Showing charity, kindness, compassion, or at the very least tolerance toward wayfaring strangers, like the thirsty beggar or road-weary vagabond, has long been considered a golden rule in Judeo-Christian ethics and liberal-democratic society. Indeed, in Western culture, the hitchhiker's "thumbs up" gesture has long been interpreted as a positive sign meaning "good."⁸³ It grants permission to go ahead and seals a bargain. Conversely, as suggested by the popular mid-1970s bumper sticker "Gas, Grass or Ass – Nobody Rides for Free," any act of charity can be read as an unequal power relationship between

haves and have-nots. Graeme Chesters and David Smith point out that given that civil society depends upon charity, trust, diversity, and tolerance, we have much to learn from the intimacy and risk taking that hitchhiking implies.⁸⁴

For alternative and noncommercial travellers, destinations and sightseeing are less important than “the performance of the journey.”⁸⁵ In his work on mobility and microadventures, Michael O’Regan regards hitchhiking as a performance through which one makes provocative statements and acquires status.⁸⁶ Backpackers and hitchhikers regard themselves as special types of travellers who participate in a sublifestyle rather than profit-making tourism. Hitchhiking is an alternative mode of mobility that grants travellers cultural and social capital in the form of credible narrative capital, which actually serves as an admittance rite to a mobility subculture, thereby giving them a valid claim to a new collective self-identity and a chance to show off their “fictive selves.”⁸⁷ Traditionally, heroic travel stories are built on quest, risk, and agency.⁸⁸ They are reproduced in travel literature, poems, and epics and are vital to the genre’s survival. They contain easily identifiable tropes such as the “brave intrepid explorer,” the “daring deed,” the “lone individual against nature,” and the “savage ‘Other.’”⁸⁹ In 1970 Chandra Mukerji interviewed male hitchhikers in the southern United States. She said that their stories lay somewhere between “road reality,” a “fish-story,” and “scary bullshit,” noting that the pleasure of telling and listening to a road story was just as important as the content of the story itself. More recently, in *Mobility without Mayhem*, Jeremy Packer has argued that hitchhikers swap stories to establish their credibility among other travellers and to produce an alternate identity by situating their experience within a “truly hip or beat” social structure.⁹⁰

Hitchhiking is a gendered and sexualized performance. Each hitchhiker rides on the contradiction between the freedom of the road and the confinement of a car, specifically a stranger’s car. Tourism anthropologist Chaim Noy’s study of Israeli men’s narratives of their backpacking trips shows how men subvert dominant and hegemonic masculine gender expectations when they are on the road.⁹¹ The male domination of automobiles and public spaces reflects the cultural assumption that women have a different relationship to cars and roads than men do.⁹² Ethnographic

observations of solo women backpackers indicate that women's risk-taking achievements do not have the same "meaning to them" as male travellers' experiences do. Gender and sexuality are negotiated on the road. In her work on solo women travellers, Torun Elsrud discovered that some women choose to "keep quiet about their actions after homecoming."⁹³ Twenty-first-century hitchhiker Vanessa Veselka says it was difficult for motorists and onlookers to imagine a rewarding future for a woman on the road. In her experience, women and girls pay a higher "social cost" for hitchhiking than men do. She argues that "a man with a quest ... makes the choice at every stage about whether to endure the consequences or turn back," whereas female hitchhikers are "fetishized" by the onlooker. "The onlooker can choose to save her, choose to watch, or choose to ignore her as her fate plays out."⁹⁴ The sexual politics of hitchhiking mean that thumb-travellers encounter unequal power relations, conflicting gazes and stereotypes, physical obstacles, and danger.

The intersection of history and biography is an important variable in research on childhood, youth, and gender because it opens up a line of inquiry that enables us to see the choices of girls and boys in the past and present.⁹⁵ The main focus of this book is the period now called the "long sixties (1965–1974)."⁹⁶ The concept of "the 'sixties' as an *idea*" is said to reveal the ethos of the postwar era, whereas the long sixties "implies that a period contains a unity of experience defined by events, values, and political and social hierarchies."⁹⁷ Cultural historians, such as Thomas Hine and other scholars believe that with the end of the innocence and idealism of the 1960s counterculture came the "decline" of the "teenager" as the icon of the twentieth century.⁹⁸ In Canada contemporaneous youth services experts, urban planners, and academic scholarship state that, as an "idealistic cult," the original youth subculture identified as the "hippie movement" had in fact come and gone by 1966.⁹⁹ In *Canada's 1960s*, Bryan Palmer argues that as the first wave of baby boomers aged, they lost the radical exuberance they had felt.¹⁰⁰ Stuart Henderson challenges the "days of hope/days of rage" narrative. His work reveals that there were still teenagers and twentysomethings in Yorkville coffeehouses and clubs who were defying the status quo, getting busted with drugs, and "playing at free love" in the 1970s and beyond.¹⁰¹

So who were the youth that made up what a 1970 *Globe and Mail* article called the “summer army of hitchhikers” who marched “across this land”?¹⁰² Drawing on older and newer scholarship, my emphasis on the long sixties allows for a sharper historical analysis of age cohorts by permitting the introduction of a new historical actor on the youth scene, variously called the late boomer, final-waver, and trailing-edger.¹⁰³ Demographers William Strauss and Neil Howe argue that children born between 1954 and 1965 came of age amid “a lost civility” surrounded by “a gray generational drizzle of sex, drugs, unemployment.”¹⁰⁴ In the 1970s challenges to patriarchy and the nuclear family by feminism, the sexual revolution, an increasingly vocal gay rights movement, the decline of trade unions, the reduced security of white-collar jobs, immigration, economic turmoil, and the sociological discovery of child abuse and domestic violence all challenged the cultural hegemony of white men and their sons. In Canada the period of childhood innocence was extended to the age of eighteen and in some cases to twenty-five.¹⁰⁵ Today, youth rebellion, resistance, and agency are well documented in academic studies of juvenile delinquency, yet we know very little about risk-taking subcultures, lifestyle mobility, and how girls and boys from diverse walks of life negotiate cooperative relationships with adults and peers to create new forms of community and ways of living.

