

**Hitchhiking in an Age of Suspicion: Work Techniques and Personal Experience
Narratives of Hitchhiking in Newfoundland and Cape Breton**

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A thesis submitted to the
School of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree Master of Arts

Department of Folklore
Memorial University of Newfoundland

June 2017

St. John's

Newfoundland

Abstract

In recent decades, the popularity of hitchhiking in North America has undoubtedly declined. Nonetheless, the tradition persists—albeit residually—as people continue to hitchhike in both community based (short-distance) and long-distance contexts. This thesis draws on interviews with hitchhikers based in Newfoundland and Cape Breton, who have hitchhiked and picked up hitchhikers from the 1960s to the present day. Hitchhiking strategy is considered through the framework of occupational folklore, and the use of such strategies for fostering trust is discussed. This thesis also examines hitchhiking personal experience narratives from a folkloristic standpoint, questioning why these narratives are often assessed as “good” (i.e., engaging) narratives, while analyzing how hitchhiking personal experience narratives might convey values and ideas about trust. Although a range of trusting attitudes is documented, the interviewed hitchhikers are generally positive about their experiences; many connect hitchhiking with a deepening sense of empathy, and exhibit counter-hegemonic attitudes towards reigning “cultures of fear.” While considering the influence of gender, location, and historical context, this work aims to demonstrate the connection between hitchhiking folklore and trust, on both an individual and societal level. By examining hitchhiking as a narrative resource, rite of passage, and source of empathy, this thesis also shows how hitchhikers may derive meaning from and situate their experiences in the greater context of their lives.

Acknowledgements

It seems fitting that a thesis about hitchhiking is indebted to the kindness and generosity of a great many people. First and foremost, I would like to thank my interviewees: Joyce Babbin, Kevin Bassett, Sara Bernat, Sasha Boczkowski, Laurie Burns, Shagg Burrridge, Joan Butler, Roshni Caputo-Nimbark, David Carpenter, Adam Critchley, Osvaldo Croci, John Drover, Chloe Edbrooke, Paula Graham, Chad Griffiths, Tom Hawco, Julie Huntington, Emma Lang, Gary Ledrew, Stephen Lewis, John MacNeil, Joe MacPherson, Margaret Morris, Liam Peacock, Greg Pike, Lloyd Pike, Laura Ryan, Linda Samuels, Peter Smith, David Sorensen, Matthew Southall, Amber Tapley, Rose Westbury, and others who have remained anonymous. This thesis would be a truly hollow document without the eloquence, insight, and humour of these wonderful individuals, and I am very grateful to have spent time with you all. Thank you for your hospitality and your stories, and for sharing your lives with me. I felt continually motivated to make the most of what I was given. Thanks are also due to the people I did not interview because of time limitations—I am immensely thankful for every email, phone call, Facebook message, media opportunity and passing conversation, although I could not include everything in this thesis. I had no idea that my plea for interviews would be met with such amazing generosity.

I feel very lucky to have had Dr. Philip Hiscock (a former hitchhiker himself) as my supervisor, especially on the eve of his retirement. His warmth, encouragement, suggestions and timely feedback kept me continually on track. Many wise and helpful people in the Folklore Department also offered suggestions and feedback along the way, all of which considerably enhanced this thesis. In particular, I would like to thank Dr.

Diane Tye and PhD candidate Noah Morritt, who both provided thorough feedback on my first hitchhiking paper; Dr. Mariya Lesiv, who offered key suggestions on my term paper for her Occupational Folklore class; Dr. Jillian Gould, who reviewed a draft of a conference paper, and also extended her characteristic kindness in so many ways throughout my degree; Dr. Cory Thorne, who told me about how hitchhiking takes place these days in Cuba; and Dr. Martin Lovelace, who helped me discern some connections between hitchhiking and magic tales. I am also grateful for the friendship of fellow graduate students, especially my cohort: Terra Barrett, Sharna Brzycki, Daisy Hurich, Saeede Niktab-Etaati, Emma Tennier-Stuart, and Jacquey Ryan. As well, Memorial University Graduate Fellowship Funding, the Mary A. Griffiths Memorial Bursary Fund for Folklore Field Research, and the David Buchan Graduate Research Award in Folklore provided support for this research, and funded my participation at the third annual Folklore, Ethnology and Ethnomusicology Conference in Aberdeen, Scotland in July 2016, which I am very thankful for.

I would also like to thank Virginia Ryan, who employed me at MUN's Writing Centre while I wrote this thesis, and offered useful feedback on a thesis excerpt (while reminiscing about her own hitchhiking days, which I wish I could have included!) The archivists at MUNFLA, Pauline Cox and Nicole Penney, and the librarians at the Centre for Newfoundland Studies have all been inordinately kind and helpful as well. David Mercer, of the QEII's Map Room, produced two wonderful, carefully rendered maps for this thesis, which I appreciate very much. While working at Cape Breton University in 2015, I also enjoyed working out some fledgling thoughts about the folklore of hitchhiking with Dr. Ian Brodie.

I am truly lucky to receive such steadfast love and support from my family. I am also very thankful for my roommates, bandmates, and other enduring friendships. Along with the hitchhiking friends who appear in this thesis, I would especially like to thank Laura Temple, who I have many good walks and talks with, and my Argentinian bandmate, Pepa Chan, who I love playing music with, and who, incidentally, arrived (and stayed) in Newfoundland after hitching a ride with a St. John's reggae band eight years ago. Thank you so much, everyone.

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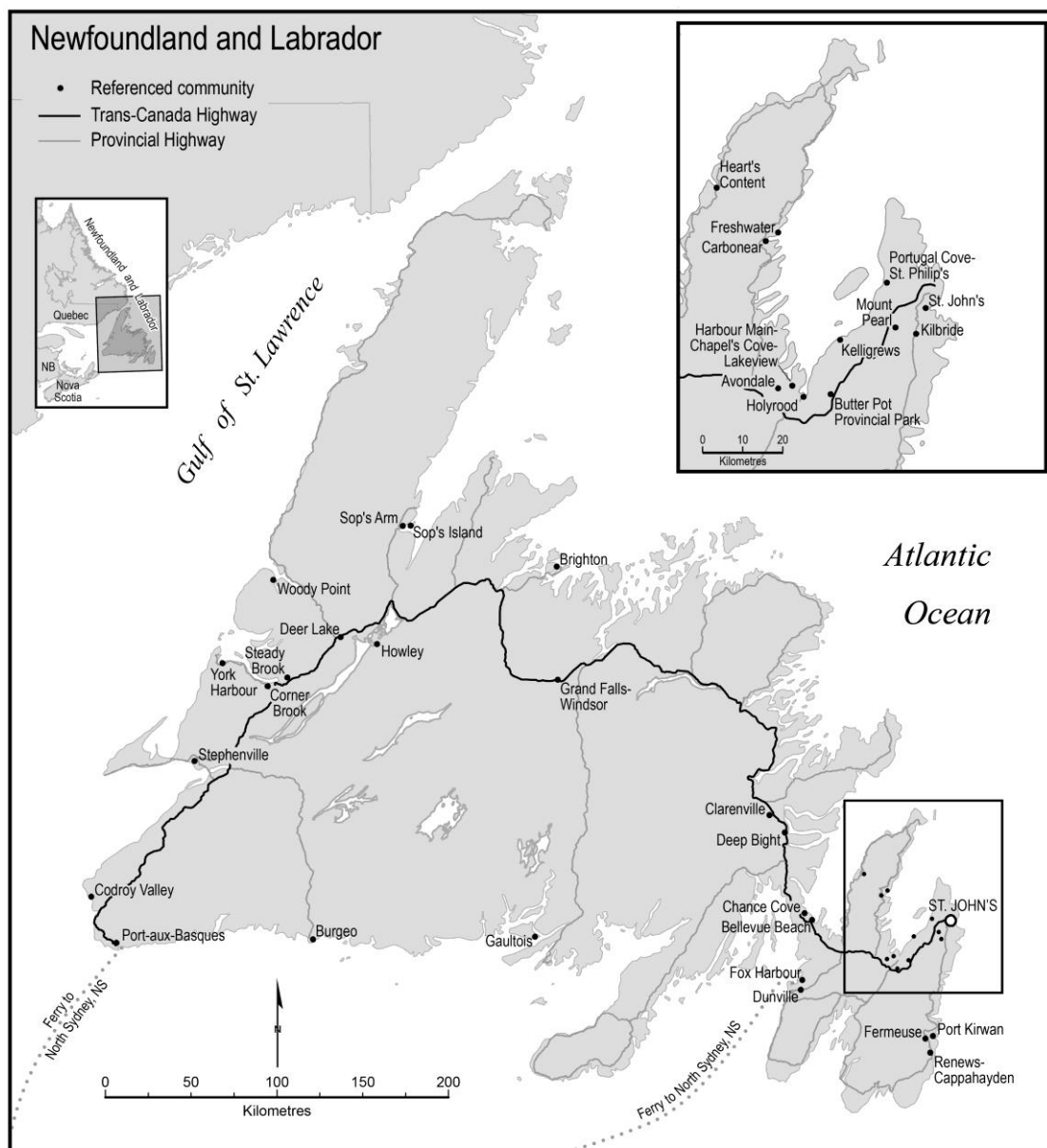


Figure 1: Map of Newfoundland communities referenced in thesis.

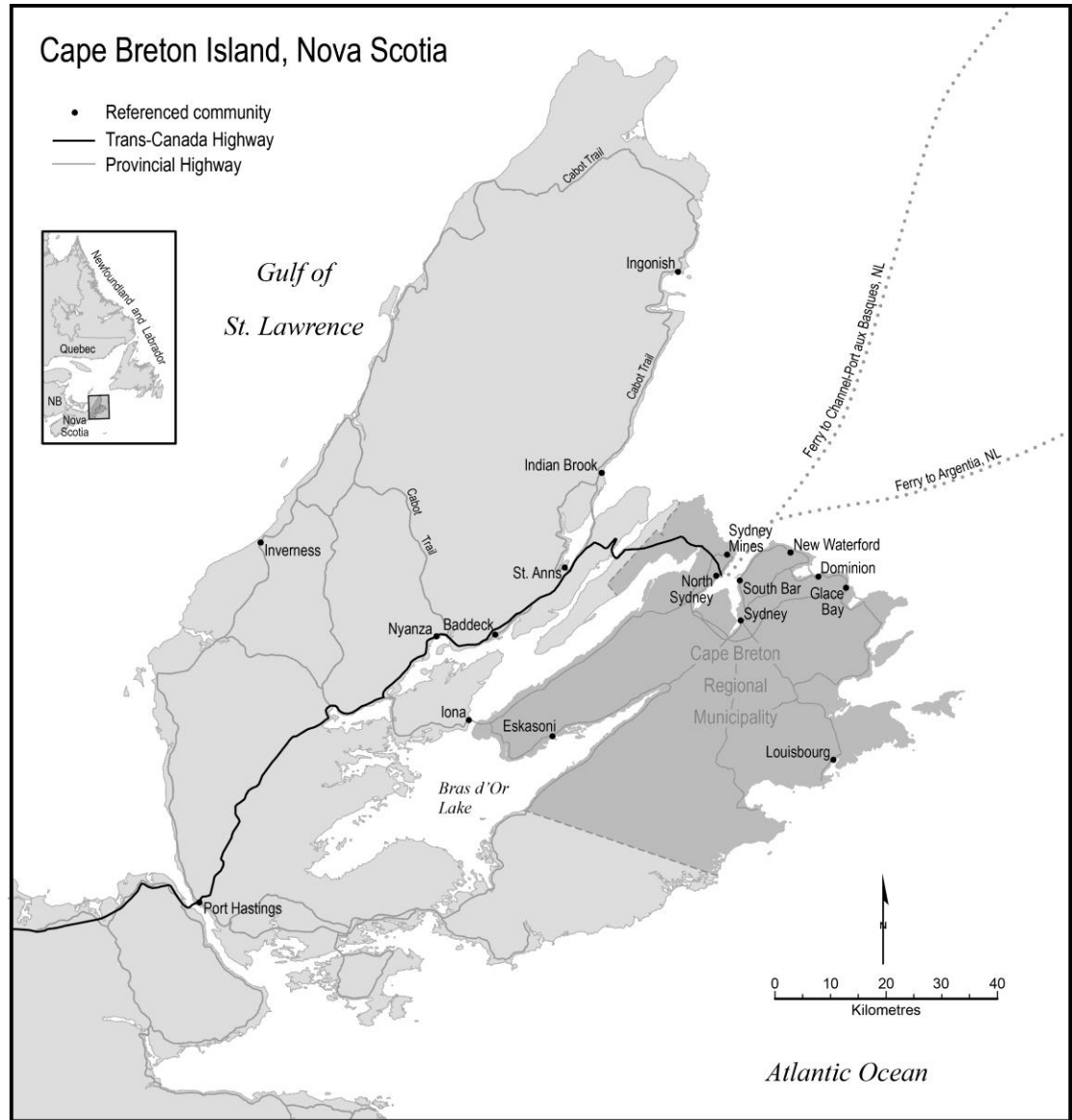


Figure 2: Map of Cape Breton communities referenced in thesis.

Chapter One: Introduction

The hitchhiker has “gone the way of the rail-riding hobo,” recently stated the *New York Times*. Hitchhiking, today, is often viewed as a relic of the past, a symbol of the good old days, when “trust and a taste for adventure trumped fear and doubt” (Bulik 2015). Although the popularity of hitchhiking has likely diminished (at least in North America), it nonetheless persists as a useful and meaningful method of transportation. Numerous individuals – young and old, male, female and transgender, and on varying ends of the socio-economic spectrum – continue to hitchhike, for both adventurous and practical purposes. This thesis considers the experiences of hitchhikers primarily based in Cape Breton and Newfoundland from a folkloristic perspective. It also questions how hitchhiking, as both a practice and a narrative resource, aligns with and responds to contemporary discourses of trust and suspicion.

I began hitchhiking in 2010, about seven years ago, after my friend Chad proposed that we travel westward along the south coast of Newfoundland. We planned to avail of the coastal ferry service along the way, before meandering around Nova Scotia and other areas of Newfoundland for the following two weeks. We would hitchhike through Gros Morne, circle around the Cabot Trail, and visit friends in Corner Brook and Halifax at opportune moments. Although I had never hitchhiked before, I felt relatively fearless about doing so. Chad had already hitchhiked across Canada and, at 20, my sense of invincibility was probably at its peak. And so, after half-heartedly assuring my mother that we were “taking the bus,” we were on our merry way. We headed for the highway, and set out to seek our fortunes.

It was a wonderful trip in so many respects, and I essentially repeated its formula during the following two summers as well. During each summer of 2010-2012, a friend and I took three weeks to hitchhike around the Atlantic Provinces. Sometimes we volunteered on farms, sometimes we went to music festivals, and sometimes we visited cities, but mostly we pitched a tent on the side of the road. Everywhere, we hitchhiked. A few years later, I did much of the same thing while travelling with a friend in Eastern Europe. Our lodgings were almost always secured through volunteer farm labour (using websites such as WWOOF or Helpx¹) or via Couchsurfing², and our transportation was frequently enabled through hitchhiking. In this way I was able to travel relatively cheaply, though these economic benefits were usually derived from my willingness to work for and converse with strangers. From my perspective, however, these encounters were almost the reason for leaving home in the first place. To my mind, hitchhiking allowed for an especially thrilling array of interactions and experiences. With every ride, we met a new personality and became habituated to a new automobile, complete with new music, new air conditioning, and new dashboard paraphernalia. When the ride ended, we'd find ourselves on a new patch of highway, often bordering on wilderness, in a realm where

¹ WWOOF, or "World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms," is a website [<http://www.woof.net>] "linking volunteers with organic farmers and growers to promote cultural and educational experiences based on trust and non-monetary exchange, thereby helping to build a sustainable, global community" (Federation of WWOOF Organisations, 2016). Helpx is another website [<http://www.helpx.net>] that facilitates the same type of exchange, although the hosts are not always farmers, organic or otherwise (Helpx, 2017).

² Couchsurfing is a website [<https://www.couchsurfing.com/>] that "provides a platform for members to stay as a guest at someone's home (homestay), host travelers, meet other members, or join an event. Unlike many hospitality services, Couchsurfing is an example of the gift economy; there is no monetary exchange between members and there is no expectation by hosts for future rewards." (Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia, s.v. "Couchsurfing", 2017)

rushing machinery meets birdcalls and wildflowers, where stillness and speed are both keenly perceived. At its best, hitchhiking, for me, inspires a rush of gratitude for the kind strangers of the world, but it also elicits a sense of heightened novelty and adventure. Every ride can contain the germ of a story. A hitchhiker can meet someone they might never meet otherwise and, oftentimes, the resulting conversation transcends the limits of ordinary small talk. Social boundaries and hierarchies can dissolve, for better or for worse, but often to the benefit of human connection.

When Chad and I hitchhiked together, we would sometimes recall our previous drivers in sequential order, as a side-of-the-road hitchhiking pastime. This game became trickier as our trip progressed, as one might expect, but I still remember the jolt of affection and recognition we felt as we remembered *that* particular ride, *that* particular individual. We rarely learned our drivers' names. In our memories, they became caricatures of themselves. There was the businessman, the sassy mom, the lady with the gold sports car. The man with the scraggly hair. The woman who hated fiddle music. The guy with the "Big Hands, Big Feet: You Do the Math" t-shirt. Enhanced by the brevity of a given hitchhiking encounter, offhand remarks turned into defining characteristics. Strangers became characters. And these characters became the subjects of our stories.

Unfortunately, my hitchhiking stories often take the form of fragmentary memories, rather than interesting, well-plotted narratives (I envy the powers of narrative recall possessed by many of my interviewees). Still, when I turn these scenes over in my mind, I feel that I am summoning a thread of memories that have stayed with me in countless ways, that have informed my views of trust, of kindness, and of adventure, but also of how weird the dynamic between strangers can possibly be. I think about the young

boy who pedalled his bike all over the boardwalks of Gaultois,³ trying to find us a boat to the next community. (This, he managed; we never could have done it without him.) I remember listening to the same Peter Gabriel song on repeat, over and over and over again, and wondering, tentatively, if our driver noticed what was happening. I remember hearing the chronicles of a door-to-door home security salesman; apparently, they deliberately prey on homeowners' fears, while covering it all up with a "pretty veneer." (Then, they get paid on commission.) I think about sitting in the backs of pickup trucks, watching the road disappear in reverse; hitching for hours in a lowering fog outside Burgeo, Newfoundland; kneeling for wild, gravel-dusted strawberries along the side of the highway; and learning that there are two mountains near Port-aux-Basques called Dolly Parton's Tits. One time, I was tickled by a trucker with a bullet strung around his neck (a memory that flashes before my eyes any time I consider hitchhiking alone). Another time, my friend and I received passage in a mobile home (referred to in two separate interviews as "the unicorn of hitchhiking." The hitchhiking gods evidently smiled on us that day.) We met so many kind, generous, unusual, fascinating, and occasionally unnerving individuals. It was usually very exciting.

In the summer of 2015, then, under the guise of doing fieldwork for this thesis, Chad and I hitchhiked around the Cabot Trail once again for old time's sake. We were picked up by a professional photographer, Scott, whose photos of a softball game between the Buddhist monks of the Gampo Abbey monastery and the volunteer

³ Gaultois is a community on the south coast of Newfoundland, which is only accessible via the provincial ferry system. The community is connected by a series of boardwalks; no cars are used within its limits.

firefighters of Pleasant Bay, Cape Breton, had recently been featured in the *Globe and Mail*. Our new friend invited us to revisit Pleasant Bay with him, and we ended up joining the monastery's yearly lobster release, which is an experience that I'll never forget. Every year, at the end of the lobster season, the monastery purchases a lobster fisherman's daily catch and heads out on a fishing vessel, so that a number of monks and a few onlookers (including Scott, Chad, and myself) may liberate the lobsters from their impending deaths. The monastery's website states that releasing previously caught animals into the wild is a traditional custom for Tibetan Buddhists, and further explains that while "the most obvious benefits of the practice are for the sentient beings whose lives are being saved ... it also serves to strengthen the individual practitioner and the sangha⁴ as a whole, and to establish an important link with the local environment and culture" (Gampo Abbey, 2016). We felt that we were about to witness something extraordinary.

And so, we all piled into the boat, and set out for the waters off the coast of the monastery. Once we were within sight of Gampo Abbey, the boat stopped, and the ceremony of the lobster release began. One monk led everyone in a monotone, droney sort of prayer. Every syllable was weighted equally and voiced with the same note and duration of intonation. *Form is emp-ti-ness; emp-ti-ness al-so is form. Emp-ti-ness is no o-ther than form; Form is no o-ther than emp-ti-ness. In the same way, fee-ling, per-cep-tion, for-ma-tion and con-sci-ous-ness are emp-ti-ness...* After this, the monks began to grasp the lobsters, one at a time, and lobbed them all off the side of the boat. I wasn't planning to participate, but an older monk encouraged me to take part, explaining that the

⁴ The word "sangha" refers to a community of practicing Buddhists.

lobster release was an exercise in compassion and an act of goodwill, which we could think about and reflect upon in the future. It took some time, but eventually all the lobsters (perhaps a hundred in all) were immersed once again in the watery depths. A short prayer was said, and then we headed back to shore. Scott, Chad and I had dinner afterwards at a place declaring “Cape Breton Island: God’s Masterpiece” at its entrance. And if we hadn’t hitchhiked, it never would have happened. This occurrence truly led us to think about the link between hitchhiking and storytelling. In this case, the driver also felt the connection. When Chad and I met with Scott several months later, he told us, “I can’t tell you how many times I’ve told the story of picking you two up.”⁵

Folkloristic Perspectives

That said, however, I don’t really self-identify as a storyteller. When relaying an experience, I tend to stumble through my recollections, attempting to piece together what actually happened, while remaining all too aware that words are coming out of my mouth in mainly digressive, half-formed meanderings. For this reason, I didn’t think of my hitchhiking experiences as good stories, exactly, since I didn’t really think of myself as a storyteller.⁶ In the fall of 2015, however, while casting about for a thesis topic, I started putting two and two together when a group of friends and roommates began telling hitchhiking stories in our shared kitchen. I occasionally chimed in with a story of my

⁵ It may be worth mentioning that while I am not immune to the excitement and storytelling potential of this experience (and thus, feel compelled to highlight its more novel, slightly absurd moments), I also admire the mandate of the lobster release, and believe that through this ritual, the monastery does make an important claim about respecting life in all its forms, while forging genuine connections with the local community (including the lobster harvesters, who are compensated for both the lobsters and the boat ride).

⁶ I have since realized that we are all telling stories (or personal experience narratives) all the time, whether we self-identify as gifted storytellers or not.

own, but for the most part, I listened. While thoughts of magic tales and personal experience narratives danced through my head, I began to wonder, excitedly: could hitchhiking narratives possibly constitute a narrative genre? Why were these stories so interesting? Were hitchhiking stories inherently fascinating, somehow?

There are many possible answers to such questions, which will be considered in later sections of the thesis. As I began contemplating the topic, however, I was surprised to discover that to date, folklorists have paid little attention to hitchhiking personal experience narratives. Scholars from surrounding disciplines have acknowledged the connection between hitchhiking and storytelling, such as anthropologist Nehemia Akiva Stern, who writes that Zionist hitchhikers on the West Bank often “tell ‘crazy hitchhike’ stories” (2012, 81), and sociologist Chandra Mukerji, who frames the narratives told by hitchhikers as “bullshit” in her article “Bullshitting: Road Lore Among Hitchhikers” (1978). Perhaps the absence of hitchhiking personal experience narratives from folkloristic scholarship can be partly explained by the considerable folkloristic interest in hitchhiking contemporary legends, especially legends concerning encounters with ghostly or otherwise supernatural hitchhikers. Such legends are typically referred to by folklorists as “Vanishing Hitchhiker” legends, and their pre-eminence within legend scholarship is, quite possibly, unparalleled. In “The Hitchhiking Ghost at Fifty-Five,” (1998) Gillian Bennett suggests that “the Vanishing Hitchhiker [legend] has become perhaps the most frequently collected and widely discussed modern story,” (1) stating that “it has been collected worldwide and from places as far apart as Algeria, Romania, and Pakistan” (3), and reflecting, in summary, that “the story is obviously still a vital part of contemporary folklore and legend telling” (4). The range of “vanishing hitchhiker” scholarship is further

revealed by John D. Galuska and John W. Johnson's extensive folkloristic bibliography, "The Vanishing Hitchhiker: Bibliographic References," which includes three references to the legend within "General Works on Folklore," sixteen references amongst "General Works on Urban Legends," seventeen references amongst works on the "Vanishing Hitchhiker in Africa," and 107 references concerning the "Vanishing Hitchhiker in Other Parts of the World" (Galuska and Johnson 2007). Linda Dégh has pointed out that personal experience narratives closely resemble legends, and states that from an emic perspective⁷, "the legend is a story that reports on a true occurrence, personally experienced by someone in the real world" (Dégh 1991, 15) while noting that "theoretically we must also accept that a truthful story, passed through the *legend process* and handed down through the *legend conduit*, can become a legend" (Dégh and Vázsonyi 1976, 284, emphasis in original). In other words, legends are usually told from the perspective of having "really happened" to someone and, though the legend's grasp on reality may be more tenuous than that of the personal experience narrative, both narrative genres are essentially rooted in the real world. Furthermore, personal experience narratives can serve as source material for legends.

⁷ I use the terms "emic" and "etic" at various points throughout this thesis. In the second edition of *Folklore: An Encyclopedia of Beliefs, Customs, Tales, Music and Art*, Linda Kinsey Adams defines the emic/etic distinction as follows: "A conceptual framework that distinguishes between two strategies used to categorize human behavior: emic, often referred to as a native, ethnic, internal, or insider point of view in relation to a specific cultural system, and etic, representing scholarly, analytical, or external constructs employed by outsiders, primarily for the purpose of cross-cultural, comparative study" (Adams 2010, 399). Here, emic refers to concepts identified by the interviewed hitchhikers, while etic refers to my own, scholarly influenced speculations. However, as a hitchhiker myself, I am not an "outsider" in the world of hitchhiking and, as a result, my perspective likely lies somewhere between the two orientations.

In light of these connections, and considering the bounty of hitchhiking legend scholarship, it is worth asking why folklorists have not sought out more hitchhiking personal experience narratives for analysis. In her article “What is the Legend After All?,” Linda Dégh states that the legend has “three essential qualities: 1) it is of existential importance for people who participate in its presentation, 2) it is surrounded by uncertainty, lacking firm knowledge, and 3) it is controversial and invites the expression of diverse points of view” (1991, 30). To a certain extent, I believe that these qualities are likewise expressed and responded to via hitchhiking personal experience narratives, as a high degree of risk, uncertainty and controversy surrounds the act of hitchhiking, and hitchhiking personal experience narratives provide another avenue for expressing these attitudes. In effect, hitchhiking personal experience narratives allow for the communication of what Alan Dundes calls “folk ideas,” which refer to the “traditional notions that a group of people have about the nature of man, of the world, and of man’s life in the world,” and which “[do] not constitute a genre of folklore but rather [are] expressed in a great variety of different genres” (Dundes 1971, 95). By telling their personal experience narratives, hitchhikers can convey ideas about the trustworthiness of strangers and the nature of kindness/goodness in a more general way. As Sandra Dolby Stahl points out, the communication of such values may constitute the “folkloric content” of a personal experience narrative (1989, 19). A hitchhiking personal experience narrative, like any personal experience narrative, is “not a narrative taken from oral tradition and retold by the storyteller, nor is it a folklore item whose plot or major motif can be corroborated by a folklorist” (Dolby Stahl 2008, 13). However, while hitchhiking

narratives cannot be classified and charted as readily as hitchhiking legends, they nonetheless merit folkloristic attention.

The communication of hitchhiking strategies comprises another relatively untapped domain of folkloric behaviour. To the best of my knowledge, folklorists have not yet categorized these strategies as a type of folklore, although scholars from other disciplines have, in a sense, described the folkloric essence of hitchhiking techniques using their own terms. In “Why did the Anthropologist Cross the Road? Hitchhiking as a Stochastic Modality of Travel,” anthropologist Patrick Laviolette suggests that his article could have aimed towards “deconstruct[ing] how grassroots hitching colloquialisms have become culturally acquired resources” (Laviolette 2014, 2) – which, filtered through a folkloristic paradigm, might be read as “determining how hitchhiking knowledge and strategies are folklorically communicated.” Moreover, sociologists James R. Greenley and David G. Rice describe hitchhiking techniques as a type of “lore” in their article “Female Hitchhiking: Strain, Control, and Subcultural Approaches”. The authors explain:

Around most behaviours which are supported by group values grows a lore about techniques of performing the behaviour. This lore develops through experience and is passed on to newer members of the group. For example, in the course of this research, the authors attended a student led ‘seminar’ which dealt exclusively with hitchhiking techniques, including tips on how to enhance safety. A female hitchhiker probably draws informally on the experience of her hitchhiking friends for tips on how to avoid potentially troublesome situations or how to deal with such situations when they occur. (1973, 99)

Here, the authors essentially frame hitchhiking technique using folkloristic concepts, although no folklorists are cited in the article. Donna Carlson is another non-folklorist who has written about hitchhiking strategy in a highly folkloristic manner. In her article “Thumbs Out: Ethnography of Hitchhiking,” Carlson observes, “Although they hardly recognize it themselves, those who hitch rides regularly develop systematic ways for

getting where they want to go. The problems of persuading drivers to stop, maintaining personal safety during travel, and arriving at one's destination have led to the development of culturally shared solutions" (1972, 137). While these authors employ terms such as "culturally acquired resources" and "culturally shared solutions" rather than "folklore," the informal communication of hitchhiking strategy is made evident nonetheless. Moreover, one hitchhiker, Joan Butler, articulated much of the same point during our interview:

I guess the thing is, probably from your interest is that it was a culture of hitchhiking for us. You knew if you were going to engage in this type of behaviour, you knew that there were certain strategies that you had to get involved in. Now we weren't sophisticated thinkers at fourteen and sixteen, strategic thinkers, like we didn't think that what we were doing was coming up with a strategic plan of how we were going to hitchhike, but I mean, we knew that there was—we had guidelines about who we were going to get in with and if somebody looked a bit sketchy, we would say no, you know.

In this thesis, then, I situate this "culture of hitchhiking," or hitchhiking strategy, as a type of occupational folklore. In particular, I look at the "work techniques" developed and circulated by hitchhikers, in keeping with Robert McCarl's definition, where "technique reflects the 'working knowledge' (what you need to know to do the work) of any work group" (McCarl 1978, 148).

Fieldwork

Preliminary fieldwork was completed as course work for Folklore 6250: Personal Experience Narrative during the winter of 2015. I interviewed five close friends about their hitchhiking experiences, including two friends I had hitchhiked with previously. Then, following ICEHR approval in July 2015⁸, I began conducting interviews in Sydney,

⁸ ICEHR 20160199

Cape Breton. To spread awareness of my research, I posted a notice on a local community website, goCapeBreton.com. I then conducted eight interviews while concluding my summer job in Cape Breton. As mentioned previously, I also kept field notes while hitchhiking around Cape Breton's Cabot Trail in July 2015.

After returning to St. John's in August, I resumed my fieldwork process. Provincial Intangible Cultural Heritage officer Dale Jarvis posted a notice on the ICH blog on my behalf, and on August 18th, I wrote a "Letter to the Editor" for *The Telegram*. Several people contacted me after these initial publicity attempts, but the profile of my project truly expanded after CBC Gander called for an interview. On August 22nd, this interview was broadcast across the province as a web article and radio story, and my email and telephone became newly inundated with messages from enthusiastic hitchhikers. To date, I have conducted thirty-six interviews of approximately one hour in length. Time constraints limited my capacity to interview all the interested participants, but some of these un-interviewed individuals generously provided written accounts of their hitchhiking experiences. Admittedly, I struggled to maintain control over the quantity of interviews during this time as each day, a new wave of hitchhikers contacted me through Facebook, email, or over the telephone. This surge of enthusiasm led me to conclude that in many cases, hitchhikers truly love to talk about hitchhiking. Because this is a master's thesis (rather than a PhD dissertation), and also because I felt compelled to transcribe most of these interviews (which was, unsurprisingly, a fairly time-consuming process), I have not managed to include all of the ethnographic material provided to me. The interview excerpts that do appear have been lightly edited, to aid readability and to adjust for false starts, while hopefully retaining the character and flow of the original

utterances. However, every act of transcription is, in a sense, an act of interpretation, as is the interview context in and of itself. As noted by Charles L. Briggs, “fieldworkers affect what is performed. Fieldworkers set up the situation and shape its contents; scholars control the selection of what to transcribe (and translate), which performances to include in scholarly texts, how to present them, how they are to be interpreted, and which audiences to address” (1993, 406). I recognize that my position as a young woman with hitchhiking experience has influenced the resulting interviews; that as the interviewer, I had greater control over the conversations as they took place (Briggs 1993; Mishler 1986); and that as the transcriptionist and writer of this thesis, I have brought my own subjectivity to bear on this document in countless ways. Where possible, I often eliminate my own interjections from the quoted interview excerpts using ellipses, in the interests of focus and concision. As Barbara Rieti writes in her dissertation, however, “the field worker’s approach is bound to have an impact on what informants tell (or don’t tell) her,” (1990, 11) which should be kept in mind throughout the pages that follow.

The hitchhikers I interviewed can be described demographically in several ways. First, a number of different age groups are represented in this thesis. I ultimately interviewed nine hitchhikers in their twenties, eight hitchhikers in their thirties, four hitchhikers in their forties, five hitchhikers in their fifties, seven hitchhikers in their sixties, and three hitchhikers in their seventies. Second, since I conducted interviews in both the Cape Breton Regional Municipality (CBRM) and St. John’s, interviewees from these locations are prominently featured in this research, but individuals from many other regions are represented as well. I interviewed seven hitchhikers from St. John’s, ten hitchhikers from other communities in Newfoundland and Labrador, six hitchhikers from

Cape Breton, seven hitchhikers from other regions of Canada (aside from Cape Breton and Newfoundland and Labrador), three hitchhikers from the United States, and three hitchhikers from other countries. Additionally, I interviewed fifteen female-identified hitchhikers and twenty-one male-identified hitchhikers. Since I had a large pool of hitchhikers to draw from, I often made more of an effort to secure interviews with the women who contacted me, as I hoped to include a balanced perspective of how gender performance can influence hitchhiking. Evidently, however, the men still outnumber the women in my study, which is likely representative of hitchhiking demographics in a more general way. In addition, all of my interviewees were white. This is not overly surprising, given that I conducted interviews in Cape Breton and Newfoundland, which are quite racially homogenous places. Nonetheless, a more diverse group of interviewees would have certainly enhanced and strengthened this thesis. I recognize the limitations of viewing hitchhiking from an exclusively white perspective.

Furthermore, a somewhat fuzzy demographic distinction can be drawn between short-distance and long-distance hitchhikers. Short-distance hitchhiking is defined here as hitchhiking within and around one's community, where the hitchhiker in question will likely end up in their own bed at the end of the night. Long-distance hitchhiking, on the other hand, refers to a kind of adventure away from home. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish the two types of hitchhiking; for example, is a hitchhiker travelling from his mother's house in Stephenville to his apartment in St. John's (760 km away) engaging in short-distance or long-distance hitchhiking? Moreover, hitchhikers who hitchhike around their community out of necessity may still conceive of their hitchhiking as an adventurous act. In general, however, short-distance hitchhiking is intended to describe hitchhiking in

the context of one's daily life (whether to go swimming, visit the doctor, go to work, head into a neighbouring community, pick up groceries, visit the university, etc.), while long-distance hitchhiking refers to hitchhiking across Canada, hitchhiking in other countries, or hitchhiking for longer periods around the Atlantic provinces; in short, hitchhiking as a lengthier type of travel. In my estimation, this research includes seven individuals who primarily engage in short-distance hitchhiking, sixteen individuals who primarily engage in long-distance hitchhiking, and thirteen individuals who engage in both types. Many of the hitchhikers in the last category began hitchhiking around their home communities in their youth, and then later set out on longer, more ambitious journeys.

Finally, while I will mainly refer to my interviewees as "hitchhikers" within my thesis for simplicity's sake, about nineteen of these hitchhikers have provided lifts to other hitchhikers as well, and some of these individuals were equally (if not more) enthused about the "driving" side of their hitchhiking experiences.

The process of conducting fieldwork happened very quickly. I left Cape Breton shortly after I began spreading word about my project and thus, numerous hitchhikers in Cape Breton contacted me after I had returned to Newfoundland. Then, my fieldwork in St. John's felt fairly rushed as well, since I received the biggest response towards the end of the summer, just before beginning my last semester of graduate courses. To cope with these limits, I attempted to schedule two or three interviews per day. Sometimes I met with interviewees at central locations such as MUN's library, and occasionally I conducted interviews over the phone or using Skype. I also met two interviewees in my own house. For the most part, however, my interviews took place in the hitchhikers' homes.

Since I do not have a car, I usually arrived at my interviewees' houses (in both Cape Breton and St. John's) by bicycle. Sometimes I biked 10-15 km at a time to reach my destinations, which occasionally invited commentary from my interviewees. With the exception of one potential interviewee, who warned me about the dangers of biking from St. John's to St. Philip's, those who did mention my bike seemed vaguely impressed by my mode of transportation. In retrospect, I wonder whether bicycling may have helped develop rapport with these hitchhikers, since it rightly suggested that I do not have access to a vehicle, and that I (like the interviewees at some point in their lives) am still, in a sense, in need of a lift. This dynamic seemed especially evident during one of my interviews in Cape Breton. While cycling 10 km from Cape Breton University to a convent-turned-bed-and-breakfast in Glace Bay, Cape Breton, I got inadvertently caught in the pouring rain, and showed up to my interview soaked to the bone. The man I was about to interview, Joe MacPherson, immediately offered me a towel and a change of clothes, and this gesture began a particularly warm and wide-ranging interview, which lasted almost two hours. Maybe we would have hit it off regardless, but I wonder whether showing up in a somewhat needy state, similar to the state of a beseeching, needy hitchhiker, may have helped to foster interview rapport. Patrick Laviolette made a similar observation while conducting fieldwork on an academic project in Cornwall, England. While there, he found that hitchhiking helped to create positive interactions with potential interviewees. Laviolette writes:

Hitching a lift in particular put me on an equal footing or even in a dependent relationship with many informants. As a field strategy, this is something that one should not undervalue, granted this can result in negative repercussions as well. I am nevertheless confident that the benefits outweighed the former. Indeed, to appear unassuming and

unpretentious is surely a tactic that most fieldworkers strive for during their research.
(2014, 4)

In Laviolette's case, hitchhiking was used "to meet informants spontaneously and interact with them on common ground" (2014, 4). Although I did not interview anyone who picked me up hitchhiking, I found that the process of interviewing two or three strangers a day bore a certain similarity to the experience of hitchhiking. While conducting fieldwork, I (mainly) rode my bike to unfamiliar locations, entered enclosed settings (effectively placing my trust in unknown strangers), and jumped into immediate, hour-long conversations with these individuals. If I substitute the word "hitchhiked" for "rode my bike," the previous sentence also basically describes my experience of hitchhiking. Beyond the possibility of using hitchhiking as a way of meeting interviewees, then, I have found that hitchhiking comes close to replicating the experience of doing fieldwork. To my mind, both activities are comparable in terms of the sense of spontaneity, the conversational aspects, the risk, and the dependency embedded in both practices.

One might assume that fieldwork is not nearly as spontaneous as hitchhiking, since interviews are often planned in advance. However, when one schedules multiple interviews in one day, moving from neighbourhood to neighbourhood and house to house can become pretty exhilarating, in my experience. Even though I knew that I would show up for a given interview at such and such a time, I didn't know, necessarily, that I would enter a beautifully ornate convent, spot a fox running by a rosebush, and meet a fascinating, kind-hearted person in the same afternoon. I knew that I was headed for St. Philip's, but I didn't know that I'd receive a meal of cod's heads and zucchini cake, or that I'd leave with vegetables from the garden. One interviewee offered a glass of

homemade rhubarb nectar, while another, Margaret Morris, invited me to check out her Harley Davidson collection:



Figure 3: Portrait of Margaret Morris, beside her collection of Harley Davidsons.

Sometimes, I also wandered agonizingly around the outside of office buildings, struggling to find an open door; or I waited a little listlessly for strangers in the library. But then sometimes these strangers would sneak a tiny dog into our study room, or they'd sport a leather jacket and an old-timey hat, or the interview would immediately open up a mesmerizing sequence of hitchhiking stories. In other words, the process of conducting fieldwork for this thesis felt consistently exciting and unpredictable, and usually sparked the same sense of spontaneity that I often associate with hitchhiking myself.

As well, the conversational interaction of both practices often consists of two strangers opening up to one another (although during interviews, of course, the exchange is usually more one-sided). The dynamics of conversation between strangers are explored further in subsequent chapters, but here I wish to point out that some interviewees also observed the similarity between hitchhiking and interviewing. When asked about his conversational approach as a hitchhiker, for example, Greg Pike responded, “Well you tell me, we’re having the same conversation. It’s the same connection.” Furthermore, Rose Westbury, an interviewee who primarily relayed her experiences of picking up hitchhikers, connected her role as a driver to my role as an interviewer:

AM: What’s your favourite thing about hitchhiking?

RW: I think what I just said. It's listening to other people. And their stories. So I'd love to be on the other end I think, interviewing, the interviewer's chair. Yeah, I think it's living vicariously through their eyes. I think that's what I'd like to do.

Another woman, Julie Huntington, implicitly connected the fact that we had met one another as strangers, just as hitchhikers meet one another as strangers, as she spoke of the need to surmount societal distrust through interaction:

JH: There's a fear, there's something that—we're meant to fear one another, which is bad. There seems to be that part of society, and really that's the part we've got to dispel. Because we're all just the same.

