

I can say with a chunky dose of certainty that I've ridden more miles of public transportation than just about any other white man in the city of Los Angeles. That's a simple observation, and if you've ridden the bus in Los Angeles you'll know what I mean. In other metropolitan areas of the country you can find stock brokers and lawyers among the minions and masses on the bus and the subway. In Los Angeles, busses are for the marginalized, the poor, the destitute, the embattled, the disaffected, the uneducated, the reborn, the illiterate, the domestics, the laborers, the addicted, the unemployed, the ones that can't catch a break, and the ones that can't keep it together after they catch the break. Even the conscientious and righteous and political that ride public transportation in cities like San Francisco and New York as a matter of pride and act of kinship with the disaffected shun the busses of Los Angeles and leave it to the pros. I qualified for several of the previous, and I wasn't making some sort of statement. I didn't have any damn choice. It was my orange Cadillac. It was my party bus, and everyone in Los Angeles was invited. Riding the bus in Los Angeles is a badge of dishonor and I've done it for most of my adult life.

My world completely changed after I learned how to ride a bike and could finesse my mom with some ruse in order to block off enough time to devote to discovery. I would pedal with friends or by myself into unknown neighborhoods and streets and areas and cherish the freedom I had to chart my own course and do it on my own time. Those sojourns, due to time restrictions, maxed out at a four or five mile diameter from my house. It was tiny, but it was exhilarating and I owned it all.

Venice, Santa Monica, Culver City, the area people now call Playa Vista all got mapped. Me and my Redline all of it and if you had asked me, I could have made an argument that the world fell off at those boundaries. Not because I didn't know better. I could read a map. I knew the story of Columbus and Magellan. But my kingdom ended at the distance my Redline was capable of carrying me.

When I was 12 I had my mind blown again. That's when I learned about the wizardry of the RTD. That's what the bus in Los Angeles was called before they changed it to MTA. The name change could have been an attempt at an image upgrade. RTD was popularly known as the Rough, Tough and Dangerous and anyone who was forced to ride it had a story.

To a kid just starting 7<sup>th</sup> grade it was a magic, golden chariot. How else to explain that for \$.75 and \$.10 for a transfer you could ride in either direction for as long as the bus would travel? That all major streets had their own lines, and that the real busy streets had multiple lines and even express busses. No adults asked you where you were going, or why you weren't in school, or where your parents were. The bus driver would give a subtle nod when you dropped your fare in the box and keep his eyes forward and at 11 years old you would savor that unspoken recognition between the two of you that said you belonged here and no one was going to tell you different.

It didn't take much time to discover the breadth of Los Angeles, I ceased to be a Venice kid and became an LA kid. Westwood, Sherman Oaks, Downtown, Melrose, Hollywood. I never went south, though. South was out of bounds. I learned the lines and could tell you where they went and how often they ran. The 33 and 333, the Santa Monica lines and the Culver City lines. There were always a pack of kids on the busses. You might not know them but the chances were good that you knew some people in common. You might connect with some kids that went to Paul Revere and end up at a house party in Malibu. You learned to stay clear of Santa Monica Posers, Shoreline Crips Sucidals and the LADS. There were rumors that FFF would ride in from the valley looking for city kids to jump. I loved Los Angeles and I loved the freedom riding those busses gave me.

As I got older, I might get a car or a Vespa but it was a temporary thing until it got impounded or stolen and then I was back on the bus. It became less a conscience exercise of liberty and more of a shame of last resort. I started seeing fewer and fewer people that looked like me on busses that were entirely 'other'. Maybe I was a LA junkie, but I wasn't one of 'them'. I had pedigree, I was the mayor of the 33 line, I was simply experiencing a temporary downturn in fortune.

In the midst of those thousands of miles of LA bus travel, I was witness to a litany of things that those cloistered in their vacuum sealed sedans would never have the privilege of seeing. In some of those events I was directly involved. Great and ordinary chapters of city life. I've seen three seizures while riding public transportation in Los Angeles. One that was so severe, the bus driver emptied the bus while paramedics were on their way. As they pressed the dude with questions about what he ingested, the ashy and pale street kid held firm in his responses. He didn't smoke any crack. He didn't do any crank. He didn't take any pills. But the paramedics were relentless and they finally broke the kid down. He let the paramedics and every nosey bus rider who hadn't drifted off know what he had taken.

"I drank a 40 Oz of Schlitz and ate a mushroom out the ground!"

Out of respect of respect for the stricken as he writhed and fished, I did my best not to laugh. It was the pinnacle of drama as a direct result of the acme of idiocy. For the purpose of this story, I can confirm that he survived, but please pay attention to the moral of this story. Don't drink Schlitz.

I've been sexually assaulted three times riding the bus. I've been in two fights riding the bus. I came close to getting my ass kicked by four kids in an argument over a mountain of discarded chicken wings. I've seen a full act of coital engagement. I've seen an uncountable stream on conscious rants directed at the government, unseen forces and B movie stars. I've seen somebody get stabbed. I watched some kid with a can of spray paint tag a sleeping wino. I've seen thousands of forgettable and ordinary people and a handful of notable and memorable characters. I've ridden in busses that were so covered with tags and etches that you couldn't successfully look out the window without giving everything some Instagram, post production dusting.

I've ridden the bus on nights that were so cold that everyone riding was under a blanket and sleeping because the heat was blowing and it was 25 degrees warmer than the concrete. While riding the redline I watched a frightfully drunk dude fall in between two cars seconds before the train left the station. While someone yelled to the train operator to hold at the station, I ran over to peek down to the tracks where he was peacefully napping with his head on the rail. Just last month, for the first time in my career and thanks to the Corona, I rode a bus where I was the only passenger. Rock Stars pay big money for a bus that big with a personal driver named Leon.