Outline: On the Road

Historians barely mention the rise or fall of hitchhiking, so we do not know how Canadians responded in the 1920s to hitchhiking flapper girls, Depression-era “kids,” or soldiers and bomb girls, for whom “flipping the duke” to “land a hop” was “Thumb Fun!”¹⁰⁶ The focus of Chapter 2 is the opposing perceptions of adventure hitchhiking in the first half of the twentieth century. In tandem with adventurous road stories by polite, rucksack-wearing youngsters and members of the YMCA and YWCA, Young Communist League, Canadian Youth Hostels Association, and Canadian Youth Congress, a counternarrative appeared in popular culture and crime reports in the 1940s and 1950s. Hollywood depictions of roadside maniacs, femme fatales, and teenage gangs transformed hitchhiking from an embodiment of trust and sharing into a risky, nerve-racking,

and dangerous activity. Chapter 3 examines why the baby boom generation ignored the risks, as well as discussing parents' fear that if a child dropped out of school or left work to drift around, it was a sign of their failure to raise a child who was a productive citizen. In the late 1960s and the 1970s, ride-thumbing adventure trips appealed to teenagers, workers, students, and Aboriginal youth during liminal moments in early adulthood, when hitchhiking was equated with the search for meaningful spiritual, political, and anti-materialist encounters.

Chapters 4 and 5 switch the focus from inside the hitchhiking subculture to the development of youth policy. Hitchhikers were a relatively unfamiliar sight on the roads in the 1950s, so when the numbers shot up to the thousands in the late 1960s, town councillors, the police, and members of Parliament were deluged with complaints. Following the publication of *Transient Youth: Report of an Inquiry in the Summer of 1969* (1970),¹⁰⁷ the Canadian Welfare Council hosted a three-day National Youth Consultation in Sainte-Adèle, Quebec, in May 1970, which led to the formation of the National Hostel Task Force, and the Secretary of State announced that it would provide free temporary hostels for summer travellers. The responses of host communities to unwelcome travellers ranged from cooperation and veiled surveillance to violence against hostellers. In Vancouver the tensions that erupted in the "Battle of Jericho" on October 15, 1970, illustrate how youth mobility and travel became a pressing social problem that turned young travellers into transients.

Any history of youth culture must confront youth crime and conflict, but it is also important to examine cooperation among rival youth subcultures and conformity with adult-run agencies. In the wake of 1967's Summer of Love, headlines in Canadian newspapers switched from the scourge of juvenile delinquency to bands of wandering bearded boys and lank-haired girls who talked about peace and love. The tide also turned in professional social work when a new generation of "blue-jean bureaucrats" entered the system. Although youth wanderlust and mobility continued to be contested, some cities developed innovative community youth-hostelling and drop-in programs. Chapter 5 examines the years of conflict and rivalry between the Canadian Youth Hostels Association's European-style hostels and the new "hassle-free" independent hostels

run by the Secretary of State until 1976 when the two merged to form the Canadian Hostel Association, founded in 1977.

Chapter 6 moves back inside the transient youth subculture to see what hitchhikers' time on the road, codes of ethics, and survival strategies meant to them. Late-twentieth-century thumb-travellers passed time on the road telling stories about their adventures, the longest wait, the nastiest meal, the biggest bugs, the dirtiest youth hostel, wild rides, dark and scary nights, and heroic feats and rescues. Contemporary writing and "road talk" reveal the survival strategies and ethical codes that enabled many young travellers to feel "untouchable" in the *communitas* stage of the rite of passage, when co-ritualists become outsiders, explorers, lovers, and wanderers. Risk-taking and pleasure-seeking, riders and drivers met each other across the dashboard of every type of automobile, where harsh words, cruel weather, and tough surroundings were among the challenges of life on the road.

Chapter 7 shows that the publication of gender-biased sociological research and police reports, criminal judicial rulings, and cases of missing teenagers raised uncomfortable questions about adolescent risk taking, hitchhiking safety, and the nature of sexual violence against youth in everyday life. The truth of the hitchhiking ritual is that one never knew the true identity of the hitcher or the true motives of the motorist. There was nothing about the late boomers' hitchhiking that should have threatened social order more than the conduct of any other generation, yet civil society's anxiety about freaks, dropouts, and youth unrest cast a dark shadow over youth mobility, especially for girls.

In the book's Conclusion, I discuss how Canada's last hitchhiking "craze" ended in the late 1970s due to pressure on the police and municipalities to pass bylaws banning hitchhiking. Pro- and anti-hitchhiking information about safety and "dos and don'ts" reignited the old debate about youth mobility traditions in Canadian society.

Life's Long Detour

We roast the kids for doing it,
But it can't be denied.
Most of us often wish we had
The nerve to "thumb" a ride.

– *Anonymous poem (1927)*

Motorist Mistakes Bear for Hitchhiker

On a foggy night around Wiaraton, Mr. E. Skene stopped to pick up what he thought was a hitchhiker, only to be frightened when a large brown bear reared on its hind legs and "landed a hay-maker on the car." Mr. Skene drove on alone, leaving the bear swinging wild punches in the air.

– *Globe and Mail (1948)*

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