AM: Do you feel like hitchhiking helps with that?

JH: Well when you meet people and you go, "Oh, they're really interesting," yeah, when you meet people that you don't know, like we just met you, it's another person doing their thing just like us, and I think that helps a lot with feeling comfortable in life.

This interview excerpt also touches on the sense of risk involved in both hitchhiking and conducting fieldwork. Although here Julie is noting the benefits of moving beyond that sense of risk, it must be said that both hitchhikers and fieldworkers have suffered during their interactions with strangers. Hitchhiking is widely perceived as a highly dangerous

activity, and numerous hitchhikers have been assaulted, raped and even murdered while hitchhiking (consider, for example, the 1981 murder of hitchhiker Dana Bradley in Newfoundland, or the many missing and murdered Aboriginal women who have hitchhiked on the “Highway of Tears” in Western Canada). Fieldwork, on the other hand, is rarely presented as a dangerous endeavour. Sociologists Gwen Sharp and Emily Kremer attempt to redress this perception in their article “The Safety Dance: Confronting Harassment, Intimidation, and Violence in the Field,” where they express their concerns about the sexual harassment and assault endured by fieldworkers, while clarifying that “the research literature to date indicates that this is overwhelmingly a problem faced by female researchers, especially those interviewing male subjects” (Sharp and Kremer 2006, 320). The authors also cite one of “the few large-scale studies of danger in the field” conducted by the American Anthropological Association (Howell 1988, 1990), which indicated that “two percent of all respondents, and seven percent of women, reported rape or attempted rape of themselves or someone in their research group while in the field” (Sharp and Kremer 2006, 320). Other accounts of assault or violence directed at fieldworkers include Arendell 1997; Green et al 1993; Jamieson 2000; and Kenyon and Hawker 1999.

To conduct fieldwork for this thesis, I mainly met strangers in their own homes. Occasionally, I also hosted unknown individuals in my own house. In a sense, this felt more risky than when I hitchhiked, since I always conducted interviews alone; while hitchhiking, I always kept the company of at least one friend. After my call for interviewees was made public, my mother began calling and fretting about my safety, as she had also recognized that my fieldwork involved trusting strangers. Thankfully, all of

these strangers were as kind as they initially appeared. However, I did have the opportunity to develop rapport with interviewees beforehand, since we always emailed or talked on the phone about scheduling options before meeting with one another; after one of these conversations, I deliberately suggested a public venue to meet an interviewee I felt unsure about. Hitchhiking, on the other hand, does not offer these kinds of possibilities. Hitchhiking almost always takes place in an enclosed, private environment, where the opportunities for rapport development are comparatively brief. Nonetheless, by engaging with strangers, hitchhikers and fieldworkers both take on a degree of risk to accomplish their goals. Sharp and Kremer also note that “it can be difficult to deal with such sexual advances [during fieldwork] because researchers feel that the subject is doing them a favour by participating” (2006, 321). This dynamic is also at play in the context of hitchhiking, since drivers who extend such advances are also granting the favour of a lift.

This last point highlights the fundamental dependency of both hitchhiking and fieldwork relationships. In a previously quoted excerpt, Laviolette states that “hitching a lift in particular put me on an equal footing or even in a dependent relationship with many informants” (2014, 4). Of course hitchhiking is, ultimately, a type of begging, and hitchhikers depend on drivers in order to reach their destinations. However, while Laviolette links this type of hitchhiking dependency to a beneficial means of appearing “unassuming and unpretentious” (4) while conducting fieldwork, this excerpt also suggests that ordinarily, ethnographers are *not* embedded (or may believe they are not embedded) in dependent relationships with interviewees. In fact, the opposite is true. Ethnographers need interviewees/informants, just as hitchhikers need rides. I couldn’t write my thesis without individuals to interview, and I couldn’t hitchhike anywhere

without the assistance of drivers. This point was first offered during my interview with John Drover, who had an illustrious hitchhiking career before pursuing a graduate degree in folklore. After John said that hitchhiking had influenced his decision to study folklore, I floated my tentative comparison between hitchhiking and fieldwork by him. In response, he suggested the following:

JD: And as a folklorist, aren't you really hitchhiking on everybody else's experiences to get yourself from point A to point B, you're kind of hitchhiking along with the people who you're interviewing?

AM: [laughter] Yeah, totally.

JD: You're not getting anywhere physically, but you're getting somewhere, I guess academically, or mentally, or emotionally, or something.

AM: Yeah. No, it's true. You're all enabling my thesis.

Thesis Outline

Hitchhiking is a very haphazard kind of activity, encompassing all sorts of possibilities, which can also be examined and interpreted in many different ways. Throughout the ensuing chapters, I strive to follow the content of my interviews as much as possible, so that my theoretical considerations have, in most cases, emerged in response to my ethnographic material. However, the fact that hitchhiking can play host to such variety means that this thesis bends and sways in many directions, as each context, story, and theme seemed to open up new, enticing avenues of meaning. Although I often pursued these paths as they arose, I also endeavoured to keep my central orientation in mind at the same time. In summary, through examining the situated histories, gendered considerations, occupational folklore, and personal experience narratives of hitchhiking, along with other domains of folkloric behaviour and folkloristic interpretation, this thesis aims to show what hitchhiking can reveal about trust, from both individual and societal perspectives.

In the chapters that follow, I attempt to move along a basic plotline for this thesis, by first charting the basic setting (or where/when/who) in Chapter Two, “Establishing Contexts,” before moving into questions of “how” hitchhiking is accomplished, strategically, in Chapter Three, “Hitchhiking as Occupational Folklore.” As I see it, Chapter Four, “Hitchhiking Narratives,” examines the “what” question of this thesis: What actually happens during a hitchhiking encounter? What is communicated through the telling of a hitchhiking story? Then, Chapter Five, “Hitchhiking as a Negotiation of Trust,” wrangles with the question of “why” and other, broader questions—why does hitchhiking matter? Why hitchhike, in this day and age? And, most insistently: what can be understood about the connection between hitchhiking and trust? In my final chapter, I summarize the thrust of these questions, and bring the thesis to its conclusion.

Chapter Two: Establishing Contexts

As mentioned previously, the hitchhikers interviewed for this thesis have hitchhiked in a number of different contexts. They have hitchhiked from the 1960s up to the present day, within small communities and across large distances, and have rooted their travels in a number of different geographic locations. Gender has also significantly influenced the hitchhiking experiences of these interviewees. Many interviewees grew up in communities where hitchhiking was a common, relatively innocuous method of transportation; for example, Chad Griffiths (born 1985), my first hitchhiking companion, hitchhiked around his hometown of Fox Harbour, in Placentia Bay, Newfoundland, as an eight-year-old en route to a nearby swimming hole. However, other interviewees grew up hearing careful warnings about the dangers of hitchhiking and of strangers more generally. Some interviewees may have hitchhiked rebelliously, to defy these cultural norms of suspicion, while others were motivated by simple necessity (whatever the cultural norms surrounding hitchhiking may have been). A few interviewees who had hitchhiked in the '60s and '70s remarked that "it was a different time back then," and doubted that they'd ever hitchhike (or even pick up hitchhikers) these days. Furthermore, many interviewees talked about where they would and would not feel comfortable hitchhiking, saying that, for example, they would hitchhike in Newfoundland but not in Western Canada, or that they preferred to hitchhike on sparsely populated islands, or that they'd hitchhike anywhere but the United States.

In this chapter, then, I wish to account for some of the histories and stories of hitchhiking which help explain these boundaries of trust. Why do hitchhikers feel safe in certain areas and not in others? How does gender affect hitchhiking? How does short-

distance hitchhiking differ from long-distance hitchhiking, and how have ideas about hitchhiking changed over time? As my research is primarily based in Newfoundland and Cape Breton, this chapter also aims to situate the particular histories and contexts of hitchhiking in these regions, while offering a comparative glance at how hitchhiking is (and has been) practiced in other locations.

General History of Hitchhiking

In “An Informal History of Hitchhiking,” historian John T. Schlebecker declares, “Begging rides from passing motorists, or hitchhiking, is an American contribution to world civilization” (1958, 305). Though this claim may appear somewhat nationalistic (particularly since Schlebecker reiterates that “hitchhiking originated in the United States” in the next paragraph before emphasizing, once again, that “the hitchhiker was first of all a product of American automobile civilization”), the *Oxford English Dictionary* also identifies the term as being American in origin. Moreover, as Schlebecker points out, the comparatively wide availability of cars along with the extensive American highway system likely led to a fertile breeding ground for hitchhiking in early 20th century America (1958, 305-306). However, the emergence of hitchhiking should not be solely attributed to plucky American ingenuity and the invention of the automobile, as there are many historical precedents for automotive hitchhiking. After all, before humans roamed the earth in SUVs and four-wheel-drives, people still travelled far and wide in their boats and on their trains, atop their horses and inside their carriages, and many of these vehicles had room to spare for penniless travellers in search of a lift. Sometimes this pre-automobile “hitchhiking” involved asking the “driver’s” (or captain’s, or horseback rider’s, or railroad conductor’s) permission, and sometimes it did not. In any case, the aim

of free transportation has been sought out and secured in a variety of ways over the years. In a sense, hitchhiking can be viewed as simply the most recent, automobile-centric node in that history.

Although it is difficult to discern exactly how hitchhiking may have taken place in the distant past, the notion of aided travel is quite prevalent in oral folk literature, which may provide some clues about its “real life” occurrence. Stith Thompson’s *Motif-Index of Folk Literature* (1955) enumerates myriad varieties of aided transportation, including transportation by way of magic hammocks, magic carpets, magic clouds, flying canoes, winged horses, flying eagles, golden apples, magic carriages, magic seal skins, magic trees, and magic bricks that journey to the moon, amongst many other examples (all of which were identified and gathered from international collections of oral folk tales). While I have not examined these magic vessels of transportation within their narrative contexts, Vladimir Propp’s *Morphology of the Folktale* (1968) shows that from a structuralist standpoint, the protagonists of folk tales are normally tested in some way by *donors* (or provider characters) and, after passing these tests, donors often reward protagonists with magical objects to aid them during the rest of their journey (79). In an example from the French Newfoundland tradition, a version of tale-type 313 (*The Girl as Helper in the Hero’s Flight*) describes three very old women (all donors), each of whom provides successive transportation to the hero by means of two magical boots and a talking eagle (Thomas 1997, 155-156). Of course, magic tales belong to the realm of fantasy and, in pre-literate societies, magic tales functioned much as novels and movies do today. These folk tales were not perceived as depictions of reality. Like any kind of fiction, however, magic tales also reflect and reveal aspects of reality through narrative,

and it seems likely that the motifs of magical transport listed above mirrored more earthly methods of aided travel in peasant societies, such as rides secured by horseback, small boats, horse and buggy, or any other means available. This view follows Bengt Holbek's theory that "all such [magical] elements refer to features of the real world as experienced by the members of the storytelling communities," which, in their narrative expression, symbolize "vivid emotional impressions" (Holbek 1987, 409).

Other evidence for hitchhiking-like practices can be inferred from the German travelling journeyman tradition, *Wanderjahre*, (or similarly, the French *Campagnons du Tour de France*), where craftspeople (or *gesellen*) in Germany and other areas of Europe travel for precisely three years and one day after finishing a trade apprenticeship. The *gesellen* must work for food and board, and are not allowed to pay for transportation. Thus, many of them hitchhike. Dating from the Middle Ages (and only residually practiced today), "accomplishing the tour meant memorising places, people and ways of life and also learning how to behave" (Calame et al.). Such life lessons are often invoked by hitchhikers as well. Furthermore, the *gesellen* also assumed a degree of risk comparable with that of hitchhiking. In 1450, for example, "the carpenter Nicolas Vatecar was roughed up, kidnapped, taken into the forest and held for ransom by soldiers" (Calame et al.).

More recent modes of transportation, such as larger ships and trains, were big enough to allow for sneaking aboard undetected. With the advent of such possibilities, destitute travellers could travel vast distances as stowaways and/or train hoppers. If caught, however, the penalties for these rogue travellers could be quite arduous. Stowaways were likely aware from the outset that once discovered, they'd be set straight

to work; in the context of the Newfoundland seal fishery, for example, stowaways “could expect gruelling work for little or, in most cases, no pay” (Ryan 1994, 227). However, as discussed in the Maritime History Archive’s web article, “Deadly Voyage: Stowaways and the Case of the *Arran*,” stowaways were also “among the most vulnerable of sea-goers because they depended on the good will of the master and mate. Some were beaten, refused food, abandoned at a distant port and, in one dreadful example, put onto the ice floes” (MHA 2011). If discovered, train-hoppers could face harsh punishment as well. Peter Willy Murphy, a train-hopper from Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, described his memory of being brutally expelled from a train in an interview with scholar Elizabeth Beaton, saying:

I got kicked off one time in Orangedale. On an early morning train. I saw the shadow coming behind me, and I was peeping out behind the baggage and Lord, before I knew it, I got the boot right in the tail bone, boy, and whoosh! He kicked me good and hard so I wouldn’t fall under the wheels. And Lord, I went out into space. Well, I laid there for pretty near half a day dazed. I couldn’t move—paralyzed me. He caught me right in the tailbone. (Murphy 1976)

Beyond the threat of getting caught, train-hoppers also contended with an undeniable risk of death. Statistics for train-hopping fatalities in the United States indicate that in 1905, there were 4650 deaths incurred from hopping trains. (This data is intended to discount fatalities caused by suicide.) By 2005, the number of train-hopping deaths had reduced to 471, which can be partly explained by the fact that in 1905, “there were 50% more train miles running over a much larger network, and in some cases the railroad literally ran down the middle of the main street of many towns” (Savage 2007, 201-202). In any case, however, train-hopping has always been (and continues to be) a highly risky method of transportation.

As discussed previously, stowaways and train-hoppers, unlike hitchhikers, do not tend to seek permission for their journeys. This distinction creates a fundamental difference between the two categories of travel, as hitchhikers must focus much more on appeasing individual drivers than train-hoppers.⁹ One interviewee, Adam Critchley, said that some modern-day train-hoppers even describe hitchhiking as “bitchhiking,” presumably because train-hoppers are “more free” from the demands of driver interactions (unlike hitchhikers, who are the supposed “bitches” of their respective drivers). However, there is evidence suggesting that some train-hoppers did, in fact, receive tacit permission for their voyages. One student paper in the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive (hereafter referred to as MUNFLA) describes a railroad conductor’s irritation with “the Superintendent’s permissiveness in letting passengers on freight trains. When roads were not as plentiful in Newfoundland, the Superintendent would occasionally grant permission in cases of emergencies for passengers to ride these freight trains” (Collins 75-265, 10). In this example train-hopping more closely resembles hitchhiking, as the passengers appealed to the superintendent for free transit, just as hitchhikers appeal to passing drivers. A 1911 travelogue entitled *Leaves from a Hobo’s Diary; Or How to Travel Without Money* describes another type of appeal practiced by would-be travellers, whereby the “poor hobo,” bound across the Atlantic for Europe, “wends his way down to the dock and secures a job on some cattle

⁹ Although stowaways do not receive permission for their journey, they tend to appease crewmembers once discovered. For this reason, stowaways do not fit neatly into the train-hopper vs. hitchhiker categorization outlined above, as stowaways require both the “sneaking” techniques of the train-hopper and the ingratiating, people-pleasing skills of the hitchhiker.

boat, when (if he gets anything at all) he may get the immense remuneration of \$5.00 or \$10.00 for the round trip, but he is as happy as the proverbial sand-boy” (Robin 1911, 1).

Though the author of this travelogue primarily travelled by working as a deckhand, he still considered himself a hobo, explaining that “in using the word ‘hobo’ I allude to the Genus Homo who is born with the lust of travel, and not being born with necessary means, takes his own particular way of accomplishing the desired result” (Robin 1911, xiv). While the emergence of the hobo/tramp characterization has been directly connected to the birth of the American railroad (Cresswell 1999, 180; Lennon 2014, 14), and though some scholars argue that hobos, by definition, travel solely as train hoppers (Lennon 2014, 13), it seems clear that the term has also been used in the more flexible manner defined above. Of particular interest here, of course, is the fact that hitchhiking has also fallen within the spectrum of hoboin activities. In 1934, for example, one reporter described a female hobo’s tendencies of “riding the rails, picking up rides in trucks, [and] walking the highways” (Reckless 1934, 176, quoted in Cresswell 1999, 186). Clearly, this woman availed of several methods of free transportation (including hitchhiking), but remained a “hobo” in the eyes of the reporter nevertheless. Furthermore, Jack Kerouac’s article of lament for the “Vanishing American Hobo” lists several customary hobo territories under threat, and states that “the American Hobo has a hard time hoboin nowadays due to the increase in police surveillance of highways, railroad yards, sea shores, river bottoms, embankments and the thousand-and-one hiding holes of the industrial night” (Kerouac 1960, 60). Hobos had many threatened habitats, according to Kerouac, including the highways. More likely than not, many of the hobos who escaped surveillance on those highways were there so that they could hitchhike.

It seems possible, then, that hitchhiking may have stemmed culturally from these related activities of “hoboing,” including train-hopping. However, hobos were often held in considerable contempt by mainstream American society; as academic John Lennon sums it up, the hobo was popularly viewed as “a menacing, selfish individualist who eschews any semblance of community while undermining proletarian solidarity” (Lennon 2014, 12), while hitchhikers were initially held in somewhat higher esteem. In *Mobility Without Mayhem: Safety, Cars, and Citizenship* (2008), Jeremy Parker refers to the first phase of hitchhiking in America (running from the 1910s to around the Korean War) as the “civic Samaritan” period of hitchhiking, since it was considered laudable to help out the young soldiers, Depression-era unemployed, and college students who were often found thumbing a ride during this period (80-81). Hitchhiking continued to grow in popularity during the 1930s but, according to John T. Schlebecker, “the increased number of hitchhikers in the thirties almost automatically resulted in an increase in the number of crimes connected with the practice,” and many of these crimes received fairly widespread publicity (1958, 314). In spite of this, numerous magazine writers of the thirties remained enthusiastic about hitchhiking, and journalists often interpreted the practice as a symbol of kindness and democracy in America (Schlebecker 1958, 317-318). Throughout the 1940s, hitchhiking was widely viewed as a respectable wartime necessity. Emily Post, renowned etiquette guru, even endorsed hitchhiking as a practical option for working women in 1942 (Claridge 2009, 397).

During the early 1950s, however, the campaign of fear associated with hitchhiking began in earnest, as the Automobile Association of America and the FBI (amongst other organizations) released pamphlets, posters, and articles in popular magazines which

decried the risks of picking up hitchhikers. One such poster, endorsed by J. Edgar Hoover of the FBI, reads, “Death in Disguise? To the American motorist: Don’t pick up trouble! Is he a happy vacationer or an escaping criminal—a pleasant companion or a sex maniac—a friendly traveler or a vicious murderer? In the gamble with hitchhikers your safety and the lives of your loved ones are at stake. Don’t take the risk!” (Dimaggio 1973, 11). As Parker describes it, “this radical rearticulation of the American driver from civic Samaritan to potential victim marks one of the early signs of what has become a culture of fear and safety” (2008, 84). Or, as journalist Ginger Strand wrote in the *New York Times*, “Hitchhiking didn’t die a natural death—it was murdered” (Strand 2012). In her article, Strand identifies the campaign against hitchhiking in the early 1950s as the beginning of the end of American hitchhiking. Furthermore, 1953 saw the release of the film *The Hitch-Hiker*, which depicted a murderous hitchhiker’s rampage and featured the tagline, “*Have you ever picked up a hitch-hiker? We guarantee you won’t after seeing this picture.*” Many hitchhikers wrote letters to the film’s production company voicing their concerns, as they felt the film’s release could radically alter their hitchhiking prospects. Not wishing to overstate the impact of the film, Parker suggests, “it is still quite possible the media effects of this sensationalist B film were minimal” (2008, 78); in all likelihood, *The Hitch-Hiker* constituted a single cornerstone within an increasingly pervasive cultural message. However, this message was certainly mounting in intensity during this period, as even Jack Kerouac became unnerved by the growing doctrine of roadside stranger danger. In his aforementioned article on hobos, Kerouac explained, “I myself was a hobo but I had to give it up around 1956 because of increasing television stories about the abominableness of strangers with packs passing through” (1960, 60).

Despite this trepidation, however, Kerouac ultimately glorified hitchhiking and road tripping more generally with the 1957 publication of *On the Road*. The novel, according to literary scholar Lars Erik Larson, “presents North American roads of the late 1940s as granting deliriously liberating social, sexual, philosophical, and spatial freedoms” (Larson 2009, 35). Though Sal Paradise (Kerouac’s protagonist) hitchhikes fairly infrequently, *On the Road* is often credited with galvanizing the youth hitchhiking movement of the ‘60s, and its influence appears to have resonated for generations of hitchhikers over the ensuing decades. Some hitchhikers interviewed for this thesis brought up *On the Road* as a primary motivation for hitchhiking. For example, after writing his undergraduate thesis on the novel in his home country of Italy, interviewee Osvaldo Croci (born 1951) travelled to America in hopes of mimicking Kerouac’s journey. He explained:

OC: And then at the time I was a student at the University of Venice, and I was doing the green American literature, and my thesis was on Jack Kerouac, so I decided that in my 3rd year I should kind of take a trip to the US, and [laughs] go through, you know, well basically repeat the experience, right? And so in the summer of ’73 I did that, and I hitchhiked through the US for three and a half months ...

AM: Do you think many people were inspired by *On the Road* to start hitchhiking?

OC: He was, when I was young, yeah, it was a very popular book among youth. It's not a great book, it's not a great novel, it's a turning point in, you know, it's an interesting—and it will be talked about a lot in literature courses, but I don't think it will remain as one of the greatest novels ever or anything like that. But it was popular, yes, it was definitely popular. So much so that this woman who just contacted me said, "I still have the book you gave me!" And I didn't even remember it, giving her a book of Kerouac, so. Certainly among hitchhikers it was well known, let's put it that way.

Another interviewed hitchhiker, Paula Graham (born 1986), explained that *On the Road* had inspired her as well. She commented, “I grew up reading Jack Kerouac and the sort of

Beat Generation kind of guys, and so I always wanted to hitchhike because I had this sort of romantic kind of view, that it was going to be this adventure and everything.”¹⁰

During the 1960s, hitchhiking in America became closely linked with this popularized narrative of adventure and self-discovery. The hippies were on the move, and hitchhiking was their chosen method of transportation. Jeremy Parker summarizes the 1960s youth hitchhiking movement in the following light:

In account after account, young hitchhikers claimed to have experienced vast spiritual changes and came to recognize the authentic humanity that still existed outside the suburban hell their parents’ postwar wealth had created. Such accounts served as a powerful siren song. It was a vision of travel that not only filled a spiritual void, but constituted a uniform rite of passage narrative that allowed young people to organize their experiences according to a legitimated youth narrative and to participate in youth community. (2008, 89)

Moreover, hitchhiking became associated with other political and counter-cultural ideals as well. Strand states, “It was the ‘60s and ‘70s counterculture that embraced hitching as an anti-consumerist, pro-environment celebration of human interdependence. Students were hitchhiking to antiwar demonstrations. Civil rights advocates thumbed rides to register voters in the South” (Strand 2012). However, the effort to curb hitchhiking in America returned during the 1970s, as the practice was outlawed in many areas of the States, and the narrative of fear began to dominate once again, “whether in response to any real threat to the capitalist system or otherwise” (Parker 2008, 94). This ideology of fear has remained more or less entrenched in the United States since that time. Parker’s

¹⁰ Greg Pike offered a more critical view of *On the Road*, and contrasted its portrayal of hitchhiking with his own experiences. He commented, “The funny thing is, you know, people for years and years said, ‘Oh, you must like Kerouac!’ I didn’t even read Kerouac. And when I finally got around to reading Kerouac after years of people saying, ‘You must love him!’ I was like no, this is crap, I don’t like this. Well not crap, but you know, it wasn’t *my* world of hitchhiking that I was reading about in his book. Yeah, it was different.”

thorough history of American hitchhiking sums this point up concisely, saying, “What is clearly known to drivers anecdotally, statistically, and experientially is that Americans do not hitchhike as they once did. It is not too strong a claim to say that hitchhiking as an activity and the hitchhiker are widely feared and avoided” (2008, 78). Though some hitchhikers are still thumbing their way through the States, the most widespread narrative surrounding hitchhiking in America these days is certainly one of fear and distrust.

In this overview, I have primarily focused on hitchhiking in its American context, partially because highway hitchhiking appears to have American origins, but also because of the influence of American media in Newfoundland and Cape Breton. Before I focus on my main region of study, however, I wish to briefly note some histories of hitchhiking in other countries as well. This is to avoid a depiction of America-as-default, and Newfoundland and Cape Breton as exceptions-to-the-norm. Judging from the global prevalence of “Vanishing Hitchhiker” legends, hitchhiking likely takes place all over the world (Galuska and Johnson 2007); here, I will mention just three other international contexts. In Poland, for example, the communist government legalized hitchhiking in 1957, and produced small “Hitchhiker’s Booklets” (*Książeczka Autostopwiczka*) to encourage the practice. These booklets contained tickets of standardized kilometre increments, which hitchhikers offered to drivers after travelling particular distances. Once drivers had acquired enough tickets, they “would send off these coupons to the Hitchhiker’s Action in order to collect a valuable prize like a washing machine or a refrigerator” (Bialski 2012, 14). During the 1960s and 1970s, then, approximately 30 000 hitchhikers were counted in Poland, and reports indicated that “95 percent of drivers accepted hitchhiking as something positive” (Czupryński 2005, quoted in Bialski 2012,

13-14). With the collapse of communism, however, the Hitchhiker's Action was scrapped, and hitchhiking became an informal practice in Poland once again.

In Cuba, on the other hand, hitchhiking “became essential” following the collapse of the Soviet Union, when “Soviet oil, the lifeblood of Cuba’s public transportation system, dried up after the Berlin Wall fell” (Newton 2015). To deal with this predicament, the Cuban government legislated the picking up of hitchhikers in government vehicles. That is, if government vehicles contain any empty passenger seats, drivers are required by law to fill those spots with hitchhikers. Folklorist Cory Thorne often picks up hitchhikers while spending time in Cuba, although he is not expected to do so as a tourist. In conversation, he stated that there are usually twenty people on every corner trying to hitchhike to work, and since almost everyone in Cuba is essentially “equally poor,” people working many different kinds of occupations are often found hitchhiking. Thorne has picked up police officers, doctors, and even a grandmother with four kids in tow while driving in Cuba. American writer David Eggers has also described the wide range of hitchhikers on the roads in Cuba. In a 1999 essay for *Time* magazine, Eggers wrote:

It had not been the plan at the outset but now is the mission, one thrust upon us—the picking up of people, because, as we learn soon enough, the most common roadside scenery in Cuba, besides the horse-drawn wagons and broken-down classic American cars, is its hitchhikers. The roads are littered with people everywhere, along the huge highways and two-laners, all strewn with mothers and their daughters, grandmothers, working men, soldiers, teenagers, schoolchildren in their white, white shirts and mustard-colored pants or skirts, day and night, in the rain or otherwise. All waiting. (Eggers 1999)

Finally, hitchhiking is quite popular these days with young Zionists on the West Bank of occupied Palestine. While some of these teenagers apparently hitchhike as a diversion from an otherwise regimented Orthodox lifestyle, this context of hitchhiking

ultimately seems much more divisive and hostile than many others. In his article “Hitchhiking and Ritual Ambiguity of Jewish Settlers in the West Bank” (2012), Nehemia Akiva Stern reports that “Jews never accept rides with Palestinians, and Palestinians never offer rides to Jews”; that people on the roads are “very attuned to accents,” so as to discern whether strangers are “Palestinian militant[s] in disguise”; and that “if at all possible” hitchhikers should “carry a firearm” as they travel (83). Moreover, Stern ultimately situates this hitchhiking “through hostile Palestinian spaces” (78) as a part of the larger Zionist project, stating that “Hitchhikers share a world where the political boundaries of the West Bank may be overcome, where everything ‘could be’ or perhaps ‘should be’ Israel proper” (84). While hitchhiking is often celebrated for its capacity to bridge human animosity, here the practice appears to deepen hostile attitudes towards marginalized populations. Though Stern also acknowledges the guilt some Israelis feel about occupying the West Bank (88), it is clear that in this case, hitchhiking reflects and likely augments highly fraught political tensions.

Although these examples of international hitchhiking may seem tangential, they also reveal the deeply contextual nature of hitchhiking. Depending on any number of factors, hitchhiking can be viewed as a symbol of kindness, democratic spirit, adventure, fear, solidarity, or political strife (amongst other notions) in a given location. Against this backdrop of potential hitchhiking connotations, then, I wish to situate my research more specifically. What factors led to the emergence of hitchhiking traditions in Newfoundland and Cape Breton? And how have perceptions of hitchhiking in these regions changed over time?

Hitchhiking in Newfoundland

Before the advent of train and highway infrastructure in the 20th century, Newfoundlanders of European ancestry primarily lived in coastal fishing communities. Although many communities were not connected by road until the mid-20th century¹¹, their commonly perceived isolation was largely abated by the sea, which linked the outports with both the rest of Newfoundland and the wider world. A coastal steamer service transported supplies and visitors around the island, while “a great many Newfoundlanders travelled regularly to Boston, New York, Halifax, and Montreal to buy and sell commodities” (Taft 1981, 29). Louis J. Chiaramonte's 1970 ethnography of an anonymized community on the south coast further highlights the regularity of transit between neighbouring coastal communities. In the summer, Chiaramonte writes, “an entire family may board the father's motor dory for a 'cruise' to an adjacent community on a Sunday afternoon, and young unmarried men and women will visit nearby communities almost every weekend. If, during the winter months, a big dance is held, two dories filled with teenagers might leave in the early part of Saturday evening” (1970, 7).

This emphasis on marine transportation is echoed in the way that Newfoundlanders appear to orient their own geography around the ocean, as people often tell one another that they are from a particular bay (such as Placentia Bay, Trinity Bay, Conception Bay, etc.) One MUNFLA essay reflects on this tendency, as student Franklin

¹¹ Some outport communities, such as those located on the south coast of the island, remain unconnected from any kind of automotive road system.

M. Clarke offers his recollections of conversing with other Newfoundlanders about his inland, railway-connected hometown. Clarke writes:

Not being an outport, Howley does not fit the pattern of most Newfoundland communities. How well I remember when I first left Howley as a young man of seventeen to make my own way in the world. People would ask me where I came from and I would tell them. "Howley?" they would say, "What bay is that in?" I could only explain that it was not in a bay at all and that it wasn't even close to the ocean. Many Newfoundlanders found this somewhat incomprehensible—a Newfie not connected with any bay! (Clarke 78-038, 1)

At the time, inland communities were an anomaly and a curiosity for many Newfoundlanders and, although the railway had existed for many years, people still seemed disposed towards travelling by sea. In terms of pre-automotive hitchhiking, then, it is unsurprising that Newfoundlanders have sought out lifts in boats over the years. As mentioned earlier, numerous stowaways slipped stealthily aboard vessels involved in the Newfoundland seal fishery (Ryan 1994, 227), and it seems probable that stowaways surfaced on other kinds of boats as well. In the Maritime History Archive's aforementioned article, the authors note the difficulties faced by stowaway researchers, as "no law required masters to keep a record of stowaways," and thus, "an unknown, and perhaps significant number [of stowaways] have not been recorded at all" (MHA 2011). Additionally, there is evidence suggesting that people sought permission, or hitchhiked, aboard smaller boats as well. One indication of this is described in "Six Weeks Hitch Hiking by Motor Boat," (1948) an article written by Kathleen Corry Hodgson, an American working for Sir Wilfred Grenfell's mission in Labrador and northern Newfoundland. Hodgson's task was to determine the "real situation" in White Bay (located on the eastern side of the Great Northern Peninsula), which had long been considered "the most poverty-stricken district in the Mission's territory" (1948, 12). To

do this, Hodgson travelled from outport to outport by hitching rides in fishermen's motorboats, and made notes on how the various communities were faring all the while. In sum, Hodgson wrote, "Altogether, I was away six weeks and travelled in 30 different boats and stayed in 19 fishermen's houses as well as a couple of merchants', and had meals in a dozen or so other houses" (13). Hodgson was likely more financially secure than many of the individuals granting her a lift, and she may have provided some remuneration for their troubles; Hodgson does note that during her journey from Sop's Island to Sop's Arm, she "was rowed across the two miles by two young fellows of 11 and 9, who thereby earned clothes to wear to school this winter" (13). Furthermore, Newfoundlanders may not have framed Hodgson's comings and goings as "hitchhiking" themselves. However, the apparent ease with which Hodgson journeyed from boat to boat suggests that her chosen method did not seem particularly unusual at the time.

Additionally, hitchhiking interviewee Stephen Lewis stated that during the '50s, his father hitchhiked ships regularly to travel between England and Newfoundland. To accomplish this, Lewis's father "would just go down to the wharf and ask around," though Lewis explained that "sometimes it would involve many rides, he would have to go to Montreal and then to Halifax or something like this, so it would take several ships to get him back to St. John's, many days." All in all, it seems clear that, as noted by folklorist Neil Rosenberg, "there has been a tendency to overemphasize the isolation of twentieth century outport culture" in Newfoundland (1981, 1).

As referred to in an earlier MUNFLA excerpt, at least one railway superintendent in Newfoundland was rather permissive about "letting passengers on freight trains" (Collins 10, 75-265). Another student paper, submitted by Elizabeth Stanley-Dalton in

1983, contains additional information about train-hopping in Newfoundland, although interestingly, Stanley-Dalton refers to the practice as “Hitchhiking via the Railway”. Stanley-Dalton’s paper is based on an interview with her mother Doris Stanley, who had lived in both Brighton and Clarendville, Newfoundland, at the time of the interview. She writes, “Apparently it was quite common for people to jump on a boxcar in St. John’s and take a trip wherever. For some it was just something to do, while others used it as a form of transportation. Many of these people would come knocking on doors looking for a bit to eat. Neither my mother or Nanny Stanley turn ever turned a soul away” (Stanley-Dalton, 82-386).

Newfoundlanders have also provided horse and buggy rides to one another over the years. While endeavouring to walk across the Newfoundland railroad track in 1925, future premier Joey Smallwood “got a lift by horse and wagon across the peninsula from Heart’s Content in Trinity Bay to Carbonear in Conception Bay” towards the end of his journey (Smallwood 1973, 158). And in more recent years (likely sometime during the ‘70s), interviewed hitchhiker Linda Samuels received a ride from a horse-drawn carriage on the southern shore. Samuels recalls:

So I walked from Port Kirwan out to the main road, it was by Renew’s or Fermeuse or some place, and I hitchhiked and finally this man picked me up with a pony and trap. So I’m like, in this snit, sitting in the back of a horse-drawn carriage [laughs], it just went clip, clop, clip, clop [laughs], going nowhere and finally after, oh, about ten minutes of that, I was just like, I’m never going to get back to St. John’s, so I thanked him and just walked back to Port Kirwan.

However, the vast majority of hitchhiking practiced by my interviewees has been enabled by the automobile. Judging by the results of my interviews, Newfoundlanders tended to feel relatively safe hitchhiking during the ‘60s and ‘70s, whether they were

hitchhiking along the highways or within their local communities. Samuels emphasized that “everybody used to do it [hitchhike] then as a way of getting around.” Another interviewee, Kevin Bassett (born 1951), commented:

Back then there wasn't a whole lot of vehicles, you know, like there is today, I mean anybody that wanted to go, like say a lot of people wanted to go to The Cove, they called it, Portugal Cove, so they'd hitchhike to Portugal Cove and back. And they'd go into St. John's, and you know, they'd hitchhike into St. John's and back, there were all kinds of hitchhikers on the road in them days, you know, all over the country. It was the thing to do.



Figure 4: Portrait of Kevin Bassett.

In their article "Residual Radicalism: Labour Song-Poems of Industrial Decline," Richard and Lachlan MacKinnon invoke Raymond Williams' "structure of feeling" concept to underpin their discussion of vernacular songs and poems in industrial Cape Breton. Structures of feeling, as developed by Williams, can be distinguished "from more formal concepts of 'world view' or 'ideology,'" and are "concerned with meanings and

values as they are actually lived and felt" (Williams 1977, 132, quoted in MacKinnon and MacKinnon 2012, 273). In MUNFLA, two archived songs about hitchhiking may help illustrate the "structures of feeling" underscoring hitchhiking traditions in Newfoundland during this period. First, Eldred Mesher's song "The Lone Hitchhiking Man," included in Marion Bowman's 1978 recording of the "Good Entertainment II 'Folklife Festival,'" (78-361/C4389B) tells the tale of a hitchhiker who, after hitchhiking throughout the rest of Canada finally arrives in Newfoundland, where "The people are so friendly, happy and so kind/to the lone hitchhiking man who leaves them far behind." Mesher does not elaborate much beyond this theme, and the song mainly serves as a tribute to the friendly people of Newfoundland. The second song, "The Hitch Hiker," composed by Rose Whiffen from Southern Harbour, Placentia Bay, and included in student Lucille Teresa Singleton's recording from 1978 (78-190/C4533 and C4668), recounts a more complicated hitchhiking moment. Two women drive by the hitchhiker, a young girl hitchhiking in winter, but opt against picking her up, reasoning, "She just can't be a working girl, or she wouldn't have to thumb/She may be a criminal, I'm sure she is a bum." Cars continually pass the hitchhiker by. Meanwhile, however, "the ice [is] clinging faster to her ragged clothes." Eventually, the girl freezes to death. She is found with a serene smile across her face, and is ultimately depicted as an angel hitchhiking in heaven. The song closes with an appeal to the listener:

*So never condemn those people who thumb their way along,
 You know they are all God's children, so why should you treat them wrong?
 Now folks, please take warning as you drive along,
 Whenever you pass a hitchhiker, remember the words of my song.*

Whiffen's song communicates the virtues of picking up hitchhikers, and emphasizes the tragedies that may arise from leaving strangers on the road—even those strangers who seem like bums or criminals. Although Rose Whiffen's music never became widely known, in her interview she stated that of all her songs, "The Hitch Hiker" received the most requests from people in her community (78-190, C4533 and C4668). Possibly, the lyrics of the song struck a chord with her listeners. However, while Whiffen's song promotes a positive, charitable view of hitchhiking, the story it tells also responds to hitchhiking fears and suspicions. This suggests that while some Newfoundlanders may have hitchhiked gladly during this time, a measure of fear was likely present nonetheless.

In December 1981, however, the province was rocked by the murder of fourteen-year-old Dana Bradley, who was hitchhiking home from school at the time of her disappearance. In his account of the murder, *Hitching a Ride: The Unsolved Murder of Dana Bradley*, Darrin McGrath writes that during this period, "It was normal for students to come out of I.J. Samson school [in St. John's], walk down Bennett Avenue to Lemarchant Road and 'put the thumb out.' Students took the first ride that came along, whether it was the bus or a car that stopped" (McGrath 2003, 6). It is strongly suspected that Dana Bradley was murdered by the driver who picked her up hitchhiking, and though her disappearance dominated the news for months (or rather, years; her photo was featured on the July 2015 cover of *The Herald*), the culprit has continued to elude prosecution. Bradley's murder was referred to as a "savage crime foreign to Newfoundland" by the editor of *The Daily News* (quoted in McGrath 2003, 62), and at the time, her family received approximately 600 sympathy cards from people across the

island. McGrath asked Constable Christine MacNaughton, who worked on the case, why the crime generated so much interest. She replied:

This was the murder of an innocent 14-year old girl in Newfoundland, just prior to Christmastime. ... hitchhiking was not uncommon at that time, and this community was shocked as people realized that this could have happened to one of their children. It shattered local people's notions of the safety of where they lived. This was a presumed abduction and murder of an innocent teenager, and it made many families feel vulnerable. We here in Newfoundland don't want to think this type of crime could happen. (McGrath 2003, 143)

I asked some interviewees who lived in Newfoundland at the time of the murder for their thoughts on the case. Regrettably (and perhaps significantly), none of the female hitchhikers I interviewed belong to this particular demographic. The following observations are therefore limited to a male point of view. John Drover commented, "It probably meant that females never hitchhiked ever again. And it probably meant that parents were probably a little more discouraging towards children hitchhiking, men or women. But you know, it was an isolated case. It wasn't part of a serial problem." Stephen Lewis described the murder as "absolutely infamous" and "a major shocker," and while he feels that "these things almost never happen," he also stated, "the emotional import and the media value of something like that is enormous." David Sorensen, another hitchhiking interviewee, revealed that his female partner had been friends with Dana Bradley. Sorensen commented, "They were friends, and so actually that really informed her view, when you talk about safety and how you view the world, I think that sort of altered her view of how safe the world was." However, though Sorensen himself hitchhiked after Bradley's murder, he didn't "recall that ever having an impact on how I approached hitchhiking or picking up hitchhikers," which he partially links to his sense of physical security of "being 6'3 and almost 200 pounds." Another male hitchhiker, Lloyd

Pike, who typically hitchhiked between St. John's and his hometown of Stephenville, said that he didn't worry too much about the incident while hitchhiking. He said, "I remember the Dana Bradley story, but that was kind of different, that was here in town." In other words, Pike may have felt concerned while hitchhiking within city limits, but on the provincial highway, he felt relatively safe.

