

## Tombstone of vanity

Sometimes I commute when I am behind work and have to make up for it on my laptop. The morning coffee fix does not kick in until after 9 am for most people, so it is quiet on the city buses and I can work undisturbed. It's been a national holiday this weekend so this Tuesday morning all face muscles around the country are exhausted. Bus 56 is not an exception either. I am tapping along on my keyboard when I hear a familiar voice in the front of the bus. It is my friend John Conner talking rapidly to the driver while looking for change in all of his pockets. I recognize that body language of his. It takes at least 2 pots of coffee to do that to him. I fear now for my work if he sees me.

"Hi Stan, rise an' shine eih? "

He has never been bothered by looks from other people although I wish for that sometimes. This is sometimes. He is coming towards me dip walking like a rap singer wannabe. But he looks happy so what can I say. The seat next to me is empty. No need to fear the worst. It is going to happen to my homework and me. He sits down with a great smile and puts his proletarian lunch box in his lap. Looks at me and says:

"Almost everybody in today's society is living a facade.

He usually does not need anything to relate a conversation to. He continues:

"If it's not a fancy home it's an apartment or a gated community man, where it's obvious that da furniture is to look at an' not to sit in. Even if the homeowners look so lost 'n' uncomfortable using their home, it's still an adorable lifestyle enhancement to them. Or so the material vanity producer tells 'em on TV. The other thing is their vehicle man, have ya notic' that Stan? "

I nodded eagerly, not out of embracement in front of the whole bus and hoping he will shut up, but I usually agree with him even if it takes a while for me to digest his point of view.

"It could go so far so they have to starve 2 days a week an' sliding some of their bills to collection agencies, man.... When Viagra hit the market, Porsche's stocks dropped 4 dollars per share an' now they're building SUV's to make up for da loss. I even read lately that they have lawnmowers on da drawing boards with spoilers, tail fins an' all. If another pill passes the FDA da plant in Stuttgart will have to close with a sign on the gate reading... Little pill's scrapped our little car. May it rust in peace."

He is now laughing loud and unstoppable. That is my friend for you right there. You see, he is not bothered by other people's approval or trying to keep the vanity polished. A few years ago he had a small operation and died on the surgery table. Ten hours later he woke up at the morgue and scared the living Jesus out of the personnel there. He told them to wait with the inscription for his tombstone and walked out with a bare butt only wearing his hospital gown. Later he told me it will read - Here lays a man that had a habit of pushing everything to tomorrow. Finally he died on the date so and so. And he is not joking either! In our late discussions at the local bars he always has the final word. I have come to understand him slowly since his opinions are odd, to say the least. A beyond death experience you could say. Don't worry, be happy - He always says that and I can see the benefit of that. Especially in this hectic time and age. He has lifted my spirit and now I am steering and listening to him on bus 56. I said:

" So John, tell me. How is your new job goin' ? "

"Fine and dandy Stan. My tab was so high at The Flyin' Pig so da owner decided I could work it off. Isn't that cool. Now I can say I'm drinkin' for a livin' man. You should have been there on my first day Stan. I'm tellin' ya, it was hilarious man."

He poses a contagious smile and I cannot wait to hear what he has to say.

"A van from da mental institute on River Road is pullin' up full of patients on da parkin' lot in front of The Flyin' Pig, right. After all are seated in t' restaurant da nurse tells me they're all gonna pay with beer caps. But she insures me that she will come in afterwards an' pay for it all. So after their meal with cheesecake for desert an' all they start payin' with beer caps one at the time. Som' even leaves an extra cap for tip."

He looks at me with big eyes and nods to me so I can realize the truth in his story.

"Well stuffed with their happy lunatic grin on, they all leave the establishment an' gettin' back in da hospital shuttle. I'm nervously watchin' them through the window, right. So when I see t' nurse comin' back I headin' for da cash register an' start sorting out some bills looking' busy. She walks up to me an' pulls out a sauce pan lid from her purse an' asks me if I have change for it... I kept it Stan. May the lid rust in peace."

Now his tears are flying and the seat is jumping from his loud laugh so I cannot work anymore and have to close the laptop. I never know when he is joking or not but there goes my lunch hour. In my next column I will tell you more about the opinions of my friend John Conner.

Your man in the zone  
*Stanley Mintras*