

[Just Hanging Around]

Roaldus Richmond Men Against Granite

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JUST HANGING AROUND

"I've got to get out of this town. There's nothing here for me. I've been out of high school four years and what have I done[??] Nothing but write for some of these lousy newspapers. A newspaperman can't make a living in this state. Of course they're underpaid in other places, but it's worse around here. You wouldn't believe how little some of these guys get. Guys that have been working for these papers for years. They work like hell too, and they get chicken-feed. Maybe eighteen bucks a week. In five or ten years perhaps they work up to a little better than twenty. Isn't that swell pay? I've got to get out of here, I know that.

"The problem is how to get enough money to get out and look for a job. I owe plenty around town already. I don't know anybody who's very anxious to stake me. So I'm stranded, like so many other young fellows. We want to get out and work, find [ourselves?], do some living. But when you're busted flat it's not so easy to do. It's pretty tough, believe me. In the old days a young fellow could borrow money to get started with, but try and do it today. You've got to have security to get anything from the banks. And the finance companies soak you so much you can't afford to clip them. All you do is hang around and drink too much, and wise-crack and laugh at everything because you feel licked and empty inside.

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"I hate to see winter coming again. When the leaves begin to fall I want to go, too. The winters here are pretty bad. I don't go in much for skiing or skating or any winter sports. I like basketball, but there's not much of that here for fellows after they're out of school. So there's nothing to do but hang around the poolroom, bowling alleys and beer gardens; 2 go to a show or a basketball game; read, if you can get hold of a decent book; talk and bum cigarettes and go out with a girl once in awhile. I don't care about dancing — unless I'm drinking. I've got a girl, just a kid, still in high school. She bawls me out for drinking. But what else is there to do in a town like this? Especially in the winter. In the summer you can go swimming; I like to swim. And there are ball games to go to.

"I've covered the Northern League games for three summers now. It's good baseball and you get to know a lot of real baseball characters: Jeff [Tesreau?], Jack Barry, Doc Gautreau, Vim Clancy, [Will?] Barrett, Ray Fisher; men like that who've been up there in the Big Show and lived baseball all their lives. I get a kick out of that stuff.

"I covered sports mostly, but I've also covered City Hall, the police [court?], about everything in the reporting line. I used to hang around the police station lots of nights, and ride out with the boys and whey they got a call. Saw some pretty funny things once in awhile. The cops always treated me fine. Decent bunch of cops on the whole. I don't know how many nights they've driven me home, late, you know. I live way up on the hill; my sister and I have an apartment there. Our folks are dead. My father had a good job with a life insurance company. I've tried to get in there — but no [soap?]. My sister works in a bank. My brother's with an airplane plant in [Ohio?]. He was a pilot but he works in the plant now. Crazy about planes and machinery. He makes good money, of course. Wish I could have been interested in machinery or brick laying, or something besides newspaper work. I wouldn't mind if I could get on a good paper somewhere, but I'm sick of fooling around with these country sheets." 3 #

Rodney was a tall lanky youth of twenty-two, who walked with an eager loping stride and wore, in all weather, a brown felt hat pulled low over his spectacles. He looked immature

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and callow, but possessed to a high degree all the hardboiled [cynicism?] and [flipgant?] bitterness of the youth of the Great Depression. He customarily associated with men older than himself, and it had left a mark on him.

“I have a lot of fun too. But it scares me to think of all the time and energy wasted. I've [got?] plenty of ambition. I don't mind hard work. But I'm damned if I want to shovel gravel or clerk in an A & P store or jerk sodas. And I couldn't sell insurance or Fuller Brushes either. I can write sports and news. But I don't seem to get started very fast, I must admit.

“I got a lot of good material for stories when I traveled around with the cops, but I guess I'm no fiction writer. You certainly see some funny ones, cruising around with a police car late at night. I was with them when that orchestra leader went berserk and broke into old Mrs. Phillips' house. He was choking the old lady's son when we got there. Had him down on the floor choking him and hammering his head. Crazy drunk that monkey was. [Jud?] cracked him over the skull with the handcuffs.

“One night up at the [Brown?] Jug this dizzy dame went into the women's toilet, locked the door, and climbed out the window. The girls were lined up outside waiting to get in. After awhile they thought sure the first babe had bumped herself off. Maybe that place wasn't a madhouse when we got there. Everybody horrified and fascinated by the suicide, you know. The girl who pulled that fast one was outside in a car laughing herself sick. 4 “Tully and [Moody?] worked together for years on a coal truck, great pals, you know. Moody had a girl and she was pretty nice. A redhead. Tully kept trying to make her. One night we were prowling past the place she lived when all of a sudden Tully comes out a second-story window and down the porch. Moody pops out right after him. Tully starts across the lawn and trips over a hedge or something. Moody jumps onto him and starts slugging him. We sat in the car laughing — until it began to look as if Moody might kill Tully. Then we got out and stopped it.”

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“I went with them once when they broke up a dice game over back of the tracks. How those guys scattered and ran! They tore off in all directions, half-drunk, stumbling, falling, crawling to their feet to run some more. Another time the police raided this nigger joint that was here a few years ago, and the old [mammy?] almost got Jud with a stove poker. It took a groove out the door jamb right beside Jud's head. They ran the niggers out of town.

“In the spring cruising around that way you learn a lot of interesting things about some of our sweet young ladies, too. Very interesting. The cops know where all the favorite parking places are, don't worry. Some of those couples sure look funny when the old spotlight hits em!

“When it was really bad here though, was when the CCC's were here working on the flood-control dams. They were mostly World War Vets, tough and wild and slap-happy. They'd come into town and sell their jackets, blouses, shoes, blankets, anything they had to get a drink. Hemingway tells about the Vets down in Florida in his book, To Have and Have Not. Well, these guys were the same way. Punch-drunk and slug-nutty. They were an awful outfit. Those dams are a great thing, but 5 the populace certainly suffered during the construction of them.

“Most of the kids I played around with in high school went to college. I'd always planned to go, wanted to go but I couldn't make it. Probably wouldn't be much better off if I had gone anyway. It doesn't seem to make much difference nowadays. They got on WPA or pump gas for Standard Oil or something like that. Still, I'd like to have gone.

“I don't have much homelife. Maybe that's what I miss, along with other things. My sister works and eats lunch downtown. It's too far to walk home anyway. I eat nearly all my meals downtown; only go home to sleep. You get pretty sick of hanging around diners and restaurants and beer joints, and it's not so good eating any old time of day and night — or forgetting to eat at all. Since I stopped working I usually stay up most of the night and

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sleep most of the day. Sleep or lie around reading. It's better than loafing downtown all day. You know how the time drags when you're doing nothing.

“Now that my job is finished I don't know what to do. I could pick up a little money covering basketball games this winter, but not enough to get by on. I couldn't make a living at it. I've never really made a living, I guess. If I could get hold of some money I'd go to Connecticut or Ohio. I have relatives there, and I could stick around and look for work. But I can't very well go without a dime. I don't know. It makes a guy wonder.

“I do know one thing though. Somehow, some way, I've got to get away from here and get started in something. This is almost enough to make a guy join the army.”