Even though some interviewees hitchhiked as children in rural Newfoundland after Dana Bradley's murder, and others felt relatively undaunted by the incident, hitchhiking in Newfoundland still appears to have slowly declined since Bradley's disappearance. David Sorensen stated, "In the late '90s and certainly in the last fifteen years, I don't recall seeing that many hitchhikers on the highway, not the way it used to be ... at least on the Crossroads outside St. John's, it was not unusual to see two or three, four groups of people hitchhiking." There are varying theories about why this could be. Sorensen posited that rising affluence and increasing car ownership might help explain the decline of hitchhiking, while Kevin Bassett feels that "People don't have the values they had back then, you know? I mean, I'm not saying people are bad now, but back then there was more of a culture of support for someone else in trouble than there is today, you know." Furthermore, undergraduate students have submitted at least eleven local iterations of the Vanishing Hitchhiker legend to MUNFLA since 2004. This may suggest that hitchhiking continues to provoke anxiety and fear in the province.

In spite of these factors, hitchhiking in Newfoundland has evidently continued in some respect. Some interviewees stated that they feel more comfortable hitchhiking in the province than in other places. For instance, Chloe Edbrooke (born 1989 in Vancouver, B.C.) hitchhiked for the first time in Newfoundland with her sister, partially because "we

heard that people were friendly on the east coast, so it seemed safer than trying it on the west coast [of Canada] where we were coming from.” In a similar vein, Paula Graham felt that Newfoundland was “probably a good place to try hitchhiking, like I don’t hear, there’s no Highway of Tears here, you know? ... I don’t think I’d hitchhike outside of Atlantic Canada.” The island is also depicted as a friendly oasis of hitchhiking in journalist John Stackhouse’s cross-Canada hitchhiking odyssey, *Timbit Nation: A Hitchhiker’s View of Canada*. On his arrival in Newfoundland, Stackhouse writes:

The next morning, I began to notice that more than movie tastes separated Newfoundland from the rest of Canada. As I walked from my hotel to the side of the Trans-Canada, cars stopped to let me cross the open road. Several times, drivers waved to me, like we were long-lost friends. I wasn’t on the roadside a few minutes when a GMC pickup truck pulled over, its driver nodding for me to climb in. Other hitchhikers had told me that Newfoundland would be a cinch, like Alberta was to the Alliance Party, and I was beginning to think they were right. (2003, 86)

However, not everyone shares this rosy point of view. Peter Smith (born 1986 in Dunville, Newfoundland) stated, “I hate hitchhiking in Newfoundland, honestly, because I just find it takes forever to get across, and people don’t pick you up very easily. And just going between Montreal and Quebec City, for instance, I’ve never had trouble, or even [between] Edmonton and Calgary.” In other words, he didn’t feel that hitchhiking was any easier in Newfoundland than in other areas of Canada. Interviewee Shagg Burrige (born 1982 in Deer Lake, Newfoundland) also felt that Newfoundlanders were slightly skittish about picking up hitchhikers. He commented:

I think Newfoundlanders are quite generous, but also a little xenophobic, which you know, just because they don’t know that person on the side of the road, there’s a bit of fear. And you know, I think in general—I have a feeling that in previous decades people weren’t so afraid of hitchhikers. For some reason, there seems to be a lot of horror stories about things happening, which I’ve never heard from anyone I actually know, but just these urban myths, I guess. And so I think a lot of Newfoundlanders probably, when they pass somebody on the road, want to pick them up in a way, but just have some kind of

hesitation. So even though I think Newfoundlanders are very generous and welcoming, I don't find it easier here than anywhere else to hitchhike.

Hitchhiking in Cape Breton

As in Newfoundland, Europeans initially settled on Cape Breton in a series of coastal communities, and mainly relied on marine transportation to travel between settlements. As noted by Jim and Pat Lotz in *Cape Breton Island* (1974), there were “no more than ten miles of passable roads” on the island in 1800 and thus, “until after the middle of the nineteenth century, the poor roads on the island kept Cape Bretoners apart, especially in winter” (81). Roads and bridges began to improve after Cape Breton re-joined Nova Scotia in 1820, but the island continued to rely on the provincial ferry service. In 1880, fifteen ferries were in circulation on the island. By 1952, however, the lake and coastal steamer boats had ceased operations (Lotz and Lotz 1974, 83). According to the Lotzes, these ships are remembered with much nostalgia by Cape Bretoners (73-74).

Meanwhile, construction began on Cape Breton's first railway around 1829. The first fifty years of Cape Breton's railways centred on the shipping of coal from the coal mines, but by 1879, at least one mining company had begun inviting passengers aboard. As the railways were still primarily intended to support the mines, most of these passengers were likely miners and other company employees, heading back and forth to work at no additional cost (MacDonald 2012, 111). Gradually, however, “express” trains dedicated to passenger service began connecting communities in industrial Cape Breton, standing in contrast with the “hobo” or “man trains,” which, as explained by historian

Herb MacDonald, “took miners to and from their shifts in the pits” (2012, 116).

Regarding the etymology of the “hobo train” name, MacDonald notes the following:

Two interesting and unanswered questions about the hobo trains are why and exactly when they acquired the ‘hobo’ name. The name appears to have emerged during the 1920s and was certainly a transfer of the term ‘hobo’ that was given to ‘travellers’ who often took free (and illegal) rides on trains. It is unknown if the hobo trains were given their name by those who travelled in them, by S&L [Sydney and Louisbourg Railway] employees, or by someone from outside the mining-railway community. (MacDonald 2012, 117)

Although MacDonald allows that many miners travelled as “non-revenue passengers” aboard trains in Cape Breton, and he also acknowledges the prevalence of train-hopping across North America, he does not make definitive statements about train-hopping in Cape Breton, explaining that “there are reports on passenger revenue but no way to determine how many of the people reported as riding the trains were ‘revenue passengers’ as opposed to ‘deadheads,’ as free riders are often called in the world of transportation” (MacDonald 2012, 111). However, the naming of the “hobo” train certainly suggests that train-hopping, or “hoboing,” was a known custom amongst Cape Bretoners, and the memories of Peter Willy Murphy, the aforementioned train-hopper kicked off a Cape Breton train, surely provide evidence of the practice. In his interview with Elizabeth Beaton, Murphy explained that since his parents were unable to provide him with a set of school clothes, he was prevented from attending classes. He continued:

The result of it was every chance I got, I got away from it—and I did. I went sailing first. I was around 13. The English boats were plentiful around here then. Coal from Cape Breton to Montreal, back to Bell Isle, iron, back to Whitney Pier. But I was underage and my parents came down and took me off. Begged me to go back to school. So I did. Went back to school for a couple of years but then—it was in the summer. The harvest trains were running. Hoboing seemed to be the popular thing. (Murphy 1976)

Evidently, Murphy began his hobo trajectory aboard boats (though whether he was a stowaway, an acknowledged worker, or a pre-automotive hitchhiker remains a mystery),

and later moved on to train-hopping, which was the “popular thing” in his day. Later in the interview, Murphy describes how to hop trains with more specificity. He explains, “For hoboing you wear high gloves, very high gloves, strong gloves. For jumping and scuffing in the ashes, see. See, you’d jump, but you wouldn’t always land on your feet” (Murphy 1976). As concluded by Herb MacDonald, “In the years before the option of hitchhiking on the highways, an illegal ride of a freight train was a possibility for a hobo willing to accept the risks involved” (2012, 127). Given the poverty endured in Cape Breton at the time, it seems possible that, like Peter Willy Murphy, many people may have been tempted to take their chances on train-hopping.

According to the Lotzes, automobiles and trucks arrived in the Margaree area of Cape Breton around 1917-1918 (1974, 82). The Cabot Trail was initially completed in 1932, but was not paved until 1954-1961 (Lotz and Lotz 1974, 82-83). However, automobiles became more and more common in Cape Breton during the 1960s and, as noted by Herb MacDonald, from then on “much of the public investment in highways and airports was at the expense of the railway network. This was especially true in Eastern Canada and the more rural areas of the rest of the country” (2012, 196). Moreover, the creation of the Canso Causeway (linking Cape Breton to the rest of Nova Scotia) in 1955 furthered the appeal of highway transport off the island (MacDonald 2012, 197). Finally, in 1990 the national VIA rail connection from Sydney to Halifax was terminated. Throughout this transportation evolution, the impulse to hop trains may have shifted towards a focus on highway hitchhiking.

All seven of my interviews with Cape Breton hitchhikers took place in the Cape Breton Regional Municipality (CBRM), an amalgamated region encompassing the

communities of Sydney, Glace Bay, Sydney Mines, New Waterford, North Sydney, Dominion, Louisbourg, and the Municipality of the County of Cape Breton. Of these interviews, five were with individuals who grew up in the CBRM (in the respective communities of Sydney, Glace Bay, Sydney River, New Waterford and Louisbourg), one was with Rose Westbury, a woman from Ingonish, Cape Breton, and the last was with Amber Tapley, who hails from northern New Brunswick. The six interviewees who grew up in Cape Breton all hitchhiked around their communities as either children or teenagers, which was evidently a common occurrence in those days. Rose Westbury (born 1958) recalled that during her childhood, her parents often picked up hitchhikers on the roads, and would “get to know them, help them out if they were camping and it was raining, take them home, dry them out. Give them some food, a place to stay for the night.” She continued, saying, “I guess that kind of rubbed off on me.”

Many interviewees highlighted the hospitality and warmth extended by Cape Bretoners towards hitchhikers. This commentary certainly aligns with my own experiences hitchhiking around the island in 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2015. My memory could be deceiving me, but I can’t remember waiting longer than an hour for a ride. As an example of the generosity I’ve been lucky to receive in Cape Breton, I will quote from my hitchhiking field notes from 2015, where I describe a brief (though fairly banal) hitchhiking interaction, just outside of Sydney, Cape Breton:

Fawn [our previous driver] left us at a turn-off before long (she was on her way home), and as soon as we stuck out our thumbs a young guy, probably in his twenties, stopped for us. He was about to take the same turn-off as Fawn, but he said, “What day is it? Monday? I feel bad about leaving you!” He seemed to seriously consider driving 50 km out of his way to bring us to Baddeck. We told him not to worry, but he insisted, saying, “I’ll call my sister, she might be driving to Baddeck later.” His concern was very

endearing, but we told him again not to worry, and that we thought we'd get a ride before too long. He drove away and about five minutes later, another car stopped for us.

Amber Tapley (born 1983) has had similarly positive experiences while hitchhiking in Cape Breton. She commented, "Cape Breton, I feel like people are really friendly, I've never had a hard time getting a ride in Cape Breton. It's always been really, really easy." John MacNeil agreed that Cape Bretoners are quite hospitable towards hitchhikers as well, though he clarified that in his view, this trait is not necessarily unique to Cape Breton. He said:

I wouldn't categorize Cape Bretoners any more than Maritimers, you know, PEI's the same thing, Newfoundland is the same thing—although there's a little difference, sometimes. In PEI they'll take you where you want to go. They'll do that in Cape Breton, but if you're stuck, they'll put you up in the bed at their place at night. And in Newfoundland, they'll ask you to stay a week. [laughs] You know what I mean? That's the way people are in those cultures, you know, the communities. And that's kind of a treat, here. Anybody that I've known that's from away, who hitchhikes, they can't believe that people are the way they are to them that way, you know.

However, interviewee Gary Ledrew (born 1942) stated quite adamantly that, in his view, Cape Bretoners fail to extend this courtesy towards First Nations' hitchhikers. In Ledrew's words:

And in Cape Breton I'm very, very, oh, almost disgusted with Cape Bretoners and their bigotry towards Indians, because they very rarely pick up Indians. When I first came back down here, just before I moved, I was down on vacation, and I picked up one poor Indian kid who was trying to get to New England to pick berries, which they had a good, you know, good job, and starting to make some money, and I actually ended up—because the way I was going, I had to go to Inverness off the main highway—and I ended up picking up this same kid three times, because he couldn't get a ride. You know, and he told me Cape Bretoners just would not pick him up. You know, very disturbing. And just a few months ago, on a really cold winter night, and I was coming home at 11 o'clock, and here's two poor Indian kids, young men, you know, around 20 or whatever, just trying to hitchhike out of a bus shelter in the middle of town, and nobody would pick them up. One

of them even had a broken leg, was in a cast, and I picked them up and took them out on the highway, they were from Eskasoni.¹²

Later in the interview, Ledrew elaborated on the subject, saying, "Cape Bretoners are almost as good as Newfies at being open and friendly and warm, but they really have a thing against Indians." Unfortunately, I did not interview any First Nations' hitchhikers in the area for this thesis, which is certainly a limitation to this discussion. However, other interviewees did mention their encounters with First Nations' individuals while hitchhiking. Amber Tapley, for example, spoke of her fondness for one Mi'kmaq man who picked her up in Cape Breton, and whom she has met with unexpectedly on subsequent occasions. John MacNeil also offered the following thought:

I'm going to tell you something. I don't know if it's right to stereotype. But you know in Cape Breton, the First Nations, the Aboriginal or the native people are better to pick you up. They never want to see anybody stranded. I don't know whether it's from their experience where a lot of them were stranded trying to hitchhike or not. And you know, the personnel that hitchhike, most of them are male. But when there's a female, and they're alone, a lot of the time they're native persons. And they're good to hitchhike. Because they're not afraid of how they put themselves at risk, or at least they seem to know how to deal with it in their head as well as in their heart. That's my take on it.

It is worth observing that, as Richard MacKinnon notes, "Cape Breton Island is populated by numerous ethnic groups ranging from Irish, Scottish, Mi'kmaq and French Acadian, to American, English, West Indian, Ukrainian, Polish and Italian, to name a few" (2009, 167). Despite this relative diversity, however, the provincial government has clearly opted to herald the "Scottishness" of Cape Breton above all else and, while approximately 50,000 immigrants did arrive from the Scottish Highlands during the 19th

¹² The Eskasoni First Nation is a band government of the Mi'kmaq encompassing three communities, all of which are located 40-62 km from Sydney, Cape Breton.

century (the descendants of whom constitute about 43% of the island¹³), historian Ian McKay has shown how state-sanctioned notions of Cape Breton Scottishness were constructed during the 20th century in numerous scholarly works (McKay 1992; 1993; 1994). This presentation of Scottish heritage continues to dominate the tourist attractions and overall nomenclature of the island. While hitchhiking on the Cabot Trail, for example, one can navigate by way of Gaelic road signs, or diverge onto the "Ceilidh Trail," a highway named after the Gaelic term for a small get-together, which, as discussed by MacKinnon, has in recent years "become synonymous with a large, touristic gathering" (2009, 171). Elsewhere on the island, one can visit St. Ann's Gaelic College, or observe a traditional milling frolic at the open-air Highland Village museum in Iona, Cape Breton. Although some ethnic groups, like the Acadians, are represented by tourist destinations such as the Fortress of Louisbourg, MacKinnon points out that "in Cape Breton, the Mi'kmaq have no open-air or folk museum devoted to their folkways. In fact, there is almost a complete avoidance of their presence in many museums and in much of our tourist literature, even though there are numerous settlements on the island" (2009, 180). In *Marxism and Literature*, Raymond Williams writes that "at a deeper level the hegemonic sense of tradition is always the most active: [it is] a deliberately selective and connecting process which offers a historical and cultural ratification of a contemporary order" (Williams 1977, 116). Williams further explains that in a given culture, "Certain meanings and practices are selected for emphasis and certain other meanings and

¹³ See StatsCan 2011 National Household Survey for Cape Breton [http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/fogs-spg/Pages/FOG.cfm?lang=E&level=4&GeoCode=1217030] (Statistics Canada, 2016).

practices are neglected or excluded. Yet, within a particular hegemony, and as one of its decisive processes, this selection is presented and usually successfully passed off as ‘the tradition’, ‘*the significant past*’ (115-116, emphasis in original). It seems clear that the Cape Breton hegemony, in all its complexities, vastly privileges Scottish heritage over that of other ethnic groups, and that this privilege is especially apparent when considering the Mi’kmaq population. While this discussion of cultural representation in Cape Breton may seem more structural or abstract than is necessary, especially in attempting to account for Ledrew’s allegations of hitchhiking prejudice, it is important to note that, as Williams points out, “a lived hegemony is always a process. It is not, except analytically, a system or a structure”; in other words, hegemony is constituted by everyday interaction, and should be recognized as “a realized complex of experiences, relationships, and activities, with specific and changing pressures and limits” (112). Government officials, cultural workers, and drivers on the road, along with many other entities in a given society, are all actively embedded in these processes.

I am not aware of any Cape Breton hitchhiking tragedies that circulate as forcefully as the murder of Dana Bradley in Newfoundland. Instead, the most infamous Cape Breton hitchhiking story seems to be that of David Wall, a Cape Breton man who, in 1979, allegedly shared his idea for *Trivial Pursuit* while hitching a ride with Chris Haney, one of the quiz game’s co-creators. Wall sued Haney for stealing his great idea, and though the case ended up in Supreme Court, Wall’s lawsuit was ultimately dismissed after a thirteen-year court battle. In his 182-page decision, Supreme Court Judge David MacAdam wrote, “I have no doubt that Wall had an interest in trivia, at least sports trivia ... However, the cumulative evidence of the alleged encounter with the individual

defendant is so marked with inconsistencies and contradictions as not to be credible” (quoted in Alphonso 2007). Many Cape Bretoners mentioned this case to me as a potential topic of interest. In my online appeal for Cape Breton interviewees, forum respondent Mathew Georghiou described the incident as “the most famous hitchhiking story I know in Cape Breton.”

This is not to say that Cape Bretoners are incapable of hitchhiking malevolence. In fact, my newspaper research revealed a horrific case from 1985, where two teenage hitchhikers from Sydney, Cape Breton held up and killed a Guelph, Ontario woman who had picked them up hitchhiking (*The Montreal Gazette*, 1985). However, this crime was not brought up during any of my interviews or hitchhiking-related conversations with Cape Bretoners. Rose Westbury stated that any horror stories she’d heard about hitchhiking had occurred off the island, “mainly when you’d leave Cape Breton, you know. Picked up in Cape Breton, but it’s when they’re out on the road, or you know, on their way to the mainland or a little further that they’ve had trouble.”¹⁴ Westbury continued to state that since “everybody knows everybody,” people in Cape Breton might hesitate to commit serious crimes against one another. However, she then paused, saying, “But then again, there’s so many transients around here, so many people passing through, tourist-wise, that could still, you know, be not so nice.”

Westbury is an exceptionally kind and compassionate woman who has picked up many visitors and local hitchhikers, some of whom were going through very difficult

¹⁴ The aforementioned crime could potentially fit into this category, as the driver was actually murdered in Quebec. Additionally, I have not unearthed any evidence that contradicts Westbury’s perception.

situations. The hitchhiking narratives she relayed all conveyed her generous and openhearted spirit. Nonetheless, the notion of Cape Breton as a safe haven from hitchhiking criminality (barring the possible misdeeds of interloping mainlanders), accurate as it may be, also speaks to a larger folklore concerning the risks posed by strangers, transients, and CFAs (Come-From-Aways), a term likely coined by Ray Guy, and which is in popular usage in both Cape Breton and Newfoundland. For example, in *Once Upon a Virus*, Diane Goldstein traces the emergence of contemporary legends in Newfoundland during the '80s, which "continually depict[ed] AIDS as a mainland disease ... Even in those cases in which the victim did not go to the mainland and contract the virus, mainlanders came to them" (Goldstein 2004, 105-106). Further, in her book *Vaccinations and Public Concern in History: Legend, Rumor, and Risk Perception* (2012), folklorist Andrea Kitta examines a Newfoundland legend she calls the "Doctor from Toronto" narrative, wherein "a doctor in Toronto calls child protection services and has the child taken away from its parents when they refuse to vaccinate" (97). Kitta attempted to discern the truth of this legend, and found no evidence that such an incident had ever occurred. However, that some Newfoundlanders believed such shocking repercussions *would* transpire on the mainland, and that the legend circulated with persistence in St. John's "refer[s] to a long-standing tradition of jokes which express the tension between Newfoundlanders and mainlanders" (Kitta 2012, 98). In her book, Goldstein writes that Newfoundlanders "had good reason to distrust authority figures, cultural elites, and foreigners ... confederation, resettlement, weak resource management and poverty contributed to that sense of distrust, but centuries of isolation had also built a culture that looked inward for support and was wary of outsiders and those in positions of

political power” (Goldstein 2004, 15). Similarly, John MacNeil explained Cape Bretoners’ distrust towards mainlanders and those from “away” as a result of exploitation in the area, both at the hands of the “greed merchants” and an indifferent, unappreciative Canadian populace. He stated:

I mean, I remember, I worked on the steel plant. I never went down underground, but I remember the codes and the work ethic, and you know, those people that worked those jobs, in those times in the ‘50s through the ‘70s—the rest of Canada never appreciated all that they did, I mean, and how they held up the country, basically. It's from this part of the world. This was where the best steel in the world was made, right in Sydney. Better than it was in Hamilton, even. You know, people in Hamilton smartened up. And of course, all that stuff went in the tank when the greed merchants got too busy. And we allowed it to happen, and that's where you get the bad expressions that people always use, like, "Oh, he's from away," – the guy that was running the company, "he took the money and ran," you know, that kind of stuff. You're going to run into that, no matter what.

In this interview excerpt, McNeil is referring to the power wielded by the steelmaking and coal-mining industries in Cape Breton, which dominated employment in the region from the late 19th century until around 2001. It should also be noted that these industries have precipitated a great deal of suffering in the region. In their book *Frederick Street: Life and Death on Canada's Love Canal* (2000), Elizabeth May and Maude Barlow deftly chronicle the environmental destruction and health consequences (including significantly higher cancer rates) wrought by the mining and steelmaking industries in the area. Joe MacPherson also spoke movingly in his interview about the injuries, deaths, and other types of human suffering caused by the working conditions of the mines:

AM: Could you—I mean, I know there's all kinds of reasons, but I'm just curious about why you didn't want to work in the coal mine.

JM: There was too much disaster that already happened. There was too much, I saw what it did to my father. I saw what it did to all my neighbours and friends and uncles. I saw, too, that I was afraid of underground. I didn't want to work underground. Like when I worked at the mine in Flin Flon, I worked on the surface in a smelter, and that was dangerous. After seeing that, even as it was surface work and it was dangerous, I'm thinking, I'll never go in a coal mine. And there were too many people that were maimed and hurt and killed, like I saw neighbours and friends and relatives that were killed, and I was willing to work in the industry, but not underground. And where we sit here right

now, we've got criss-crossed coal seams and tunnels all over this entire community. I didn't want to be, after looking out for my freedom and trying to get across the country with my thumb, I wasn't going to impose myself into a coal mine.

With all that said, many Cape Bretoners remain nostalgic about their industrial past. Although these were highly hazardous jobs, which introduced many toxins, affecting human and environmental health, they were, at least, *jobs*, and such jobs helped foster a more or less equal socioeconomic structure in the area. There is also a long history of labour protest and solidarity in the CBRM, which has been celebrated and is widely commemorated in a series of monuments throughout the region (MacKinnon 2013; MacKinnon and MacKinnon 2012). During our interview, John MacNeil brought up a comment he'd heard while hitching a ride with an eighty-six-year-old woman in the area, saying, "And she said to me, we were coming through South Bar, she said, 'You know, when they closed down the mines and stopped the steel plant, they killed the culture.' And I mean, that was her philosophical statement, but by God it was telling."

At first glance, an outsider might question the reasoning behind such an indictment. The Sydney Tar Ponds, a steel plant-induced, infamously toxic waste site, was remediated in 2013, and its residue is currently buried beneath a large, recreational green space. The orange haze, cancer-causing toxins, and odours of rotten eggs long associated with the industrial areas have all largely dissipated. However, the sentiment voiced by this eighty-six-year-old woman also speaks to the unemployment, high incidence of drug use, and overall inequality currently endured by the residents of a

deindustrialized Cape Breton.¹⁵ Many of my Cape Breton interviewees connected these issues to the hitchhiking that takes place in the CBRM these days. When asked whether she felt people were afraid of picking up hitchhikers, interviewee Laurie Burns replied:

There's a lot that are afraid, because of the way everything— what's going on and that. I can understand, though, there's a lot of young guys out there that are grabbing people for drug money and stuff, you know. So I can understand them being afraid, you know. It's not as easy today as it was twenty years ago, per se, to get a ride. But I usually don't have trouble.

Gary Ledrew provided another perspective of contemporary hitchhiking in Cape Breton, saying:

Mostly it's like everybody else, too poor, can't afford anything else, really, and stuck doing that, you know. That's pretty well the same all over Cape Breton, I think, it's one of those things—I know my friends in Ontario just have no idea how poor Cape Breton is, I mean, everybody lives from welfare cheque or paycheque to paycheque, and that's it.

Amber had a similar view of how hitchhiking currently takes place in the CBRM, which she distinguished from hitchhiking in other, more scenic areas of the island:

AT: Here I find most of the people I pick up are just kind of going from one community to the next, like they're not going long distances. And they're always really sweet, but yeah, nothing really extraordinary, just people going from New Waterford to Sydney, or Sydney to Glace Bay.

AM: Do you think there's kind of a difference between the people hitchhiking over longer distances and those hitchhikers?

AT: I think there's usually a difference in age, for sure. I mean most of the people, most of my friends that would hitchhike, we were all younger, we were in our twenties. And I do see a lot of people, a lot of young people kind of hitchhiking from Nyanza to Sydney, or Nyanza to Baddeck, which are small distances. But most of the people I pick up here, yeah, they're older people, just kind of don't have a car, the bus system is terrible here, the transit's not great. And so yeah, they're just older folks that don't drive, or can't afford a car, yeah, so it's kind of a different—it's more out of necessity than the desire for a grand adventure somewhere into the unknown.

¹⁵ For a depiction of drug addiction in the former coal mining town of Glace Bay, see Nance Ackerman's *Cottonland* (2006), a National Film Board documentary on the topic [<https://www.nfb.ca/film/cottonland/>]. In the summer of 2015, several Glace Bay teenagers assured me that the film remains true to life.

Short-distance Hitchhiking

Short-distance hitchhiking, as defined earlier in this thesis, is intended to describe hitchhiking as a means of traveling within and around one's local community. In the previous interview excerpts, Gary emphasized that local hitchhikers are "stuck doing that," and "can't afford anything else, really," while Amber sensed that the hitchhikers she picks up in the CBRM are primarily motivated by necessity, rather than "the desire for a grand adventure somewhere into the unknown." In many ways, this correlation of short-distance hitchhiking with utilitarian needs, and long-distance hitchhiking with fulfilling adventurous/recreational aims seems to hold up. However, much of the short-distance hitchhiking reported by my interviewees was actually undertaken for recreational purposes. In large part, this is probably because I only interviewed two hitchhikers who presently hitchhike as adults around their local communities. Most of the time, people brought up short-distance hitchhiking in response to the question "When did you first hitchhike?", which often elicited memories of hitchhiking short distances as teenagers in search of something (anything!) to do. At the same time, however, these younger hitchhikers likely lacked the means to realize their recreational pursuits without hitchhiking for a variety of reasons, such as lack of public transit, lack of money for public transit, not being of legal driving age, or having parents who were too busy or were otherwise unwilling to chauffeur their offspring around. Hitchhiking may have emerged as a viable solution to any of these practical dilemmas. Additionally, some interviewees who hitchhiked as teenagers, and others who continue to hitchhike locally as adults do so as a means of travelling to school or to work. All in all, though, my fieldwork does not suggest that short-distance hitchhiking is an especially utilitarian endeavour. However, as

some people in this study do avail of short-distance hitchhiking to accomplish mandatory tasks in the context of daily life, such as visiting the hospital or going to work, it is clear that short-distance hitchhiking does play a critical role in many people's lives. In that sense, short-distance hitchhiking does seem eminently more practical than long-distance hitchhiking.

So, why have the individuals in this study hitchhiked around their local communities? Laura Ryan (born 1989) began hitchhiking to work from her hometown of Bellevue Beach to the fish plant in Chance Cove at age twelve. Usually she could get a ride with her parents, "but every now and again," she said, "maybe once or twice a week, I'd have to hitchhike to work, because I had no other way to get there." David Sorensen also hitchhiked to his summer job in Butter Pot Park from St. John's during the early '80s, which he described as a "really dependable" form of transit. Both Chad Griffiths and Peter Smith hitchhiked around the Placentia Bay area to go swimming and to visit friends in nearby communities. Occasionally, Peter also hitchhiked to school after missing the bus. Tom Hawco (born 1951) began hitchhiking around age thirteen or fourteen, and mainly hitchhiked "between the communities in Conception Bay Central, between Chapel's Cove, Harbour Main, Holyrood, Avondale, those communities. Weekends, mostly, going to snack bars, that's what we did." He said that many young people hitchhiked in that area when he was young, but that "Even in recent years, you'd see kids swimming in those areas, and they'd hitchhike home ... I've seen that as well." John MacNeil often hitchhiked to dances when he was young. He remembered, "When we grew up in Cape Breton, you wanted to go somewhere like a dance or something, it was always quite a distance. Best way to get there was on the golden thumb." These days,

John MacNeil continues to hitchhike around the CBRM on a regular basis. His roommate, Laurie Burns, also hitchhikes in a similar manner. Joyce Babbitt (born 1955) hitchhiked between communities in the CBRM as a teenager as well and, as she explained it, “It was just utilitarian, it was just to get from one place to the other.” Another hitchhiking interviewee, Rose Westbury, used to hitchhike with friends to nearby shops as a teenager in Cape Breton, and commented, “Well, I think the more rural an area that you’re living in, definitely you had no choice. Really, hardly any of us had vehicles back then. Especially—you know, or anybody to take us. Mom’s home taking care of the kids and Dad was off to work. You wanted to go somewhere, you either walked or you hitchhiked.”

Joan Butler (born 1958) began hitchhiking around her hometown of Kelligrews, Newfoundland around age thirteen. There was a bus line in the area, but as Joan explained it, “As we got older we didn’t want to spend money or wait for the bus, so we started to get into hitchhiking.” Sometimes she hitchhiked home from school, sometimes she hitchhiked to visit her friends, and sometimes she hitchhiked to nearby nightclubs. She commented:

If I wanted to go out on a Friday night and I was sixteen years old and I wanted to go out to a club in Holyrood, there was no way for us to get there. There was no cab, there was no cab service, my father certainly wasn’t going driving me out to the bar, I can tell you that. I can see me now, “*Daaaaad*,” you know. He’d drive me to Girl Guides or school, but he wasn’t driving me up to the local bar.

Joe MacPherson’s hitchhiking began when he was around nine years old, after his mother decided that it was Joe’s responsibility, “as the guy in the home of nine children,” to pick up the family’s groceries. His mother always gave him bus fare to travel the 2.5 km distance to the grocery store, but Joe realized at an early age that if he hitchhiked, he

could pocket that money “and save it for something that I might like better.” Around the same time, Joe also began hitchhiking to his 6 am hockey practice. Joe explained that he wasn’t given bus fare for this kind of journey, as hockey practice would have been viewed as “a frivolous thing.” His parents did give him a weekly allowance of \$1 to cover his school bus fare, however, which Joe budgeted for other pursuits through his regular hitchhiking routine:

That dollar, that could turn into more if I could gamble with it, like a bingo machine, or peg board, or something like that, or playing pool for money ... cigarettes were another part of our routine, you know. Cigarettes back in those days were twelve or fifteen cents a pack, or twenty cents a pack, so you know, we needed that money for [laughs] more important things, right? So that whole generational period, from thirteen to seventeen, we hitchhiked everywhere.

At the time, there could be anywhere from a couple to “half a dozen or ten or more” teenagers hitchhiking from the same railway crossing in his community, as many teenagers were likewise determined to spend their money on more essential matters. Joe also described an offshoot of hitchhiking called “hooking bumpers” that took place around the same time in the Glace Bay region:

JM: In the wintertime it was hooking bumpers. Like if you didn’t have any money for a bus or any other way, and there was ice on the street, you latched onto a bumper on a car and skidded your way to wherever you were going. That was another form—it wasn’t hitchhiking, we called it hooking bumpers.

AM: And so, would the car usually be okay with that?

JM: Generally not. [laughter] Not really.

AM: How long would you usually last?

JM: It depended on how slippery the roads were, and back in those days they weren’t ploughed as well as they are today, so the road was generally quite slippery. And you know, you’d probably hook a ride from here right to Bridgeport, which would be a mile, mile and a half. You might lose your glove in the process, you might lose part of the sole of your shoe, but you did it anyway.

Another instance of short-distance hitchhiking that is, arguably, not hitchhiking, was described by John Drover, who grew up in Grand Falls-Windsor during the late ‘70s

and early '80s. At that time, Grand Falls and Windsor were two separate towns, and the main road in Grand Falls, High Street, was about a thirty-minute walk from the Windsor area. However, according to John, “there was a particular corner [in Windsor], if you stood there, people knew that you were going to High Street in Grand Falls, and they would stop and pick you up.” John said that you didn’t really need to stick out your thumb to make this happen, and that he doesn’t think they even called it hitchhiking, because “hitchhiking was something you went out on the highway to do.” If you stood on that corner, your intention to visit Grand Falls was understood. When I pressed him a bit further, asking whether it felt at all rebellious to do this, John replied:

No, it was a natural thing. If you were going to Grand Falls, why would you walk a half an hour? You could stand on the corner for like five seconds and somebody would pick you up. And you know, nine times out of ten, it was somebody that you knew, or not that you knew, but they were families from Windsor and you knew their last name, or they were friends of your parents, that sort of stuff. It wasn’t—it was very rare that you got picked up by an absolute, complete stranger. So no, it wasn’t, there wasn’t anything really rebellious about it. It was just the way that kids from Windsor got to High Street in Grand Falls, and how they got back home.

On a similar note, Liam Peacock said that if he missed the school bus and ended up walking from Carbonear to his home community of Freshwater, people from Freshwater were liable to pick him up, even though, as he stated:

At that point I was not even really feeling like I needed a ride, you know, it would just be like, okay, the weather’s fine, the bus is late, I can walk and entertain myself, but you know, this is the bay and Newfoundland. People will just drive right up to you and—‘Hey, I knows you!’ You know, that whole thing, right?

Many short-distance hitchhikers said that they were usually picked up by familiar people. Laura Ryan remarked that more often than not, she was picked up by “somebody’s parents,” and Laurie Burns, who continues to hitchhike around her community of New Waterford, Cape Breton, commented, “Usually when I’m hitchhiking

back to town anyway, it's usually somebody that I know would pick me up, because it's such a small town, you know, I'm born and raised here." Chad remembered that while hitchhiking around Placentia Bay, the closer he was to his hometown of Fox Harbour, the easier it was to hitchhike, "just by merit of people knowing you." In a small community, hitchhiking as a known individual can become a part of an ongoing exchange of reciprocity and hospitality. Folklorist Martha MacDonald's MA thesis, *Group Identity in Social Gatherings: Traditions and Community on the Iona Peninsula, Cape Breton*, describes a similar dynamic in her region of study, while hinting at the existence of hitchhiking in the area. She writes:

... devotion to hospitality has regained ascendancy as the primary virtue on the peninsula. This has practical as well as symbolic application because in an area so limited as to services, people could not survive without each other's help. There is no taxi or bus service and no low-cost accommodation ... It is natural to offer food, lodging, transportation and anything else to people, even strangers, because there is no other choice. Reciprocity is largely based on practicality; it is an economic system of sorts, where a mental ledger is kept of favours given and repaid. (1986, 184-185)

As young teenage ne'er-do-wells, it is possible that these hitchhikers failed to directly reciprocate the hospitality of their drivers. However, there are other kinds of reciprocity at play here as well. In a sense, when parents pick up other people's children hitchhiking, they are saving those children's parents the trouble of picking them up later. In this case, the mental ledger of "favours given and repaid" may not have anything to do with the hitchhikers themselves; instead, parents and other adults in the community may be the main actors in this system of exchange. However, young hitchhikers may someday have the means to pick up other hitchhikers, and many former hitchhikers feel compelled to pick up others once they have access to a vehicle. The teenage hitchhikers of today may someday help out the teenage hitchhikers of tomorrow. In this situation, direct

community reciprocity might be delayed, but could sort itself out eventually.

Furthermore, short-distance hitchhikers, like other hitchhikers, often try and reciprocate with friendly conversation during the actual hitchhiking interaction. However, this impulse for conversation may be stronger when hitchhiking involves the bringing together of strangers. Joan Butler intimated this point, saying, “Most of the times people would pick us up that we knew, other times people would pick us up that we didn’t know, and then we’d just chat them up, and you know, be nice.” The fact that Joan and her friends placed importance on chatting with strangers, rather than people they already knew, suggests that these conversations may have had more to do with fostering trust than with reciprocating the favour of a ride.

While most short-distance hitchhikers said they were familiar with the majority of their drivers, the fear of being picked up by a malevolent individual was still present at a certain level. Peter Smith stated that these fears circulated in his hometown of Dunville, Placentia Bay, and commented:

Usually people know you, or recognize you, or figure you’ll know someone they know or whatever, so you kind of—you know. But that lore—that falsehood of, you know, hitchhiking’s dangerous, even seeps into small towns, like your parents warn you against hitchhiking because it’s dangerous, even though there’s like 2000 people in this town, everyone knows everyone pretty much, but that whole lore of it being dangerous is still, quote unquote, you know, it’s still there.

It is important to note that “everyone knowing everyone” in a community does not necessarily translate to community harmony. As Laura Ryan remarked, “You know who the bad and the good are out in a small community of 200 people, so you know who to stay away from when you’re hitchhiking. That’s what I find.” Joan Butler also kept tabs on threatening individuals in her community, and availed of a number of strategies to

avoid certain people while hitchhiking. Furthermore, when Joe MacPherson was growing up in Glace Bay, Cape Breton, he had to be careful about hitchhiking through certain neighbourhoods. As he put it, “Neighbourhoods had their barriers. And some people in those neighbourhoods had issues with other neighbourhoods.” According to Joe, these neighbourhood rivalries often intensified if a boy from a more distant neighbourhood began dating a girl “that somebody else from that neighbourhood might have had a little crush on.” While hitchhiking home from a date one night, Joe was ambushed because of that very situation:

A couple of guys jumped out—one guy—two guys jumped out at me behind some bushes, another guy got out of a vehicle, and I got the supreme piss beat out of me. And all because I was in the wrong neighbourhood for that evening, walking the wrong girl home, in their view, and they left me on the sidewalk full of blood and bruised. Luckily, it was just a beating, it didn’t go beyond that—but those were the risks, even in town, that you had to endure.

While being “known” in a community can result in certain repercussions, many short-distance hitchhikers still feel that familiarity works to their advantage. For example, John MacNeil, who continues to hitchhike around New Waterford, Cape Breton, makes a concerted effort to enhance his reputation in the community. As he explained it:

It always helps, too, if you’re hitchhiking, and somebody’s going by in the opposite direction, and they wave at you—you wave back, because then people know that you’re recognized in the community. You’re not just a wastrel. That’s a thing that bothers people, you know, like, “Who’s this?” You know. That’s going to be a problem. They don’t want problems. And so you try to make it so that there’s not a problem.

John’s techniques for short-distance hitchhiking will be enumerated in more detail in the following chapter, but for now, I wish to emphasize the importance of reputation for short-distance hitchhiking endeavours. When a person hitchhikes around their local community, they may strive to build a reputation cumulatively, over time, of being a safe, pleasant hitchhiking passenger. Furthermore, the success of a given ride can influence

future hitchhiking opportunities, as drivers may feel inclined to repeatedly pick up a hitchhiker with whom they have positive interactions. John mentioned a few people who consistently pick him up; one person, he said, “is a good friend now, she’s a teacher. And she likes me to talk shop, or read poetry or whatever while we’re going there. And that’s always a boost between us, you know.” Another woman picks him up no matter what, and even if she has three people in the car, John says, “She’ll make them move over, so that she’ll get me.” These drivers may tell other people about their positive encounters with John, which might encourage other drivers to pick him up as well. John was delighted when one night, while hitchhiking at 11 PM, a questioning police officer stopped and, according to John, “said, ‘Oh,’ he said, ‘I know you. You’re John MacNeil.’ I said yes I am. ‘Oh,’ he said to his partner, ‘He’s okay. Let’s go.’ ... I was elated.” Short-distance hitchhiking, unlike long-distance hitchhiking, is much more of a community affair. While short-distance hitchhiking may involve the meeting of strangers, these strangers rarely hitchhike off into the sunset afterwards, never to be seen again; instead, the same stranger may be spotted hitching a ride the following week. For short-distance hitchhikers, reputation is of critical importance.



Figure 5: Portrait of John MacNeil in his home office.

Long-distance Hitchhiking

Long-distance hitchhiking, as mentioned earlier, is intended to describe hitchhiking as a kind of adventure away from home. The interviewees for this thesis have hitchhiked for longer periods of time in a number of different locations. Some have wended their way around Newfoundland, Cape Breton, or the Atlantic provinces more generally; several have hitchhiked across Canada; and some have braved hitchhiking in the United States, which, according to Tom Hawco, was still deemed a risky venture by many Newfoundlanders during the '60s. He said:

A lot of people had stayed on the Trans-Canada-Highway and stayed in hostels, or maybe a tent, and hitchhiked to Toronto. But not very many people had hitchhiked in the States, because it was difficult to get across the border. And it didn't seem to have entered their minds. They looked at the map, and didn't think, "There."

Other hitchhikers included in this thesis have hitchhiked in countries all over the world, such as Mexico, Guatemala, England, France, Belgium, Germany, Holland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Ukraine, Spain, Portugal, Argentina, Italy, Turkey, Greece, Bosnia, Kosovo, Israel, Iceland, Norway, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Armenia, the Philippines, New Zealand, Ireland, Scotland, and Australia. Most of these countries were visited by a relatively small number of interviewees, many of whom used hitchhiking (in addition to Couchsurfing, WWOOFing, and other kinds of cost-saving measures) to extend their travels abroad for longer periods of time.

