

image Edition 2

Descriptive Script

Wednesday, December 13, 1978

Soledad

by Jeff Hodgen

"Muchas gracias," I yelled in my best Spanish accent. The Chicanos who had dropped me by the roadside roared away like a band of singing mariachis, leaving me in the dust and quiet of rural California. I was on the outskirts of one of those many towns with Spanish names that dot the entire length of California. Ancient and romantic, these names fill the road signs leaving one with images of Spanish saints — Santa Rosa, San Mateo, Santa Cruz — and testing one's basic Spanish vocabulary — Milpitas, Los Gatos, Los Banos, Arroyo Grande. As I trudged along with my pack slung over my shoulder, I studied the name of this particular town on the approaching sign. Soledad. The latest dot on my hitch from Oakland to San Luis Obispo.

Soledad, Soledad, I pondered while kicking up clouds of dust and gravel along the dry roadbed wishing I'd accepted the beer the Chicanos had offered. As I searched my memory bank for the English equivalent, my subconscious was dealing with other associations. Soledad. A list of words came to mind but none seemed quite right. Solo, alone, solitary, singular; all had close meanings but lacked the essence that the Spanish word conjured, Soledad. It wasn't until I neared the barren on-ramp to the interstate highway that the precise definition of the word hit me. Loneliness. I tried to imagine why founding fathers would name a town "Loneliness," but my train of thought was broken as I hooked my thumb at the first passing vehicles.

With the relative ease I'd had finding rides all day, I figured Soledad would be miles behind before I gave the name a second thought. The instant success I'd expected passed me by doing well over the 55-mile-per-hour limit. With each passing car and truck, I cautiously inched my way farther down the long ramp towards the super-slab. I knew full well that I was far

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Phil Troehler is back in school after a stint with the service. He has just started at Parkland as a Communications student and is working on developing his hobby of photography into a career.

beyond the NO HITCH-HIKING sign. I had no worries, however, for I felt my luck, would hook me a ride any minute. My vision of a smiling face and open door was shattered by the first car that stopped. Luckily the state trooper only issued me a warning. On the lonely and seemingly endless trek back up the on-ramp, I noticed some social commentary concerning the police scribbled on the back of a pedestrian prohibitory sign. I empathized with the anonymous poet. "Is my luck changing?" I wondered aloud. I reached the top of the ramp and again saw the sign for Soledad.

I tried not to worry about "creeping loneliness" and looked at my present situation as only a momentary setback, a little trial by fire to temper my hitchhiker spirit. I had to remember the thrill and adventure of facing the open road alone. What I couldn't overlook, however, was the fact that every car that came down the ramp, few as they were, not only passed me by but accelerated as they came close. Did I suddenly look dangerous or evil? The seeds of doubt were planted. Those seeds might have germinated into full grown paranoia had it not been for the appearance of an instant comrade: another lonely hitchhiker.

We talked, he and I, of destinations, how far we'd come, the remoteness of "our" on-ramp and the need of finding a ride before the sun went down. I say "he," for I didn't ask his name, nor he, mine. The relief of companionship was sufficient.

Although only an hour or so had elapsed since my "amigos" had first let me off near Soledad, being isolated from fellow travelers made time crawl. With the arrival of my new-found companion, time took on a more normal pace. It was then I realized that two of us were going to be in Soledad after dark if we didn't get a ride quickly. Throwing caution to the wind, I headed back down the ramp to try thumbing on the interstate again

while my nameless friend caught the ramp traffic.

Upon reaching the place where my encounter with the law had occurred, I turned and looked up the ramp just in time to see my hitchhiking partner climb into a car. Ah, the thrill of victory! I hurried back up the ramp as the car descended. I lowered my pack to swing aboard, for we had agreed that whoever succeeded in getting a ride would call the other. I only caught a glimpse of my "partner" shrugging his shoulders as he and my supposed ticket out of Soledad whizzed by.

My anger grew as I watched the traitorous taillights fade out of sight. If only I had asked him his name, I would have had someone to curse. But I knew my anger was only a temporary shield from fear, a defense mechanism to ward off for the moment the inevitable loneliness of my deserted ramp. The cooling fires of the sun were perched on the edge of the horizon, ready to jump over that edge and desert me, also. The encroaching darkness with its accompanying coldness intensified the loneliness and turned my anger into anxiety. It was from somewhere deep in this anxious state of mind that I discovered why the name Soledad had haunted me. It was the name of a prison.

