

JOURNAL OF ORDINARY THOUGHT

Round About

Winter 2008



ROUND ABOUT: JOT Writers on Transportation
Writing from Bezazian, Hall, King, and Mabel Manning Branch Libraries; Albany Park Community Center; Project Hope, Pausa; San Lucas Church; and St. Leonard's House

The Journal of Ordinary Thought
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Photography from Claire Pentecost's "Documentary Practices" class at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Introduction by Richard Cahan, author and writer at the Chicago Sun-Times.

INTRODUCTION

From home to work, downtown to the suburbs, from here to there. A jaunt can be a trip or a journey. It's up to you. You can endure it or you can relish it. You can phase it out, sink into reflection, or open your eyes and watch as the city passes by. Watch as you make connections. If I added all the hours I spend on the road, and spent them in front of my piano, I'd be a virtuoso by now. So I want to get something from travel. All kinds of travel.

The EI gives me a chance to understand the city. I listen in on cell phone calls, I watch parents scold or praise their kids, and study would-be love affairs as they just miss. I remember a night, two decades ago, as I crept home. A crowded EI in December. A con artist showed all takers just how easy it was to spot what cup the pea was under. I wanted to play, but another passenger got the first chance. I was jealous—the game master was an old man, so slow I knew I could beat him. But with the money down, the pea wasn't there. We were all surprised; it must be there. But, of course, it wasn't. In an instant, the swindler had folded a wad of worn bills in his pocket and was gone.

"What will I tell my wife?" asked the man who lost.

His words, meant to be private, were just loud enough for all of us to hear.

We didn't know what to say.

These days, I often drive. Guilty, but late. Seduced by the chance to listen to sports radio (even though I don't watch the games any more), and to be alone. This is my time. To get caught in traffic, to take shortcuts that seldom are short, and to see the city. Every time I get lost (no TomTom here), I tell myself it's okay because I will find something new.

I moved back to Chicago to live a city life. To be among millions, to brush against crowds. And I do that best when I travel. Behind the green-tinted windows of the Metra train, gliding along as if I'm aboard some smooth monorail; at the front of the EI, figuring out just where the tracks drop beneath the Chicago River as we approach the Loop; on a bus (okay—buses make me queasy), or at O'Hare, figuring out how to snake through security faster than the first-class crowd. I've come to peace with the amount of hours I spend on the road. It makes me who I am.

Now I realize I am far from alone. Every contributor to this month's issue has a unique relationship to

travel. “How Will You Get There?” asks Phillis J. Humphries. The response, by dozens of writers, makes you realize that travel is so much more than from here to there.

So join my fellow travelers as we explore trains and planes, rickshaws and camels. Join Bill, who takes a bus home on the day he was released from prison, and faces a complicated situation. And join Sandra Payne, who writes: “Sex and flying/Two great highs.” Crown Victorias and crocodiles. Schwinn and skateboards. It’s a wild ride—like life.

TRAVEL BY DAY, TRAVEL BY NIGHT

Johnny Conner

Travel by day, travel by night. Each step I take sends me on a journey. Where I will be liked or not liked, where I will grow and experience new things, people, and places. Each night, I close my eyes and think of where I can go. Tonight I will stand on the edge of the pier, with the wind blowing in my face. Waiting, standing, looking for my ship to come in. Tonight I will travel the world, if only for a short time. Dinner in Hong Kong, dancing in New York, lunch in Paris, the summer games in Germany, shopping in Mexico, and a good night’s rest in Spain.

When I wake, I will have gone through a change of likes and dislikes, comforts and discomforts. I will understand that it’s better to have traveled in my dreams than not to have traveled at all.

LEAVING BEHIND

J. Buckholz

Bill was released from prison one cold day. Besides his one cardboard box, he had his television.

Bill was transported to the spot where the bus would stop. The prison employee returned to the prison, leaving Bill at the spot where he’d catch the bus. The bus was on time. The bus driver told Bill that he’d put the box in the luggage area, but not the television. The bus driver was adamant about not taking a television on board. So Bill left his television at the side of the road, got on the bus and rode to his city destination, leaving his perfectly good television behind on the snow-covered ground.