It is important to note that “short-distance” and “long-distance” hitchhiking are etic terms I have employed for use in this thesis. None of the interviewees availed of these terms themselves. However, the interviewees who had experience with both types of hitchhiking often drew their own emic distinctions. As Joyce Babbin put it, who first hitchhiked around the CBRM as a teenager, “the first few times I hitchhiked would have been just to get somewhere.” When Joyce hitchhiked across Canada, however, she had other purposes and motivations. She explained:

Mostly it was a hitchhiking experience, so that was all about the experience of travelling across the country, the excitement of that, the interest in just travelling ... it was all about the excitement and the fun, and the meeting people, and what can you get up to with new people you’ve never met before in new places you’ve never been before.

Even the transition from hitchhiking around the Placentia Bay region to hitchhiking across Newfoundland felt like a notable shift for Chad Griffiths. He reflected on his first hitchhiking trip across the island in the following light:

I guess it was, it seemed like a bit of an adventure, for sure. It was definitely different, it was travelling, you know, to a different part—to a place I’d never been before, and that is different, you know, and not being able to pick up the phone and call someone you know,

like a parent to get a ride, you're kind of on your own at that point, that was definitely different.

Other interviewees also described long-distance hitchhiking as a kind of adventure. Matthew Southall, for instance, said that he “decided to hitchhike just because I felt like it would be a fun adventure,” Linda Samuels said that she hitchhiked around Newfoundland during the ‘70s to “get away for adventure,” while Joe MacPherson stated that with hitchhiking, “all of it is about adventure ... It’s about testing your own spirit to get that sense of discovery that you don’t know is around the other corner.” Moreover, almost all of these hitchhikers embarked upon their first long-distance hitchhiking journeys in their late teens or early twenties. Accordingly, this prompts the question of why such adventures are often pursued during this stage of life. Why do so many individuals on the cusp of adulthood set out on long-distance hitchhiking journeys?

Anthony Saturno’s MA thesis, *Tramping: Alternatives to Traditional American Rites of Passage* (2013) argues that some young men in contemporary America hitchhike as a “self-created” rite of passage from adolescence to adulthood, in the absence of more broadly encouraged, societally consistent rite of passage rituals (Saturno iii). Rites of passage, as defined by Barbara Myerhoff, are “a category of rituals that mark the passages of an individual through the life cycle, from one stage to another over time, from one role or social position to another, integrating the human and cultural experiences with biological destiny” (Myerhoff 1982, 103, quoted in Saturno 1). As Arnold van Gennep notes in his pioneering work, *The Rites of Passage*:

Transitions from group to group and from one social situation to the next are looked on as implicit in the very fact of existence, so that a man’s life comes to be made up of a succession of stages with similar ends and beginnings: birth, social puberty, marriage, fatherhood, advancement to a higher class, occupational specialization, and death. For

every one of these events there are ceremonies whose essential purpose is to enable the individual to pass from one defined position to another which is equally well defined. (van Gennep 1960, 3)

According to van Gennep, all rites of passage consist of three stages: separation, liminality, and reaggregation. During the separation stage, individuals typically leave their community, becoming “detached from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions.” On entering the liminal stage, then, individuals “pass through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state” (van Gennep 1960, 94). Liminality is often a place of marginality and anonymity, which can last for a sustained period of time. As Victor Turner writes, “A limen is a threshold, but at least, in the case of protracted initiation rites or major seasonal festivals, it is a very long threshold; a corridor almost, or a tunnel which may become a pilgrim’s road” (Turner 1992, 49). Finally, reaggregation refers to an individual’s return to the community and social structure after the period of liminality. According to Barbara Myerhoff, “marital choice, creativity, and innovation” are possibilities of reaggregation that may occur after the liminal stage (1982, 120).

Is hitchhiking a rite of passage? When I brought up the topic with some of my interviewees, I received a pretty middling response. John Drover, for instance, who has hitchhiked both short and long distances, replied that he didn’t think hitchhiking was a rite of passage, as it was “really just a natural thing that people in my hometown did. And then—no, I don’t see it as a rite of passage at all.” Emma Lang also didn’t view hitchhiking as a rite of passage. She stated:

I think people pretend it is, I don’t know. I think it gets glamorized and romanticized to a degree that’s kind of silly. I would say falling off your bike is a bigger rite of passage. I think doing things where you find your independence and you feel confident is important.

I think, in my experience, men think of it as a rite of passage, especially young men who think of themselves as slightly counter-cultural. I don't—to me that's not the point.

Peter Smith offered a tentative “maybe,” as a response to the question, saying that hitchhiking “kind of gave me a sense of autonomy.” But on the whole, these interviewees were fairly reticent about the whole idea.¹⁶ However, there's no doubt that long-distance hitchhikers *do* wilfully separate themselves from their communities before entering liminal states of travelling amongst strangers. Some hitchhikers discussed the sense of freedom brought about during hitchhiking journeys, which could be interpreted as a commentary on liminality. As Chad Griffiths put it, while hitchhiking “you are in a relationship with the road and other people that is not conducive to a tight itinerary, and you know, there's a freedom from planning and the will.” Matthew Southall commented on this aspect of hitchhiking as well, saying that he liked “just being free for once and not attached to anything, not being stressed out about anything.” In the following interview excerpt, Adam Critchley also touches on the freedom from responsibility afforded by hitchhiking, while articulating the sense of physical, geographic liminality that accompanies this state:

AC: That's my only real romanticization of it [hitchhiking], is that I really, really like highways. It's not the getting to places, and it's not the being at a place or arriving at a place or leaving from a place, it's the—

AM: [interrupting] Spending time on these patches of highway?

AC: Yeah, that's the more fun part of it.

AM: What do you like about it?

AC: I think I like the fact that it's more of a liminal space, maybe, is the word that I'm looking for? Where it's like—while you're here, you're neither here nor there. You're just—you have no responsibility beyond looking after yourself and getting where you're

¹⁶ Because of the scepticism of these interviewees, I (perhaps unwisely) dropped the question from later interviews. It is possible that other hitchhikers would have offered alternative views on the matter.

going. And there's something about the oneness of that purpose or oneness of mind that's really, really nice.

The long-distance hitchhiker's exodus from community life and movement into liminality is also evocative of the quests pursued by the heroes and heroines of magic tales, who tend to leave their family homes as young adults, setting off for unknown, liminal worlds of adventure. Folklorist Max Lüthi describes this narrative pattern in the following light:

The hero leaves his parents and by no means always returns to his father's house like Hansel and Gretel. Hansel and Gretel are abandoned; others leave voluntarily, travel under completely different pretexts out into the unknown world and encounter adventures alone. But just because they are nowhere firmly rooted, they are free to accept each new relationship, free to enter into and dissolve every tie; they receive gifts and help from otherworldly characters easily and surely. In its heroes and heroines the Märchen [magic tale/folk tale] delineates man as isolated and, precisely because of this, capable of universal relationships. The hero of the Märchen is isolated, but not at the mercy of the world; instead he is simply the gifted one, who receives gifts and aid at every step and is able to accept them ... he is isolated, but not lonely, because he doesn't feel himself to be alone. (Lüthi 1969, 168)

Like the heroes and heroines of magic tales, hitchhikers can begin and cease every tie, receive gifts and help from strangers, and remain "capable of universal relationships" because of their detachment from community life. While interacting on the road with strangers, hitchhikers may also feel an essence of *communitas*, which refers to an intense, non-hierarchical sense of communion. This kind of sensation usually occurs outside one's community, and often takes place in the absence of social hierarchy and structure. As discussed by Victor Turner:

Communitas breaks in through the interstices of structure, in liminality; at the edges of structure, in marginality; and from beneath structure, in inferiority. It is almost everywhere held to be sacred or "holy," possibly because it transgresses or dissolves the norms that govern structured and institutionalized relationships, and is accompanied by experiences of unprecedented potency. (1969, 128)

When hitchhiking within one's community, one must remain aware of social norms, hierarchies, and reputations. There are social scripts to follow and conventions to obey. Long-distance hitchhiking, on the other hand, offers a stronger possibility for reaching *communitas*. As noted by Yi-Fu Tuan, "the stranger offers not only excitement but also, paradoxically, intimacy ... and if we ask what makes it possible for strangers to open up to each other, the answer is the absence of socially defined statuses and roles in the initial encounter ... people are encouraged to speak as unique selves, or not at all" (Tuan 1986, 13). This dynamic was also articulated by Greg Pike, as he described the conversations he tended to have while hitchhiking:

If you were going to be together for four or five hours, you'd get through all the small talk. And then you'd start talking about things that matter. And you know, people start telling you about their divorce, or about their legal troubles, or all sorts of things, and you get into some very in-depth conversations because frankly, they don't expect to ever see you again. So that's not the folks from York Harbour to Corner Brook, that's the folks on the longer drives, who, really, they're right, they're not going to see me again, I'm not going to see them again. It's going to be kind of interesting. So, you know, I tell them all sorts of things I wouldn't normally say, and vice versa.

Long-distance hitchhiking necessarily involves a separation from one's community, and continues into a state of liminality, where one can potentially connect intimately with strangers. But how does long-distance hitchhiking align with the "reaggregation" stage of van Gennep's model? Do hitchhikers return from their travels as fully-fledged adults, ready for marriage, kids, and a 9-5 lifestyle? This question may strike some hitchhikers as absurd. Perhaps the notion of "hitchhiking as a rite of passage" implicitly suggests this idea of "hitchhiking to become an adult," which seems like an objective too crude to consciously and deliberately pursue. If anything, long-distance hitchhikers may hitchhike as a means of escaping social structure (whether to cope with the end of a romantic relationship, to grieve the loss of a loved one, to detach from family

life, or simply to avoid the workaday world for awhile, amongst other reasons). I do not think that many people hitchhike as a wilful strategy of maturation, although something to that effect probably does occur. However, reaggregation does not have to correspond, in this case, to reaching “adulthood”—according to van Gennep’s theoretical framework, reaggregation refers to one’s return to social structure, which may involve a homeward journey or immersion in a new, more or less stable environment. In this sense, I would argue that long-distance hitchhiking fulfills van Gennep’s rite of passage model since, like any journey through liminality, all hitchhiking odysseys must eventually reach their end.

Along with the discomfort of correlating “hitchhiking as a rite of passage” with the process of becoming an adult, some interviewees seemed uncomfortable with the implicit romanticism of the “rite of passage” term. This reflects a tension that surfaced frequently throughout my fieldwork. During our interviews, many hitchhikers seemed cautious about romanticizing the act of hitchhiking, since it is also a need-based activity. As mentioned earlier, short-distance hitchhiking, though often recreational, can also have an important utilitarian function in the context of daily life (such as going to work, buying groceries, etc.) Long-distance hitchhiking, on the other hand, is often used for the purposes of travel and adventure, which, one might argue, are not indispensable aspects of survival. When examined through this paradigm, it is easy to regard long-distance hitchhiking as the more romantic, idealistic variety of hitchhiking. In keeping with a “romanticism vs. practicality” dichotomy, one might also assume that some long-distance hitchhikers have more financial stability than they let on, and might not actually need to hitchhike. For example, cult filmmaker John Waters recently hitchhiked across America

for the sheer experience of it, and published a book, *Carsick: John Waters Hitchhikes Across America* (2015), which documents his exploits. However, most of my interviewees—even those who travelled abroad for long periods of time— could not have afforded to travel without hitchhiking, and several interviewees picked up odd jobs along the way to support their journeys. While hitchhiking across Canada, Joe MacPherson “got a job in the circus for a week,” fought forest fires in northern Ontario, worked in a transistor radio factory in Montreal, and held a mining job in Flin Flon, Manitoba. Joyce Babbin also said that she “had to stop and work a few times, because I had no money.” Joyce pumped gas in Alberta and “cleaned toilets in a hotel somewhere in northern Ontario.” Greg Pike worked odd jobs while hitchhiking across Canada as well. He said, “I was really hoboing around this one summer, and having a great time doing it. And I didn’t care where I went, I’d just hitchhike wherever there was something to do and try it out, and if I didn’t like it I’d hitchhike somewhere else.”

As long-distance hitchhikers travel about, in pursuit of work, adventure or anything else they set their hearts on, they occasionally cross paths with one another. Osvaldo Croci, who hitchhiked in America during the ‘60s, often ran into hitchhikers he had met before. In his words, “One of the funny things was that the community of hitchhikers, in a sense, would meet again as we moved along.” Throughout these interactions, Croci said, “there was this kind of lore, really, hitchhiker’s lore, you know, where it was easy to get a ride—you would exchange techniques, or talk about places.” For example, at that time (“two or three years, or four years, after the summer of love”), everyone was headed to San Francisco. The most widely discussed hitchhiking locale throughout my fieldwork, however, was definitely the community of Wawa, Ontario. I

had never even heard of Wawa before beginning my interviews, but my ignorance was quickly cured as I spoke with more and more hitchhikers (from various generations) who brought up the infamous town. As legend has it, hitchhikers who dare to hitchhike through Wawa do so at their own peril. Osvaldo Croci remembered the town thusly:

Well, there were stories of people who basically could never get out of there, it was like a time warp, or people ended up settling there [laughs], you know, just kind of funny things, really. I mean most of them, I don't think they were true at all, but you know, Wawa had become the hell of hitchhikers, or the place to avoid, or you know, you don't go to Wawa. So I remember consciously that—I forget where I was, somewhere in northern Ontario—and at the time, of course, and even today, the so-called TCH was nothing but two lanes. And so, you know, I remember I got a train.

Joyce Babbin also knew about the infamy surrounding Wawa, and recalled a song about a hitchhiker stranded there. However, Joyce appeared to regard the rumours as a personal challenge, even asking a driver to let her out to hitchhike by the Wawa sign, because she “had to see.” As it turned out, she said, “I wasn't there fifteen minutes and I got picked up, and I thought, that's not true, what the man said in the song.” Nevertheless, the legends were still circulating during the '90s, when Greg Pike hitchhiked across Canada:

GP: And Wawa is famous as a place to avoid—you already know this, don't you.

AM: Yes, I was told this only yesterday. ...

GP: “Fear the goose.” That was the phrase, I heard it from umpteen different people all through—“Fear the goose,” because the goose is the big attraction in Wawa. If you go there, you aren't leaving. And according to legend, one guy was hitchhiking there for so long that he used to walk into town and get his breakfast. He eventually fell in love with a woman who worked at the diner and married her, and he's still there to this very day. That's the story that was being told to me twenty years ago.

The legends are still hanging onto the town. The Hitchwiki¹⁷ article for Wawa, last updated on June 1st, 2016, states that Wawa “is a no man's land at great hundreds of km distance to any cities where many hitchhikers get stuck for days. ... Wawa is generally

¹⁷ Hitchwiki is a collaboratively sourced knowledge base about hitchhiking around the world. It is modeled after Wikipedia, so that any user can contribute hitchhiking insights.

considered by Canadian hitchhikers to be the absolute worst spot in Canada to wait for a ride” (Hitchwiki, s.v. “Wawa, Ontario”). Adam Critchley, who hitchhiked across Canada in more recent years, also mentioned Wawa while discussing his fears of being stranded, saying, “It’s not what if someone’s going to pick me up and do something to me, it’s—oh my god, what if nobody picks me up and I have to live in Wawa for ten years next to this goose statue living on nothing but Tim Horton’s.” Wawa wasn’t the only hitchhiking dead zone brought up by my interviewees; Amber Tapley mentioned a haunted, “terrifying highway that I do not recommend any hitchhikers going near” in northern New Brunswick, while Margaret Morris discussed a place in New Zealand called the “Haast Pass,” which had “all kinds of stories about hitchhikers waiting for days to get a ride.” Perhaps these place-based legends surrounding hitchhiking dead zones could be considered “ecotypes” of the same legend motif, in keeping with von Sydow’s definition, where “in the field of traditions a widely spread tradition, such as a tale or a legend, forms special types through isolation inside and suitability for certain culture districts” (1934, 349).

Trucking regulations comprise another focus of long-distance hitchhiking lore. Several hitchhikers told me that truckers are not actually allowed to pick up hitchhikers, as their insurance won’t cover them with an extra passenger aboard. This regulation appears to have existed since the ‘60s, when Kevin Bassett was hitchhiking around Ontario and Alberta. He commented, “I never got picked up by a trucker though, not ever. I found that funny, but then again, you know, the law is they’re not allowed to have people in with them. But you know, that wouldn’t stop them from picking up a 24 year old girl.” Adam Critchley also offered a more recent perspective:

I tried to get a truck ride off the ferry, and it turns out most of them now, their insurance is after cracking down on them, so unless you're a private [trucker]—like I don't know, you just own your own truck, and you do it wholesale, a lot of them won't do it, because—and this—I imagine truckers having some sort of code. ... But now, like, apparently a lot of truckers, where there is so much competition, they'll rat each other out. So if there was somebody that, you know, is ahead of you for jobs and you know that they picked up a vagrant or whatever, you'll tell the company.

Both Chad Griffiths and John MacNeil said that they like to wave at truckers, to show that they're aware of these regulations, and that they understand the truckers' predicament. However, it's undeniable that truckers do give hitchhikers lifts from time to time. As John MacNeil sees it, "A lot of those transport drivers say that their insurance won't cover them if they're taking you as their passenger, but some of them will risk that, you know, a little bit. Especially if they're a little bit lonesome, or away from home, and they just want somebody to talk to, and they can trust you." Several truckers have picked me up hitchhiking, and many other hitchhikers recounted rides with truckers as well. Roshni Caputo-Nimbark, who has hitchhiked in many foreign countries, described a series of especially helpful truck drivers in Eastern Europe:

I hitchhiked from Estonia down to Croatia once, and I gave myself five days to get there, and that was, I think, my first time sleeping in a truck, and really being taken in by a truck driver. And I thought it was very cool how probably the second or third ride I got was in Poland, and that truck driver, he radioed in to all the other people who had radios, which were mostly truckers, and I heard him say, like, "I have a girl, a pretty girl," I heard him say in Polish, "who is hitchhiking down to Croatia, is there anyone going that way?" And pretty much there was a train of truckers ... So he'd stop and there'd be a truck waiting, get off the truck, go into the next one, and it went like that almost the entire way. It was really easy. I didn't have to do anything, I didn't even have to thumb it. It was cool.

In a way, truckers and long-distance hitchhikers are natural companions.

Hitchhikers need a ride. Truckers travel long distances, spend much of their time alone, and usually have an empty passenger seat. While the severity of these insurance regulations remains up for debate (although my cursory research indicates that the

rumours may be true¹⁸), the story itself is also useful for both truckers and hitchhikers. The rumours of harsh insurance policies let hitchhikers blame the red tape of the system, rather than any individual truck driver (or their own failure to win the affections of truckers). For the truckers, on the other hand, the insurance policies provide a plausible excuse for rejecting hitchhikers.

While hitching a ride with a trucker in Newfoundland, Laura Ryan learned about another type of “trucker lore.” This information was completely new to me, and did not surface during any other hitchhiking interviews. However, I did find one blog post, titled “Lot Lizards—Ladies of the Night” that may substantiate the following, which reads, “There are a lot of great things about the trucking world and a lot of really sad, tragic and horrible things that no one really wants to talk about. Lot Lizards are one of these” (Foster 2013). In Ryan’s words:

This was something I didn’t know, that he told me. Any truck that you see with a lizard symbol, a lizard sticker on the windshield, it means they’re accepting of truck stop prostitutes. And I had no idea about that. And I was hitchhiking for a long, long time, and I had no idea. Because apparently that’s what they call them, “lizards,” at truck stops. And he was telling me that he was at this one truck stop—this is going to sound really crazy—and there was this lizard. And she crouched in a diesel puddle and cleaned herself, and then hopped into another truck. ... And anyways, he was like, “So apparently in Newfoundland, there are a lot of lizards.” I had no idea about it. There’s a lot of truck stop prostitutes, apparently ... He was like, “Anytime you’re hitchhiking and you’re going to go in with a truck driver, if they have a lizard symbol on their truck, stay away from them, don’t get in with them.” And that was a good life lesson I learned.

Hitchhiking and Gender

The last contextual factor of hitchhiking that I wish to discuss is gender. I recognize the fluidity and social constructedness of gender in everyday life, and do not

¹⁸ See “Picking Up Hitchhikers” (Miller 2017).

wish to impose a reductionist gender identity on any of my interviewees. I firmly believe that “there is considerable overlap between the groups male and female, and there are people who cannot be readily defined as fitting in either” (Crawley, Foley and Shehan 2008, 241). To the best of my knowledge, however, none of my interviewees identified as transgender while hitchhiking. Furthermore, whether one is perceived as male or female while hitchhiking has an immense effect on the experience of doing so. For these reasons, the following discussion is framed using a binary conception of gender.

Although I am female, and had hitchhiked myself before beginning this research, I was not truly aware of the misogyny endured by many female hitchhikers (especially solo female hitchhikers) until I had conducted several interviews. As my research progressed, I became more and more aware of and disturbed by the differing experiences of male and female hitchhikers. Many of the female hitchhikers I interviewed came across as highly independent, fearless women, and several praised the virtues of hitchhiking alone. For the most part, these women were quite enthusiastic about hitchhiking; they met all kinds of wonderful people while doing so, they had countless stories to tell and, as they often explained it, they “only had a handful of bad experiences.” Despite this tone of positivity, however, it became undeniably clear to me that women hitchhike very differently from men. Granted, most hitchhikers (of all genders) acknowledge that women usually hitchhike at a much quicker pace. This is usually regarded as a point in the favour of female hitchhikers. However, women often endure a great deal of sexual attention in the process of doing so. As mentioned earlier, hitchhiking has been viewed in a variety of ways over the years. It can be framed as an emblem of social trust, of danger, or of community reciprocity, amongst other notions; unfortunately, however, women’s

experiences of hitchhiking can also serve as a powerful reminder of the patriarchy in full effect.

Travelling has often been regarded as a masculine endeavour. As Mimi Sheller writes in the anthology *Gendered Mobilities*, “Since time immemorial men and women have had different patterns of access to travel and movement, whether locally, nationally, or internationally, in both Western and non-Western cultures” (Sheller 2008, 259). Sheller also points to the common correlation of women with domestic life and men with the wider world, saying that “Women are often defined as lacking a ‘mobile subjectivity’, being rooted in place and home, while narratives of masculine becoming often hinge on travel, hitting the road, and escape from home” (258). As mentioned earlier, Kerouac’s *On the Road* has been long regarded as an inspirational novel for legions of hitchhikers; however, the novel is also a recognized example of such “narratives of masculine becoming,” as it largely features men joyously travelling (and occasionally hitchhiking) away from the confines of home and feminine domesticity. This point is taken up by Tim Cresswell in his article “Mobility as Resistance: A Geographical Reading of Kerouac’s ‘On the Road,’” where he writes, “In *On the Road*, travel in space is connected with masculinity while place and home are feminine. Such images are firmly rooted in the dominant ideology of the United States” (1993, 258). Given the continued cultural sway of *On the Road*, and the noted embeddedness of these long-standing stereotypes, are female hitchhikers inherently controversial, boundary-defying figures as far as archetypes of “the traveller” are concerned? How have female travellers struggled to attain mobility from a historical point of view, and how do those struggles manifest for women today?

Of course, some women have managed to travel throughout history, and there are several books that chart the histories and writings of solo female travellers. However, many of these volumes solely chronicle the exploits of Western, middle-class female adventurers. *The Blessings of a Good Thick Skirt: Women Travellers and Their World* (1986), for example, largely features female travellers from a middle-class background. Author Mary Russell writes that while a middle-class upbringing “may not always have provided the traveller with lavish financial resources, and may have been a cage from which she longed to escape,” it also likely provided “a degree of security and, in most cases, a fund of confidence with which the traveller can launch herself into a new world” (1986, 210). Furthermore, Russell alleges that many of these supposedly solo female travellers were likely accompanied in some respect. According to Russell:

... few women were as adventurous as to travel entirely on their own; so lowly a position did the Victorian servant hold that to describe a woman as being a solitary traveller often meant merely that she was unaccompanied by someone of her own social class. ... She would most probably have had a paid guide and possibly a maid. (1986, 182)

Whether these women travelled entirely alone or not, however, their behaviour was still rarely condoned during the Victorian era, as travel was often viewed as a somewhat suspicious endeavour in the first place. And, as Erica Wilson and Donna E. Little point out:

If travel was generally viewed as socially unacceptable by Victorian standards, then the idea of a woman who travelled alone seemed to be particularly aberrant, worthy of tarnishing a ‘lady’s’ highly-regarded social reputation ... The solo female traveller could only be made more socially acceptable if she was labelled as eccentric or unconventional. (2008, 171)

In marking these women as aberrant, eccentric, unconventional, or in effect, “other,” the gendered association of women with home life and men with the wider world remained largely unchallenged. Men could travel and stay in society’s good graces (for the most

part); female travellers, on the other hand, had to assume a compulsory mantle of eccentricity. Although this history depicts a highly privileged class of women, it also demonstrates that even the most fortunate and mobile women at the time remained shackled in many respects. The Victorian woman could not travel freely without enduring at least *some* socially sanctioned repercussions. The aim of social respectability was likely a suitable and effective harness for such wayward, unseemly impulses.

In any case, Victorian middle-class women are not the only women in history who have yearned to leave home. Lying outside most histories of “women’s travel” (but also on the periphery of many tributes to American hobos) is the little known history of female hobos in the late 19th and early 20th century. In her article “In Search of the Female Hobo,” Heather Tapley writes about the absence of female hobos from much of the “celebratory and/or empathetic representations of the hobo,” wherein “the hobo was produced as a typology of masculinity—whether a failed copy of bourgeois maleness or the rugged individual who conscientiously objected to middle-class models of masculinity” (2009, 58). Female hobos, on the other hand, were denied this type of representation. Instead, they were regarded almost entirely in terms of their sexuality. Female hobos were commonly assumed to be prostitutes; as Tim Cresswell observes, “many commentators during the period 1875-1939 referred to female tramps and prostitutes in almost the same breath, often making the assumption that the two were more or less equal” (1999, 186). Although many female hobos did earn money from sex work (especially since, as women, they were denied the majority of labour opportunities available to men), the sole conflation of female hobos with sex work is symptomatic of another kind of “othering” wherein, as Heather Tapley writes, “the female hobo, fixed as

prostitute in the majority of hobo-generated discourse of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, is produced as a specifically ‘feminine other’ to hobo masculinity and, therefore, is denied recognition in the hobo class” (2009, 60). Female hobos had rich and varied life experiences; some left home because of poverty and economic duress, some actively participated in revolutionary, anti-capitalist movements, and others, as noted in *Sister of the Road: The Autobiography of Boxcar Bertha*¹⁹ were “just seized by wanderlust. The rich can become globetrotters, but those who have no money become hobos” (Reitman 2002, 13). In other words, female hobos and male hobos were quite similar in many respects. Nonetheless, as noted by Stephanie Golden, “a female hobo needed constantly to control her sexuality in an objectified, externalized way; when she was not fending off rape, her body was often her working capital” (Golden 1992, 136). Many female hobos attempted to evade sexual assault by cross-dressing or by travelling in larger groups, but rape was still a frequent occurrence (Cresswell 1999, 186). These threats (and instances) of sexual assault, along with other types of near-constant sexualisation, have clearly marginalized and negatively affected female hobos in countless ways over the years. Unfortunately, many of the solo female hitchhikers featured in this research have been sexualized in a highly similar manner.

¹⁹ Although this book was originally published as an autobiography, written by a female hobo named “Boxcar Bertha,” it was actually authored as a work of fiction by a Dr. Ben Reitman. That said, Reitman conducted interviews and was acquainted with numerous female hobos, and appears to have been steeped in the world of Depression-era hobos and train-hoppers. Heather Tapley notes that “her [Bertha’s] narrative is still considered one that speaks to the experiences of several actual hobo women of the late-nineteenth and earlier-twentieth centuries, albeit in a more sensational vein” (2009, 6).

Like the female hobos of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, these more recent hitchhikers were often perceived as sex workers, too. As Linda Samuels recalled, “In Italy they used to think I was a prostitute, because apparently prostitutes hitchhike. That happened to me once. It was just like, no. And a lot of French guys were pretty insistent, like, ‘Aw, we go to a hotel together, d’accord?’ ‘No.’ ‘Yes, we’ll have fun!’ ‘Nope.’” Samuels said that these assumptions never upset her too much, however, and stated that the men always accepted her refusal. Laurie Burns has been approached in a similar manner while hitchhiking around the CBRM in Cape Breton as well:

AM: Have you ever ended up in any sketchy situations?

LB: Mmm. Of course. You’re going to get the odd male that, you know, would think you’re going to do, you know, something sexual for them or whatever. They didn’t force themselves upon me or nothing like that, it’s just—kind of just came right out and asked, you know, “Do you do sexual favours for money?” Because there was a lot of prostitutes in Sydney and that, right. I said no. And that’s when I just wanted to get out then, but I did hitchhike a lot after that, too. But it didn’t scare me to stop.

Although Burns clearly found these interactions unpleasant, she continues to hitchhike nevertheless. Sasha Boczkowski has also been mistaken for a prostitute while hitchhiking. Like the women in the previous examples, however, she has remained similarly undeterred from hitchhiking alone in future:

AM: Are there some places that you wouldn’t hitchhike alone?

SB: I found Bosnia really difficult on my own. I just had a string of really aggressive guys grabbing—they thought I was a prostitute, or whatever. I guess that’s the biggest thing, is when men try to sleep with you, or they think you’re a prostitute, or whatever. And yeah, I guess just where their country’s still really fucked up from the war and everything, it seemed like when people were aggressive, they were really aggressive. But I’d probably still hitchhike alone there. I don’t know, maybe I would be a little bit more careful, or something.

Furthermore, female hitchhikers are not only propositioned because they’ve been mistaken for sex workers. When Roshni Caputo-Nimbark was hitchhiking in Turkey, she said, “I feel like 95% of the time, the word ‘sex’ came up, but at the same time they

would always buy me tea or lunch or something, because it's sort of just part of—I shouldn't say part of their culture, but it was just a very matter of fact, nonchalant sort of thing to do. Like, 'I might as well ask.'" She also said that while hitchhiking, "there's definitely men who touch your leg and that sort of thing, or even grab your boob ... men who say, 'Oh, we're going to this hotel,' and pull in, but you just have to really stay firm and say no if there's any sign of that sort of thing about to happen." As well, Linda Samuels commented that, "When you hitchhike across Canada there's always guys trying to kiss you and stuff, but it's not that big a deal." Joyce Babbin also described the following incident with a driver outside Vancouver:

This guy picked me up, and within five minutes he said to me, "So, how 'bout a blowjob?" And I said, "Nooo. No, no, no. There'll be none of that." And I said, "Why don't you just stop and let me out, and we'll be okay." "Oh no, no, no, no, I shouldn't have asked," he said. And we had that exchange like three times, and then finally he said, "How 'bout a handjob?" And I said, "There'll be none of that either. So why don't you just stop and let me out?"

Joyce Babbin's driver did eventually let her out, and she said that she "found it really funny at the time." However, not all drivers listen when hitchhikers refuse to give sexual consent, and sometimes these interactions escalate in horrific ways. Linda Samuels was violently attacked by a driver in France, and another female interviewee was raped. Male drivers have sexually assaulted a couple of male interviewees as well; Peter Smith, for example, was sexually propositioned by an older, bisexual man in his seventies and, after Peter asked to be dropped off (instead of visiting a memorial down an old dirt road, as the man had suggested), he began worrying that the man would return to pick him up again. However, Peter also said that he wasn't too concerned about this, "because in my head I

was thinking, ‘I can overpower this guy.’” John Drover expressed a similar degree of physical confidence during our interview:

AM: [slightly in jest] So you’ve never been hit on at all?

JD: No, never! I mean, my god. You’d think somebody would. I mean, I was a handsome young man then, now I’m a bit of an older guy. I don’t know, you know, I’ve always had a lot of self-confidence, and maybe I had that look, like if you lay a hand on me I’m going to punch you in the face. Which is probably what I would have done.

This type of physical self-confidence is completely alien and somewhat astonishing to me as a young woman. Moreover, no female hitchhikers interviewed for this thesis expressed any remotely comparable sentiments. As noted in *Gendering Bodies*:

In U.S. culture, we tend to think dichotomously, expecting that the male body is always, in every case, stronger than the female body ... because of the cultural message of gender difference, so-called ‘average’ ... men tend to believe in their bodily potential, perform it consistently, and actually build their own physical capabilities more readily than ‘average’ women.” (Crawley, Foley and Shehan 2008, 56-57)

Women, on the other hand, are often socialized to feel physically vulnerable to men from a very young age (Greer 1999). The possibility of being overpowered and sexually assaulted while hitchhiking has led to the notion that it is especially dangerous for women. Emma Lang, for example, said she “was definitely taught that very loudly, very clearly, and very specifically by my mother, like, ‘Don’t hitchhike. It’s dangerous. You will get raped and killed.’” In “Space, Sexual Violence and Social Control: Integrating Feminist and Geographical Analyses of Women’s Fear of Crime,” Rachel Pain writes that while sexual violence usually occurs in domestic environments, “the common occurrence of sexual harassment in public space acts to remind women of sexual danger. In other words, sexual harassment evokes fear of more severe sexual attack through routinely creating a state of insecurity and unease amongst women” (1991, 421). As a result of the ubiquity of sexual harassment in public space, certain settings (such as dark alleyways,

public space at night, and in the case of hitchhiking, strangers' automobiles) become imbued with threatening associations, and many women therefore struggle with avoiding and/or negotiating their way through these environments. Numerous writers have identified the pervasive, recognized fears surrounding sexual assault in public space as a patriarchal means of controlling women (Pain 1991; Brownmiller 1975; Greer 1999). As geographer Doreen Massey has summed it up, "Survey after survey has shown how women's mobility, for instance, is restricted—in a thousand different ways, from physical violence to being ogled at or made to feel quite simply 'out of place'—not by 'capital' but by men" (1994, 147-148). Furthermore, as noted by another geographer, Gill Valentine, "this cycle of fear [surrounding sexual assault in public space] becomes one subsystem by which male dominance, patriarchy, is maintained and perpetuated. Women's inhibited use and occupation of public space is therefore a spatial expression of patriarchy" (1989, 389).

Several female hitchhikers interviewed for this thesis appear to have rebelled openly against this ideology of gendered fearfulness. They heard that hitchhiking was dangerous for women, but they went ahead and did it anyway. And while many (though not all) of these women have been sexually assaulted while hitchhiking, the interviewees often downplayed such incidents by emphasizing how rarely they occurred, or by insisting that none of it was really a big deal. As Sasha Boczkowski commented, "Once you have gotten hundreds and hundreds of rides, now, and of those hundreds and hundreds there's only been, you know, a handful of incidents, that says something. Or maybe I'm just super lucky." For the most part, negative hitchhiking encounters (including rape, kidnapping, and violent attack) were absorbed by these women into

largely positive depictions of the hitchhiking experience. Of course, not all of the female interviewees felt this way, and several refused to hitchhike alone due to the threat of such possibilities (I include myself in this category of female hitchhikers). Paula Graham, for example, practiced a number of defensive strategies for hitchhiking as a woman (to be discussed further in the following chapter), and reflected on her preparations in the following light:

Mostly I didn't use any of them [her strategies], yeah, but I prepared, or I thought a lot about it, because yeah, and like I'm really—I write for *The Independent*²⁰ about feminism, and I'm involved in social movements, like indigenous rights movements, violence against women, so I'm super, hyper aware of violence against women and gender inequality and stuff, so I think that was—that was my main concern, I wasn't really afraid of being hurt as a person, I was more afraid of being hurt as a woman. Yeah.

I do not mean to suggest that women who tolerate sexual assault while hitchhiking are somehow “less feminist” than others; nor do I mean to blame any woman (or anyone else) for feeling understandably afraid of hitchhiking. While I do feel that female hitchhikers are, in a sense, rebelling courageously against a notion of the highway as “male space,” I also became increasingly aware that many female hitchhikers endure a great deal of sexual assault while doing so. In effect, contemporary female hitchhikers continue to grapple with the same issues of gendered inequality faced by many 19th century female travellers and, while feminism has made great strides over the last century, the threat of sexual danger by men still limits female agency and mobility in many ways. In recent years, this discussion has often centred on women's abilities to walk safely at night (Scott 2003; Koester 2015). Throughout the course of my research,

²⁰ *The Independent* is an independently owned and operated online news publication in Newfoundland and Labrador. Topics discussed often centre around indigenous issues, women's rights, and various kinds of political critique.

however, it became more and more evident that women's hitchhiking experiences illustrate another iteration of this core injustice. As Rachel Pain notes, "The relation between patterns of inequality in space and patterns of inequality in society is a key tenet of social geography" (1991, 424). Limitations on female hitchhiking and female mobility in general thus demonstrate, quite painfully, the continued patterns of patriarchal inequality faced by women today.

Hitchhiking is not as popular as it used to be (at least in North America), and some people may be incredulous that a woman, or indeed anyone, would willingly engage in such risky behaviour. The idea of hitchhiking as a kind of feminist practice, or as a rebuke to long-standing archetypes of the male traveller may seem like an overly reckless endeavour. At the same time, however, it is important to remember that many women hitchhike because they simply have to do so. And, as John MacNeil wisely reflected:

You know yourself that if somebody says, "Oh, you're a girl or a woman, and you're hitchhiking? You've got to be nuts!" You know, "You've got to be crazy, what's wrong with you?" This kind of stuff. People react. But that's because they don't understand. That's the way I look at it, they just don't understand. Somebody has to get to where they have to go. Doesn't matter whether you're male or female, big or little, small or even a child. You know, you got to get somewhere, you need a ride.

Chapter Three: Hitchhiking as Occupational Folklore

In the previous chapter, I endeavoured to establish the geographical, temporal, and gendered contextual factors that root the hitchhiking experiences of my interviewees. In doing so, I hoped to situate my research amongst larger, more culturally pervasive associations with hitchhiking, while showing how variable and context-dependent these associations can be. With this orientation in place, I now shift my focus towards the question of how hitchhiking actually takes place.

As mentioned in Chapter One, folklorists have long been fascinated by hitchhiking contemporary legends (and have written extensively on the topic over the years), but to the best of my knowledge, they have not yet identified the act of hitchhiking as a realm of folkloric activity. In this chapter, then, I show how hitchhiking know-how, as an informally communicated set of expressive practices, constitutes a variety of folklore in and of itself. Using the framework of occupational folklore, I focus on the hitchhiking strategies, or “work techniques” developed by hitchhikers to advance their hitchhiking journeys. These techniques follow folklorist Robert McCarl’s classic definition, where “technique reflects the ‘working knowledge’ (what you need to know to do the work) of any work group” (McCarl 1978, 148). Of course, some people may feel justifiably puzzled by the notion of hitchhiking as an occupation, or of hitchhikers as a “work group.” Hitchhikers do not earn a wage for their efforts, and they do not interact with one another in a stable work environment. All in all, though, the question of whether hitchhiking is actually “work” is incidental to the goals of this chapter. As I see it, McCarl’s terminology can be extended to trace the folkloric transmission of strategies and

collaborative knowledge in a wide array of human activities. This chapter questions the merits of examining hitchhiking through McCarl's occupational paradigm.

Many hitchhikers seem to light up at the chance to talk strategy. The topic emerged as a natural focal point during my interviews, and multiple interviewees brought up the subject without any prompting. I know that I became fairly obsessed with strategy during my own hitchhiking journeys (and since I always hitchhiked with someone else, it also became a frequent subject of debate). In part, I feel that this obsessiveness is derived from a compulsion to control *something* during the act of hitchhiking, since the act of repeatedly entering strangers' vehicles is basically fraught with uncertainty. In my experience, the unpredictability, randomness, and potential danger of hitchhiking elicits a desire to simplify and systematize the process. During any given hitchhiking journey, strategy can become a definite preoccupation; in retrospect, and amongst fellow hitchhikers, hitchhiking strategy also serves as an inviting topic of debate and discussion.

The hitchhikers I interviewed brought up a wide variety of hitchhiking techniques, which are detailed in the sections that follow. Along with describing these techniques, however, I also open a discussion of the folkloric transmission of these strategies, in light of McCarl's notion that "the importance of any expressive behaviour lies in the group's mechanisms for recognizing and evaluating these activities—its critical canon" (McCarl 1985, 160). In other words, is it possible to determine a canon of hitchhiking work technique? Can we say that hitchhikers constitute a folk group? If so, which techniques are culturally shared, and how are they circulated? What factors are influencing these processes of transmission? As I seek answers to these questions, I will examine matters of

trust, belief, and the presentation of self (Govier 1997; Hufford 1995; Goffman 1959), while exploring the dynamic and static elements (Toelken 1996) of hitchhiking traditions.

Hitchhiking Today: Contemporary Contexts of Trust

Many hitchhiking strategies are developed to foster trust between strangers. Before discussing these techniques, then, I will begin by contextualizing some contemporary connections between trust and hitchhiking. It should be noted that many of my interviewees haven't hitchhiked in years, and that regional variations certainly exist inside of the nationally bounded statistics that follow. However, as trust comprises a central focus of this thesis, it seems useful to point towards some generalized, overarching contexts of trust as indicated by recent statistics.

The contemporary Western hitchhiker operates in a cultural landscape of considerable suspicion. Polls show that levels of generalized trust for other people have continuously declined since the 1950s in the UK, and the 1960s in the USA (Duffy et al. 2004 and Putnam 2000, quoted in Bakir and Barlow 2007, 4). Though crime rates in Canada and the United States have, in fact, steadily diminished (Statistics Canada 2013; FBI 2012), the public nevertheless believes that criminality is on the rise (Keohane 2010). Furthermore, a study of children's independent mobility in the UK showed that while 80% of third-graders walked to school alone in 1971, just 9% continued to do so twenty years later (Shaw et al. 2012). In light of these cultural attitudes, many contemporary hitchhikers have grown up with particular lessons about strangers. Children are usually told to avoid talking to strangers, and certainly to refuse rides from them. Many individuals, but especially women, are fearful of walking alone at night (Valentine 1989; Wilson and Little 2008). Additionally, potential hitchhikers may be aware of gruesome

hitchhiking contemporary legends (wherein, for example, a hitchhiker is axe-murdered by a cannibalistic cowboy driver [Mukerji 1978, 233-244]), or media accounts of hitchhiking tragedies. Likewise, the drivers that enable hitchhiking have likely heard legends and media depictions of malevolent hitchhikers. In short, the public perception of hitchhiking in North America, as derived from mainstream cultural attitudes and hitchhiking legendry, is frequently shrouded in fear and suspicion. This creates a significant challenge for the modern-day hitchhiker.