Of course, the prison. I knew the name rang a bell somewhere inside. Maybe the prison was there before the town. That might explain why a city named "Loneliness" existed. Soledad; it was a good name for a prison. My mind raced through images of being locked behind bars: the cells, the guards, the unscalable walls, solitary confinement, counting times, the distrust, the loneliness. The last of which brought me back to my own predicament. For the first time in my hitchhiking career I felt truly stranded. The town sign was barely visible in the fading light of dusk.

Like all those locked behind bars, whether justly or unjustly, I too, was

confined to my ramp. I felt trapped between the dark, endless highway ahead and the unknown countryside all around. The prison was close; it had to be. That might explain why all the cars on the ramp accelerated upon seeing me. They thought I was a convict, an escapee. Maybe that other guy had escaped from Soledad. My fear increased as I let my imagination get the best of me. Maybe I was paying my debt to society for having broken its laws. After all, I had gone past the "NO HITCH-HIKING" sign twice already that day. The guard at the highway entrance had told me to go back up the ramp, into my "cell."

In the dark the superslab looked insurmountable, like giant cement walls. I knew the darkness was playing its evil tricks on me, but I was unable to move. Then the very real possibility of passing the entire night in that blackness slapped me in the face, snapping me out of my paralysis. I scanned the darkness blindly, threw my pack on my back, took a deep breath, and made my break.

The exhilaration of running down to the highway certainly dispelled my feelings of loneliness and the chill of the night. The adrenalin, however, had me jumping up and down on the shoulder of the road with my thumb held high over my head. The headlights of passing cars were like searchlights discovering my escape from the ramp. I swore if I ever got out of there alive, my hitchhiking days were over. As if the gods were only waiting for such an oath, a small, Japanese car came to a squealing halt only twenty yards past me. I was still getting situated in the tiny front seat, and already we were a mile down the road. A mile from Soledad.

I was surprised that a young woman would pick me up, a hitchhiker after dark. She said that I looked cold and lonely. I told her that she was quite perceptive and that I was quite grateful. She asked where I'd been and

where I was headed. Before I knew it, the combination of a warm car and an excellent FM stereo sound system had me bragging of past journeys by thumb and boast of more to come. My four hours in Soledad were only a bad dream.

Or so I thought.

She dropped me off on the ramp leading into San Luis Obispo. It was the name of a protecting saint. I was up the ramp and headed towards my sister's home only three or four miles away. With a feeling of relief, security, and familiarity with the area, I stuck out my thumb for the home stretch.

It was a small, yellow, American-made compact that pulled over from two lanes away to the curb I was perched on. The driver reached behind the passenger in the front seat to pull open the lock. The car was still rolling forward. His hand continued past the lock, out the window, and pointed a gun directly at me. Whether he was a bad shot or used blanks, I'll never know. I had hit the deck on instinct alone. With ears still ringing from the shots, I loped the last two miles to my sister's home.

With exhausted muscles and shattered nerves, my thoughts swung from feeling lucky to feeling warned. Were the gunshots fired a clear warning for breaking my oath not to hitch? Was my four-hour sentence in Soledad penalty for earlier transgressions? Too tired to continue, I left this universal balancing act up to the gods and decided to stick by the oath I had taken in Soledad.

I feel a pang of loneliness when I see a daring soul walking the highway with thumb erect. But I haven't hitched a ride since.

Jeff Hodgen is majoring in Biology, and plans to go into a career of vet med.

Observations of Sue

by Roger McElroy

The day was cold as I stopped my car and went into the Pastry Shop on Sixth Street in Champaign. I noticed a new girl behind the counter as I hurried through the door into the warmth. She was flitting here and there, trying to keep with the eight o'clock rush. She poured coffee and plucked doughnuts and cakes from the carousel as customers yelled out their orders. She moved with the subtle gracefulness of a cat, pacing back and forth while waiting for the next customer to make up his mind. When a lull came in the action, she leaned against the counter and looked out the window, watching the minute flakes of snow showering down. She smiled as she talked to another waitress, showing a perfect set of teeth. Her voice had a musical

ring, and I thought she would be a fantastic singer. As Nancy brought me a cup of coffee, I asked her what the new girl's name was. She told me it was Sue.

When I looked up again, Sue was running her small hand through her hair, brushing it from her face. Her hair was a mousey brown color, naturally curly and fluffy. Her fair complexion reminded me of a girl I had once dated. If she stayed out in the sun very long, cute little freckles would start popping up all over her exposed flesh.

