

---

Posted on Fri, Oct. 21, 2005

## A New Yorker's take on meaning of not owning car

ONE OF THE VERY FIRST things I noticed when we moved to the Lamorinda area was that there were no cabs. I am the first to admit that I hate to drive. (And I am equally sure that everyone in Northern California is ecstatic that I rarely take the wheel of my '88 Legend.)

While we have a fairly decent bus system here, I rarely see them filled with travelers nor am I certain that they run in tandem with the BART schedule, at least as it relates to Moraga where a minute's delay causes you to wait almost a full hour to catch the next bus. Any BART delay kills any chance of catching the bus at its expected/declared departure time.

Does anyone care that these buses inevitably leave on schedule, despite the fact that they travel empty after leaving before the normally timely BART arrives with their passengers? Thus, I have often wondered where those "for hire" cabs in Lamorinda are.

In contrast, I think in the NYC suburban areas there exists a string of taxis waiting at train stations to whisk the weary commuters to their destinations. From what I see, there are never any taxi services at the Orinda BART station, but I don't know what goes on at the Lafayette BART station.

One of the reasons this lack of cab services in the area irks me is that there never appears to be a space to park when I get to the BART station, leaving me to torture myself to get through the horrendous Caldecott tunnel and morass of trouble on the Bay Bridge.

Cabs would just make my life much easier here. In New York, it is rare that one owns a car; in fact, to own one is actually a luxury and to park it is like paying for a small apartment in Walnut Creek. Moreover, the status symbol is not to own a Mercedes SL500 or BMW 740i, but rather to have a driver behind the wheel of a Lincoln Towncar or have a limousine service which, surprisingly, can be just as cost effective as paying all the inclusive costs relating to owning an expensive luxury vehicle.

This brings me to my introduction to California car mania. When I first moved to the Bay Area, I had a "to-die-for" apartment on Telegraph Hill with views of the Golden Gate and Bay Bridges. With an office near the Embarcadero, needless to say, I did not own a car, but little did I know what lack of ownership meant in California.

Of course, this awareness was brought about by learning the dating rituals when I first arrived in California with a suitcase and keys to a rent-controlled apartment in NYC's Murray Hill neighborhood. The logistics of dating were problematical as getting between my dates' residences and my own abode always provided an interesting encounter.

Before I met my beloved, I had met an aspiring model type woman with whom I seemed to have some common interests. But when I called her to arrange the time and the like for our first date, I proudly told her I would pick her up in a cab, thinking I was impressing her by hinting at my then budding economic status. Under virtually any circumstance in any city, taking a car service is not a cheap proposition and when dating, first impressions are key.

Needless to say, her response surprised me as she asked if my car was incapacitated. When I told her I didn't own a vehicle, she said something about her getting a "560" or some number. Before I could tell her that was a half-decent English SAT score, she excused herself from our date by developing the fastest "flu"/"my cat is dying" excuse in history. Much to my relief, in hindsight, my failure to understand what "560" meant doomed that relationship before it even got started.

In those days, I could not tell the difference in car designation and, to this day, I couldn't care less. When I finally met my wife, she was mildly amused that I had every cab service in San Francisco on speed dial. In fact, happily, she is always the designated driver, perfectly willing to demonstrate her Dale Earnhardt-type skills if the opportunity were to present itself.

Anyway, I also think she was just happy to know that vehicle-less me was born out of choice and not necessity. Interestingly, she has since revealed to me that she viewed cabs as livery service for those inebriated souls that should not drive in such condition. Rightly so, I suppose, as who knows what remains in those backseats after a night of drinking. Suffice to say, I am more mindful of that backseat.

I wonder how the Lamorinda residents of the various assisted living and retirement homes get around in the area. Everyone appears to own one of those huge SUVs, which could pulverize me in a New York minute on Moraga Way. It is a small wonder why the roads, particularly Moraga Way, are in need of deep repairs. Without counting, I can imagine that the number of potholes on Moraga Way equal those on any snow-belted highway in New York.

With the weather so great and gas prices higher locally than in neighboring locales, I think walking is the best solution for all of us Lamorindians, utilizing all those wonderful and glorious trails to nowhere, but flush with stunning scenery and nature's beauty. Everyone should get some exercise, save on gas and give the roads a break! In the meantime, I will keep looking for those yellow cabs.

---

*E-mail Randolph Tom at [rltnyub@gmail.com](mailto:rltnyub@gmail.com).*