

The tailor pulled a sack cloth from a bin, wrapped up the food, and handed it to John. Then he handed John twenty-five cents. Before sending John back out onto Dearborn Avenue with the sack of food, Soloman Geller paused, leaned over and kissed his head.

From Chicago, John jumped into a boxcar and fell asleep. When he woke the next day, the train was still and he had no idea where he was. He jumped off the train and walked toward a store where he learned he'd made it to Michigan. From there on, John chose rail travel over hitchhiking and he got better and better at telling the story of his Montanan parents' untimely demise. The bums he traveled with taught John he could find a pretty hearty meal at a Salvation Army, or Sally, as it was often called, and all it cost was sitting through a twenty-minute-long lecture on the gospel. If a town wasn't large enough to have a Sally, the bums said, he could go to the local police and ask for a flop. If there was a free jail cell, the cops will let you rest for the night and boot you out first thing in the morning, they told him.

The east-bound freight train dead-ended across the water from Manhattan and from there John could see the skyline of New York rising mightily before him. But by the time he finally reached the biggest city he could think of, his resolve had faded. Instead of walking the streets of Manhattan the way he'd walked the streets of Chicago, John's mind was fixed on St. Paul – on home. So, after all that travel and adventure, instead of heading across the bridge, John jumped onto a westbound freight train and began his journey home.

The whole trip had taken him a couple of weeks, and while John was gone Zmorrod had been beside herself with grief and worry. At first, his parents thought he'd run away, but after Mac returned to town, he told the family that John had just wanted to see New York. John never considered how the family would respond to his decision to cross the country at age twelve.

When John re-entered his father's house he learned how hard his adventure had been on those he left behind, especially his mother. "Ma cried constantly," Art told him later.

Facing his father for the first time in weeks, John braced himself for a fierce punishment. Instead of hitting the boy, though, Betros looked at John calmly and said in his native tongue,



John Nasseff enjoys a chocolate lollipop in the family coaster wagon. Circa 1925.