As she walked by the counter where I was sitting, I noticed that her bluejeans were faded from numerous washings and wearings; that led me to believe that they were a favorite pair. She wore an off-white pullover sweater, open at the neck to reveal a silver chain and wishbone

dangling around her throat. Over her jeans and sweater was a gold Pastry Shop apron to keep off the mess of spilled coffee and doughnut crumbs. Her brown suede and leather shoes looked comfortable. As she glanced at her watch to see if it was almost quitting time, I saw that it was a round gold timepiece with a brown leather band that accented the pale fleshtone of her slender wrist. Her silver ring did not match the watch, although it did not look gaudy on her.

As I started for the door, I nodded at her. She waved and chimed emphatically, "Come in again." "It was nice observing you," I mused to myself as I dodged the traffic getting back to my car.

Roger McElroy is a full-time Business Administration student, Illinois Power worker, and family man. When he finds free time, he likes to fish and read.



Devoured

by Amy Stout

I'm trying to remember everything I can about the fire — the smoke, the dirt, the water drenched floors and that smell — that over-whelmingly awful smell. The walls were black and peeling with plaster gone in some places.

The ceiling in the kitchen was gone, leaving only a few rafters and some exposed insulation. There was glass everywhere. The cabinets were chopped into a million pieces, with their contents strewn from one end of the kitchen to the other. A few salvageable dishes lay among the rubbish, but each was covered with a thick layer of black, sticky film. There were boxes of sopping wet cake mixes, crushed cans of tuna, green beans and tomato sauce scattered everywhere. All of the beautiful appliances we received only nine months before — the toaster, the deep fat fryer, the mixer and iron



—were gone, some not even leaving their melted or burnt remains. The old oak table we worked so hard to refinish was charred beyond repair.

Then there were Larry's books. What used to be stacks and stacks of favorite paperbacks appeared to be a mere pile of ashes now. I can't forget our

plants. The sickly cuttings we so tenderly nourished to mature beauties were nothing but sticks protruding from their blackened pots. The melted versions of both the television and telephone were hardly recognizable. There were stacks of unused wedding gifts; none escaping without scars from the fire.

The wedding dress I so carefully chose looked pitiful. The plastic that was intended to "protect" it was melted firmly into its toasted lace.

The fire had been a relentless one, devouring even our most treasured belongings. But we survived, and that's what counts.

The Bride of the Beast

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by Ronnie Mansfield Klems

Every five years the Beast takes a bride,
On this fateful day the villagers hide,
They take a maiden and tie her fast
To a great stone pillar of the past.
In their warm little homes they'll hide in fright,
Soon screams will rip thru the fabric of night.

The Beast has claimed his bride once more,
As he has each time before,
This year I am the chosen one,
Tomorrow the long purification is done,
Then at dusk I will be bound and alone,
The Beast will claim me as his own.

The fear I feel, I try to hide,
I pray the Beast won't eat his bride,
Black night has come and now I hear
A movement, I want to scream in fear,
But I won't. I wait, the silence is deep,
And the village below me seems asleep.

A figure looms over me dark and tall,
A gentle pull and away my bonds fall,
A soft, furry arm grabbed me and then
For a minute I wanted to scream again,
He walked in a cave and again came fear,
But he didn't slow down, we weren't stopping here.

We left the cave, he was climbing down slow,
There was a beautiful village down below,
We went thru the village, past the city square,
And entered the biggest building there,
What was going on I couldn't tell,
But these weren't demons out of hell.

He set me down, now I could finally see,
He pulled off his fur and grinned at me,
He was a man tho' far different from us,
He was glad I didn't scream and fuss.
They came from a very distant place,
Across something, he called outer space.

None of their women had come, it seems,
Their radio-thing wouldn't make any beams,
I didn't understand too much of this,
But this place was nice and I wouldn't miss
The village or people I'd left behind,
For tho' strange, these men were kind.

They had a serum to keep us young and fair,
With us their science, they did share,
We loved our mates, they gave us joy,
But not one of us could conceive a boy,
Only female children and nothing more,
Could be born, it seemed, from this out-world spore.

For years we lived and worked side by side,
Then suddenly all our men had died,
It happened too quickly to find the cause,
One after another, without a pause.
We tried to teach Earthmen, we were of Earth still,
They reacted in fear, many did they kill.

We took action then and hid our entrance caves,
When we caught men we made them slaves,
When they heard our name they ran in fear,
We held the Earth in terror here.
To us men were ignorant, savage pawns,
And we are the mighty Amazons.

Ronnie Klems is on her last year as a liberal arts student. She wants to continue to develop as a poet and plans having some of her poems published this year.

Evolution?