My bus stories are dear to me. Each one is a chapter in a biography of my life, because the RTD/MTA was my baby sitter, my club house, my therapy, my escape, my big brother, my inspiration, my comfort, my introduction to adulthood, my example. But those stories are mostly forgettable, they're routine and entirely expected. If you put the poor and overworked and drunk and bitter in a crush of rush hour bus riding, things are gonna happen, and it's going to be dramatic and grimey. In short supply when riding the bus in Los Angeles are stories of joy and whimsy. I regret having to use the word, 'whimsy', but this qualifies.

I was walking down Pacific Ave one day when I heard my name from somewhere behind me. It was someone yelling, "Creedy!" and it was approaching fast and had an urgency to the tone. Only one person in my life has ever called me, 'Creedy', and when I spun around I was shocked at what I was seeing. Brett Knight was riding atop the roof of a speeding RTD bus, the 108 line. He blazed past in a crouched position as if he was skipping down the face of a close out Waimea slab.

He let out one exaggerated, 'Wooo-Hewweoo' as he passed and it was like every triumphant teen movie scene I've ever seen. It was John Hughes, Teen Wolf, Amy Heckerling, and Porky's all rolled into one. Kids on the bus were hollering and banging on the windows. The few randoms that were walking dogs or riding bikes were all frozen in disbelief and pointing. It was one of the most magical and unexpected things I had seen in my young life.

Let me explain this street, because it's important for context. From the channel in Marina Del Rey going north, Pacific Ave runs about one mile before hitting the light at Washington Blvd. It's called the Marina Peninsula because it's surrounded by the ocean, the channel and a stretch of dirty canal that amusement tycoon Abbot Kinney dug out more than 100 hundred years ago in attempt to recreate Venice Italy. This stretch of Pacific Ave is almost entirely uninterrupted because all the streets on the west side are pedestrian walk streets. Sending a bus down Pacific, which is where the 108 operated was a lonely affair because even though there were a handful of stops, the only people riding the bus to and from the Marina Peninsula were domestics and the occasional neighborhood kid who couldn't guilt one of his parents into a ride. Passengers were so rare, that pulling onto Pacific Ave almost always insured a non stop ride and the driver would have the chance to hit a top end of 40-45 MPH before slowing down for the light at Pacific and Washington.

When I saw Brett that day, he was traveling at least 40 MPH and the bus was on the descent into the red light. I can count on one hand the number of times my mouth physically fell open in a response to some awe inspiring event. It took some time to process what I was seeing. It didn't make sense. People don't ride on the top of busses, right? That's what the seats are for inside. How does this even happen?

When the bus stopped, Brett jumped off the side of the bus at the rear and came walking my way with his arms swinging wide in that way that looks like you own the world. Or if it's not for sale, you're about to make a legit offer.

"S'up, Creedy? Buy me a beer, Holmes".

I did as I was told. When someone operating at the level of superhero tells you to buy them a beer, you do what you're told. Even if it was \$.99 40 oz of Schaffer. When I asked him about the bus surfing, he shrugged and acted like he was surprised that I would even ask. Brett Knight: the drunk Jimmy Dean of Venice. On those old RTD busses, there was an emergency exit in the roof that riders would occasionally open to help ventilate the bus. If you threw a switch and pressed a button, the panel would completely open so that in some sort of emergency where the bus had rolled onto it's side you could exit before being consumed in a terribly accelerated traffic fire.

I don't know if that emergency exit ever helped someone escape a terrible end in an accident, but on that day on his way home from school, Brett had stood up in the middle of the rough housing and screaming that characterized the 108 at that time of day and popped open the hatch. Without saying a word or indicating what was about to happen, he pulled himself onto the roof and surfed the entire length of the Marina Peninsula atop the bus. When he reached his stop, he jumped from the roof and into legend.

News travels fast at that age. You don't need cell phones and social media to go viral, all you need is majesty, relevance and inspiration. There were plenty of witnesses and the details were so unbelievable that they resisted exaggeration or distortion. The story was perfect exactly as it was. He was riding the after school bus that consisted almost entirely of Marina Junior High students. Nobody even had a pager, but notes were traded like commerce in class and home telephones were busy that night. By the end of school the next day, every kid in Marina Junior High knew what he had done, and in a matter of days every kid in Mark Twain Junior High and Venice High School knew the story. The response was universal. Brett Knight was a badass. He had managed to do something impressive in our age, an act that was universally celebrated. From the stoners to the geeks to the ese's and the hippies and skinheads. A couple of teachers even pulled Brett aside and revealed a whispered admiration for the act. Everyone that heard about the story believed that Brett Knight was some sort of Dogtown superhero.

On more than one occasion, while standing around with Brett and hands filled half filled with Solo cups at a kegger in some far flung neighborhood, kids would start

whispering and pointing. The bravest among them would walk up, servile and reverent.

“You’re Brett Knight? Are you that kid who surfed the RTD bus?”

The notoriety had been cemented, and the drunken Jimmy Dean of Venice reveled in the attention. Eventually, in an attempt to outdo himself, he did the same thing on a rare day in Los Angeles when the rain was falling in great sheets. It was reckless, and it didn’t seem to have any additional affect on the mythology. In fact, it created something of a problem for Brett and the kids like me who traveled with him. Busses started passing us at the bus stops. It was an act of preservation for the drivers. You can’t have a kid fall off the roof of your bus if they don’t get on the bus in the first place.