In order to hitchhike, the hitchhiker must necessarily confront the stranger, while contending with the fact that she herself is also a stranger. In other words, the hitchhiker must earn the trust of the driver, while negotiating her own level of trust for the driver throughout the hitchhiking interaction. Discourses of suspicion being what they are, this is by no means an easy accomplishment. To contend with these dynamics of suspicion, hitchhikers use a variety of techniques to build towards trust. These processes of trust formation can be quite idiosyncratic, since each hitchhiker may develop techniques that are uniquely suitable to their particular presentation of self.

However, trust negotiations do not comprise the sole focus of hitchhiking technique. The bare essentials of hitchhiking require a certain practical know-how, and these techniques form a critical component of the hitchhiking canon. As hitchhikers progress from the side of the road, to their position of appeal, and then, inside the confines of a stranger's vehicle, they make use of a multitude of techniques as they travel towards their destination.

“The Basics”: Roadside Strategy

There is a kind of spatial logic involved in hitchhiking, which may not be readily apparent to the uninitiated. Drivers cannot stop just anywhere along a busy highway, so it is up to the hitchhiker to anticipate their needs. In this section, I outline some of the folklorically communicated techniques that contend with these spatial logistics.

First, hitchhikers must choose a suitable position from which to hitchhike. This is a critical technique for the aspiring hitchhiker. The hitchhiker usually selects a spot with, as Chad Griffiths put it, “a nice shoulder that’s easy to pull off on,” so that drivers can safely stop and pull over from the flow of traffic. Visibility is another important consideration. Hitchhikers often seek straight sections of the highway, so that drivers have time to look, consider, and pull over before they meet the next bend in the road. As Matthew Southall explained it, “You want to be on the straight-aways where they can really see you, you don’t want to be around corners, or up or down a hill.” Adam Critchley also pointed out that since trucks and other large vehicles cannot readily stop on a hill, he tries to stand “on a flat with lots of room.” Hitchhikers often seek spots with slower flows of traffic for similar reasons, so that the driver’s pull-over can occur as smoothly and safely as possible. Chad also considers the “bystander effect” when selecting his position, arguing that on busier roads, “People think that, ‘Oh, I won’t pick him up, someone else will pick him up eventually.’ And this compounds with the amount of people who pass by.” In contrast, however, John MacNeil prefers to hitchhike along the busier roads of his small Cape Breton community. He also tends to situate himself “a little bit past the bus stop, so you let people know that you don’t have enough fare that day for the bus. You know? Sort of a psychological little ploy? So that works too.” These

position considerations are often deemed to be essential for hitchhiking success. As Joe MacPherson summed it up, “It’s all about the right spot. If you’re dropped off on a forlorn piece of highway where traffic is going at 60 miles or 70 miles an hour, and there’s nowhere on the side of the road to stop, it doesn’t matter if you’re wearing a [military] uniform or not.” Earlier in our interview, Joe had commented on the ease of hitchhiking home in military garb. In this quote, however, Joe prioritized hitchhiking position over appearance in his personal evaluation of hitchhiking know-how. This evaluation also aligns with Chad Griffiths’ point of view, as Chad initially described hitchhiking position as “the basics” during our discussion of technique. If hitchhikers do not choose an appropriate position, they may not be able to hitchhike at all.

Second, hitchhikers should remember that the unlucky hitchhiker can, in fact, remain completely stationary throughout the course of the day. As John Drover recalled, “Oh my Jesus, there were days I remember, my friend Barry and I, where we would get up in the morning, you know, have a bite to eat, pack up the tent, stand on the highway, and then in the evening when the sun went down, you’d be in the exact same spot.” To avoid this type of scenario, many hitchhikers begin early in the morning, so as to catch as much traffic as possible during the day. Joe MacPherson also affirmed the importance of this strategy. He commented, “One thing about hitchhiking, especially—no matter where you’re going—don’t start hitchhiking at six o’clock in the evening, don’t start hitchhiking even at three o’clock in the afternoon, if you can avoid it. Get out there early and make sure that, you know, if things are slow, you’re going to get a ride sooner or later.” In case worse comes to worst, it’s always wise to be prepared. Many hitchhikers therefore make a

point of carrying food, water, sensible shoes, a tent for roadside camping, and rain/snow gear for adverse weather conditions.

Signs are another widely used hitchhiking technique. Hitchhikers often make signs that convey their desired destinations to drivers, so that drivers can factor this information into their decisions. The merit of this communication is hotly debated, however, and several hitchhikers acknowledged a divergence of opinion during our interviews. As Chloe Edbrooke reflected, “And then there’s the matter of having a sign or not, which is always a debated subject, because if you have a sign, then maybe they’ll see the name of the place and not pick you because they’re not going to that place. But I think for me, signs end up working.” Adam Critchley expanded on this debate:

I generally use signs. A lot of people will argue—like there’s two schools of thought. One is that people will see your sign and know that you’re legitimately travelling. And want to pick you up, and then they’ll take you to wherever the sign says. The other side of the coin is that they’ll look at a sign and be like, “Oh, well I’m not going to that town, I’m going to two or three towns before.” When in reality any ride is better than no ride, but people will see the sign and argue, “Oh, well I’m not going there so I’ll let somebody else pick them up.” So I mean, yeah, it totally can go either way.

The mentioned “schools of thought” and “debates” surrounding the use of hitchhiking signs suggest that signs have entered a canon of hitchhiking work technique, even if the overall success of the technique remains a subject of contention. Some hitchhikers find signs useful, and some hitchhikers do not. It seems probable, however, that most hitchhikers have *heard* of using signs, and that they may consider using them in particularly tricky hitchhiking scenarios. For example, the “Hitchwiki” article for Newfoundland and Labrador recommends a “TCH” (Trans-Canada Highway) sign for hitchhikers leaving St. John’s via Pitts Memorial Drive, because it is “a busy commuter roadway unsuitable for hitchhiking” (Hitchwiki, s.v. “Newfoundland and Labrador”).

This unsuitability is partly because vehicles usually accelerate on this road, but also because many drivers on Pitts Memorial Drive are heading towards nearby communities such as Kilbride and Mt Pearl. By signalling that one is highway-bound, however, the hitchhiker can attempt to avoid potential hitchhiking digressions along a busy, dangerous roadway, in hopes of reaching a more amenable hitchhiking location. Hitchhikers may also use signs as vehicles for humor, or as a means of conveying other presentations of self. One time, Matthew Southall scrawled “Port-aux-Basques to See My Mommy” on a sign, while Adam Critchley took to making French signs while hitchhiking in Quebec (such as “S.V.P.”), and “From Newfoundland—Entirely Lost” signs during his travels through Ontario. On the other hand, some hitchhikers seemed to reject the very idea of a sign; Joyce Babbin, for example, said that she “never used a sign, I didn’t have the stuff to make a sign, I didn’t care, I didn’t have a destination. So the whole journey—the next ride was the destination, the next seat in the next car was the destination.” Evidently, hitchhikers have many different thoughts about both the practicality and symbolism of hitchhiking signs, and there appears to be no clear consensus on the matter. Nonetheless, experienced hitchhikers are usually aware that they *could* use a sign, and that signs might prove especially helpful in certain hitchhiking locations.

Hitchhiking as a Presentation of Self

After considering these types of practical matters, the hitchhiker will usually focus on appealing to the driver. To do this, hitchhikers often project particular presentations of self (Goffman 1959) in hopes of garnering their driver’s trust. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman defines a performance of self as “all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the

other participants” (15). The first order of affairs for the would-be hitchhiker, presentation-wise, is to identify oneself as a hitchhiker. This is usually achieved using the characteristic thumbs-up gesture. Almost all hitchhikers appear to use their thumb (or “the golden thumb,” as John MacNeil put it) to signify their hitchhiking intentions. Most of the hitchhikers I interviewed had little to say about thumb technique, although Chad Griffiths confessed that he sometimes “gets kind of picky about how someone is holding their thumb” while hitchhiking with others. Folklorist Philip Hiscock has also noted some variations of hitchhiking thumb technique. Some hitchhikers, for example, hold their thumb at a 45 degree angle, while others strive for a perkier, 90 (ish) degree sort of thumb. Hiscock also observed that while many hitchhikers maintain a fairly stationary thumb, other hitchhikers include more motion in the gesture (Hiscock 2002, 40-41). In general, however, the thumbs-up gesture remains basically consistent. This consistency is fairly unusual in light of the dynamism of many other aspects of hitchhiking presentation. As will become evident, hitchhiking presentation is an especially individualized sphere of hitchhiking technique.

Many hitchhikers also consider the “numbers game” as they travel—that is, how many hitchhikers of each gender are travelling together. Based on my research sample and personal experience, women are generally picked up more quickly than men. Hitchhikers often consider this to be an obvious (if unfortunate) fact of life, and usually take these factors into account while planning their hitchhiking journeys. Chad Griffiths commented, “You know, guy and a girl is better than a [single] guy. That’s arguably, I think that’s kind of contentious though. I think if you’re a couple, that helps, you look a little more plucky and less threatening.” Chloe Edbrooke elaborated on this, saying, “the

kind of gender-y thing, like I said, the two men combo is always thought of as being the least successful kind of grouping for hitchhiking, and then two girls being, or maybe one woman, or two women being the best combination, and the most likely to get a ride.”

Some women said that they hitchhiked more slowly with a male companion and, in general, men reported longer periods of waiting along the side of the road. One woman, Paula Graham, had remarkable success hitchhiking with a female friend and a small, adorable dog:



Figure 6: Portrait of Paula Graham and her dog, Jerry.

With Tanya, the three of us, me, Tanya and Jerry [the dog]—sometimes I’d drop my pack, light a cigarette and not even take a puff, and there was another car there, like, so fast. So I think, my theory is that two cute girls, one cute dog, is a good recipe for anything, right? [laughter] ... So yeah, I wonder if the two girls and one dog is even more attractive than just one girl.

Once the journey is in motion, of course, there is little the hitchhiker can do to alter these gender combinations, barring the old trick of having a woman hitchhike alone on the road, while a man or larger hitchhiking group hides in some roadside shrubbery. Several interviewed hitchhikers had carried out this technique. When Rose Westbury hitchhiked with two female friends as a teenager, one girl would often hide in a ditch. Amber Tapley's old boyfriend tended to hide as well, and would emerge as Amber offered apologetically, "Oh, I've got a friend with me." This strategy also prompted the following exchange between Adam Critchley and I:

AC: So certainly, I've found that travelling with a girl, I get rides faster. Probably like half as fast, or twice as fast, rather. So you know, we always used to—which I'm sure you've done, because everybody's done it—just like the guy hides in the ditch.

AM: I've never done that, because to me it seems—well, I've also heard from people that they've gotten kind of pissed when that happens—

AC: Whatever, as long as they give me a ride!

AM: Because, but I feel like it's good to kind of trust the hitchhiker, like to establish some sort of trust—

AC: I will agree, I will agree that you're totally right, but if you've been somewhere for hours and nobody stops, your idea of what's okay to do and what's not is going to be modified very quickly.

AM: So you did that before?

AC: Oh yeah, a bunch of times.

AM: And did the driver ever get annoyed?

AC: Oh, one time they were just like, "Ohhh," and they just gave me the finger and drove away, and the other time they were like, "FINE!" [laughter]

In fact, all the hitchhikers who used this technique said that on some occasions, drivers had become visibly annoyed about the situation. Other interviewees stated that they avoided hitchhikers who employed such tactics. When deciding whether to pick up a hitchhiker, Joyce Babbin said that she examines "what you see on the side of the road, is there somebody else in the ditch waiting to jump out, etc. etc. As somebody who picks up hitchhikers, you look at that." Linda Samuels also recalled the unfavourable impression conveyed by the use of this technique:

One time I picked up hitchhikers, and said, “I’m not going to be judgemental,”—well actually it was one guy hitchhiking. It was just after I got my license, I got my license and my sister was in the car, and she said, “Don’t pick him up.” I said, “I have to, because he’s hitchhiking.” And she opened the car door and his friend scrambled out of the ditch. So that was not good. And then they got in the car, and they were real rough speakers, so I just—we were going out on the highway, and I just pulled over to the first gas station and I said to get out.

Evidently, the success of this strategy is debatable. While many drivers dislike being deceived, the deception probably does convince some drivers to stop (and once they make the effort of stopping, they may feel less inclined to drive away after the hidden party emerges). However, the fact that this technique exists (and that it is likely practiced widely, given Adam Critchley’s view that “everybody’s done it”) indicates that the number and gender of hitchhikers in a hitchhiking group matters a great deal to many hitchhikers. It is clear that hitchhikers often make experiential observations about hitchhiking in various gender combinations, and that they sometimes contribute these observations to larger discussions of hitchhiking technique. When hitchhikers comment on how two men are “always thought” to travel more slowly, or mention is made of “contentious” arguments regarding the speed of a male and female pair versus a single hitchhiking male, they appear to be referencing a collaborative realm, or folkloric canon, of hitchhiking work technique. These kinds of comments help validate the use of McCarl’s occupational terminology.

Hiding tactics aside, the hitchhiking “numbers game” is often a fairly passive subject of observation and contemplation (at least, once the journey is already in motion). However, other aspects of hitchhiking appearance can be actively controlled and altered. For example, many hitchhikers give clothing a considerable amount of thought. Bright colours are often sought out, and several hitchhikers mentioned the advantages of

carrying a brightly coloured backpack. Beyond the flash of innocence conveyed by a cheery yellow or green satchel, however, backpacks were also prized for their connotations of long-term travel. As Liam Peacock pointed out, “You know, people with backpacks are going places, I think that’s a pretty obvious signifier to people, you know. Without a backpack, people—I’m sure they must wonder why you’re suddenly improvising a way to blow town, right?”

Some older male hitchhikers also reminisced about hitchhiking in military regalia. As Joe MacPherson remembered it, “Hitchhiking in uniform was primarily a breeze. ... Because you’re well dressed, you’re in your dress greens, crisp shirt, tie, hat, you know. Nobody would ever fear that—‘Hey, he’s just a military recruit, we’ve got to give this guy a ride.’ So it was very easy to get a ride.” Gary Ledrew also recalled that while he actually wore his “civvies” (or everyday clothes) during his workday in the Navy, he always put his uniform back on to hitchhike, because “if you were in uniform, everybody picked you up.”

Moreover, Chloe Edbrooke explained that she prefers to wear modest, feminine clothing while hitchhiking, as she wishes to benefit from the lack of danger typically associated with femininity, while restricting a more sexual gaze. She commented, “I try to look more feminine when I’m hitchhiking, like I’ll maybe have a scarf in my hair, or be wearing a dress or skirt or something. But I also don’t want to look sexual in any way, so I’m hoping that it’s like a Mormon dress, or you know, a really conservative skirt or something.” Similarly, Emma Lang noted that she and her brother made sure to dress very neutrally when they hitchhiked together; her brother, who identifies as gender queer, toned down his look as per Emma’s request, while Emma wore shorts “of a proper length,

like nothing too skimpy.” They also decided to “wear shoes that we could run in, in case there was an emergency.” Matthew Southall wore dress shoes while hitchhiking once, “because I really wanted to make myself look nice,” though he “couldn’t walk for two weeks” afterwards because of the blisters he sustained in the process. Other hitchhikers emphasized the importance of appearing clean-cut or, as Liam Peacock put it, “not looking like a sketchbag,” but as Adam Critchley explained, this is sometimes “easier said than done.” Not all hitchhikers seem motivated to reach this goal, however. Adam had even heard of a hitchhiking clown:

AC: I know one guy that used to do it in a clown wig and nose, but I would never stop for that guy. I’d be like, “Nope, I want to keep my skin today.”

AM: That sounds kind of disturbing.

AC: Yeah!

AM: But he thinks it works better?

AC: Well he keeps doing it! So I guess there’s a certain subset of people that will pick up the weird clown on the side of the road.²¹

Hitchhikers may also use props to augment their presentation of self. For example, Adam Critchley felt his banjo usefully conveyed that he was not, as he put it, “a runaway convict.” Chad Griffiths, on the other hand, cited the advantages of carrying baseball equipment. He explained, “Sometimes I have special things that I do, like I’ve been getting into the habit of taking a baseball mitt and a pair of cleats with me, even if I’m not going to play [laughter]. Because it just makes you look like you’re going to a ball game

²¹ In her blog post, “Creepy Clowns Explained, Folklore-Style,” Sarah Gordon examines the mounting “creepy clown hysteria” on social media (wherein first and second-hand accounts of clown sightings are often discussed). She argues that the alleged sightings are “absolutely textbook” urban legends, and hypothesizes “that the creepy clown narrative has latched on right now because of a cultural encouragement to fear smiling, unfamiliar faces,”—or, in other words, because of a lack of societal trust (Gordon 2016).

down the road.” Hitchhiking props can be wonderfully idiosyncratic. Sasha Boczkowski revealed a particularly innovative strategy:

SB: Props really work. I got a pumpkin once. I needed to get back from Steady Brook quickly, so I bought a pumpkin. I was like, yeah, a single woman with pumpkin, no one’s going to—[laughter] and it worked ...

AM: So did you ask people if the pumpkin helped?

SB: No, but I knew it helped. They were like—everyone wanted to know about the pumpkin. They were like, “Why do you have this pumpkin? Where are you going?” And I was like, “I’m going to St. John’s with my pumpkin.” You know? [laughter] It just worked really well.

Another type of hitchhiking presentation concerns the stance or body language of the appealing hitchhiker. Should the hitchhiker stand up straight? Should they walk along the highway? Is it ever reasonable to hitchhike from a seated position? Chad Griffiths argued, “Yeah, you know, you don’t want to be sitting down, you know, you kind of want to be standing up. Some people even have certain respect for those hitchhikers who are walking instead of standing there, but I find—you know, that’s a consideration, but I wouldn’t give away a good position just to walk.” In Chad’s view, sitting could read as laziness to drivers, which might reduce one’s hitchhiking prospects. Another hitchhiker, Shagg Burrige, felt that walking conveyed an impression of determination, which might garner respect from drivers; similarly, Kevin Bassett said that he always walked and “kept in motion all the time. I saw a lot of guys, you know, standing there like that—I was like, you’re never going to get nowhere like that.” Clearly, not all hitchhikers agree on these principles. Adam Critchley also described a man who liked to sit and read a book while hitchhiking:

Another tactic that I used I learned from a friend in BC, because he was like a 6’5, giant, aggressively gay man. But he looked like a Viking. He was delightful, we called him Big Gay Nick. That was how he would introduce himself. But you know, he’s huge. He’s built like a brick shit house. So what he used to do, he used to sit on his pack, and make himself as small as he possibly could and just read a book. And then, you know, his logic

was that when the family in the station wagon drove by, they'd be like, "Oh look, he's totally not a serial killer, he reads!" [laughter] Which I found worked, actually—although the one time I did it, I was reading a book about serial killers.

Here, a seated position is valued because it conceals the hitchhiker's height, while leading towards connotations of respectability (through the supplementary act of reading). In matters of body position, it seems that hitchhikers are primarily concerned with maintaining a trustworthy, respectable stance. However, hitchhikers can also use their bodies for more clandestine types of communication. For example, Chloe Edbrooke thought about using clasped, praying hands to express religious devotion:

My friend that I was going with, she said, "Well, if we get really desperate, we can put our hands into a prayer shape and sort of wave our hands in a prayer formation." And I kind of thought, well that's a bit weird and dishonest, because I'm not religious, but she said, "Well you know, I have a friend who wasn't getting picked up for a long time, and then she did that and got picked up." And so it's like this secret weapon, but it seems a bit dishonest.

Body stance can potentially be used as a disguise, then, to conceal one's physical presence, or convey a mask of religious sentiment. However, the vast majority of interviewed hitchhikers remained faithful to a fairly classic hitchhiking position: an upright stance, with a visible, outstretched thumb.

Finally, several hitchhikers highlighted the importance of appearing happy and "acting like you're having a ball" while waiting for a ride. Smiles and grins were noted as effective expressions, along with the use of eye contact to "connect with," or alternatively, "guilt" drivers into stopping. Shagg Burrridge also mentioned a time when he felt his shift in attitude had influenced his hitchhiking fortunes, during the end of a long trip in Armenia:

So anyway, I got on the road, and I was there for a long time. Already feeling kind of bad, and then on top of that nobody was picking me up. And I had gotten into a real sour mood, I guess, but then after awhile of feeling this way I got kind of desperate, and just

had to pick myself up. So I started singing really loud, “Don’t Cry for Me, Argentina.” [laughter] And within a very short time someone hauled over and picked me up, so I think maybe sometimes people can sense your grumpiness and choose not to take you with them.

Some hitchhikers worry about appearing *too* happy, however, as drivers could assume that their help is not needed. Overall, the communication of something between desperation and general good cheer seems like the most popular performance of hitchhiking expression.

In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman describes how high-stakes moments can provoke especially conscientious performances of self, stating, “It is apparent that care will be great in situations where important consequences for the performer will occur as a result of his conduct” (1959, 225). As hitchhikers wait along the side of the road, they strive to make the most of their “expressive equipment” (Goffman 1959, 24) to create an innocent, sympathetic presentation of self. If hitchhikers fail to present effectively, they may spend an awful lot of time in the ditches of the highway. They could run out of necessary provisions, or miss an important travel deadline. For these reasons, many hitchhikers put their best, most trustworthy foot forward as they present themselves along the highway. As they do so, hitchhikers imaginatively demonstrate the dynamism and creativity of hitchhiking traditions.

Inside the Car: Stranger Danger in Intimate Space

Once the driver stops along the highway, hitchhikers often attempt to form a character assessment of their new chauffeur. However, this judgement must occur within seconds and in the interests of efficiency, hitchhikers tend to leap hastily towards a general level of trust for their drivers. This type of trust is akin to the phenomenon of

“scatter trust,” defined by Trudy Govier as trust directed at “an indeterminate range of other people, mostly unknown to us, on whose actions and functioning we are dependent in the course of ordinary modern life” (1997, 116). Hitchhikers are fundamentally dependent on drivers, and they do not have time to cultivate trust with everyone who stops for them. In order to make progress, hitchhikers must accept rides from strangers who may not have their best interests at heart.

Upon accepting the ride, hitchhikers usually begin conversing with the driver. As Chloe Edbrooke explained:

Once you get in the car, you are a performer, almost. Because you don't want to give them nothing, you don't want to be silent during the ride. It feels like you are bound—you are forced to make conversation because it's part of the exchange. So then you will find out more about them, and they'll find out something about you.

Many hitchhikers anticipate these conversational expectations, and therefore aim to be friendly and personable with their drivers. A possible explanation for these expectations can be inferred from Melvin Firestone's 1969 article “Mummers and Strangers in Newfoundland,” as he describes an isolated Newfoundland community's attitude towards strangers during the 1960s. Firestone writes:

That strangers are feared does not imply that anyone is in any way unkind to them. On the contrary, the people of the straits are genuinely hospitable, friendly, and eager to establish relationships. The outsider is urged to visit, stay late, and partake of meals. One man said to me, “People around here are good to strangers, aren't they?” He was right. However, covert fear and overt friendliness are complementary. The more you find out about an outsider, what he is up to, and what he is like, the less of a threat he is. (1969, 71)

Thus, hitchhikers and drivers strive to learn about one another throughout their encounters, in hopes of dissolving the threat of the unknown stranger. Even though short-distance hitchhikers may seem more knowable than long-distance hitchhikers, some short-distance hitchhikers also abide by this principle. For example, John MacNeil, who

hitchhikes locally around the Cape Breton Regional Municipality, stated that he always introduces himself after being picked up, “so that I’m not imposing, and they know that I’m not there to hide out or something.” Short-distance hitchhikers may also try to discern social connections as a part of this process. Joan Butler, who hitchhiked as a teenager around her community in the ‘70s, commented, “I would usually be picked up by someone [I] knew, and I’m a very talkative person and both my parents were from the community, so I always found that I could link connections. That was one of the strategies I used, was trying to make a connection with somebody so that I was less fearful.” Moreover, John Drover stated that while hitchhiking in Newfoundland, “you could get picked up by somebody that you know, or you know, it’s Newfoundland, so the first questions are well, where are you from, who are you related to, you know.” By tracing social connections, hitchhikers and drivers can forge networks of trust and social meaning, and lessen the interaction’s anonymity. In doing so, the threat posed by the unknown stranger will, ideally, diminish substantially.

Sometimes, these conversations can lead to euphoric moments of connection between the hitchhiker and driver. Hitchhiking interactions can open up new perspectives and insights; Peter Smith, for example, credits a series of rides with spiritual drivers to his current practice of Zen Buddhism. Long-term friendships may also flourish in these moments. However, social friction inevitably occurs, and hitchhikers often develop a variety of defensive tactics to deal with these situations. For instance, many hitchhikers keep their actual opinions about religion and politics to themselves. As John Drover remarked:

If you're going to be stuck in a car with someone, the last thing you want to do is start talking controversial topics, you know ... you would never want to be stuck in a car with someone and you know, all of a sudden you're in an argument about religion or politics or anything, really. You want to keep it pretty nice and calm. ... You just play sort of the dumb innocent Canadian, you know, you're just appreciating getting a lift, and getting a little history lesson and a little politics lesson.

Of course, drivers have control over the moving vehicle, and they likewise have greater control over the conversation. Hitchhikers are dependent on drivers, and they often follow and appease the driver's direction of conversation. Even when faced with proselytizing drivers, many hitchhikers remain quiet and respectful. For example, John Drover responded to a group of Jehovah's Witnesses that were "really hardcore trying to convert me" by smiling and nodding, saying that he "agreed with whatever it was they were having to say, and just really—it was pretty uncomfortable, you know."

Furthermore, Roshni Caputo-Nimbark found it helped to identify with some kind of religion while travelling through certain countries, as religious drivers were not responding well to her views:

I don't have a religion, I wasn't raised with one, or an organized one, but I came to just say I was Christian because they prefer you to say Christian, even if they're Muslim, than to say, "No, nothing." ... Buddhist is also a good one to say, I found. I met some Mormons once and they, well the young guy, I told him I was Buddhist, and he whispered, he was like, "That's way cool." I was like, yeah! I'm in with the Mormons. [laughter]

Many female hitchhikers also use tactics to deflect sexual advances. Sometimes, female hitchhikers pretend to be married or in a relationship for these reasons. Paula Graham, for example, was advised by another female hitchhiker to devise these kinds of stories ahead of time, in preparation for her eventual interactions with drivers:

I guess for me, a lot of it was being a woman hitchhiking, yeah, so preparing those things about like, "You know, my boyfriend is a professional boxer..." [laughter] So I had all these lines prepared ... but in fact, more times than not, I would tell people, like, "Oh, I have all these silly stories about my boyfriend, really no one knows where I am,

dadadada,” you know? Like I felt so safe with them that not only did I not use my safety strategies but I told them about them, you know?

As discussed previously, however, not all women feel this comfortable or safe while hitchhiking, and many have been sexually assaulted while doing so. To deter sexually aggressive drivers, Roshni Caputo-Nimbark said she tried to “keep, keep on talking, so they don’t even have time to think about it, you know. I found as long as I kept babbling about, you know, weather and I don’t know, maybe their mom or something ... the news, stuff that’s unrelated, that usually worked.” These techniques are not always effective, however, and sometimes terrible things do happen. Many hitchhikers are aware of these risks, and usually aim to remain vigilant throughout their interactions with drivers. Drunk drivers are usually avoided, and detours definitely tend to raise alarm bells; if a driver heads off the main road, hitchhikers tend to become immediately suspicious. Some hitchhikers carried knives for defensive purposes, and one hitchhiker was even advised to carry toilet paper as a fire starter, which he could throw in the backseat after lighting “so he [the driver]’s got to deal with that before he can deal with me.” John Drover demonstrated another defensive hitchhiking technique, which involved folding money into a small, compact square, so that “nobody would be able to find it if they were to steal it from you.”

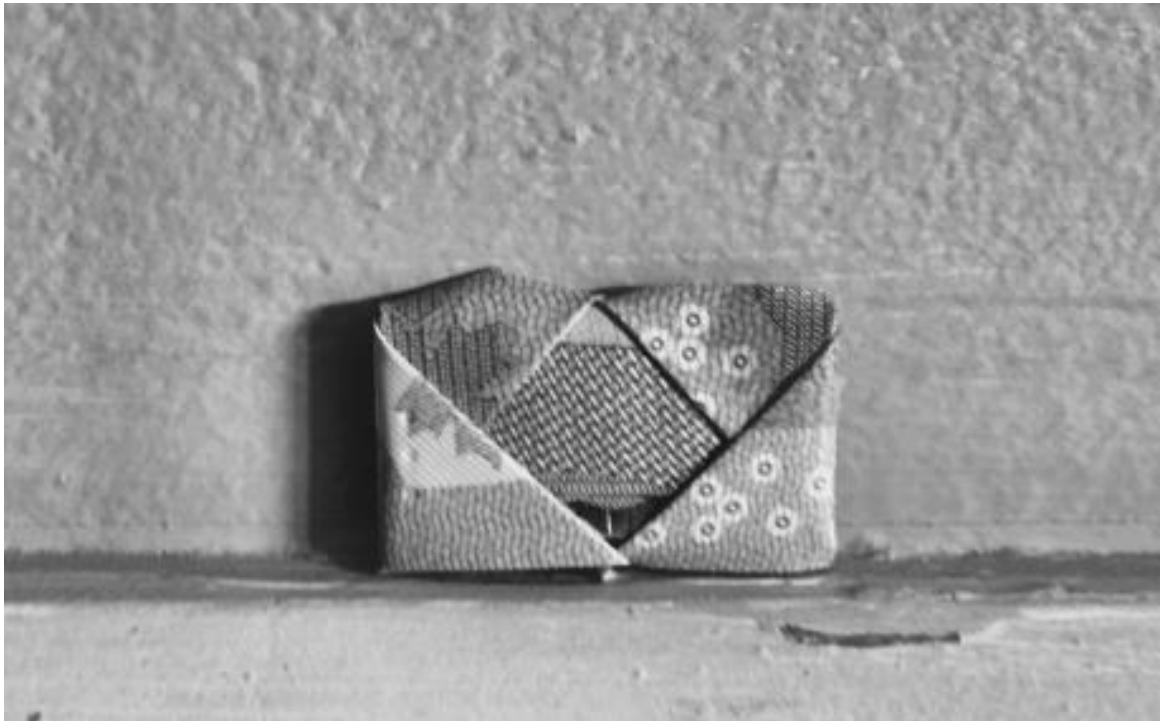


Figure 7: A rare sighting of hitchhiking material culture: A \$20 bill, folded compactly by John Drover to prevent theft (approximately 2.5 cm in length).

John never used this technique while hitchhiking himself, but he recounted how his father taught him to fold the money when he was a child, explaining:

That was something I learned at a very young age, how to fold up this money, and my dad would always be like, “Now, if you’re ever hitchhiking,” and I mean, I’m five or six years old at this time, and my dad’s like, “If you’re ever hitchhiking you can fold your money up this way, and you know, it’ll be safe.” And I don’t think I ever folded my money like that while hitchhiking, but I still remember how to fold the money.

Furthermore, Matthew Southall decided to use Snapchat (a video app on his mobile phone) while hitchhiking as a safety measure. He said, “Anytime that I got picked up by somebody, I always tried to do a clip showcasing what their car looked like, or where on the highway I was, or something like that. Subconsciously I was doing that as well just for my own safety and for my mom and dad’s sanity, because I told them I would.” Matthew explained that if anything ever happened to him, the Snapchat post

would reveal the time and location of his last video. Most of his drivers were apparently enthused about the videos, and Matthew's hitchhiking Snapchat posts eventually acquired a sizeable internet following. In this way, Matthew combined a safety technique with an expressive documentation of his hitchhiking experiences.

Finally, hitchhikers often learn to become slightly different versions of themselves while travelling from car to car. As Chad explained it, "You know, when you're talking to someone who's picked you up, you know, and they seem—whatever, educated, or middle class-y, or whatever, you're going to talk to someone a bit different." At the same time, however, Chad remarked, "You don't want to sound like an egghead to someone who's woodsy." Hitchhikers may mirror the conversational styles of their drivers, so that they can attempt to appear relatable. They might also conceal information that contradicts their desired presentation of self. As Goffman writes, "If an individual is to give expression to ideal standards during his performance, then he will have to forgo or conceal action which is inconsistent with those standards" (1959, 41). When a hitchhiker tells a "woodsy" driver that he studies English rather than Sociology, then, he is concealing the perceived esoteric nature of his studies. A more down-to-earth, relatable subject better fulfills the "ideal standards" of this particular performance of self.

How are Techniques Shared?

Do hitchhikers constitute a folk group? In *The Dynamics of Folklore*, Toelken writes that folklore is usually communicated "over a period of time or across a geographical area mostly among people who share some basis for everyday communal contacts" or "some factor in common that makes it possible or rewarding or meaningful ... to exchange vernacular materials in a culturally significant way" (1996, 37).

Hitchhikers may not be acquainted with other hitchhikers, and they do not interact with the regularity or proximity of most occupational groups. However, some hitchhikers might be said to belong to an “imagined community” of hitchhikers, where “all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined,” since “the members ... will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson 2006, 6). Some hitchhikers may not know other hitchhikers, but they may still feel an affinity for those who have had similar experiences. However, some hitchhikers are definitely acquainted with other hitchhikers and may excitedly exchange their techniques and stories with one another. Such conversations may inspire those who have not yet hitchhiked to give it a try. Moreover, since a single hitchhiker may wish to avoid hitchhiking alone, this motivation can also bring new people into the hitchhiking fold. Chad Griffiths stated that he’s “always interested in getting new people into it,” saying that he liked the process of “virginally guiding them through the world with hitchhiking.” Furthermore, hitchhiking pairs and trios often theorize (and occasionally argue) about hitchhiking techniques with one another. Those who hitchhike together could be considered a more traditional type of occupational group, as they will likely recognize and evaluate hitchhiking techniques collaboratively with one another.

Because hitchhiking is ordinarily practiced by individuals and small groups, its techniques lack the coherence and unity of work techniques circulated amongst larger, more stable occupational groups. McCarl’s theoretical position argues that technique is “prescribed by the group and used as criteria for the determination of membership and status within it” (1978, 149). As a mostly individual pursuit, however, hitchhiking is

fairly impervious to these types of hierarchical and conformist group dynamics. The fragmentary aspect of hitchhiking technique may also derive from the individualism of each driver's system of trust. In a sense, hitchhiking may be viewed as an act of meeting the sheer variety of human diversity. Every driver on the road has their own set of prejudices, desires, and life experiences, and everyone has their own methods of developing trust with strangers. Chad acknowledged this variation, saying, "There's a certain randomness to it, even though I try to mitigate that randomness with my skills." The idea of hitting on a strategy that adeptly simplifies these possibilities might be considered a form of belief, which, as defined by David Hufford, refers simply to "claims about the world in which humans live" (1995, 21). Hufford also distinguishes between beliefs that develop rationally from personal experience and beliefs that are communicated culturally, which "allow us to build on an enormous treasury composed of the experiential learning of others" (22). Many of the most creative and unique hitchhiking techniques are developed from personal experience, and could therefore be considered experience-based beliefs. After a given hitchhiking technique is developed and successfully executed for the first time, the impetus mounts to try the technique again. If the technique proves consistently successful, the hitchhiker's convictions and belief in the technique can become more and more fervent. For example, Chad has experienced multiple successes while hitchhiking with baseball equipment. Last summer, his brother forgot a large bag of baseball bats, and Chad was asked to hitchhike into St. John's with the bag of bats in tow. Reportedly, this was one of his swiftest journeys ever, and several drivers reminisced to him about their baseball glory days. Chad's belief is

now rock solid: hitchhiking as a baseball player is a proven, demonstrably successful hitchhiking strategy.

Many of the interview excerpts in earlier sections mention techniques recommended by other hitchhikers. Often, these techniques were suggested because they were developed from first-hand experience, and these strategies were usually relayed as a story. This is in keeping with Hufford's notion that "the natural vehicle of folk belief, perhaps of most belief, is stories that show what is true by what is said to have happened" (1995, 20). Sometimes, a hitchhiker tries out the storied technique and finds it effective, sometimes the technique is tried and found deficient, and sometimes the technique is not attempted, as the hitchhiker finds the technique morally questionable, risky, or otherwise unsuitable for their purposes. The hitchhiker's experimental approach towards hitchhiking technique speaks to the impressive dynamism of hitchhiking traditions, which follows Barre Toelken's articulation of the dynamic and static elements of folklore. Essentially, Toelken explains that any given folkloric performance consists of conservative elements that remain the same and dynamic elements that change, both of which occur in varying degrees over space and through time, as the performance (or tradition) is folklorically communicated (1996, 39). Although some hitchhiking techniques remain consistent, a great number of them are highly changeable and dynamic. If this is the case, why might that be? What factors are encouraging such dynamism? And in light of this dynamism, is it really possible to determine a canon of hitchhiking work technique, in keeping with McCarl's theoretical framework?

In my view, the most conservative elements of hitchhiking technique are generally unrelated to matters of trust. These techniques include the thumbs-up gesture, which

connotes hitchhiking purpose, and the techniques that concern spatial considerations. The most basic principles of hitchhiking involve knowing where to stand along the highway, and understanding how to identify oneself as a hitchhiker. Hitchhiking techniques that deal with appearance and conversational tactics tend to be much more dynamic, however, because they respond to the demands of trust. Trust can be a highly individual emotion, as people forge trust with one another in unique, personal ways. Hitchhikers are therefore motivated to devise creative personas and conversational techniques that cohere with their own idiosyncratic, ideal, and trustworthy presentations of self. Importantly, trust is also socially constructed, and many hitchhiking techniques anticipate and reckon with these constructs. Throughout this process, hitchhikers introduce a great deal of dynamism into the realm of hitchhiking work technique.

Is it useful, then, to apply McCarl's "canon of work technique" to a discussion of hitchhiking strategies? Hitchhikers do not necessarily communicate on a regular basis, and they often develop their techniques alone. Moreover, when hitchhikers hear of a technique, they will usually try it out by themselves. Hitchhikers do not recognize and assess techniques together in large groups—at least, not while they are hitchhiking—and if a canon of hitchhiking technique does exist, it is assembled in a highly individual, fragmentary manner. McCarl's terminology does help demonstrate the circulation of more stable hitchhiking techniques, while bringing attention to the variety and dynamism of other hitchhiking traditions. However, McCarl's insistence on a canon of work technique which is communally prescribed by, and "used as criteria for the determination of membership" (1978, 149) within larger occupational groups does not acknowledge the communication of strategies between practitioners of more individualistic pursuits.

Hitchhiking certainly is not the only venture of this type; other endeavours with a similar exchange of strategies could include writing, programming, or home cooking, among other things (to say nothing of the countless work techniques circulated between individuals online). Ultimately, McCarl's definition should be extended to reflect these patterns of folkloric communication between individuals.

Hitchhiking does not occur in an ordinary occupational context, and is not subject to the group dynamics of a stable work environment. Furthermore, hitchhikers do not earn a wage. However, an occupational analysis of hitchhiking work techniques can still yield insights about trust, belief, and the dynamic and conservative processes of hitchhiking traditions. For these reasons, I have found it beneficial to examine hitchhiking strategies using McCarl's occupational folklife analysis.

Chapter Four: Hitchhiking Personal Experience Narratives

As mentioned in Chapter One, this thesis began to take shape as I listened to my friends tell their hitchhiking stories. Some of these friends are writers, and many of them can easily elicit laughter from a crowd; in my biased estimation, they are all pretty gifted storytellers. It isn't unusual to feel entertained in the company of these people. However, as the exchange of hitchhiking stories continued, I became increasingly convinced that these stories had an oddly captivating quality. The plots of the stories were, at turns, suspenseful, surprising, hilarious, and redemptive; the characters portrayed (generally, the drivers) were alternatively (and sometimes simultaneously) intimidating, intriguing, eccentric and lovable. Many hitchhikers will say that there is *something* about the act of hitchhiking that leads to storytelling. Some may even allow that, in a sense, there is something about storytelling that leads to hitchhiking—as Greg Pike remarked, “I think half the reason people hitchhike is to get a good story.” In this chapter, I will explore some aspects of this dialogue between hitchhiking and storytelling, while offering tentative explanations (from both emic and etic perspectives) of why hitchhiking stories are often assessed as “good” stories. Using examples from my corpus of interviews, I will also identify some structural patterns and broad categories of hitchhiking stories, in hopes of illustrating the shared, folkloric values that underpin many of these hitchhiking narratives.

First, however, I should clarify that when I use the terms “hitchhiking stories” and “hitchhiking narratives,” I am referring to hitchhiking personal experience narratives. The personal experience narrative, as defined by Sandra Dolby Stahl, refers to “a prose narrative relating a personal experience; it is usually told in the first person, and its

content is non-traditional” (1989, 12). Over the years, the question of whether the personal experience narrative is folklore or not has remained a subject of some contention. This is because personal experience narratives, unlike other folkloric forms of oral narrative such as folktales, myths, and legends, are not ordinarily told by multiple storytellers in an imitative, traditional manner. Personal experience narratives are typically told by the person who had the experience and, as a result, the informal, folkloric transmission of these stories is not usually evident. However, while the stories themselves remain idiosyncratic, and are thus not immediately recognizable as “items of folklore,” Dolby Stahl argues that “the secular beliefs represented by such academic terms as *values*, *attitudes*, or Alan Dundes’ (1972) term *folk ideas* would form the core of these secular narratives,” explaining that she “would identify such ‘nonverbalized folklore’ as the folkloric content of personal narratives” (1989, 19). This argument appears to have resonated with many folklorists (See Ryden 1993 and Frank 2003, for example). In this chapter, then, I aim to identify the covert values expressed by many of these hitchhiking personal experience narratives, to demonstrate the folkloric, informally communicated qualities conveyed through these stories.

