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Hitchhiking and riding have always gone hand in hand. The ebb and flow of mountain-town subsistence means reliable transportation may not always be in the cards, but local codes of Samaritan conduct usually prevail. Many times on deep days, I've found myself alternately broke, without wheels or in urgent need of a ride back to the top of the pass for one more fix. With patience and persistence, a lift has always materialized often from some similarly addicted soul with a keen understanding of my plight. And once loaded inside, these 10, 20 or 40-minute interactions have never disappointed.

As with any ride-seeking shredder, I've had my share of scores and scares. I've caught rides in billowing hippie vans, struggling Subarus, cramped Jeeps and even a beautiful blonde's brand-new Beamer. I've sprawled on top of subwoofers in the back of a fish-tailing Camaro, jumped into the bed of a pickup with two slobbering huskies (Teton and Sierra, of course) and listened patiently as frustrated Idaho Mormons detailed the chaste dating scene. My 10 minutes of local fame was ensured with a thumb-out portrait on Century Drive gracing the front page of the *Bend Bulletin* during the winter of '93, but the oddest juxtaposition in my 16 years of transport came this season while rideless again after a 100-inch storm, I jumped into a battered minivan for a lift up the hill.

My driver was up to speed before I could shut the broken sliding door and a squawking AC/DC soundtrack set the tone for the frantic rally up State Route 542. Inside was a hard-charging foursome from the industrial suburbs, already with two hours invested into the morning rush for first tracks. Dad, son and son's friend were charged to get fresh turns, and it was the quiet kid's virgin trip to Mt. Baker. Before long, Highway-to-Hell dad cracks a twenty-two ounce and snowboarding tales began to flow with new amplitude. Topics ranged from resorts ridden and trips to be taken, to the snap of our sidecuts, but what elicited the loudest cheer of approval was the quiet kid's affirmation that this was the season he'd buy his first board.

After a glorious day of puffy powder lines, the trip home was equally strange. Mere minutes after unstrapping, I climbed over car seats and into a just-off-the-lot minivan with an all-American family of four. Mom quickly popped in a Dr. Seuss DVD and offered me hot cocoa for the ride home. Learning they were stationed at a local naval base, I was poised for a politically charged discussion of the second Bush war. But common ground emerged once again in the form of snowboarding. Dad reminisced about epic days of riding he logged while stationed in Japan; we talked about the decline of step-ins; snowboarding's similarity to surfing; and soon shifted to the family's hope of being restationed close to good mountains in Europe. My return ride ended abruptly when junior had a little accident in the back-seat, but the bookend experience indelibly impressed me.

Left roadside to think it through, my glimpse of the new snowboarding demographic hinted that diversity has taken hold. While the old-school refrain claims that the original bond of the tribe has been diluted, hitchhiking tells me a different tale. Each time a few places are sacrificed in the access road queue to offer up a morning lift for another, the thread that links us is exposed. We may not all share the same proficiency, legacy, profile or style. We may not even all have wheels, but our unbreakable connection to riding should provide all some solace next time you're standing out on highway 61, with a freezing thumb and a storm rolling in. ▲