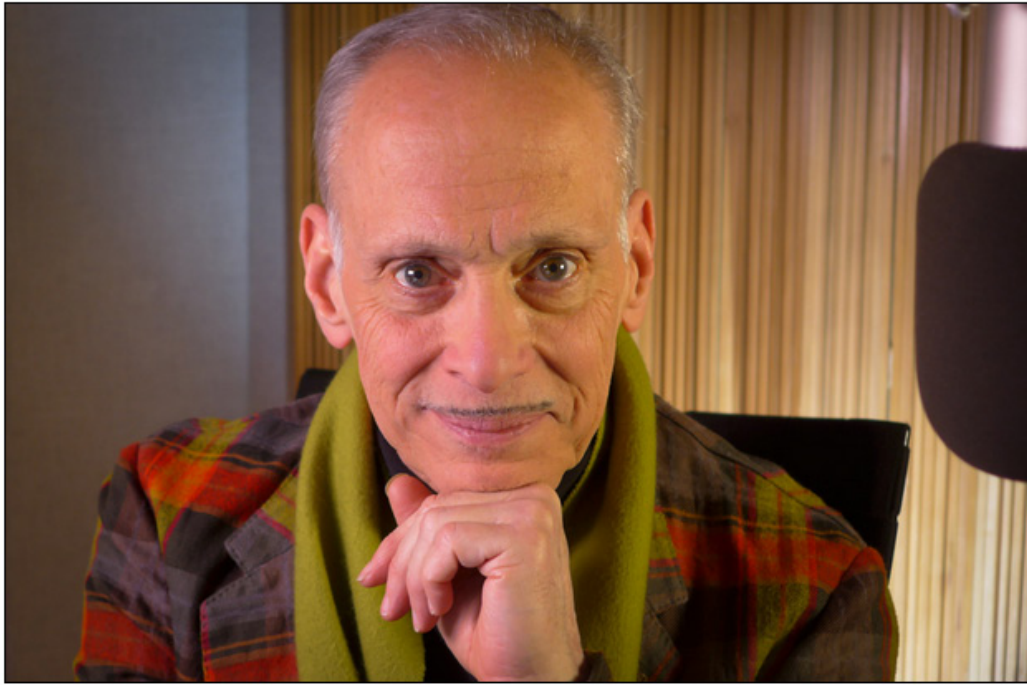


Esquire

Exclusive: John Waters Reads His Book About Hitchhiking Across America

Hilarious stories of hitchhiking across America

By Jeff Slate



Scott Sherratt

"**C'mon, there's no way** I'd pass you by if I saw you hitchhiking," I tell director-turned-author John Waters when we catch up by phone to talk about his new book, *Carsick: John Waters Hitchhikes Across America*, in which he recounts his escapades hitchhiking cross-country. "In fact, I probably would have just driven you all the way to San Francisco. What kind of book would that have been? Were you prepared for that?"

Waters roars with laughter. "It could have happened," he tells me. "I probably wouldn't have let that happen, but then who knows what sort of adventures we would have had!"

Carsick is an account of Waters traveling alone, armed only with a cardboard sign reading "End of I-70 West" on one side and "I'm Not Psycho" on the other, from his native Baltimore to San Francisco. It begins with Waters's fantasies of the best- and worst-case scenarios that await him on his journey — dreams of wealthy potheads who are secretly aspiring film moguls, and an assortment of typical John Waters freaks and horny hunks, all in thrall of his work. His nightmares include small-town homophobes, unbearable stage moms, crazed environmentalists, and serial killers.

In reality, Waters's trip is even wilder than those fantasies. His riffs on the tedium of hitchhiking cross-country and the art of making the most eye-catching cardboard sign (note: keep it simple, don't put a distance that seems too far, and humor never works) are hilarious, as are his run-ins with a preacher's wife, a hay farmer, and an indie band, not to mention a young Maryland Republican city councilor. And even in rural America, Waters finds that his minor celebrity status wields power, at least when he's not being mistaken for a vagrant and offered money (which he politely refuses).

"This was my midlife crisis," Waters confessed to me. "I have so much control of my life, I'm so organized I could gag. So I wondered if I could give that up, just walk away and see what happens. I thought it was brave and I was testing myself, and showing my street cred, going on an adventure that I created."

Perhaps even better than the book itself is the audiobook, in which Waters deftly acts out every part and nuance of the text. Imagine John Waters in your head for a few hours. Priceless.

"It was so weird to read it out loud," Waters confessed of his experience making the audiobook. "Some of the stories are just so *alarming*. When you read a book out loud you realize how extreme and obscene some of it is. It's awful to say, but I'm just glad my mother isn't alive to read it."

If you're still not convinced, here's an exclusive clip of Waters reading from the prologue of *Carsick*, out Tuesday from Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

<http://www.esquire.com/blogs/culture/john-waters-carsick>