As mentioned, I use both “hitchhiking stories” and “hitchhiking narratives” as terms in this thesis, to avoid repetition and because I find the phrase “hitchhiking personal experience narratives” a bit wordy and cumbersome. I recognize that these terms may seem a little vague in a broader folkloristic context, given that hitchhiking legends are also a kind of story/narrative. In this thesis, however, I use these terms solely in reference to personal experience narratives. Any mention of hitchhiking legends will be clarified using more specific folkloristic terminology.

Hitchhiking and Storytelling: Emic Perspectives

The connection between hitchhiking and storytelling may not be immediately apparent to those who have not hitchhiked. For many of my interviewees, however, there was an obvious kinship between the two activities, and their remarks may offer the most convincing explanation of this association. Chloe Edbrooke, for example, said she feels “like every single hitchhiking experience can easily become a story, unless it’s really boring, but most are kind of funny in some way,” and listed “gathering stories” amongst her favourite aspects of hitchhiking, saying, “I think that’s the biggest part of it, gathering other people’s stories and just having this little glimpse into somebody’s life. Because what can you find out about somebody in a couple of hours? Well, sometimes a lot.” Another hitchhiker, Matthew Southall, said that a main motivation for hitchhiking was to “see what stories would come of it, because realistically I think that stories are all you have in life, and any opportunity that I get to do that is something I’m going to take advantage of.” As mentioned earlier, Greg Pike suggested that some people intentionally hitchhike to “get a good story,” and further commented, “It’s disappointing when you have an uneventful hitch ... if somebody interesting picks you up, that’s the story you tell your friends over the next few days. If everyone’s really normal, there’s no story.” Some hitchhikers used their hitchhiking experiences for other types of narrative reflection as well. For example, several hitchhikers wrote poetry about their time on the road²², Matthew Southall posted Snapchat videos of his individual drivers (as discussed in

²² See Appendix A for two examples of hitchhiking poems, written by interviewees Joe MacPherson and John MacNeil.

Chapter Three), and Laura Ryan often chronicles her hitchhiking rides on Facebook, saying, “I do little posts on Facebook after every single ride I have, where I’m like, ‘I met this person today, and this was this person’s story.’” Laura explained that her hitchhiking narratives also help her with her work as an aesthetician, since her clients often respond well to her stories:

LR: Hitchhiking just gives me exciting things to talk about with my friends and to my clients at work. I think that's why people keep requesting me as an aesthetician, because I don't keep talking about the same stuff, I have a wide variety of different things I can talk to them about. Things that a lot of people consider wild and different, yeah. ... It helps, you know, with talking to strangers all day long and having to, you know, keep conversation going. Because sometimes you'll have a full package of like a manicure, pedicure, facial, massage, that'll be like three and a half hours of conversation you have to come up with, right.

AM: Do people comment on it sometimes?

LR: Oh a lot, a lot. They really do. And I've had clients, actually, after I tell them stories, they actually give me their number and email in case I'm hitchhiking through sometime. So that happens too, I have people from my work add me to Facebook and things like that, they're like, "Oh, if you're ever in Ontario send me a little message, and I'll give you a little ride somewhere," or something like that.

As well, Joe MacPherson, who concluded much of his hitchhiking by the 1970s, discussed the various ways that he makes use of his experiences:

I enjoyed the early moments of my time on the road, I enjoyed the camaraderie and the people that I met, I enjoyed the situations that I got myself into, I was scared many times, I was blown away many times by some of the things that occurred, but I experienced a lot. I mean, I took everything that I gained in experience and I made it a part of my life, and now I can sit back and I can talk to you about it, I can write about it, I can feel it like it was just yesterday and to me, like I said, I could do it all over again tomorrow.



Figure 8: Portrait of Joe MacPherson, reading aloud a poem he wrote while hitchhiking in the '70s.

Arthur W. Frank's *Letting Stories Breathe: A Socio-Narratology* (2010) offers many salient points on the relationship between story and experience. As Frank puts it, "According to the conventional understanding, people have experiences—something happens—and then they tell stories that represent those experiences" (21). However, experience does not necessarily precede storytelling, as stories often furnish our imaginations with notions of potential action. In Frank's words, "Stories refine the human capacity to simulate possible futures," so that in effect, "Life and story imitate each other, ceaselessly and seamlessly, but neither enjoys either temporal or causal precedence" (2010, 21). Folklorists have also examined this dynamic. In *Story, Performance and Event: Contextual Studies of Oral Narrative*, for example, Richard Bauman notes that "It

is the structures of signification in narrative that give coherence to events in our understanding,” and further demonstrates how narrative can influence events before they take place (1986, 5). This subversion of a more sequential “experience leading to stories about the experience” order is particularly evident in the case of hitchhiking. For example, several interviewed hitchhikers were inspired to hitchhike after reading Kerouac’s *On the Road*, or said they “thought it would be an adventure” because of other depictions of hitchhiking. Another hitchhiker, Tom Hawco, spoke about how hitchhiking allowed him to connect literature and academic ideas with his personal experiences:

Because that’s the thing about it at that time and that age for me, I had all kinds of academic things I was learning, but I didn’t have any experience. So to be able to get experience to go along with it was a wonderful thing, it was really good. ... And because of what I was doing, being out on the road, it was mostly kind of searching stuff, and so I knew the background of all that, I knew the poetry behind that ... And then for the experience stuff, because you only have so much experience, you can read sociology and anthropology and whatnot, but I found great comfort in literature, to be able to see the examples of it, and so it was kind of filling out in my mind, and then to be able to go out on the road and start meeting people and talking about some of it, and trying to figure it all out, it was a very good thing for me, you know.

When Tom Hawco returned from his hitchhiking trips to the United States, he often told stories to his fellow students at Memorial University during the ‘60s. He stated, “So I told the stories many times, you know, there were many stories I could tell about being on the road and stuff, and people were interested, to the point where some people wanted to come with me next time I went—so anyway, I went with another friend of mine.” This example further underscores the imitative interplay of story and experience. In part, Tom Hawco hitchhiked to round out the stories and academic notions he had been previously exposed to. Then, the stories he told about his own experiences prompted others to pursue similar activities. This linkage between story and experience is not revolutionary, but the

notion of hitchhiking as a highly “story-able” activity may intensify this correspondence in a novel way.

Not all hitchhikers tell stories about their exploits, however. Joyce Babbins, who engaged in both long and short-distance hitchhiking, commented, “I didn’t talk about it a whole lot when I did it or after I did it, or about the business of picking up hitchhikers, because it just seemed like a very normal, natural thing to do. I didn’t see it as anything extraordinary.” Other hitchhikers/drivers may wish to avoid disclosing their activities to others. For example, Rose Westbury, who regularly picks up hitchhikers, said, “It’s been a long time since I’ve talked to anybody about hitchhiking, to tell you the truth.” She explained:

AM: Do you usually tell people about the hitchhikers you pick up?

RW: No. Well no, I like to—I keep that to myself. You know that Zappa story²³, I haven’t told anybody. That was a few—I think I told somebody about the Quebec couple, and they said, “*Mom!*” or “*Rose! Are you crazy?*” “No.” [laughs] You know, in this day and age, it’s frowned upon.

Even if they *do* sense that their hitchhiking experiences are somewhat noteworthy, some hitchhikers may not feel that their stories fit easily into conversation. Linda Samuels, for example, said she’d gladly discuss hitchhiking if it came up, but that in everyday life she “doesn’t make big stories about it.” Kevin Bassett commented that he doesn’t have too many people to reminisce with these days and, as a result, he rarely talks about hitchhiking with anyone. On a related note, Margaret Morris stated the following:

²³ The “Zappa story” refers to an exchange Rose had with two hitchhikers regarding their dog, Zappa. When Rose asked, ‘Oh, as in Frank Zappa?’ the hitchhikers proceeded to “look at me, like ‘How did you *know* that?’ As in, a woman your age”—despite the fact that Frank Zappa’s career took off during the ’60s.

If people have an interest, yeah, I'll happily tell the stories, but often they don't come up, you know. People are usually more into the moment now, you know, instead of what we've done in the past. But I'm not meeting as many new people as I used to, because I'm kind of set in my ways now, I have my friends and I have my interests and I have my hobbies, and this and that. ... Most of my friends know most of my stories, so that's it.

Because my public appeal for interviews was framed as a quest for “hitchhiking stories,” (McGuire 2015; CBC News, Newfoundland and Labrador 2015) I likely attracted a pool of hitchhikers who were at ease with the act of storytelling. Amongst other writer/storytelling types featured in this thesis (including the hitchhiking writers I was already acquainted with), I met Greg Pike, a former English professor, who had hoped to be a writer during his hitchhiking days; Joe MacPherson, who gave me a thick, spiral-bound book he authored about his childhood in Glace Bay; Lloyd Pike, who I recognized from a Storytelling Circle at The Crow's Nest in St. John's²⁴; and John MacNeil, who responded to my request for hitchhiking stories in the following light:

There's always a set few, I mean I'm a storyteller, I mean that's—I got that legitimately from my father and our bringing up and the times, and of course teaching high school English for years, thirty-one years at that, so I like storytelling. And I'm always ready to listen to one, and I always try to tell one, especially if it's of interest to people. Anyway. But yeah, there are a lot of good stories that—you get some dandies from people. I'll tell you a fishing story. You want a fishing story?

The fishing story was great, though it wasn't hugely relevant to the topic at hand; in fact, John tossed out a few stories during our interview that had little to do with hitchhiking (and which might be classified more readily as tall tales). All this is to say that on the whole, the hitchhikers interviewed for this thesis showed a definite knack for storytelling,

²⁴ The Storytelling Circle is an event held monthly at The Crow's Nest, an otherwise private naval officer's bar in St. John's. Attendees may regale the audience with an oral story of any kind. For a folkloristic study of another contemporary storytelling event, as well as a brief description of the St. John's Storytelling Circle, see Caitlin Bethune's MA thesis, “Rain city chronicles: storytelling and authenticity in Vancouver, BC” (2015).

and more often than not, were willing to ruminate upon the storytelling potential of hitchhiking, too. The fact that hitchhiking and storytelling are both eminently social activities may also help explain this connection; as Lloyd Pike suggested, “Maybe you have to be a little bit more of a gregarious type to hitchhike, which would make you more of a storyteller.” However, much hitchhiking is done out of necessity, regardless of the hitchhiker’s temperament and, as several interviewees noted, not all hitchhikers are going to tell stories about their experiences. For instance, Lloyd Pike expressed some doubt that a former hitchhiking companion of his, whom he described as “a very quiet type of guy,” would feel compelled to tell his hitchhiking stories. As a result, Lloyd didn’t see hitchhiking and storytelling as being inextricably connected. Peter Smith also hesitated to affirm this link, as he feels that many hitchhikers (particularly more practically-motivated, short-distance hitchhikers) are not oriented in this way:

Like I’ve picked up hitchhikers who are probably criminals, or you know, drunks, and they’re not interested—they just want your ride, you know, they just want to get a ride somewhere, they’re not too—they’re probably not going to tell anybody about the person they met hitchhiking. They’re probably not thinking about the camaraderie of humanity or ecological conservation or anything, they’re probably just like, “I need to get out of town.” And that’s it, and that’s fine, I think that’s cool, that’s the baseline, you know, the kindness and assumption of trust for me, I think that’s the coolest thing about hitchhiking. But I think generally, yeah, it can—there’s always stories to come out of it, there’s always stories there, whether or not the hitchhiker will tell them or not, but for someone like me, I’m always interested in hitchhiking stories, as are you, obviously.

But what is it about the act of hitchhiking that might allow for the creation of “good” stories? What sets hitchhiking apart from other types of travel (as far as storytelling potential goes) so that, as Emma Lang noted, “It’s great stories, you know, what are our normal travel stories? ‘Oh, I got stuck in Heathrow for three hours’”? How are the plots of hitchhiking stories created?

Several explanations were proposed by the interviewed hitchhikers. As Shagg Burridge pointed out:

I guess when you're mingling with people from all different walks of life, you get to hear their stories and tell them yours, and you know, there's a mingling that doesn't often happen, like a 50-year-old woman and two 25-year-old guys or something like that, normally we just wouldn't meet. ... So that's good, and yeah, for some reason maybe the adventure aspect that you never know where you're going to get to, or that you sometimes meet some odd characters—good stories are created that way too, I think.

On a similar note, Chloe Edbrooke remarked, “You end up with very unlikely people that you probably wouldn't have met otherwise, so that can kind of lead to a story,” and suggested that “because the circumstance of hitchhiking is so out of the ordinary, I find that more out of the ordinary conversations or experiences are bound to happen.” And, as Chad Griffiths commented, “I think it does have an air or aura of storytelling, kind of an adventure tale. Yeah, and it does give you material for it, I mean, you meet all these people, you go all these places, of course, yeah, there's stories all throughout.” Chad also suggested that the physical journey of hitchhiking mirrors the narrative structure of a story. He said, “You know, it is a journey, there is a beginning, middle and an end, and I think that is the most basic structure of a story ... you know, it is a story. You start somewhere, and then you go and you do these things, and you come back home.” Chloe articulated a similar thought. She said, “It's also your own journey, and they're on a journey, so there's two journeys that meet in one place. So where are they going, where are you going, and the intersection of that can already be kind of an interesting storyline.” Other hitchhikers discussed some elements that help foster particularly good stories. Emma Lang, for example, said that in her view, “The thing that always stands out in hitchhiking stories is when you don't get rides.” As well, many hitchhikers felt that risky

and dangerous rides tended to result in interesting stories. Greg Pike, for instance, suggested “the stories that are most interesting are the ones where you almost get hurt, I think.” He later distinguished between the stories that intrigue other people, and the memories he personally enjoys reminiscing about, saying:

When I look back, the stories I think other people like are the stories where something dangerous happened, something exciting, and you know, beginning/middle/end kind of stories. I think the things that I like to think about most are more so the—just the really nice people I met, really nice interactions, and then you go your separate ways.

Hitchhiking and Storytelling: An Etic Take

William Labov and Joshua Waletzky’s study on the syntagmatic structure of personal experience narratives, “Narrative Analysis: Oral Versions of Personal Experience” has been cited frequently since its publication in 1967. In their article, the authors isolate six sections of personal experience narratives: the *abstract*, which signals that a story is about to begin; the *orientation*, which introduces the time, place, and situation of the story to the listener; the *complicating event*, referring to the rising action of the story; the *resolution*, which reveals what finally occurs; the *evaluation*, where the storyteller expresses an attitude towards the story’s events; and the *coda*, which transitions the story back to the present moment. Not all stories contain every structural section, and occasionally a single sentence will express two sections at once (such as the resolution and the evaluation, which are often difficult to disentangle). Nonetheless, this structural breakdown has been widely accepted by narrative scholars, and Labov and Waletzky’s analysis can be readily applied to hitchhiking stories as well. In the following hitchhiking story, which was relayed by Greg Pike, I have isolated a possible narrative

structure using alternating font styles to convey the **abstract**, *orientation*, complicating event, **resolution**, *evaluation* and coda (in that order):

One of my favourite stories is where a woman picked me up, with Kendrick.

Kendrick was the guy I was hitchhiking with across Canada. She picked us up in Nelson B.C., and it was strange enough that she stopped that we asked her why she stopped. You know, and she was the first woman who really did this. And later, more women actually stopped, and you know, it didn't strike us as odd, but this was the first one and it did strike us as odd. Kendrick and I had both hitchhiked a lot, and this was new to both of us. So we just kind of after, we were driving for a bit and everyone was comfortable with each other, we said, you know, "It's kind of strange that you stopped. Thank you for doing that." And she said, "Well it's okay, I'm a professional psychic and I had a good feeling about you." And every time I tell that story, people laugh, and people think it's funny, but she was right. You know? [laughs] We totally were nice guys, we totally were happy for the ride, we kept each other company, we had a really nice time talking to each other. And when the ride was over she dropped us off, and you know, we wished each other well, so. There you go! I hope she's still out there, picking up really nice people and driving them where they need to go. I liked her a lot, I thought she was great.

With an opener of “One of my favourite stories...” Greg has signalled that a story is about to start, which constitutes the “abstract” of the story. In the following sentence, Greg provides an “orientation” to the story’s events by describing his hitchhiking partner, the place they were picked up, and the overall context of their hitchhiking journey. Once Greg and his partner are picked up, the “complicating event,” or rising action of the story begins. They have been picked up by a woman, a new occurrence, which seems a little strange at the time. After driving for a little while, the hitchhikers discuss the novelty of this event with their driver. Then, in response, their driver offers the “resolution,” or climax, or maybe punch line of the story: She picked them up because she is a professional psychic. Although some solo women might hesitate to pick up two hitchhiking men, she felt she could discern the safety of the situation. The plot of the story basically ends there, and Greg continues into the “evaluation,” where he expresses his own take on what occurred. Although he concedes that the story is pretty funny (at

least for the sceptics of the world), he also emphasizes the accuracy of the woman's intuition. After all, they were nice guys, they had a nice time together, and in fact, there's no evidence suggesting that she *doesn't* have psychic powers. The tone is a little tongue-in-cheek, perhaps, but the story remains open to interpretation. And with that, the story drifts into the "coda," as Greg offers a wistful reflection on the psychic driver, and brings his narrative back to the conversational moment.

While it can be fun to identify the moment where a narrative moves from *orientation* to *complicating event*, these boundaries are also slippery, and I do not see a larger objective in completing this type of analysis. I am not interested in subjecting any more hitchhiking stories to this variety of structural scrutiny. However, I believe that Labov and Waletzky's terminology is helpful for drawing attention to other unifying features of hitchhiking stories, which is why I have attempted the preceding analysis. Here, I wish to focus on the *complicating event*, or the rising action of any given narrative. In my view, the complicating event of almost every hitchhiking story begins when the hitchhiker steps into the car (or conversely, in driver's stories, when the driver picks up the hitchhiker). This action is inherently suspenseful and, in effect, sets up a question at the heart of many/most/even all hitchhiking stories: What happened when you trusted a stranger?

Was it wonderful? Bizarre? Terrible? What does it mean to trust a stranger? It is up to the *resolution* and *evaluation* to sort out the answers to these questions, and not all hitchhiking stories take up trust as an overt thematic concern. However, I feel that it simmers below the surface much of the time, and usually motivates the "story-able" events of a given hitchhiking interaction. The act of hitchhiking, in many cases, is about

trusting strangers, and in the telling of a hitchhiking story, that act of trust brings about an automatic sense of suspense and curiosity. By answering the question that complicates a hitchhiking story (“What happened when you trusted a stranger?”), hitchhikers effectively express the “folkloric content” of their stories. In the narratives that follow, then, I hope to show how hitchhiking stories folklorically communicate values of trust, while identifying some broad narrative categories and patterns that surfaced throughout my interviews.

Uplifting Stories

Since the general public tends to regard hitchhiking as a dangerous activity, the recounting of a safe hitchhiking ride could, potentially, become a story in and of itself. However, many hitchhikers tell stories that certainly transcend an “I trusted a stranger and nothing bad happened” plotline. These stories often convey the kindness and generosity of strangers or, in other instances, describe momentous, serendipitous interactions. By telling such stories, many hitchhikers affirm the goodness, joy and spontaneity that can be brought about by hitchhiking, along with the overall safety of the act. In the following story, for example, hitchhiker Sasha Boczkowski recounts an almost absurdly lucky hitchhiking moment:

Well, there's another one, one of the early ones on Vancouver Island, I was thinking about it earlier today, was with a first girlfriend, I think this was what set me on hitchhiking actually, and we were—we were on Salt Spring, and we had nowhere to stay for the night, and it was kind of wet and rainy and cold, and we didn't even have tents, we had a blanket, and we were like, "Where are we going to sleep? In the woods somewhere," and I remember we went out on the road, it was pitch black, and we were like, "Oh, let's try to hitchhike to a lake, or find a tree," and then this lady picks us up, and she's like, "Oh girls, what are you doing?" And we were like, "Hitchhiking," and she was an organic flower farmer. [laughter] So she talked to us, and she was like, "Yeah, I'll drive you to this really nice lake, you can sleep there," and then we got to talking more, and she was like, "You're nice people," and she's like, "If you want, you can come and stay in this shed, but I just have this crappy old shed, and you're welcome to come sleep at the farm." And we're like,

"Oh amazing, we won't be cold tonight." And then we arrive, and it's like—it was like paradise, it was this—fields and fields of flowers, and an archway with rose vines climbing on it or whatever, and she drives us down this paradise garden, and then to the shed, which was actually where she made potpourri. So we ended up sleeping in the potpourri drying rafter area that night, and then we helped her the next day, and she gave us all this chocolate and drove us to a boat house, like hitching is the way to go, man. Fuck anything else.

As hitchhikers, Sasha and her girlfriend are saved from a dreary night in the rain by an organic flower farmer. This farmer offers a ride, kindness, conversation and shelter, along with a uniquely aesthetic experience; through her hospitality, the hitchhikers find themselves sleeping amongst the scent of drying flowers, eating chocolate, and spending time in an impossibly beautiful, Eden-like sanctuary. In Sasha's words, this is the moment that "set her on hitchhiking." The next story (again, relayed by Sasha) also centres on hitchhiking as a means of finding beautiful, somewhat obscure places while travelling:

I remember being brought by this guy in Greece, and he's like, "Oh, I take you to my favourite place where I like to go and smoke marijuana." But it was this like ancient, first century after Christ little Christian temple, it was all overgrown in the middle of the woods, you know? With old school Orthodoxy paintings around and stuff. It was just, you know, a place you would never—like, how would you ever, ever find this place in the middle of a village in the middle of nowhere, right? There were beaches, another beautiful beach in Greece that people—I guess it's places—my most beautiful memories feel like places people brought me that I wouldn't otherwise find.

On a similar note, Amber Tapley told a story about a young Mi'kmaq man who, after picking her up hitchhiking, showed her "all of these special, sacred places" during a thunderstorm:

AM: You said you had written a poem about hitchhiking.

AT: I did, it was about this guy named Monk who picked us up, I think it was my first hitchhiking trip to Cape Breton. I came with a fellow named Matt Pretty, and we had intended to go around the Cabot Trail. We made it as far as Indian Brook, I'm not sure if you know Cape Breton very well, but that is not very far at all. And we decided to camp out there, and it was beautiful, we camped by a river for a few days. And then on the way back we were picked up by this guy named Monk, who was a young native fellow. And he, he was like, "Okay, you guys have a bit of time, I'll take you around to all our sacred places." And so he took us on this three-hour adventure, I don't even know where we went. And he was sharing a pipe with us, and anyway, he just drove us all around for

hours. We spent an entire afternoon together. And I wrote a poem about Monk, and the thunderstorm that was happening while he was driving us around to all of these special, sacred places.

As mentioned, many positive hitchhiking stories illustrate the generosity and kindness of drivers. Often, drivers give hitchhikers meals, shelter and other kinds of gifts, along with the requisite favour of a ride. Hitchhikers sometimes refer to their drivers as “angels,” or talk about how drivers truly went “above and beyond” their expectations. In some hitchhiking narratives, kind drivers even assume a sort of mystical, archetypal quality. In the following story, for example, Chad Griffiths is picked up by a pastor who, modern business practices aside, could easily reside in the world of magic tales:

I met this pastor one time, it was—I had this terrible time, which is a story that’s probably a little too long to get into now, about trying to get across the American border, and so after the first day, this pastor stopped and me and my travelling partner, Mary, got out of the car and I said my usual thing, “Oh, thanks for stopping,” and he said, “I always make sure that people get safe passage,” or something like that. And I was like, “Oh, that’s very nice,” and he turned out to be a pastor, he’s from this dry town in New Brunswick. And he was an interesting guy, and he made a living buying domains, internet domains, and then sitting on them for years, and then selling them for thousands and thousands and thousands of dollars, so that was kind of interesting, and eventually we got back to the border, after a six-week trip to the US. So I came back to Canada and I was hitchhiking back across the border, and got picked up, and said, “Oh, thanks for the ride,” and then the driver said, “Oh, I always make sure that someone has safe passage.” Here it was, it was this pastor dude again. And he was just this charming, endearing kind of character, he had a lot of love in a way, and yeah, he was a very giving, generous guy, and I was very happy to have met him again, for sure. Yeah, there’s lots of characters, I mean, you see the good in people, there’s, you know, just a lot of people, there’s a lot of people out there. Yeah.

Chad’s ending reflection is typical of other positive hitchhiking stories, too. While reminiscing about the kindness of particular drivers, some hitchhikers seem to become suddenly moved by the cumulative generosity they have received, and end their stories with comments to that effect. Greg Pike ended one of his uplifting hitchhiking stories in a structurally similar way, which I have bolded for emphasis:

There was a woman in Winnipeg, lovely woman. Picked us up, I can't remember where she picked us up, but she drove us right into Winnipeg. She brought us to her house, put us up for the night, and then brought us to the Natural Museum of, I can't remember if it was a History of Man, or History of Nature. But you know, Natural History museum. [laughter] And she paid our way! She said, "This is such a great place, you just have to go see it." And she did, she put us up for that night, fed us, brought us to this place, paid for our tickets. We went in, looked around, she picked us up, and we were done. She didn't go in with us. And then dropped us off on whatever part of the highway we wanted to be dropped off at. You know, that was lovely. **And I wish I still had, you know, I wish I could send her a Christmas card or something, I'd love to know what happened to some of these people, and I don't have any of that. There are a lot of fabulous people, you know, so it was really good.**

With this type of closing "evaluation" (in the Labovian sense), hitchhikers situate the positivity of a single hitchhiking ride within the larger sum of their experiences. In this way, hitchhikers suggest that positive hitchhiking rides are not exceptions to the norm but instead, are par for the course, as moments of kindness amongst many other moments of kindness, in a world full of sweet, fabulous people.

The reflections of drivers who pick up hitchhikers can also illustrate the goodness of hitchhiking. Rose Westbury, for instance, has picked up many hitchhikers in clear need of help. In this type of story, the social good fostered through hitchhiking is perhaps most evident:

RW: Another time, it was a woman who was, it was like 9:30 at night, it was pitch dark and she's standing there on the side of the road with two suitcases, and I thought, she needs help. And I picked her up, and yeah, she had just ran away from an abusive boyfriend, and I took her as far as I could, and I always—being the type of person I am, I always have extra rain ponchos and everything in the trunk. That's just me. You know, so here's my rain poncho, and here's a few bucks, and I took her to the nearest garage where I knew there was truckers, there were going to be, and she got a drive immediately, but you know, I often wonder how she'd get along. She was quite upset. And another young guy just the other day, just down behind where I live, he was hitchhiking. As soon as I pulled out of my street, I saw this guy hitchhiking, and he had a big garbage bag at his feet. And you could see it was busted, and clothes were hanging out, so I said, "Hop in," to him, and I took him right to the homeless shelter I didn't even know existed, he told me how to get there, and you know, I gave him a few bucks, and he told me his story. A girlfriend was abusive in this case, and you know, he was crying, you know, and hurt, but I just like to help people. [crying a little] Sorry.

AM: Oh no, don't be sorry.

RW: I get emotional. Softie ... Sorry, you kind of caught me at the heartstrings.

The characters of positive hitchhiking stories are not always obviously kind-hearted, altruistic angels. In the following narrative, for example, Chad Griffiths reminisces about a driver who may have picked him up out of spite, but whom he nonetheless recalls with much affection:

This one woman picked me up when I was hitchhiking to Halifax, and it was on the road off of the main highway, and she picked me up and she was just having kind of a crummy day, her and her husband were fighting, and she's like, "I never pick up hitchhikers, but I picked you up!" And it's like, "Really, well that's really nice, thank you, why?" "To make my husband furious!" And it's like, "It would make my husband furious to know I picked up a hitchhiker." And it's like, "Oh, really, well, thanks..!" And it's like, she was kind of giving me the 411 about her and her relationship, and I was kind of just listening to it. Some people who pick up hitchhikers just want someone to talk to, or at, or whatever. And then before she dropped me off, she pulled in, and she was like, "I'm going to get you a salad." And she pulled into Wendy's, and it's just like, not anything else, just a salad, a large salad. And she was like, "What kind of a large salad do you want?" And I picked out one of them. Yeah, and she dropped me off at the little ferry terminal at Dartmouth, and I don't know, there was something really endearing about that, she kind of had this angry kind of attitude, but not at me, you know, and she was just kind of fiery, like this, you know, Stella-getting-her-groove-back hitchhiking moment.²⁵ [laughter] It was kind of nice.

While positive hitchhiking stories often portray exceedingly kind strangers, or recount scenes of serendipitous beauty, they can also illustrate the nuance and complexity of a generous moment. In this interaction, the driver expresses a somewhat vindictive motive ("to make my husband furious!"), while Chad recognizes his use as "someone to talk to, or at." Despite this, however, he still finds something to like about the whole exchange. When I asked Chad about the drivers he remembered fondly, this woman was the first driver who came to mind.

²⁵ In reference to the 1998 film, *How Stella Got Her Groove Back*, wherein a listless female powerbroker finds love with a younger man. According to Urban Dictionary, "When someone has been in a funk or not on their game but has since returned to normal; then they can say, I GMGB (got my groove back)." [<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=GMGB>]

Scary Stories

Most hitchhikers can tell at least a couple of scary stories. Sometimes these stories focus on drunk drivers, sometimes they describe instances of being driven at aggressively on the side of the road, sometimes they involve sexual assault and/or violence, and sometimes they narrate somewhat ambiguous occurrences of fearfulness where, as Greg Pike put it, “you’re just kind of left wondering.” On the other hand, some hitchhikers have managed to avoid negative hitchhiking experiences; Paula Graham, for example, commented, “I don’t think I’ve had any really bad [rides]—like one time I left my sweater in someone’s car. That’s like, my worst ride.” However, most interviewees could report rides of a more sinister nature, though they often introduced these stories with disclaimers (or Labovian “orientations”) like, “The one time I really felt afraid...” or “The only negative experience I ever had...” These hitchhikers did not wish to associate hitchhiking with danger or negativity, even when hitchhiking had ushered in the most frightening moments of their lives. Moreover, after describing the “one time” they felt afraid, some hitchhikers subsequently recalled other instances of fear. For instance, after Chad Griffiths introduced the time he competed with a hitchhiker in Labrador as his singular moment of hitchhiking fear, he then remembered “that trucker who was incredibly intimidating” towards he, Chloe Edbrooke and myself; the drunk, speed-demon teenagers who offered us both a lift in the Codroy Valley (recalled by Chad as “his most viscerally scary ride”); and, almost as an afterthought, the time he was picked up by a self-proclaimed murderer:

CG: And I got in with someone who told me pretty early on that he was a murderer. He told me he just got out of jail, because he, according to him, he was jumped by these two guys, and he had a gun, or one of the guys had a gun or something like that, and he

disarmed or otherwise incapacitated one of the guys, and then picked up the gun and I think he shot him, or something like that, and then one of the guys ran away, and he shot the other guy in the back, so yeah, that was according to his story obviously, he didn't get charged with murder for the first guy, but he got charged with murder for the second guy, because he was running away.

AM: So, how did you feel then?

CG: I thought it was okay, because I wasn't, you know, I didn't feel, I honestly didn't feel at all intimidated by this guy, I think he wanted to kind of maybe put a bit of a spook in me, just kind of for fun, but I could tell, I could just tell it wasn't a threat. He just seemed kind of acquiescent about it, I don't know. Yeah.

Even though Chad genuinely feared for his life during some of these moments, he also nearly forgot that they ever occurred. Furthermore, he was willing to give the murderer the benefit of the doubt. This tendency of downplaying negative or fearful experiences was often exhibited by the interviewed hitchhikers. However, while many of these hitchhikers are eminently trusting people, it is also important to note the influence of gender on these dynamics. As discussed in Chapter Two, negative hitchhiking stories are highly gendered, as women tend to encounter much more sexual aggression while hitchhiking. Consequently, the most unnerving hitchhiking stories were usually told by women. Sasha Boczkowski, for example, recounted her own kidnapping in the following light:

SB: I had a friend in Athens that I wanted to go and see, so I sort of made it from the Balkans on this three day non-stop adventure, at one point with a guy who I'm pretty sure was bringing stolen cars from the border of Croatia to Serbia in the middle of the night through back roads, and didn't realize that I was Canadian, and we hit the Serbian border, and was like, "Fucking Canadians!" And he had to bribe them with chocolate and whatever. Anyways I hadn't slept for about three days, and then I got out the first place I saw the ocean in Greece, coming out of the mountains in Bulgaria, and was like, "Stop the truck!" I was drinking brandy with this truck driver. And then in the morning I set out, and I have a rule, usually, never to get in a car with two men. I don't mind one man, but when I'm alone, I don't really like getting in with two guys. But I was just really eager to go, so these two guys pulled up, and I was like, "Oh shag it, just go for it." And at that time I didn't speak any Greek at all, and they set out, and then they turned down a side road, and I was like, "Oh fuck, oh fuck, oh fuck," and they kept on going, and I was like, "Where are we headed?" And they were like, "Be quiet!" And I was getting my knife out, and was like, oh my god, what am I going to do? Where are they taking me? And they go further into the country, and then they come into a village, so I was like, so this is sort of

better, because we're not in the middle of nowhere, and then they drove to the center of the town and they stopped the car. And then there's a festival going on, and they're like, "Wait here." And they come back with this guy, and they're like, "This is Jorgos. You must marry Jorgos! He's a very good man! You come to our festival, you marry Jorgos!" And I was like, "You motherfuckers!" Like, I don't know, it was just dramatic. The escalation of emotions, from holy fuck, am I going to get killed, or I don't know what ...

AM: So what'd you do? How'd you—

SB: Oh, I was just like, "No, I'm not going to marry Jorgos! Drive me back to the highway!" And they were like, "No, stay!" So I just left. And had to make my way back to the highway, which took a long time, but that was fucking better than what could have happened. Yeah.

Since Sasha managed to escape, she seems capable of telling her story as a kind of adventure tale. Her story is pretty thrilling in retrospect. However, negative hitchhiking experiences can also be quite traumatic. When asked about her hitchhiking stories in a general way, Roshni Caputo-Nimbark replied:

Well I have to say that there were overwhelmingly positive, all of my experiences, all but maybe—depending on how I look at it, I guess I could say they were all positive, since I learned from all of them. But there were certainly—well, one in particular that sticks out as actually the worst experience of my life.

The worst experience of Roshni's life was being raped by a man while hitchhiking through Greece, which Roshni discussed later in our interview. Roshni was greatly shaken by this event, and stopped hitchhiking alone for a while thereafter. Strangely, both of these incidents took place in Greece, and both involved being picked up by two men, which was emphasized as a factor in Roshni's and Sasha's narratives. For Roshni, this element surfaced as a warning, when an Albanian family (and possibly an elderly man) told her to avoid cars with two men:

And then the next day, they took me to the border of Greece, and they [the family] said, "Okay," like you know, "Good luck hitchhiking, but if there's one thing we can say," they said this to me in Albanian, they were like, "If you get a ride with two men, don't get in the car." And so I didn't take warnings as seriously then, but now I take them very seriously. So I said okay, yeah, thanks, thanks for everything, you know, and walked a little bit. ... And I was hitchhiking with this sign, and this old man from across the street came hobbling over, and he was saying stuff to me in Greek, which I had no familiarity

with at all, and he looked like he was warning me about something. And then right as he sort of came over, this car came and stopped, and it was two men. And I was just like, “Okay, well whatever that guy’s saying,” and I got in the car with these two guys.

In Sasha’s case, accepting a ride from two men violated her own personal principle. As she stated during her story, “I have a rule, usually, never to get in a car with two men. I don’t mind one man, but when I’m alone, I don’t really like getting in with two guys. But I was just really eager to go, so these two guys pulled up and I was like, ‘Oh shag it, just go for it.’” Both Sasha’s and Roshni’s narratives include a broken taboo, which may help rationalize the horrible events that eventually took place. The structure of these stories bears some similarity to Jack Santino’s discussion of “cautionary tales” in the workplace, which, as he writes, “suggest a system wherein the reason for the accident can be determined and, if the lesson is properly learned, similar accidents can be avoided in the future” (1978, 203). As Roshni mentions, she now takes warnings very seriously. Like the cautionary tales discussed by Santino, these narratives have a “function similar to the parable—they teach” (202). The importance of steering clear of cars with two men (and also of listening to warnings) is therefore communicated through the events of these narratives.

Detours are another common element of negative hitchhiking stories. Of course, in ordinary life, detours have no obviously negative implications; the word simply refers to an alternate route. For hitchhikers, however, detours are laden with connotations of fearfulness, largely due to their capacity to conceal acts of aggression. As a result, hitchhikers usually become suspicious whenever drivers talk of detours or veer off onto side roads, whether anything terrible happens or not. For example, Chloe Edbrooke and I both felt nervous during a detour through the community of Deep Bight. Even though this

was the driver's hometown, and we escaped unscathed in the end, the two of us felt quite unsettled the whole time. Furthermore, although Peter Smith felt relatively safe while being sexually propositioned by an elderly man, he was a bit "creeped out" by the man's wish to visit a memorial on an old dirt road. Linda Samuels also realized that something was awry during her "worst ride ever" when her driver turned onto a dirt road, claiming that it was a short cut:

AM: Do you want to talk about the bad ride?

LS: Oh, the bad ride was outside Marseilles, which was in the south of France, and this guy picked me up and by then, actually, people were, I'd been in France for a month, and so people were starting to actually give me compliments on my French when people picked me up, because I found the key was to remember my French from high school, and speak it with a French accent. Like to [in French accent] *mimic a French accent. En français*. And it seemed to work really well. [laughs] So anyway. And this guy picked me up in a white van, and I couldn't understand his French at all, which was weird, because I could understand most people's basic French by then. So I don't know if he was English or foreign and he was just—or just had the equivalent of a really deep Newfoundland accent in French, so that ride wasn't going so well, it was very awkward, and then he turned off onto a dirt road, and it's like, "Where are we going?" "Oh it's a short-cut," and I was like, I don't think so, because it was almost like a riverbed, that kind of gravel road, so I just said, "Stop." You know, I'm getting out. And he wouldn't stop, so I just opened the car door and then he stopped. So I stalked off, and I had this 50-pound knapsack, and wearing espadrilles and a skirt and everything, and he came up from behind and grabbed me, and threw me. I don't remember what happened, but anyway, I ended up on the ground, on my back, you know, kind of turned turtle. And he was attacking me, but—so I just never stopped fighting, and at some point he yelled something at me, which I took to mean "Don't scream," so I started screaming like crazy, and still fighting. And all I could think was, "God, if I'm killed, my mother will die, she'll just die of grief if I die, so I can't die." And he picked up a rock to like beat my head in—

AM: Wow.

LS: And then I just kept yelling and fighting and he just gave up. And I got up and gave him a look and he stopped. [laughs] Went back and hitchhiked into town, and reported it to the police, who were actually worse than the guy.

When hitchhikers find themselves on a side road, their trust is definitely put to the test. In this case, Linda Samuels' fears of the mentioned "detour" were certainly validated, as she ended up in a life or death situation, facing the type of hitchhiking assault most feared by hitchhikers and the general public alike. The supposed detour signalled danger to Linda

during the moment, and it also constitutes a major “complicating event” in the plotline of her narrative. As I have argued, the bringing together of strangers during a hitchhiking encounter often creates narrative suspense. When a detour is involved, however, that suspense reaches a heightened pitch. Sometimes, a detour can facilitate a dramatic story regardless of its conclusion. In the following story, for example, Greg Pike reckons with a sudden berry-picking excursion on a side road:

I had, the scariest thing that happened to me, and I'll tell you a different scary story that should be scarier, but this was the one that actually scared me. And it was in Newfoundland. I was driving with some guy, and I mean, you're driving the speed limit on the highway. And with no warning, no explanation, no anything, it's a totally normal ride, and then suddenly he turns hard to the right, way too fast. And we're driving down a dirt road, and I can't even see the highway—the second we take that turn, we're invisible from the highway. And it's the first moment that it really occurred to me, there's nowhere to go. You know, you tell yourself if something weird happens in a car, you can grab the wheel or, you know, you have these scenarios in your mind. This was a case where, well if I grab the wheel we're just going in the ditch. You know, why the hell are we here? And so I ask, you know, “What are we doing?” Trying to sound normal. He says, “I'm going to pick some berries.” Jesus. He's going to bury me in a berry patch. You know, so I'm creeped right out. And honestly, we're not even talking far, once we're off the road and behind tree cover, I don't think we must have gone more than a few 100 feet before he pulls over the truck, he gets out his door, I get out mine. I pick up a rock and throw it at a sign. As casually, like it's the total not casual thing where I'm trying to be cool and casual, like, “Nah, you go ahead and pick your berries!” And I just pick up a rock and throw it at this sign. And I hit the sign. And I pick up another rock and throw it again, and I am not good at this, you know, if we played darts I would lose, I don't care if you've ever played darts before, I would lose. ... But thank god, the second rock hits the exact same spot and it's a big loud whack, and you know, it seemed—I mean, it impressed me. And honestly I don't know if this guy actually meant to just go picking berries, but he kind of looks at me, he goes over in the field for a second, he [laughs], he picks a handful of berries. And I mean a *handful*. It's not like, I've got to get some gallons of berries or anything, he gets himself a *palmful* of berries, eats them, we get back in the truck, we back up, and we leave. So like, I still don't know. Was there any danger there? Did I just get creeped out over somebody being weird, was he aware of it being weird? I don't know. We drove away. And like all these stories, it ends with, “And then I got out of the truck and he drove away.” And you're just sort of left wondering.

