

# Cabbie meets emancipated woman

by Jens Andersen

The idea of driving taxi first came to me many years ago via a journalist teacher who felt that, like bartending or waitressing, being a cabbie is a perfect antidote for all the baloney theories stuffed into students in the classroom. No teacher, he said, should be inflicted on students until his or her own 16 years in the cubicle, absorbing Sociology, Ed Psych, et al, were tempered with at least one year's internship in a "meet-the-public" job, observing specimens of humanity *au naturel*.

The teacher's proposal stuck in my mind because in those days, with the down spouting on my cheeks and my eyes popping with delight at my first exposure to *Rolling Stone* (which was then serializing jhunter S. Thompson's 1972 "Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail") I was acutely conscious of my own sheltered booshwah upbringing, and was determined to overcome it by somehow getting acquainted with the fascinating demimonde.

When an opportunity to drive taxi arose a few years later I found that the gritty side of life is considerably less romantic than my youthful imagination had led me to believe. Seedy drunks lose their charm well before one has seen a thousand of them. Snorty young punks who scurry up an alley without paying their fare are simply snorty young punks, no matter how much their angst has been ballyhooed in the popular press. Getting propositioned by hookers is just plain tacky.

In fact, hookers themselves are generally pretty tacky. I sometimes wonder where Bob Dylan found the one he so eloquently hymned in "Stuck in the Harlem Incident." Maybe he invented her.

Such folks, thankfully, are a minority. Reducing it to numbers, I would say that obnoxious people comprise only about 20-30% of all passengers. The vast majority are merely monotonous.

One of my favorite newsworthy types was a plump lady on welfare who took taxis quite regularly. Most of the time she would be heading to the liquor store to pick up a bottle.

She could hardly have been described as attractive, yet in spite of a certain domineering attitude she had a perverse sort of charm. After she had driven in my cab a few times she developed the "old friend" attitude toward me (an irritating habit of many drunks), but she never stopped telling me at every corner (and sometimes in between corners) which direction I should be going. For that matter, she never really stopped talking.

I learned that she was taking classes of some sort, and on one occasion she hopped into my cab and asked me, "Did you know that nowadays a woman can do anything a man can?"

She paused triumphantly, awaiting my reaction. I said nothing.

"That's what our teacher told us. They're driving taxis, they're secretaries, they're flying airplanes..."

I wondered whether her teacher had actually given her this garbled version of feminist doctrine, or whether she had gabled it herself.

"They're doing all the things that men do," she announced with great pleasure, pausing and eyeing me again.

"Does that bother you?" she asked finally.

"No," I replied, "I think I can handle it."

"Turn left here," she said.

One day I am dispatched to her apartment and find that the buzzer button to her suite has been ripped out. Fortunately someone is passing by just inside the entrance. It turns out to be the caretaker.

"The buzzer to Apt. 106 is gone," I tell her.

"Oh? That's the third time that's happened," she says, frowning at the button.



"She called a taxi." "Lucky you," says the caretaker sanctimoniously, letting me in.

I knock at the door. It opens slightly, releasing a powerful waft of boozy aroma. "Coming," she says.

I return to the cab and wait the mandatory eternity. Finally she emerges with a skinny, bespectacled and very drunk fellow in tow. He can barely walk, and halfway from the apartment to the cab he collapses on a planter. Ms. Dominus glares at him disgustedly.

"C'mere bat-brain," she yells.

Bat-brain slowly gets up and staggers precariously to the taxi. Once into the back seat he proceeds to stare with slack-jawed indifference at the front-seat head-rest.

"To the liquor store," she tells me imperiously, "Turn right when you get out of the driveway."

Along the way she gives me more directions, and tells me about the wonderful party they are having.

"Your know, I would have taken my other purse," she tells me confidentially, putting her hand on my arm, "but I spilled a 26¢ of rye into it and really soaked it."

We arrive at the liquor store and she turns to Bat-brain.

"Have you got your wallet with you?"

"Haven't you got any money?" he mumbles.

"I left it in my other purse. Hurry up, dammit."

Despite his impaired motor skills Bat-brain eventually retrieves the wallet from his pocket.

Ms. Dominus takes it and informs me she will need my help in the store.

"I know I'm pushy," she grins as we go in "but I've got his wallet."

I follow her, hoping she won't make herself too conspicuous. In the process of purchasing two cases of beer and three bottles of rye, however, she tries to make conversation with a good-looking serviceman, and provokes the check-out girl to smile by telling her how much change she should give on the bills tendered.

On the way home she has me stop at a roadside fresh fruit stand, where she proceeds to get incensed with Bat-brain because he is incapable of deciding whether he prefers cherries or plums.

"You lazy, stupid, feeble, god-damn-invertebrae," she yells at him. Finally she begins shopping without his help.

"Have you got a light?" Bat-brain asks me after she has gone.

I give him the car lighter. With all the concentration he can muster he aims it at

his cigarette, and misses. He tries again. Another miss. It is like watching bad comedy. On the third attempt he connects. He hands back the lighter.

I have no sooner replaced it in its socket than I hear him swear under his breath. He has dropped the cigarette on the seat, bringing the total number of cigarette burns on the upholstery up to six. Then he knocks the cigarette into the footwell. To my relief he doesn't try to light up again.

Ms. Dominus returns. "Home," she says. "Turn right here."

"He knows that already," Bat-brain mutters.

"Ah, shut your mouth!"

He does so and she continues to give me directions. She tells me again how she spilled the rye in her purse, and how lucky they are to be restocked with booze. Then she asks me if I can cash a personal check.

"Sorry," I reply. She reaches into Bat-brain's wallet for the money. He, meanwhile, is nodding out in the back seat, oblivious to the world. Not for long though.

As we pull up she begins shaking him and calling him a feeble, ignorant invertebrae (sic) again, and telling him to help carry the booze.

The bill comes to \$4.90 and I hand her back a dime before she tells me to.

"I'd give you a tip," she says in parting, "but I tumbled my purse."

The last thing I see as I drive away is her pushing and swearing at Bat-brain so he doesn't pass out before they reach the apartment.

As they say in sociology, it's a pluralistic society.

(Author's note: Yes I know I promised something on dispatcher's English in this article, but these anecdotes have a way of taking over everything. I promise this will be the last anecdote of the year and that I will do dispatcher article - some time.)

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**Notice of Gateway staff meeting:**  
 Sept. 23 at 4:00 p.m. in 282 SUB  
 All Welcome!

**DINWOODIE**  
 2nd Floor SUB

**FOOTLOOSE** 8 pm.  
 Friday September 24  
 Sponsored by U of A School of Nursing

**PRETTY ROUGH** 8 pm.  
 Saturday September 25  
 Sponsored by U of A Dental Hygiene Society

**BAVARIAN FEST** 8 pm.  
 Friday October 1  
 Sponsored by BACUS

Tickets are available from the SUB Box-Office (2nd Floor SUB) and various club members.

Note: These events are open only to U of A students, staff, and guests. Absolutely no minors admitted.

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