I often think of life
and living
enough to ask its worth . . .

and consider past existence
as a reason
to stop future birth!

by Mary Sue Michels

Mary Sue Michels is a part-time student in Liberal Arts, and is interested in theatre. She keeps busy working one full-time and one part-time job.

Conformist

by Doug James

Labels
labels
everywhere
labels
This is this
that is that
Can't
we
escape
a
proper
format?
Richman
poorman
beggeman
thief.
I guess I need
Pepto-Bismol
relief.

Doug James is a liberal arts major and has participated in about all the arts — writing, singing, and acting. He plans to go into social work.

Losing Pasts

By Dane Barrett

Lost: one piece of past.
It isn't big. About 8x11
and half an inch thick.
Maybe seventy poems
and a threadbare blue cover
with the cardboard insides exposed
just at the corners.
It's first true loves
and high school
and a dirty word in sand on a
Virginia beach
and even indiscretions
however small they were.
It's machine-guese
and a birdskull book
and I miss it.

Dane Barrett is in a two-year Art transfer program to Southern Illinois University. A volume of his poems is being submitted to the Yale Younger Poets Series.

Mid-day Frustration

by Doug James

He makes me angry
Telling me what to do
When to do it
What gives him the right?
I'm down and out and feeling low
Doesn't he know to leave me alone?
Life is enough of a heartache
Why must he rub my nose in it?
Sometimes I want to give up
Why should I give him the satisfaction?
Peace and quiet can soothe
My beastly desire to take revenge
I can only take so much
Better shut his mouth before it's too late
Who am I kidding?
I still feel guilty for kicking the dog next door
He's a dehumanizing animal
But he's worth something, I guess.

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How Do You Do, Mr. Kipling!

by Charles Mercer

I loved ice cream, especially when I was a small boy. We lived in a three-story red brick apartment complex in Richmond, Virginia. Everyday a truck would come down Hanover Avenue with its bell ringing to signal the kids on my block that the ice cream wagon had arrived. Some of the children would spent their saved school lunch money, others would get ten cents from their mothers, and I would beg a bite from everybody's cone. A little girl, who always got the biggest cone, would tease me but never give me a bite. One day in my frustration I grabbed the frosty out of her hand and stuffed the cold cone down the front of her dress. She cried and it made us mortal enemies. It made my father madder than hell.

"Some day you will be a man, my son," were often his last words after beating my ass with his belt. Sometimes it would be, "It hurt me more than it hurt you," and he would smile when he said, "my son." That belt hurt for days but must have taught me something, for I have never put anything cold down a girl's dress to this day.

I went to grammar school in Richmond. It was several blocks from my home, and I took a different way each time to avoid the little girl. I seemed to always get the blame for anything bad that happened in class, so I spent many days after school cleaning the classroom. And then when I got home with the note from my teacher, I had to have it signed by my father. When I think back, I wonder if that little girl had programmed me to be bad. I slowly took on the nickname "HT." "HT" meant HOLY TERROR. It was holy terror this, and holy terror tóhat, but always "my son."

In the fifth grade, the teacher gave us an assignment to learn a poem. We could pick any poem we wanted, but we must memorize it and be able to recite

it in class. Holy Terror!

"Poems are for girls—that's sissy stuff. I'm not learning any poem."

As soon as I had said the words, I knew another note from my teacher was on its way home. "HT" had struck again.

My father sat me down and told me a story. It was peculiar words and advice from a father to his son. He reached ove my head and grabbed a book that was over his desk. It was a small worn leather-bound volume with wrinkled pages and a broken spine.

"If you can filled the unfor-
giving minute
With sixty seconds' worth
of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and
everything that's in it,
And—which is more—
you'll be a Man, my son!"

My father introduced me to Mr. Kipling.

"Learn this poem, believe in it," were his last words on the subject.

All the parents were invited to our classroom for the day of poems. I didn't really think my father would show up, but he did. He was taller than most men and in his gray business suit with a bright bow tie, he stood at the back of the class. I was last to recite. My teacher probably thought I wouldn't have a poem, but the old battleaxe never said a words. I walked to the front of the class, lowered my head, and remembered the poem, word for word.

Before my father died two years ago, I went to see him at the hospital. My brother and my mother, tears in their eyes, left me alone with him. I recited the poem again for him and held his hand. He gave his approval in his moribund state with a squeeze of his hand. No one ever knew what I had said to him and although she never asked I felt my mother close by me helping me remember the words. I carry "If" in my heart and know my father and Kipling were close friends.

*Have A Happy Holiday —
See You Next Semester!*