Ambiguous Stories

The preceding story may belong more comfortably in the next category of stories that I wish to discuss—stories that do not depict shining instances of compassion, nor

heinous acts of depravity, but something a little murkier, at least as far as trust is concerned. In these stories, the implicit question “What happened when you trusted a stranger?” is not answered evenly. Strangers are not necessarily good or bad, and in these narratives, the hitchhikers explore their sense of that. The hitchhikers might form elaborate conclusions out of the drivers’ “scraggly hair,” just as their hackles are raised over detours; however, they are often able to address and transcend suspicious qualities as well.

Chloe Edbrooke began hitchhiking rather reluctantly. After taking a train across the rest of Canada, Chloe and her sister were faced with an eastward journey through Newfoundland, where trains have been defunct since 1988. Thus, she and her sister resorted to hitchhiking, since, as noted earlier, they had “heard that people were friendly on the East Coast, so it seemed safer than trying it on the West Coast [Vancouver, B.C.] where we were coming from.” However, these rumours didn’t exactly console Chloe. In fact, as Chloe put it, “I was definitely very paranoid the entire time we hitchhiked across the island.” Their first prospective driver was a single man. As he rolled down his window, Chloe and her sister “could see that he had kids in the car, so that was great, we knew that unless he’d kidnapped the children that we were—we were pretty safe, so we said yes.” The man carried a suitcase full of pills, and was living on a remote island off the coast of Newfoundland. Chloe and her sister were invited to visit, but although nothing ultimately happened, and the children seemed like legitimate offspring, Chloe and her sister remained suspicious, and warily declined the island get-away. On a later ride, Chloe’s fears became even more pronounced:

So another ride that we had was with this man with really long, scraggly hair, and I remember being convinced the entire time that he was going to kill us. I think I was definitely very paranoid the entire time that we hitchhiked across the island. I found certain things in the car that I felt like were evidence. There was a book that had sort of a sinister cover on it, and I was like, “Oh, this must be his inspiration!” And I saw some just weird, maybe even splatters in the back of the car or something—something, I don’t know, I was interpreting every little thing as being creepy or scary. And so, that was—but I don’t exactly remember his personality.

This entire narrative is built out of highly ambiguous details. Long hair becomes “long, scraggly hair” (is the word “scraggly” ever used to describe a plainly innocent being?), a sinister-looking paperback becomes a murderous blueprint, and cryptic splatters only add to the case. As Chloe says herself, she doesn’t “exactly remember his personality,” and she also doesn’t describe anything the man actively said or did. Instead, Chloe’s narratives demonstrate how her prior associations of hitchhiking with criminality (whether as kidnappers, murderers, or other types of miscreants) affected the way that she perceived the rides as they were happening, showing how “experience is filtered through pre-existent patterns even before it is articulated as a story” (Dolby Stahl 1989, 18). Pierre Bayard’s notion of the “inner library” also helps to illustrate this type of phenomenon. As discussed by Arthur Frank, the inner library refers to “the organization of all the stories a person can be influenced by ... just as a librarian knows a book by knowing where it belongs among other books, people make sense of a story by placing it among similar stories” (Frank 2010, 54-55). In his work, Bayard uses the term “location” to refer to “how it [a story] is situated in relation to other books [or stories]” (Bayard 2007, 11). Using Bayard’s terms, Frank clarifies that “the inner library predisposes attention to those stories that can be readily located; they sound like familiar stories. And conversely, the inner library predisposes disregard for stories that have no apparent location. The general

principle of reception is reluctance to create new sections of the inner library” (2010, 55). Thus, if a person mainly associates hitchhiking with murderous strangers, they will likely continue doing so until new categories or “sections” of hitchhiking experiences/stories have been revealed. Chloe has hitchhiked a great deal since this time, and she has many positive stories to tell, too. However, Chloe’s stories from this journey also betray a certain familiarity with the more fearful depictions of hitchhiking.

This connection between one’s “inner library” and the perception of experience is also evident in the following story, detailing when interviewee Stephen Lewis and a friend picked up an axe-carrying hitchhiker in Woody Point, Newfoundland. The hitchhiker in question had tucked the axe under his jacket, which Stephen only noticed after the fact. Of course, the axe-murdering hitchhiker is a widely known figure, and the two drivers endured much silent terror when the axe was revealed:

SL: He opens the back door, and as he puts his left foot in to sit down, he pulls out from under his coat with his right arm this axe which is in his hand, which is basically heading right for my head. And we both experienced this immediate—our hearts are just [makes pounding, drill-like sound]. As it turns out, he steps into the car and we, you know, he sits down with the axe in his hand, and we strike up a conversation even though we're both terrified, we're basically forcing this conversation. And he only needs to go about 300 yards, he's just going up the road. [laughs] He gets out, and that's the end of it, so it was basically a tool that he was carrying, but you couldn't see it where he was, I think, deliberately hiding it under his coat. [laughter]

AM: What was he up to?

SL: I don't remember. I can't remember now. We didn't ask about the axe. [laughter] We deliberately avoided that subject.

In *The Personal Narrative as an Oral Literary Genre*, Sandra Dolby Stahl paraphrases Carl Jung (1958, 112-113) to discuss how “an archetypal or universally shared pattern or theme might create a corresponding vision of the experience in the individual’s initial perception, even though in reality the experience does not illustrate the universal theme exactly” (Dolby Stahl 1989, 18). In all likelihood, this man was adding to his winter

woodpile, or tending to some other pragmatic task. Because the axe-murdering hitchhiker is such an archetypal figure of hitchhiking legendry, however, Stephen likely took note of how the axe was “heading right for my head,” and felt accordingly terrified. Like the scraggly-haired man in Chloe’s narrative, the axe-carrying hitchhiker does little to encourage or dispel Stephen’s suspicious outlook (beyond his abiding characteristic of carrying an axe). In these stories, ominous characters are crafted out of external details. No concrete actions take place, for the most part, but stories are framed from the possibility of what could have been.

In the following narrative, this question of “what could have been” seems even more uncertain, particularly as the speaker, Adam Critchley, is describing something that he heard about, instead of something he experienced himself:

AC: I did hear about one guy who got picked up by an overweight man with a comb over and a prosthetic arm with a hook wearing a cheap grey suit, that tried to keep—kept trying to get him to drink from this bottle of ginger ale [laughter] and was like, no.

AM: So they were suspicious of the ginger ale?

AC: Yeah, yeah, and then he was like, “I’ll show it to you,” and he took a swig of the ginger ale, but like swerved the car at the same time and spat out the window. He was like, “Ohh no, I was just, you know, making sure.” It’s like—and then apparently he said he was a freemason, and he was testing them for road safety and road smarts. I think he was—I don’t know, he would have taken a swig of ginger ale and woken up on like a meat hook or strapped to a pool table in his house or in his garage or something.

AM: That’s crazy.

AC: Never trust a sweaty man with one arm and a comb over.

AM: And ginger ale—the most insidious beverage.

AC: I just imagine a fat Donald Trump with a war amps bumper sticker.

In many ways, this story resembles a legend more than a personal experience narrative. The details seem a little too extraordinary to accept without question. Furthermore, the story remains open-ended: Did the sweaty man with one arm and a comb over drug the ginger ale? What were his intentions? The narrative does not make this information knowable, and invites debate and discussion in the same manner as a legend, which, as

Linda Dégh writes, often appears as a “product of conflicting opinions” (2001, 2). To a lesser extent, this same open-endedness applies to Chloe and Stephen’s narratives, too. Perhaps the scraggly haired man did have a murderous plan. Maybe the axe-carrying hitchhiker would have used his prop as a weapon, under the right circumstances. Like many contemporary legends about hitchhiking, these narratives invoke a kind of cautionary impulse. The hitchhikers survived, but their sense of distrust was possibly aroused with good reason.

In other ambiguous hitchhiking stories, suspicions are transcended throughout the course of the encounter. The following story, relayed by Amber Tapley, illustrates this quality quite dynamically:

I did have one really weird experience, I wasn’t alone though, I was hitchhiking with my friend, and this man stopped in a van, and he was going to Cape Breton, and he said, you know, “I’d love to give you guys a ride, but I have to tell you something. I have a passenger in the back,” and I kind of looked in the back, and it looked like a body on a stretcher, covered with a blanket, and I was like, “Okay...” And anyway, he’s like, “So, this is my passenger,” and I was like, “Oh, who is it?” And he’s like, “Well, it’s a dead body.” And I was just like, “Okay!” And I kind of stepped back, and I was like, “Brian, I’m not going to get in that car.” And the man’s like, “Just let me tell you.” He was one of the few people in the province who take dead people from the hospital to the funeral home. Anyway, that was his job, and he was so sweet. He just talked a lot about how he felt, he was trying to convince us, because he really wanted to give us a ride, and anyway, he’s like, “It’s really important that this job’s done with respect, and you know, that their last ride is one of utmost importance.” Anyway, so I was like, “Well, okay! Brian, you’re sitting in the back.” So poor Brian, he sat on the other stretcher in the back next to this dead person, who I think was a woman named Hazel, and then we took the body to the funeral home, and then he’s like, “Do you guys mind if I go pick up another one?” And I was like, “Why not?” Oh my god. And so he did, he went and got another person. And then took us to Cape Breton, lectured me about smoking, because I smoked cigarettes at the time, and he gave me a big lecture about that, anyway. That was the weirdest ride I’ve ever had.

This story can impart many worthy lessons. It shows that appearances are deceptive, that there are plausible reasons for travelling with a dead body, and that trust can be created in the unlikeliest of circumstances, amongst other things. It’s a very unsettling kind of story,

and one that seems to suggest the questions: Would you have trusted this driver? And what does that say about you? This type of response is explored in *Letting Stories Breathe*, as Arthur Frank discusses how “stories work to make characters available as generalizable resources that listeners use to engage in work on their own character” (2010, 30). In other words, stories let listeners wonder whether they would conduct themselves as the characters conducted themselves, given a similar situation, while thinking about how this hypothetical action reflects on their own sense of themselves. After hearing Amber’s story, listeners may wonder whether they would have trusted this man, while likewise admiring Amber’s sense of intuition—at least, this is how I react to her story. As a listener, I had a similar reaction during the following conversation, when Julie Huntington mentioned picking up a mentally ill teenager:

JH: We picked up a young fella hitchhiking, my husband and I, and we always pick up people back and forth to town, we picked up this young fella, and I said, "You were on the front page of the paper yesterday." And he was a young guy who'd been in the Waterford.²⁶

AM: Ohh.

JH: And he said, "They should pay me." For being on the front page of the paper. [laughs] And the poor guy, he was just a nice fella, and coming out to his grandparents or something, and I mean, he'd gone after someone with a chainsaw—

AM: He had?

JH: Yeah, but I think, you know, he's just a teenager who was angry, you know, and they were forcing him on medication, he was like, "Whatever." That would drive him crazy, and I mean, we had a great conversation, that so many times people like that, no one wants to visit someone in the Waterford, or visit someone, because they think, “Oh, what can we talk about,” or “This person's sick, there's a problem here,” but they're just like us. They're just the same, and that's the separateness. So people don't want to talk with one another, and maybe that's why more people are depressed, and a lady that worked for us this summer said yeah, she knows so many people on meds now. It's like, what? You know, these are not good things. So maybe that's it, we're not talking to one another hitchhiking. [laughs] We're not being open enough to meet our neighbour, to meet the guy down the road.

²⁶ The Waterford Hospital is the only psychiatric hospital in Newfoundland and Labrador.

As this transcript reveals, I did a slight double take at the mention of the chainsaw.

Although I agree with Julie's convictions, I also know that my own trust may have faltered in that moment. However, Julie is ultimately describing a pleasant hitchhiking interaction, and it seems that her openhearted trust probably did the hitchhiker some good. Both Amber and Julie's stories have stuck with me in the months since I first heard them, possibly because both stories seem to invite so many questions.

Another story illustrating some of the ambiguities of trust was told by Sasha Boczkowski, when I asked whether she had a favourite country to hitchhike in:

I don't know. That's another really hard—like not Spain, for sure, because it's hard to hitchhike in Spain. Not the US, people are really weird in the States. I feel like you would get killed really easily in the States, because people are super afraid of each other. Yeah, just sort of—like I remember being on Ocracoke island down in North Carolina, sitting in a café, and there was a lady there, and she was like, "You should stop smoking, because I used to smoke, and now I have to take this heart medication every four hours or my heart will stop." So we were just like oh yeah, okay, whatever. And then she got up and left in her camper van with her husband, and was like, "Well, bye girls," and forgot her purse with her heart medication in it. So we were like, "Holy fuck!" And we chased the camper van down, you know, like, "Hhhhheyyy, found them!" And she's like, "Oh my god, what amazing people you are, I can't believe you went through all this trouble—you knew that I would die without my medication, like wow, you girls are so sweet." So we were like, "See you later..." And then later on that day, we were trying to hitchhike to the other island, and they drove by us. And they kind of went by us and looked at us and still drove by, and then probably had a flick of the conscience, and came back. And were like, "Oh, okay, get in." But then they spent the whole time driving telling us, like, "If our son and daughter knew that we were picking up hitchhikers, they would kill us, you know, because you might be murderers! You might kill us!" And nananana, and I was like, lady! We're just the people that saved your life, right, relax! You know, chill out. I don't know. So I felt very nervous in the States, definitely, Mexico is a lot better. Mexico is nice, because everybody drives pickups, and when you hitchhike you go in the back. I remember getting panoramic views of the mountains and stuff, it's always a nice feeling.

As Sandra Dolby Stahl writes, "The advantage of the personal narrative is that the storyteller chooses the specific situation (plot) that aptly expresses a covertly held value ... the well-structured plots of personal narratives serve both the teller and listener as vehicles for expressing and learning values" (1989, 19). Before telling this story, Sasha

voiced her opinion that “people in the States are super afraid of each other,” and then relayed the events of this narrative to support her statement. Even though Sasha and her friend returned the woman’s heart medication (and possibly even saved her life), the woman in question was reluctant to pick them up hitchhiking, “because you might be murderers.” In the context of the story, the woman’s response seems fairly absurd. The larger inference, however, is that this woman’s response is typical of attitudes towards hitchhiking (and a general fear of the Other) in the United States. This story is tidier than some of the other stories included in this section. The plot of the narrative clearly supports Sasha’s opening statement, and the characters in the story are fairly unambiguous. Nonetheless, this story also demonstrates how layered and complicated the matter of trust can be.

The last “ambiguous” story that I wish to discuss arose during my interview with Laurie Burns, who I met after interviewing John MacNeil in their shared home. Laurie hitchhikes out of necessity, and didn’t divulge too many stories during our interview. However, there was one interaction she said she would “never forget,” which occurred while she and John were hitchhiking together:

AM: Do you—have you met any particularly memorable people while hitchhiking?

LB: Just this one incident. John, remember that woman? About the drug use?

JM: Yeah, that would be a good one to tell her.

LB: That’s the only one—me and John were hitchhiking from New Vic one day, in New Victoria, and there was this woman—she was driving by and she stopped, and so I got in the front, John got in the back, and oh, she said, “Oh, there’s a lot of crazies out there,” she said, “druggies” or whatever, she said, “You’s don’t look like that,” or something, or whatever, something like that, along that line, and she said, “That’s the only reason I stopped to pick you’s up.” And I am a drug addict. And I’m thinking to myself, what does a drug addict look like? You know what I mean? Like I’m sitting next to her, like I’m a drug addict myself, I’ll admit it, you know what I mean? And she’s saying, the only reason she’s stopped is because we didn’t look like drug addicts. I will never forget that moment. Yeah.

AM: Did you tell her?

LB: No. I didn’t tell her. I wanted to, I said to John, but I didn’t. I didn’t tell her. She would

have been very surprised, I bet you, sitting next to her, and her saying that. That's the only reason she picked us up, because we didn't look like drug addicts, and I'm thinking to myself, what's the drug addict look like?

As shown in this narrative, hitchhiking has the capacity to reveal many ugly aspects of bias and suspicion. If communicated, these attitudes can be very hurtful. I don't think there's an easy way to interpret a story like this, but I think it does show how self-perception and suspicion can collide in painful and uneasy ways. In this narrative, some of these difficulties are brought to a head.

Other Hitchhiking Stories

Not all hitchhiking stories focus on the supposed malevolence or kind-heartedness of a given stranger. Some stories chronicle coincidences, or describe meetings between unlikely characters. In some of these stories, the "complicating event" might be the mounting expectation for an amusing punch line, rather than the flattening (or stoking) of hitchhiking fears. Take Osvaldo Croci's encounter with a "hobo type of guy," for example:

Another time, this was during the trip in the US, I was picked up by somebody, it was in Arizona somewhere, and then in turn he picked up this older guy, like a hobo type of guy, very old, drunk, and so at one point, you know, I'm driving, the hobo is next to me, and the guy's sleeping in the back. And so the hobo looks at me and says, "Where are you from?" And I say, "Oh, I'm Italian." And the guy says, "Ah, from New York!" And I say, "No, no, I'm not from New York, I'm Italian." "Ah, from Chicago!" So he was, to him Italians were from, you know, Chicago or New York, but he couldn't really place, you know, where Italy was so it was really funny.

Hitchhiking stories that centre on rides in unusual vehicles could also be categorized together. One time, Sasha Boczkowski received a ride from an industrial vacuum cleaner truck, which was already carrying fourteen other hitchhikers along with its vacuum equipment (apparently, hitchhikers were in great abundance on Vancouver Island during this era.) Another time, John Drover and his hitchhiking companion were

picked up by a convoy of school buses. The bus drivers insisted that the hitchhikers travel on separate buses, and also asked them to switch buses every few hours, so as to keep the drivers entertained. Sara Bernat, a Couchsurfer I met in Cape Breton, was invited to join a motorcycle pack while hitching around the Cabot Trail. Rides from luxury vehicles, such as mobile homes and sports cars, are also noteworthy (and thus, narrate-able)

occurrences. Most unusual of these, perhaps, is Shagg Burrridge's story of being picked up by an ambulance:

I just remembered another kind of odd story. I was hitchhiking with this girl—well, she grew up in Switzerland, but she identified more as being Serbian. But we were in this territory that's not really recognized as a country, but it's called Nagorno-Karabakh. It's between Armenia and Azerbaijan. And those two countries had been sort of involved in a decades-long conflict, so anyway we spent a couple of days hitchhiking in this weird territory, and we got to this really—this road that was like a dirt road, with very, very little traffic. You might see a car—once every half an hour would be pushing it, it was more like once every hour. But the lucky thing about that, I guess, is I find the roads that you're on that have the least traffic are the places you're more likely to get picked up. But while we were waiting for the next car to come, a police officer came, and I didn't really understand the conversation. She could speak Russian, and he could speak Russian, even though it wasn't either of their first languages, but anyway he was basically saying you're not from around here, this is a militarized zone, and you can't proceed. And he said, "The next vehicle that comes this way, you're getting in it." And so we waited for a while, while also arguing with him, trying to persuade him to let us go.

The next vehicle that came in that direction was actually an ambulance. So he flagged them down, made them stop, and forced us to get inside. So we sat on the inside of this ambulance, with this old woman, who—I don't know if she had just had a heart attack or whatever, but they were rushing her to a clinic. So I was just leaning over her for the whole time, basically, because there's no room in there. She already had her daughter and husband or something in there. So then there was me and my friend also there, on this bench, just with her at our feet. [laughs] And we actually had to stop at this one clinic, and whatever medical personnel were there just did some tests on her, it was a really barebones clinic, they had an outhouse out back, and it was just a little shack where I guess they had a doctor on duty, but they'd send her into the main city, so actually it was kind of good, in that we got the whole way we were going in one ride, but we had to lean over this possibly dying woman the whole time.

While much of this thesis is centred around trust, and most of these stories fixate on the suspense that builds between strangers as a "complicating event," there are other elements that could be explored as well. Hitchhiking stories hinge on both suspense and

possibility. Anyone can pick you up, anyone at all—an ambulance, a family of Hutterites, a businessman, whoever. This randomness also fuels the storytelling potential of hitchhiking.

A Folk Code of Trust?

In “The Crime-Victim Narrative as a Folkloric Genre,” folklorist Eleanor Wachs writes that her collection of 120 crime-victim stories from New Yorkers “underscored an urban folk code: the Code of Survival, a synthesis of crime skills and prevention techniques intrinsically embedded with the narrative or discussed in crime centred conversations” (1982, 18). In part, this code emphasized a sense of suspicion towards strangers, while heralding the importance of “street smarts,” which “allow one to size up and assess one’s rapidly changing environment,” so that “one learns to recognize both verbal and nonverbal clues of possible danger” (25). In many ways, these hitchhiking narratives do affirm the value of trusting strangers. The “positive” hitchhiking stories show the goodness and joy that this trust can bring about, while the “negative” or “scary” hitchhiking stories are usually couched in disclaimers about the rarity of the reported events. Furthermore, most of the interviewed hitchhikers remained upbeat and positive about their experiences, even when they had endured fairly awful hitchhiking encounters. Such affirming attitudes of trust could be identified as the informally communicated, folkloric content of these hitchhiking narratives. However, this code of trust should not be contrasted too severely with the Code of Survival articulated in Wachs’ work. When it comes down to it, hitchhikers do not trust one and all and, as these stories indicate, many hitchhikers rely on “street smarts,” too. They read their drivers, they are leery of detours, and they defend themselves against aggressors. As well, the most intriguing, suspenseful

hitchhiking stories typically involve a more complicated negotiation of trust. Since I have mainly focused on these types of stories in this chapter, the idea of a resolutely positive “folk code of trust” may seem incongruous here. However, this can be partially explained by the demands of telling a good story. Hitchhikers recognize the storytelling potential of their more harrowing hitchhiking encounters; during our interviews, for example, they usually opened with stories of their “bad rides,” likely because they understood the dramatic appeal of this kind of tale. Thus, while hitchhikers often convey attitudes of trust through their personal narratives, the demands of storytelling can also distort the nature of this trust. To better understand the connection between hitchhiking and trust, then, I leave behind these types of narratological matters in the following chapter. By examining the hitchhikers’ reflections on trust to a greater extent, the folkloric content of these narratives will likewise become more readily and precisely understood.

Chapter Five: Hitchhiking as a Negotiation of Trust

By now, the centrality of trust in this thesis is likely apparent. In Chapter Two, I examined several contextual factors of hitchhiking, such as location, gender, and short vs. long-distance settings, both to situate my research and to show how hitchhiking can be altered by the shifting, ever-changeable domain of societal trust. Chapter Three described the folklorically communicated “work techniques” of hitchhiking noted by my interviewees which, as I have argued, are frequently used to foster trust between strangers. In Chapter Four, I suggested that hitchhiking narratives are often appealing because of the inherent suspense of most hitchhiking encounters. I also argued that by narrating the resolution of this suspense, trusting values may be communicated by hitchhikers as a kind of worldview.

When it comes to hitchhiking, questions of who, what, when, where, how and why can often be answered with ruminations on trust. Who hitchhikes in this day and age? Why do some people hitchhike in Newfoundland and not in Ontario? When did the popularity of hitchhiking begin to falter? How do hitchhikers and drivers learn to endure one another? What values are conveyed by a scary hitchhiking story? Why would anyone willingly choose to hitchhike at all? It can be difficult to talk about hitchhiking without talking about trust. Furthermore, all of my theoretical speculations have arrived at the matter of trust as well.

Because the notion of trust already underscores so much of this thesis, the ensuing chapter may contain some repetitive elements. My intention, however, is not to reiterate what has come before, but to examine trust in a more focused manner—to look at how trust is created during a hitchhiking interaction; to reveal some of the resulting benefits,

as identified by the hitchhikers, of building that trust; to note how the views of hitchhikers respond to and contrast with prevailing “cultures of fear”; and to consider the relationship between hitchhiking experience and more overarching ontologies of trust. In pulling apart the embeddedness of hitchhiking and trust in so many ways, I hope to illuminate several elements of this connection in greater specificity.

What is Trust?

Although I have circled around the matter of trust throughout this thesis, to examine how it builds and disintegrates between particular people in particular contexts, I have not yet discussed any of the more philosophical or sociological considerations of its essence. According to philosopher Trudy Govier, “Trust is fundamentally an attitude, based on beliefs and feelings and implying expectations and dispositions” (1997, 4). She also clarifies that “though the word ‘trust’ is often used vaguely and has a kind of warm, fuzzy aura about it, there is nevertheless a kind of logic or epistemology to trust. It is not entirely a matter of feeling and emotion. Trust presupposes beliefs, and often those beliefs are based on evidence” (5). It should be noted that this idea of “beliefs based on evidence” recalls David Hufford’s notion of “experience-based beliefs” (Hufford 1995), as discussed in Chapter Three. Furthermore, a function of trust, according to sociologists J. David Lewis and Andrew Weigert, is to reduce the variety of future possibilities. As discussed by the authors, “It is not possible to develop plans of action which take into account all possible contingent futures” (1985, 968). To trust, then, is to wilfully believe that various possible, adverse scenarios will not transpire. According to Lewis and Weigert, distrust also works to reduce future complexity “by dictating a course of action based on suspicion, monitoring, and activation of institutional safeguards” (969). In this

sense, trust and distrust act as two sides of the same coin. Both attitudes allow individuals to pursue coherent paths out of the chaos of possibility. These paths of coherency have an undeniably social dimension as well, since reigning attitudes of trust and distrust foster distinctive types of social systems. Taking their cue from Bernard Barber (1983), Lewis and Weigert propose that trust “tends toward solidarity” in contrast with distrust, which leads towards increased individualism and social fragmentation (Lewis and Weigert 1985, 969).

Trust also rests on a social base, and can depend on an individual’s childhood and social experience, along with the familiarity they feel towards the object of trust. According to Lewis and Weigert, however, this familiarity “only opens the door to trust without actually constituting it” (1985, 970). Trust can be viewed as a leap beyond familiarity and expectations, described by Niklas Luhmann as a process of “overdrawing on the information base” (Luhmann 1979, 192). In Luhmann’s view, people tend to gather cursory (and perhaps insufficient) knowledge before making these leaps toward trust. These leaps might be deemed risky, but are often enabled by a sense of familiarity and confidence in the competence of others, which is usually derived from prior experience.

Hitchhiking as a Leap of Trust

Unless they are hitchhiking in and around their home communities (and sometimes even then), hitchhikers are necessarily dependent on the kindness of strangers. Though they may try to assess their drivers, the brief nature of these encounters means that hitchhikers must move quickly beyond customary patterns of trust formation. As discussed in Chapter Three, hitchhikers typically rely on “scatter trust,” defined as “trust

directed at an indeterminate range of other people, mostly unknown to us, on whose actions and functioning we are dependent in the course of ordinary modern life” (Govier 1997, 116). Sometimes hitchhikers leap to trust in spite of their intuitive feelings, partly because suspicion can hinder hitchhiking efficiency. Refusing a ride could set a hitchhiker back for hours. Consequently, hitchhikers often adopt trusting attitudes out of necessity and/or desperation. As discussed by Trudy Govier, drivers on the road experience a similar dynamic. Though cars have an obvious capacity for destruction, it would be highly inconvenient for many adults to avoid driving. As a result, drivers “have a powerful incentive to ignore [their] vulnerability,” and therefore will themselves to trust their fellow motorists (Govier 1997, 114). Hitchhikers and drivers alike lack the chance to familiarize themselves with each individual in their path. They must, as Luhmann states, “overdraw on the information base” and leap towards trust if they are to advance along their journeys.

Creating the “Bond of Trust”

Although hitchhikers likely adopt a principle of trusting *most* strangers in their midst, they still attempt to form initial character assessments, as mentioned above. In

Social Trust and Human Communities, Trudy Govier discusses the “rough generalizations” that often inform sudden judgements of strangers. She writes:

When we suddenly must decide whether to trust a stranger, we have little or no knowledge of character and background. We resort to rough generalizations based on such things as gender, social class, occupation, age, or race. Generally, women tend to be trusted more than men, being generally weaker, less aggressive, and less likely to commit criminal acts. ... For strangers, expectations of reliability and integrity can be based only on self-presentational cues, stereotypical beliefs, background experience, and general assumptions about human nature at large. Obviously, grounds for trust and suspicion in such cases are weak at best. (1997, 122-125)

Many of the hitchhiking techniques mentioned in Chapter Three engage with these types of generalizations. While standing on the side of the road, numerous hitchhikers endeavour to enhance their seemingly innocent traits, such as femininity, amiability, youth, etc., while downplaying any conceivably threatening qualities. Hitchhikers cannot readily observe drivers from their vantage point on the side of the road, so this aspect of the trusting process is largely one-sided. The hitchhikers strive to appear trustworthy, and the drivers make their decisions.

Although I did not seek out the views of drivers for this thesis, many interviewees had picked up hitchhikers themselves, and kindly offered their thoughts on what informed their decision-making process. Joyce Babbin, for example, said that she “would not pick up more than one person,” because she wanted to “keep the odds balanced,” and that she’d hesitate to pick up anyone on the highway without a backpack as well, even though, as she noted, “I don’t know how many times I hitchhiked around Cape Breton without a bag, I had a purse or something, a little knapsack.” Furthermore, she felt averse “to picking up an older person, male or female. When I say older, I would mean like forties-older.” Emma Lang felt similarly fearful about picking up older hitchhikers, and also avoided hitchhikers in urban areas. After Emma expressed her reluctance to pick up hitchhikers around Stavanger Drive (a large box-store shopping district, located on the north-eastern outskirts of St. John’s), I asked what was implied by the act of hitchhiking in such a location. She replied:

I think it reads as more of an economic necessity and more desperate, which I think can read as scarier, which is really horrible on so many levels. ... Because we know the buses run there, like are you that short up for bus money—I’m much more likely to give someone bus money. ... I guess if someone was hitchhiking and they had a sign saying Gros Morne and they were on Stavanger, I might be more inclined, but it’s this weird

thing because you want, you don't want to—and I think this is where I struggle with hitchhiking, it's like, you want to pick up people who need it. You don't want someone—on the other hand, you want to pick up someone who doesn't need it. Because they're safer. So all these class-based assumptions.

Greg Pike said that when he first began driving, he picked up a fairly wide range of hitchhikers. Now that he's married with children, however, he stated that he's "far more cautious," because he's "got people who are really, really dependent on me. ... It's really negligent, actually, to open myself up to certain risks." To that end, he commented:

I'm still inclined to pick up somebody if they look the part, and by that I mean a young student, somebody who realistically doesn't have a ride and needs one. I'm not going to pick up an adult, and that's hard to explain. But I don't trust it the same way. ... I feel like if you're an adult and you haven't figured out how to do this, there's something going on.

Gender also influenced some drivers' decisions. As expected, some female interviewees felt cautious about picking up men. To my surprise, however, I learned that some men are wary of picking up women as well. Gary Ledrew, for instance, stated the following:

I'll pick up most people unless they're really disgusting or you know, and again as I said, I kind of shy away from really young, good-looking girls. I don't know, it's one of those things. The way I look at it is that you know, suddenly you might get accused of something. Maybe they're up to something. I don't know, you know, it's kind of a weird little prejudice in itself.

Greg Pike expressed a similar thought, saying that he "used to pick up girls and now I won't, just out of the fear that there's some allegation that something inappropriate happened there. I just don't want to risk it." Although single women can often hitchhike fairly quickly, it is clear that their gender doesn't always work in their favour.

Of course, this moment of the hitchhiking trusting process may be the most superficial of all, reliant as it is on a fleeting image of a person, perceived through the window of a swiftly moving driver. As Emma Lang put it, this instant entails "trying to

make this very quick assessment about someone and their entire life story and deciding whether it meshes with yours.” It is understandably difficult to arrive at accurate judgements during these moments. As a result, some well-meaning hitchhikers are likely left adrift because of their age or other conceivable connotations of desperation. For instance, Laura Ryan offered the following observation regarding older hitchhikers in rural Newfoundland:

I've seen a couple people [hitchhiking] in their fifties and sixties, and it seems like people aren't so inclined to want to pick up older people, because it seems more dangerous and I guess they think that it's just odd, seeing someone who is older out hitchhiking. Usually it's people who are going to hospital appointments and stuff, like my dad, he'll hitchhike from Bellevue to make it to his brain tumour appointments and stuff like that. Yeah. It's really sad, actually.

It is clear that some hitchhikers are victims of the “rough generalizations” that often govern one’s sense of trust towards strangers and that, as Trudy Govier writes, “grounds for trust and suspicion in such cases are weak at best” (1997, 125).

If a driver does decide to stop, a brief opportunity for rapport development presents itself. The driver and hitchhiker will often discuss their destinations at this time. Stephen Lewis elaborated on this interaction in some detail:

SL: When the car stopped and I would look in the car, I would always, my mind would be making a judgement. And then I would step in. There was never—each and every time that I stepped in, I never felt that I was in any danger, ever.

AM: And how did you form your judgement?

SL: Just based on quick—what I saw, and the two words exchanged. The question would be, “I’m going to such and such a place,” and you’d see how the other person answered. ... when you open the door and you have this two second conversation, you know, I’m going to Montreal or whatever, or I’m heading to Stephenville, a hell of a lot’s going on there. So there’s this one second where you’re making your judgement.

Occasionally, hitchhikers turn down rides after these exchanges. John MacNeil has refused rides in the past, explaining, “You can tell from somebody’s eyes whether they’re a nice person or not. Especially in my age, I’ve learned that.” Amber Tapley also turned

down a ride with a driver who “seemed really aggressive. The way he pulled over was really fast, he just seemed really kind of angry and I was just like, ‘Um, no thanks!’ And then he got really kind of angry that I refused the ride. ... I trusted my gut.” However, the most intensive stage of trust negotiation typically occurs after the hitchhiker has accepted the ride. This is when the hitchhiker and driver attempt to bring about, through conversation, what John MacNeil called “a bond of trust”:

I mean, it’s not enough to be a slick talker [while hitchhiking], you have to be honest with people, and that’s another thing. In the Maritimes, people are good at establishing a bond, a bond of trust. That’s the thing. It’s simple enough, but it’s very effective.

Many interviewees emphasized the genuine, sincere nature of their hitchhiking encounters. While there are certainly degrees of intimacy and self-disclosure and, as discussed in Chapter Three, several hitchhikers used deceptive techniques to protect themselves (such as pretending to be married), the interviewed hitchhikers rarely misled strangers for their own amusement while hitchhiking²⁷—at least, as far as I can tell. In general, I have little reason to doubt the word of my interviewees, and little means of disproving any possible embellishments if I did. However, I did suspect the word of one hitchhiker who claimed to have hitchhiked across Canada, since he seemed curiously devoid of hitchhiking stories from that period (especially in contrast to the wealth of details on offer about his local hitchhiking experiences). Another individual sent me a fairly unbelievable series of text messages, reporting a ride with a hooded “dead face

²⁷ The one exception was Adam Critchley, who admitted that he occasionally makes things up (or “bullshits”) while hitchhiking. He explained, “Sometimes, yeah, sometimes you just—you’re never going to see this person again, probably, so why not. Why not just have fun. ‘I’m trying to get up to Dawson City to see my three kids,’ or something like that.”

man” driver wearing a gas mask, who allegedly tied him and his friend up in a cabin, administered some kind of sleeping potion, and gave them stick and poke tattoos as they slept. When I met this hitchhiker in person, he seemed unable to repeat many of the more incredible details he had texted me about, claiming, “It’s almost like a dream. And it’s kind of merged in with maybe dreams I was having while unconscious or something? I’m not sure, but it just—yeah. It’s really hard to describe.” In any case, I felt there were grounds for remaining suspicious of this improbable tale. Aside from these exceptions, though, I trusted the word of my interviewees, and therefore trusted their reports of having engaged in relatively genuine hitchhiking interactions. Overall, this disposition of honesty contrasts with the attitudes documented in Chandra Mukerji’s article, “Bullshitting: Road Lore Among Hitchhikers” (1978), which focuses on the “tall tales” that hitchhikers tell one another as they travel. Mukerji characterizes these stories as “bullshit,” referring to when people “do not so much tell lies as create situations where events can be elaborated in non-ordinary ways” (242). Although Mukerji states that “truth and falsehood are not issues in bullshitting because this talk is playful” (242), and she does not directly equate bullshitting with lying, she also notes that she “first heard this term applied to road stories by one youth who was worried about my study. He was afraid I believed what I heard” (241). While hitchhikers, like all storytellers, manipulate “the truth” of their personal experiences to some extent (Dolby Stahl 1989, 18), I see no reason to doubt hitchhikers’ experiences more than the experiences of any other group of

people.²⁸ Like John MacNeil, I believe that it's "not enough to be a slick talker" while hitchhiking. There are more complex dynamics at play.

In this thesis, I have argued that trust is often cultivated as a safety measure, to shield oneself from fears of the unknown stranger. In this sense, the seemingly genuine connections fostered while hitchhiking may appear to be self-serving, as they function as a kind of insulation from fear. However, while the bond of trust may be guided by a self-oriented impulse, there are many broader social benefits that can accrue as well. The next section examines some of these benefits.

"It Makes Every Car on the Road into a Person": Tolerance, Empathy, Connection

Several hitchhikers said that hitchhiking helped them meet local people while travelling. Even Matthew Southall, who attended Memorial University during his years of hitchhiking through Newfoundland (and who, as a Nova Scotian with a Newfoundland-born mother, is not overly "culturally removed" from the province), felt that hitchhiking helped him connect more with Newfoundlanders. He explained, "When you're hitchhiking, you're there with the locals who are driving there every day, and you get to hear their accents, their stories, the tales of the land, and it just, I don't know, it really

²⁸ Mukerji's research methodology consisted of picking up and interviewing as many as five hitchhikers at a time in a VW van, and she also acknowledged that the hitchhikers regarded her as an outsider. Furthermore, Mukerji largely relied on recorded conversations between hitchhikers who were previously unacquainted with one another for the majority of her study (1978, 242). As far as I can tell, the hitchhikers in Mukerji's study were surprised by the interview that awaited them inside the van. Thus, there are multiple factors of Mukerji's study that may have induced a more "bullshit"-laden series of interviews: the element of surprise (which may have introduced an aspect of distrust, from the hitchhiker's point of view); the presence of several unknown hitchhikers (which may have provoked a more competitive storytelling impulse); and possibly, a general sense of unease about being recorded. In my view, this sounds like a significant departure from an ordinary hitchhiking encounter. As a result, I suspect that these hitchhikers felt less inclined to create a "bond of trust" in the sense practiced by many of my interviewees.

made me appreciate Newfoundland more, and feel more a part of it.” Sasha Boczkowski made a similar observation about hitchhiking in foreign countries, describing hitchhiking as “a good way to get in” with people:

Hitchhiking gives you this access to meet the local people that I feel you won't get even—even with hostelling and backpacking, you're still separated. I mean you'll always not be from there, but [while backpacking] you're still someone who's gone to the country, and is in that realm of people who are going to buy things. ... So I don't know, I've been invited—I've stayed with people for months, you know, hitchhiking, people pick you up, they take you to all their favourite places, they bring you in to meet their families, you know, it's just a good way to get in, I think, with people, really get to know the local population.

Along with meeting locals, hitchhikers also extolled the virtues of meeting many different kinds of people, or, as the ever-quotable John MacNeil put it, the “smorgasboard of types.” He explained, “You know, you get the business person, the professional, the working man, the working girl, you get all that kind of stuff.” Lloyd Pike expanded on this aspect of hitchhiking, saying:

The thing about hitchhiking is that you meet a lot of people that you otherwise wouldn't meet. Because generally, let's face it, if you're working or you're in studying or something, you're meeting people that have something in common with you, right, whereas when you're out hitchhiking it's much more random, I mean you're meeting people of all different ages, and people in different circumstances, and you're hearing a lot of things. So I guess that has an impact on how you approach people and your perception of others in society, you know?

In order to create a bond of trust, the hitchhiker and driver must find a means to connect.

This is sometimes easier said than done, as it can be difficult to bridge the divide between some individuals. Peter Smith discussed this dynamic during our interview:

That's the thing—you have to find some common ground, and a lot of the times it is humanity. Because I've met, you know, I met a woman who was going out with a Hell's Angels guy, and she stopped in the bathroom to snort cocaine on the way. Invited me in, and probably would have had sex with me there in the bathroom if I had gone in, by the feel of the thing. And just totally clueless about several things, and I had no real common ground with her, but you know, there's still the truth that you—oh, and she was drinking in the car as well—and I had no, you know, not much common ground with her, and not much relatability there, I couldn't relate to her. But we had the common humanity, you

know, and we had to find something, and the fact was that she had offered me her car and was willing to chat with me and that kind of thing. Or I met a guy, you know, super conservative guy who worked in the oil industry, and had very little common ground with him, but again, you find the common ground, and we found a common ground in music. Music appreciation—so I think that’s an element to it too, you know, you might be appalled by somebody’s politics or demeanour, but you’re sharing humanity, so it’s kind of an equalizing effect, maybe.

At the time of writing this thesis, in 2017, much public discourse surrounds the political polarization of society. In the United States, the news spouted by right-wing and left-wing media sources has become wildly divergent, having been enabled by, as many social commentators have noted, the emergence of “social media echo chambers.” This term refers to the fact that on social media websites, such as Facebook and Twitter, individuals of similar ideological leanings tend to flock together, as “users show the tendency to select information that confirms their pre-existing beliefs,” resulting in “largely closed, mostly non-interacting polarized communities centred on different narratives, where like-minded people consume information in strikingly similar ways” (Bessi 2016, 319). Consequently, people are communicating less and less with individuals they disagree with. Moreover, it has been argued that ideologies can become even more unyielding after like-minded people engage in discussions with one another. As Cass Sunstein asserts, “Group polarization means that after deliberating with one another, people are likely to move towards a more extreme point of view in the direction to which they were already inclined” (2004, 59). In other words, this development is widening and intensifying ideological rifts, and fostering patterns of social fragmentation as a result. Newspaper and web articles abound on the topic, many of which link this phenomenon to the recent election of Donald Trump, while warning about the threat this dynamic poses

to democracy.²⁹ Furthermore, such echo chambers also render society susceptible to a growing “us and them” style rhetoric. Clearly, this is a deeply troubling development. As discussed in *Empathy: What It Is and Why It Matters*:

If ... you want to hurt and harm people, you need to believe in their difference, their otherness. When people have strong feelings of who is ‘us’ and who is ‘not-us,’ who is friend and who is foe, they can conjure great empathy for their own ‘kind’ and strong feelings of hate for those who are ‘not them.’ (Howe 2013, 181)

On an episode of the podcast *On Being*, dating from October 13, 2013, writer Alain de Botton spoke to the virtues of tolerance, which, as he clarified, “does not mean agreeing with people. ... No, what tolerance really means is even though you don’t get what the other person’s saying at all, even though you may not like them, you make an effort to tolerate, in other words, to make space for them and don’t try and squash their opinions.” He continued, saying:

What we need to learn is, how can we live together with people whose views we don’t actually like very much? That’s the far greater challenge, without attempting to convert them, or dismissing them, or denying their right to exist parallel to us. It’s really about the stranger ... It’s basically saying we have a shared humanity, even with people who don’t seem to tick the boxes that we put in place in terms of recognizing what a good human is.

In my view, Peter Smith’s discussion of finding “common ground” and “humanity” with strangers while hitchhiking resonates strongly with this notion of tolerance. Although no other interviewed hitchhikers used this sort of language, I feel that many (if not all) of the interviewees touched on this aspect of hitchhiking in some capacity. Yet, finding common ground (or tolerating disagreeable strangers) is not an entirely altruistic act in the context of hitchhiking. This approach also helps resolve the challenges of existing in close

²⁹ See, for example, “Democracy ‘Threatened’ By the Social Media Echo Chamber” [Barker, 2017], “Your Filter Bubble is Destroying Democracy,” [El-Bermawy, 2016] and “Social media Echo Chambers Gifted Donald Trump the Presidency” [Hooton, 2016].

quarters with strangers. During a hitchhiking moment, the hitchhiker and driver are reaching towards trust (while meeting other corollary goals, too, such as avoiding awkward silences and confrontations, as discussed in Chapter Three). But through this exercise, which is at least partly self-motivated, a surprising connection can build.

In a sense, hitchhiking creates a structure for tolerance. If hitchhikers are to reach their destinations, they must mingle with people outside of their social set, including those whose views they may vehemently disagree with. According to some psychologists, the benefits of this type of interaction are manifold. As discussed by Gordon Hodson, for example, “Contact is routinely touted as a critical method for improving attitudes and intergroup relations ... contact reduces anxiety and increases empathy, while increasing inclusion-of-other-in-the-self (‘psychological closeness’)” (2011, 154-155). Hodson’s article examines recent studies that encouraged interaction between “ideologically intolerant” individuals and the “outgroups” they were prejudiced against (such as LGBTQ individuals, immigrants, homeless people and black inmates, amongst others). His analysis yielded several fascinating insights, including the following:

Contact reduces prejudice among those prone to it whereas interventions that challenge and confront intolerant individuals often fail or backfire. ... Of note, contact operated on highly prejudiced individuals through well-established psychological processes linked to elevated empathy, trust, and closeness, and to reduced threat and anxiety. (155-157)

Hopefully, none of the interviewed hitchhikers have ever harboured such “ideologically intolerant” levels of prejudice. As noted, however, the outcomes of intergroup interaction are also observed across the wider population, and many interviewees perceived benefits of hitchhiking that echo the benefits of contact identified

by Hodson. For example, several interviewees mentioned that hitchhiking had encouraged a more open-minded disposition. As Laura Ryan remarked:

LR: I think I've become a lot more open-minded and a lot more accepting of a lot of things. Before I was—I grew up in a really strict Irish Catholic household, so I guess I felt like I was a bit more close-minded, so that's really opened up my mind to a lot of different things.

AM: From meeting different people [while hitchhiking]?

LR: Yeah, meeting different people, and just experiencing what they're all about. It really helps morph you into what you want to be. Yeah.

Similarly, Paula Graham said that hitchhiking served as “a reminder about you know, not judging people and that you can't tell a person by the look of their car, I guess.” Other interviewees made more general statements about the “opening” that hitchhiking can facilitate. As Julie Huntington stated, “When you do it [hitchhike], there's such an opening in your life and in your mind again. Openness ... it was open, you know, you were high from the openness of meeting someone and talking to them.” Stephen Lewis made a similar comment, saying, “There's something about people travelling which opens people up. For some strange reason, it's a very open—there's this disposition of openness. And you remember those encounters.” Although Julie and Stephen's statements are a little ambiguous, and also point towards an expression of *communitas* (as discussed in Chapter Two), the described “openness” could be interpreted as a kind of empathetic opening as well. John MacNeil's thoughts on connecting as a hitchhiker may shed further light on this dynamic:

Let me put it this way, as an English teacher: “An open mind and an open heart.” I genuinely like people, no matter what they are, or what they look like, I really like them. I like them before I even get to know them, and when I get to know them, I like them even more. I mean, especially if you really know them. You know, not the dress-up stuff, but the real deep inside stuff—sometimes that can come out, you know, quite nicely on a trip when you're going some place. So I guess that's why I've been so successful as a hitchhiker.

To be empathetic, according to David Howe, “is to know, sense or enter into (*em*) the feelings (*pathos*) of the other” (2013, 13). Gathering a sense of a stranger’s “real deep inside stuff,” or, as Laura Ryan put it, “experiencing what they’re all about,” can deepen one’s capacity to enter their (the other’s) frame of reference and, thus, to empathize with their point of view. As David Howe writes:

The more we are encouraged to imagine what it must be like to be someone else in a particular situation, the more likely it is that our empathic sensitivities will heighten. Cognitive effort (thinking what it must be like to be that other person in that particular situation) therefore can increase emotional empathy. (156)

Literature is often celebrated for its ability to arouse this type of imaginative, empathetic impulse. While reading a novel (especially one written from a first-person point of view), for instance, we are taken in by another person’s experience of the world, and can gradually learn what it is to reside in that character’s mind. While hitchhikers and drivers may forge a more filtered connection with one another, there appears to be something about hitchhiking that can deepen one’s sense of empathy. Interestingly, two hitchhikers drew a connection between hitchhiking and stage acting. In the following interview excerpt, Lloyd Pike discusses how his hitchhiking experiences, more so than his exposure to novels or television, allowed him to empathize with and inhabit characters as an actor:

LP: You’re meeting all these different types of people, and that has to have an impact. ... I know, like for example I got into acting and that and you know, sometimes I wonder where it comes from, the things that you draw on, you know? You’re dealing with a certain character that’s obviously not you, where do you get that from, right? Personality, how do you know that this is how this personality type would behave, you know? So maybe a lot of that comes from those early days.

AM: Do you think that hitchhiking can change your outlook?

LP: Absolutely, well you meet different people, and if you’re paying attention at all, you know, you pick up on cues on people and how they think and how they behave and the type of person they are, you meet all different personality types, right? And you know when you’re acting, if you have to take on a character, you know, if everybody in your life was the same as you, how would you go about it, what would you draw on? Would you draw on some caricature you got from watching TV yourself? Which wouldn’t be

very genuine, because good acting allows you to feel the character, you have to feel it, you have to sort of become it in a way, you know? And you're not going to get that from watching television, I don't think. Or even, maybe even through novels, I guess you get to know a character a little bit there, if it's well-written, but when you meet people like that, so many different people ... when you're in a car with someone driving across the island for hours and hours and it's just you there, and you're chatting and talking, you learn, right?

Amber Tapley offered a similar observation, saying:

Yeah, I heard a lot of stories, and I thought that was really, really great. I'm trained as an actor, and so it's just nice when you can get these little insights into people, and kind of what's happening, and why other people are doing the things they're doing, and how that affects other people. So I would say definitely, just meeting lots of people was really my favourite part.

Cliché as it may be, everyone has a story—or as a folklorist might put it, everyone has a repertoire of personal experience narratives—which may be openly revealed during a hitchhiking exchange. Lloyd and Amber's interview excerpts both suggest the similarity between hearing a stranger's personal narratives and hearing stories of other kinds, while touching on the increased empathy that can result from absorbing both types of narrative. Perhaps it could be said that seasoned hitchhikers are well read in the oral narratives of strangers. Moreover, this literacy appears to impart the sort of wisdom often accorded to devotees of written literature.

Along with elevated empathy and decreased prejudice, Hodson's psychological study also linked intergroup contact with an overall reduction in anxiety. Although this topic didn't come up too much, Laura Ryan said that hitchhiking had helped a great deal with her own feelings of anxiousness. She stated:

When you put yourself in a situation where you're hitchhiking, you're kind of deleting anxiety, because you're forcing yourself to speak to this person even though—you know, at first I used to be nervous and anxious and stuff to have rides, but it makes it easier for you to talk to people. I used to be really, really shy and really anxious all the time, and it's really helped me. It really has. Yeah.

As discussed in Chapter Four, Laura Ryan speaks with strangers for hours at a time while working as an aesthetician, so this reduction in anxiety has had a deeply tangible benefit. Laura's hitchhiking experiences have thus provided her with the confidence to talk to strangers, along with the material for telling stories in an occupational context.

As a final point on the pro-social benefits of hitchhiking, I will include this excerpt from Adam Critchley's interview, in which he contrasts the "humanizing" nature of hitchhiking with other types of travel:

So entirely, it's definitely one of the most interesting ways to travel. It's the way of travelling that—I find most ways of travelling that we do now for the sake of—example like, a bus, or driving, or heaven forbid, taking a plane—puts you at odds with other travellers. It's like, "Oh, these people are all cramping my space, and they're taking up the plug-ins so I can't plug in my super phone, and you know, they all, like ughhh," like nobody's ever been pleased in an airport when they've been getting on a flight ... when you're ready to get on a flight, you're just sweaty, and uncomfortable, and you're worried about where you're going to buy bubble gum so your ears don't pop, and you're praying there's no babies on the plane, and it puts you very much at odds with other human beings. And boats are a little bit better, and trains are better still, but hitchhiking—you rely on other people, so yeah, it's a very humanizing way of travelling, I think. Like it makes every car on the road into a person as opposed to like, "Get out of my way, I need to pass you." So yeah, that would be my hippie logic reason for hitchhiking.

By creating a bond of trust, hitchhikers and drivers move towards dissolving a fear of the unknown stranger. As discussed, this process can result in many positive outcomes. Cars on the road become humanized, and the hitchhiker can meet and connect with locals. By interacting with many different types of people, hitchhikers can become more open-minded and empathetic, and less riddled with anxiety. Furthermore, through the structure of tolerance encouraged by hitchhiking, drivers and hitchhikers are often motivated to transcend incompatibilities and connect with one another, even when they disagree on fundamental matters.

As Cass Sunstein writes, “People should be exposed to materials they would not have chosen in advance. Unanticipated encounters, involving topics and points of view we have not sought out and perhaps find irritating, are central to democracy” (2004, 58). In an increasingly divisive political world, replete with “social media echo chambers” and other polarizing mechanisms, I find much hope in the noted benefits of interacting with strangers, as discerned by both psychological researchers and the interviewed hitchhikers. At risk of sounding overly idealistic and Pollyannaish, I can’t help hoping for a hitchhiking revival of some kind—or perhaps some other sustained, conversational context between strangers—which could usher in a dose of tolerance, empathy and societal connection.

Yet, the outcomes outlined here contrast immensely with prevailing, culturally dominant views of hitchhiking. In the following section, I examine how the interviewed hitchhikers contend with more pervasive ideologies of fear. How does one approach hitchhiking in this day and age?

Responding to the Culture of Fear

As Frank Furedi writes, the term “culture of fear” has become “a widely used idiom. ... The usage or even over-usage of the term indicates that fear is not simply a reaction to a specific danger, but a cultural metaphor for interpreting life” (2007, vii). I do not think that any interviewees were unaware of this ideology, and more than one hitchhiker specifically employed the “culture of fear” phrase during our interviews. Emma Lang, for instance, discussed how she grew up with the “US culture of fear.” She explained:

The US has such a cultural fear around fricking everything. In Washington D.C., your bag gets searched when you walk into every single building, more or less. The culture of other people being scary, I mean it permeates everything from you know, police shootings of black kids to just the way people are treated, and assumptions that are made.

This culture of fear is not limited to the US, of course. Although societal trust is likely higher in Newfoundland and Cape Breton than many other places, I know that my mother, a Newfoundlander from Trinity Bay, routinely forbade me from walking at night in our suburban neighbourhood in Mount Pearl, Newfoundland. Linda Samuels also recalled how a few years ago, several women she was friendly with balked at walking on Water Street (a main downtown thoroughfare in St. John's, Newfoundland) at 9 pm, "because it was too dangerous. It was like, oh, come on. [laughs] Some people are way too worried." As David Sorensen, a Newfoundlander who works at Memorial University stated, "Our society, I think, emphasizes how dangerous the world is, even though statistics don't back it up, but I think we're living in a culture of fear more than ever now, and so people are more nervous about everything." As mentioned in Chapter Three, crime rates have indeed declined in Canada, the United States, and the UK since the mid-20th century, although the perception of crime appears to have increased. Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman comments on this modern irony in his book *Liquid Fear*. He writes:

Contrary to the objective evidence, it is the people who live in the greatest comfort on record, more cosseted and pampered than any other people in history, who feel more threatened, insecure and frightened, more inclined to panic, and more passionate about everything related to security and safety than people in most other societies past and present. (2006, 130)

The decline of hitchhiking is sometimes regarded as a kind of litmus test for this culture of fear. In the introduction to his book, *Culture of Fear Revisited*, Frank Furedi recalls his earlier years as a professor, when "all my students used to hitchhike to get into

town or travel further afield. I would frequently see queues of 20-25 animated students waiting for a ride. Today, none of them hitches a ride. The idea of getting into a car with a stranger has become stigmatized” (2007, xix-xx). Several hitchhikers discussed how hitchhiking has become increasingly feared over the years. Joyce Babbin, who hitchhiked across Canada in her youth, said, “In the ’70s, I’m sure there were lots of predators out there, but it just wasn’t part of the common culture to be talking about it.” Joyce never regarded her solo hitchhiking journey as an especially unique or brave venture, saying that she “never thought about it. ... Maybe I was naïve in thinking that it was a safe thing to do, I don’t know.” These days, however, she feels that media coverage of various calamities has discouraged hitchhiking, saying:

Yeah, my thought about the modern society and how we view our personal safety, terrorism, bomb threats, all the things that go on that people are exposed to from the media, I think people don’t have as strong a sense of personal security as they may have had at other times, and therefore they’re not going to pick up, and they’re not going to hitchhike.

Fears surrounding hitchhiking have certainly accelerated in tandem with the growing focus on personal security and risk mitigation. However, hitchhiking is also an especially suitable host for fear, dependent as it is on unknown, potentially vindictive strangers. The most terrifying figure of one’s imagination may be around the corner, intent on ensnaring a stranger in their clutches, and offering little chance of escape. As Zygmunt Bauman writes, “Fear is at its most fearsome when it is diffuse, scattered, unclear, unattached, unanchored, free floating, with no clear address or cause; when it haunts us with no visible rhyme or reason, when the menace we should be afraid of can be glimpsed everywhere but is nowhere to be seen” (2006, 2). Hitchhiking usually involves a dance with the unknown, as even the most trusting hitchhikers are typically

aware of. The villains of hitchhiking can emerge unexpectedly with, as Bauman writes, “no clear address or cause,” and attack without provocation. However, this type of occurrence is quite rare. Although a measure of fear has likely accompanied hitchhiking throughout much of its history, it seems clear that rising levels of societal distrust have exacerbated the fearsome aspects of hitchhiking, such that today’s public often regards hitchhiking as an overly risky, wholly dangerous, and somewhat suspicious endeavour.

The interviewees reconciled their experiences with this culture of fear in a number of ways. Some of the older interviewees, who hadn’t hitchhiked since the ’60s or ’70s, feel that hitchhiking has indeed become increasingly unsafe over the years. Joe MacPherson commented, “The world has changed. We are a little bit more, what’s the word, I think we’re afraid ourselves. ... There are a lot of scary people out there, that’s the thing, you know.” When asked whether he felt fearful during his hitchhiking days, Joe replied:

I don’t know if that came into the equation when I was hitchhiking back then, because everybody was—like everybody was hitchhiking then, it was a common form of transportation. Whether you were a hippie hitchhiking to your next concert, or whether you were a military guy going home for the weekend, money wasn’t easy to get. You know, you didn’t—wages weren’t very good, whether you lived in Newfoundland or Nova Scotia or wherever, you didn’t have much choice.

In other words, the fact that everyone was hitchhiking in that era normalized the act.

Kevin Bassett offered a related thought, as he contrasted his hitchhiking experiences in the ’60s with his more pessimistic perception of the modern world:

I mean, I guess you call it the hippie days, you know, everybody was pretty carefree. There wasn’t the fear that there is today. Like I wouldn’t hitchhike today. You know, not unless I was desperate, but I mean, I told you about that incident where that guy swerved [at Kevin, while hitchhiking on the side of the road], you know. I could see that happening today in a minute, any number of people doing it, you know. Just for a kick.

Some former hitchhikers also refuse to pick up hitchhikers these days. As the following interview excerpt (with Joan Butler) demonstrates, I was initially quite surprised by this information:

AM: Do you pick up many hitchhikers?

JB: I never pick up hitchhikers now. Never.

AM: Because you don't see them, or..?

JB: No. Just don't trust them. There's so few of them hitchhiking now that—no, I wouldn't. I think I won't pick them up now because there's more fear, I mean—and I think we've become—there's the fear factor because of the daily reports from the police that they feed to the media, and the media takes it all and makes news out of it, it makes their lives easier. But no, if I'm in the car by myself, I certainly won't pick one up. ... I think when I look at it now, like if you're hitchhiking, there's other ways you can get there is how I was thinking, like, "You must know someone," or perhaps you don't, I don't know.

After this exchange, I pointed out that it costs over \$100 to travel the island of Newfoundland by bus, and that many people (including myself) lack access to a vehicle. In response, Joan said that if she "was in a service station and there was someone, a hitchhiker in there, and I started chatting to them and found out they needed a ride, if I sensed they were a decent person I would take them. But I wouldn't stop on the highway." Even though Joan felt this fear was constructed by the media's increasing release of crime reports ("to make their lives easier," through the act of creating ready-made news content), her trust in hitchhikers has wavered nevertheless.

Other hitchhikers wished to defy this culture of fear. After mentioning the discrepancy between crime statistics and the perception of danger, David Sorensen stated, "I try to rebel against that [the culture of fear] a little bit, so I still think I would pick up hitchhikers if I was travelling by myself." When I asked what motivated this spirit of rebellion, he responded:

Well, I don't believe it. I don't believe that the world is getting dangerous. I think, you know, being in the media business myself and having been a reporter, I think a lot of the

stuff is sensationalized. I know crime is always a sensational topic, so I think that—I feel that the world is just as safe as it was back when I was hitchhiking in the ‘80s and ‘90s, and so, you know, I’m not going to let fear trump reason.

Peter Smith, who had his first highway hitchhiking experience in the early 2000s, reflected that after this initial journey, “I felt like I did something really good, you know. I felt like I was breaking down myths, you know, this isn’t dangerous.” He continued, saying:

Eventually, maybe not that day, but over the years it developed into this, like, you’re providing an opportunity for people to express their kindness, you know. Like getting really high minded about it [laughs], plus the saving the—even if it’s minor ecological damage, like if the car’s going there anyways, you just hop in. It’s better for the environment, yeah. All that!

This notion of rebelling through acts of kindness was taken up by Paula Graham as well, who also articulated how hitchhiking aligns with her activist, anti-capitalist proclivities:

I like doing things in the world that are counter to the normal way of doing things, the way you’re supposed to do things, right. If you need to get somewhere, what you’re supposed to do is purchase a car, or purchase a plane ticket, or purchase a bus ticket. And buy that item, it’s all very materialistic, very capital-driven, right. ... I think that’s a big part of hitchhiking for me, is this sort of low-tech, simple, you know, relying on other people is also very much not what you’re supposed to do in Western culture, you’re supposed to be an individual, you’re supposed to have all the things you need in your possession, and yeah, so this way of travelling around that’s relying on the kindness of people you don’t even know, to me is an act of defiance as a political act.

The type of rebellion invoked here is more directed at the expectations of capitalism than the culture of fear. However, the link between fear and capitalism has often been addressed. German psychoanalyst Dieter Duhm, for example, wrote that “Fear is not only the product of capitalism, but part of its foundation, an element without which this entire system would collapse” (Duhm 1975, quoted in Winiecki 2016). The fact that North Americans are more fearful of hitchhiking these days is good for the economy; with hitchhiking seemingly out of the question, more people spend money on transit—thus

engaging in, as Paula pointed out, “what you’re supposed to do [in a capitalist society] ... purchase a car, or purchase a plane ticket, or purchase a bus ticket.” As discussed in a blog post for the *Freakonomics* podcast, the 2009 US Summary of Travel Trends indicates that “the average vehicle commuting to and from work today carries just 1.1 people, which means about 80 percent of car capacity goes unused” (Huynh 2011). Clearly, these trends showcase a widespread, inefficient consumption of fossil fuels, which is also hugely beneficial for corporate interests. By hitchhiking (or by picking up hitchhikers), however, one can defy these norms of capitalistic consumption, along with the fearful attitudes that may accompany such practices.

As noted by Frank Furedi, “The culture of fear estranges people from one another. It also distracts people from facing up to the challenges confronting society” (2007, xx). In the following interview excerpt, Sasha Boczkowski discusses how hitchhiking can help to heal this type of estrangement:

Not to be like, “I’m so moral and ethical for hitchhiking,” but maybe you are doing something good, right, because you are shattering that perspective that everything in the world is dangerous, and people are just out to rob people and kill them, you know, like when they meet me and they’re like, “Oh, this little woman who’s hitchhiked alone through a good many countries and slept outside, and nothing happened to her,” you know? Maybe that kind of sets people at ease more. Which is probably a good thing. And it helps with racism too, I think, because you know, people are like, “Oh my god, you hitchhiked through Mexico by yourself, it’s fucking dangerous down there,” or whatever, and you’re like, no it’s not. People are just people, and you can tell people that after you’re hitchhiking, yeah. I mean, what happened? People took care of me, and people invited me into their homes, people, you know, wanted to be my friend. You know? So you can break down barriers that way, kind of, like stereotypes and stuff.

Other hitchhikers touched on the sense of hope they derived from hitchhiking, too. Laura Ryan, for instance, said that she liked hitchhiking because “I like to think that there’s hope for humanity, and not everybody’s, you know, out to harm you.” Margaret Morris offhandedly remarked, “I’ve had some great rides hitchhiking, and it really

restores your faith in humanity. People—you know, you’re just on the side of the road, and both people are taking a chance.” Sometimes, Peter Smith hitchhiked in a deliberate effort to reaffirm his faith in others:

There’s times after I started hitchhiking, if I was losing faith in people, I’d go and hitchhike and like—oh yeah. Travel a bit, you know. Rely on people’s goodness and kindness and nature and good will, and their trust. All that’s happening in a hitchhiking moment, you know, you’re—someone’s taking a chance to trust you, and to offer their kindness against the greater narrative that everyone knows, and you’re taking that risk, and you’re trusting in them to help you out. And you know, you get to receive their kindness, and they can get something from you too, which can be an interesting story, or nothing, just a chance to help out.

Here, the “greater narrative that everyone knows” refers to this narrative of fear. Perhaps hitchhiking has become all the more uplifting over the years because of the contrast it offers from ideologies of suspicion. David Sorensen remarked that while hitchhiking in the ‘80s and ‘90s, he was often struck by “how routine it all felt ... it really didn’t feel unusual or different, or certainly didn’t feel threatening or exceptional, it just felt like this was the way you got around.” His rebellious attitude appears to have been borne in reaction to declining levels of societal trust. And although Joyce Babbitt doesn’t recall having the following view during her hitchhiking trips in the ‘70s, she did reflect that, in retrospect, “Every drive I got that was a good drive from a good person was probably reaffirming my faith in humanity, to just be kind to each other and help each other out. ... I don’t remember consciously thinking of it at the time, but I do think that those, all those good drives had to have reaffirmed in my mind the basic fundamental goodness in mankind.” It seems to be difficult to hitchhike these days without taking this culture of fear into account. Hitchhikers may feel alarmed by the culture of fear, or rail against it (though of course, many hitchhikers would locate themselves somewhere between this

dichotomy). They may also feel uplifted by the departure of their own hitchhiking experiences from more culturally pervasive, negative depictions.

In light of these factors, I will now continue into the final section of this chapter. Does hitchhiking experience lead to an increased sense of trust? And if so, what is the nature of this connection?

Trust as Worldview

Several hitchhikers expressed a high level of trust in others. As Sasha Boczkowski stated, “I just really feel that—and maybe it’s hitchhiking that’s given me this opinion, but 99% of people in the world are awesome and lovely, you know? Are just great and more than the majority just want to get to know you. So I think at this point, yeah, I’m extremely trusting.” Some hitchhikers also confessed that they were a bit too trusting at times. John Drover, a practicing lawyer, remarked, “Generally in my life I’ve been trusting to a fault, and even sometimes in the practice of law, I’m still a little too trusting, you know.” Rose Westbury also stated that she’s “sometimes too trusting,” saying, “I just like to think that there’s good in everybody. I know that sounds cliché and corny, but I do.”

Perhaps hitchhikers (especially contemporary hitchhikers) simply represent an overly trusting segment of the population. Maybe those who harbour a positive view of human nature are more willing to take a chance on the strangers of the world. Chad Griffiths and I discussed the idea of trust as an enabler of hitchhiking during our interview:

AM: I was also thinking about trust a little bit with it, because I mean, to hitchhike you have to trust in people, you kind of have to have to a good outlook, and basically believe that people will more or less be kind—

CG: People are more or less good, yeah. There's definitely a certain social ontology that is more conducive to hitchhiking than others that does involve—yeah, people are generally good. Like, bad things generally don't happen. Most people when meeting a stranger will not do upon them harm, you know, of course there are situations where that doesn't come to pass, but there is a certain trust that has worked out for a lot of people.

Furthermore, Amber Tapley mentioned that many of her hitchhiking friends “are pretty trusting. They're pretty open-minded, you know. I think you have to be to trust your fate to a bunch of people you don't know on the highway. ... So I would say I'm trusting, and I think most hitchhikers generally are.”

However, several hitchhikers did express a more subdued, cautious sense of generalized trust. Chloe Edbrooke, for example, stated the following:

Sometimes hitchhiking makes me feel like people are just sort of surprisingly good, or something, or when someone unexpected gives you a ride, it makes you have a different perspective on that person than if you just saw them from a distance. But I don't think it necessarily makes me have more trust in people as a whole, because there's all kinds of people that could pick you up, I guess?

Rather than making any overall claims about the goodness of people, Paula Graham directed the question of trust towards her own sense of reason and intuition, saying:

It's not that I don't think bad things happen, but I think they happen for reasons, there's a cause to the effect. Very rarely does somebody just attack you for no reason. ... So am I trusting? I think I trust that I am perceptive and analytical and I trust that I will catch most suspicious things early enough that I will then avoid it, and not get into a bad situation, you know?

Additionally, Emma Lang discussed how she finds it difficult to resist the culture of fear, saying, “I wish there wasn't the culture of fear, and I think that I bring a lot of the US culture of fear, as much as I'm pissed at it existing, I think I did grow up with it. And it's hard for me to break out of that, even in rural areas, and even in places where it is safe.”

Moreover, Laurie Burns clearly rejected the notion of hitchhiking as being an affirming or enjoyable activity, while hinting at her own lack of trust:

AM: Do you enjoy hitchhiking?

LB: Oh, not really, I don't really enjoy it. [laughs] But I do it if I have to, if it's necessary I will do it, if I have an appointment or something and I just can't get there or whatever, I'll hitchhike. I don't enjoy it, no.

AM: Why not?

LB: 'Cause it's strangers, right, and I don't know. You never know what they could be capable of, but I still put myself at that risk. ...

AM: Does it restore any faith in humanity or people or anything?

LB: No.

AM: No, okay. All right.

Gary Ledrew, on the other hand, gave a decidedly mixed response to the question of his own sense of trust, appearing to change his mind midway through his answer:

AM: Are you—would you say that you're a trusting person?

GL: No, not particularly. I've been around, you know, with some of the things that I've done, it's not that, it's—again, I don't know, really I'm basically—I don't know, maybe I am a trusting person, I always sort of say that I don't lock my doors because I've got a pure heart, you know? [laughs] It's sort of worked.

In other words, hitchhikers are not necessarily more idealistic or trusting than anyone else. There is a broad range in the hitchhikers' self-assessments of their own attitudes of trust. Most hitchhikers are aware of the dangers that could beset them, and try to take these factors into account. However, there is likely something about the gradual accumulation of positive hitchhiking encounters that leads toward an enhanced sense of trust. As Lewis and Weigert (1986) write, one's familiarity with an object of trust (in this case, the experience of accepting rides with strangers) allows one to leap towards trust. If you have hitchhiked before, and solely encountered kind, generous people in the process of doing so, you will likely feel comfortable with the idea of hitchhiking more in the future. Several hitchhikers made comments to this effect; as Chloe Edbrooke stated, hitchhiking is "one of those things where the more it works out, the more you end up just continuing to do it," while Shagg Burrige remarked, "I think because I have so much experience now [hitchhiking], I don't have much fear." It would appear that the

experience of hitchhiking, in and of itself, can lead towards a more expansive sense of trust. However, this also means that bad hitchhiking experiences might turn one off hitchhiking, too, as Rose Westbury pointed out:

AM: Do you think that hitchhiking almost helps create trust?

RW: It's a fine line. If you had a bad experience right off, you would probably never do it again. Or you would distrust people forever, or at least you could. It's like everything. But if you have lots of good results, that would build your trust. It's like anything, if you start dating and you get a lot of assholes, you're going to distrust men or people in general. It depends on your experience.

Emma Lang made a similar comment:

I guess it [hitchhiking] enhances your ability to see people as good. And that's true of any travelling, if you do it right. My American flatmate in Ireland, who spent the entire time complaining about not being able to get Pringles, I don't think had that experience. But I think generally when you travel to a different place and people accept you, and people are welcoming—or are willing to do anything from stopping and giving you directions on the street, I think those interactions slowly build that up, and I think hitchhiking is a more extreme version of that. But I think it can also very quickly diminish your level of trust. I think it shoots to extremes a bit.

Ultimately, however, the interviewed hitchhikers discussed their hitchhiking experiences in a highly favourable light. More often than not, bad rides were presented as exceptions, while positive encounters were framed as being broadly symbolic of hitchhiking as a whole. Of course, this is a generalization of the myriad views discussed in this chapter. There are many factors that may contribute to this variation. Just as an understanding of hitchhiking and trust, when interpreted from the personal narratives of hitchhikers, may be subtly warped by the demands of storytelling, so too can methods of direct questioning (such as “Are you a trusting person?”) result in a more hesitant, cautious response, particularly since trusting attitudes may be associated with traits such as naïvety and gullibility. As well, this thesis rests on interviews with a broad range of hitchhikers, from several generations, whose individual personalities, values, and life

experiences have all come to bear on our discussions in various ways. It is easy to find arguments and counter-arguments on numerous points within my corpus of interviews. Some of the interviewees know each other and some do not; some currently belong to folk groups of hitchhikers, while others haven't spoken with fellow hitchhikers in years. The exchange of hitchhiking vernacular materials is difficult to discern in some cases and, thus, the circulation of covert values behind such exchanges can be challenging to pinpoint as well. However, while there are varied perspectives on the subject of trust, I would also argue that the views of these hitchhikers converge in many respects. The vast majority of interviewees presented their hitchhiking experiences in a positive light. Because of these experiences, most interviewees also felt that hitchhiking was a fairly safe activity (certainly, safer than how it is usually represented). On the whole, the merits of trusting strangers were frequently expressed, both implicitly and explicitly, through the hitchhiking folklore discussed in this thesis.

All in all, though, the views of hitchhikers towards trust are complex and multifaceted. Based on my interviews, trust may be viewed as a bridge built deliberately between strangers, a value implied through narrative, an inclination founded on experience and, these days (and in certain contexts), a counter-hegemonic impulse. Amongst strangers, trust can elicit *communitas*, and deepen one's sense of empathy for the Other; within a community of known individuals, it can foster group cohesion and solidarity. As both a process and an attitude, with underpinnings in one's life experiences and beliefs about human nature, it is difficult to reach any singular conclusion about hitchhiking and trust, or of how, exactly, these attitudes are folklorically communicated between individuals. However, because the matter of trust is so bound up with the act of

hitchhiking, the views of hitchhikers can nonetheless reveal a great deal about the delicacy, boundaries and variability of trust, along with its attendant capacities for hope and subversion.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

AM: What's your favourite thing about hitchhiking?

GL: Well, really just getting from point to point. I mean, you know. I don't know, I do like people and adventures and stories, and I certainly believe you're only going through once, you'd better gather your rosebuds as you may, you know. Experience everything.

AM: And hitchhiking broadens your experience?

GL: Oh certainly.



Figure 9: Portrait of Gary Ledrew, holding his self-portrait.

At times, I have felt daunted by the interpretive potential of this topic. Hitchhiking may be viewed, at once, as an instrument of necessity and a transformative ritual; a site where gender inequity, prejudice and aggression can become sorely apparent, while likewise fostering moments of serendipitous kindness. In large part, hitchhiking involves the bringing together of strangers. The resulting encounter may be awful or beautiful, awkward or ordinary—as any exchange between any two (or more) people may be. The

way that one feels about hitchhiking can reveal a great deal about a person's worldview, which is also reflective of broader societal perspectives. These societal views of hitchhiking are highly variable as well, as ideas about risk and safety are often tied to narratives and beliefs that emerge out of particular places during particular moments in time. Hitchhiking personal experience narratives, occupational techniques, legends, and other kinds of hitchhiking folklore offer avenues for examining these dynamics. As Mary Hufford writes, "Folklife is community life and values, artfully expressed in myriad forms and interactions" (1991). In other words, folkloric forms and interactions, in their many iterations—proverbs and riddles, graffiti and root cellars, to name a few—can be read as distillations of social values. By looking closely at the hitchhiking folklore presented by my interviewees, I have attempted to discern the attitudes and questions about trust that have guided such expressions. Can one trust a stranger? How does one deal with a stranger? What are the benefits of trusting strangers, on both a personal and societal level? How have these views changed over time? In this thesis, I have examined the ways that hitchhiking strategies and hitchhiking personal experience narratives may provide answers to these types of questions. While doing so, I also endeavoured to contextualize the experiences of my interviewees, so that the influence of gender, location, time frame and short-distance vs. long-distance hitchhiking may be taken into account. The values conveyed by these hitchhikers, in large part, stand in contrast with more officially sanctioned discourses of fear and suspicion. In this thesis, then, the informally communicated, vernacular culture of hitchhiking generally expresses a counter-hegemonic perspective.

Hitchhiking, as Stephen Lewis put it, is “a very human thing, it’s a social moment.” The connections made during a hitchhiking encounter can resonate for years to come, and bring about a deepening sense of empathy. As John MacNeil summed it up, “I think probably you discovered the magic of hitchhiking is—people are wonderful. They really are. And give them half a chance, they just shine. And if they like you, it’s amazing, okay.” Many of the hitchhikers I interviewed described their experiences with a great deal of warmth and enthusiasm. Like Gary Ledrew, the hitchhiker quoted at the beginning of this chapter, they often felt that hitchhiking had broadened their life experience. Some interviewees write poems about hitchhiking; some habitually tell their hitchhiking stories. Others keep their memories to themselves. In almost all cases, however, the experience of hitchhiking seemed to hold much significance. Using the tools of folkloristic analysis, this significance and meaning can be examined from a number of angles—whether as a narrative resource, a realm of informally learned know-how, a rite of passage, or a mirror of societal trust, amongst other possible considerations. In any case, much can be understood about the folklore of hitchhiking beyond the analysis of Vanishing Hitchhiker legends.

At the same time, it is important not to sugarcoat the risks of hitchhiking. Several interviewees disclosed truly alarming hitchhiking stories, some of which rival the events recounted in hitchhiking legends. The experiences of the interviewed women also demonstrate that female hitchhikers (particularly solo female hitchhikers) are often bombarded with sexual attention from men and, thus, must face a host of challenges that are seldom endured by male hitchhikers. A folkloristic examination of hitchhiking can reveal the circulation of patriarchal attitudes and prejudice, just as it can reveal the

circulation of ideas about trust and kindness. In this thesis, I have mainly focused on the latter point of emphasis; beyond my own positive associations with hitchhiking, the interviewed hitchhikers, in large part, remained upbeat and enthusiastic about their experiences, and I endeavoured to follow their lead. While hitchhiking can certainly facilitate frightening encounters, this was not the overarching message put forth by my interviewees. Instead, these hitchhikers primarily highlighted the goodness of the act, describing hitchhiking, variously, as an antidote to fear and alienation, a catalyst of empathy and compassion, a wellspring of storytelling potential, and a useful, practical means of getting around. The link between hitchhiking and trust runs through many of these themes, fusing together the varying strands of this thesis, so that the range of experiences and interpretations recounted here may coalesce.

In closing, I will offer a final excerpt from my interview with Joyce Babbin, to ground this discussion back in the hitchhiking moment, and to zero in on a simple, lucid, recognizable instance of hitchhiking joy:

I always thought it was really cool that somebody stopped. I think that point at which you realize that somebody's stopping to pick you up—and I don't know if it was a sense of, "Hey, I got it, I got good karma," and somebody's stopped to pick me up, or if it was, "Oh jeez, great, now I get on to the next place,"—I'm not sure why I felt that, but of all the things—the destinations, the people, the experiences and all that stuff, it was that split second where I thought, "Ah! They're going to stop!" I think that was the most exciting thing about hitchhiking. Yeah.

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Appendix A: Hitchhiking Poetry

THUMBING A RIDE

Written by Joe MacPherson in July 2015.
Received as an email attachment. Original presentation.

HEADING ON OUT TO THE WIDE OPEN ROADS
 SEARCHING LONG FOR A WAY TO THE STARS
 HITCHING A RIDE HAD AN UNWRITTEN CODE
 SO BE READY WHEN YOU TAKE TO THE TAR.
 PICK YOUR POST PROPER, PATIENCE BE YOUR GUIDE
 MAKE IT LOOK LIKE YOU KNOW WHERE YOU'RE GOIN,
 STAND OUT CLEARLY, BUT STAY TO THE SIDE
 BE ALERT FOR THE TRAFFIC THAT BE FLOWIN!
 TAKIN TO THE ROAD, WISE TO HAVE A GOOD KIT
 NEVER SURE JUST WHAT OR WHEN BE YOUR NEEDS
 PACK ALL NECESSITIES, ENSURE A TIGHT FIT
 PROTECTION FOR MOST ODORS, BITES AND BLEEDS.
 LONG DAYS AT TIMES TURN QUICKLY INTO NIGHT
 KEEPIN STUFF DRY, AS A SHIELD FROM WIND AND RAIN
 WEAR LIGHT COLORS, AT LEAST A LITTLE WHITE
 OR WHERE YOU ARE, MAY JUST BE WHERE YOU'RE STAYIN!
 DAYS CAN BE SO LONG AND THE RIDES AT TIMES BE FEW
 DON'T BE OVER BOLD, AND AS WELL DON'T SEEM TO MEEK
 WHEN YOU GET A LUCKY BREAK, FOLLOW ALL THE RULES
 ENSURE THE USE OF COURTESY, NEVER RANK OR REEK!
 HITCH-HIKING CAN BE FUN, BUT IT ALSO HAS IT DANGERS!
 ALWAYS BE PREPARED, STAND YER GROUND, KEEP YER FOCUS
 EVERY TIME AND RIDE, EVERY LIFT CAN BE LIFE CHANGERS!
 KEEP A WELL PLACED "B-PLAN" SHOULD THERE BE SOME HOKI-POKI!
 YOU CAN SEE THE COUNTRY, MEET GREAT FOLKS, IN MANY PLACES
 LIKE CITIES, TOWNS, YOU ONLY SAW IN PICTURES AND FROM STORIES
 DEEP AMID THE NORTHERN PINES, AND THE PRAIRIE OPEN SPACES
 BECOME THE LIVING LEGENDS YOU CAN SPEAK ABOUT WITH GLORY.
 PERHAPS AS YOU GET OLDER, LONG TO HIT THE LINES ANOTHER TIME
 TO KEEP THE MEMORIES LIVING, WE'LL REFLECT WITH WORDS AND
 RHYME
 WHOOPS, SORRY GOTTA GO, THERE'S A CAR AND THE MOTOR'S RUNNING
 GRAB ANOTHER TALE, OF THE WANDEROUS DAYS OF "THUMBING"

Shank's Mare

Written by John MacNeil in March, 2015.
Transcribed from an oral recitation.

I walk.
I walk because I must.
I walk everywhere,
I walk past west,
I walk past dust.
I walk through snow,
I walk all the time,
I walk because I am able.
You know?
So.
I keep walking.
I feel blessed.
I am able to get around.
Many tried to engineer me, making it possible for me to go aground.
But they must know, I'm still around.
Pleasure, envy, surprise, bother, outrage,
I face daily.
So, I keep walking.
On solid ground.