

Cab Gab
by Abe Mittleman

The Way It Was

It doesn't seem like it was that long ago when I started in this business. But, in 36 years many things change. Sometimes they happen gradually and you don't notice until it is completely different. This is the case in our boroughs with respect to how the taxi business is provided to the many passengers that need the service every day of the week and every day of the year.

I obtained my hack license in Sept 1970. In 1970 it was not difficult to obtain. I seem to recall the fee for the license was only cost \$5. There weren't any classes required. All that was required was a physical examination. But the fee for that was covered in the \$5 fee for the license. It wasn't much of a physical examination either. You lined up with a few other applicants and a doctor gave you a quick look over and it was done. There were no blood tests, there were no drug tests, if you looked alive you were given your license.

Although I can't recall all the details of my first day on the job, I can recall my first fare. After picking up my taxi at the garage on Ave I and Nostrand Avenue in Brooklyn that sponsored me for my license I cruised up Flatbush Avenue. I picked up a man and took him to a location in Bay Ridge. But more important was that I spent the entire shift in Brooklyn. I felt very comfortable doing this. I had grown up in this borough and there was plenty of business there for medallion taxis.

This seemed very natural. I didn't even consider that I could work in Manhattan. I knew that there were other medallion taxis. There were medallion taxis also in Queens and The Bronx. Although I knew that any taxi could work wherever they were I never considered working out of what I considered my territory. I thought that if I'm taken to another borough by a passenger it would be ok to pick up a fare there just as it would be ok for medallion taxis from other boroughs to do the same. But I considered my main territory to be Brooklyn and I would always aim to return there.

I continued operating in this manner for all of the 1970's and into the 1980's. But I changed my mode of operation during the 1980's for two reasons. One was that during the 1980's I moved out of Brooklyn and it was now more convenient for me to work in Manhattan. But the second reason was not something I had any control

over.

Things were changing. The City Administration was under pressure from the public. There seemed to be more taxi business than what could be handled by the medallion taxis. There were many people that simply could not get a taxi. Because of the many hurdles and objections from the industry, it became virtually impossible for the city to issue any new medallions at that time. So, to get around this problem they decided that they would take all the radios out of the yellow taxis. This would free the medallion taxis up for the many people on the street who were unable to get a taxi. For the passengers who wanted to call a taxi by telephone they would create radio groups with unmarked cars. They declared that it was not necessary to have a medallion to do radio business. They declared that medallion taxis were only and exclusively available for street hails.

Since the bulk of the street hail business was in Manhattan, the medallion taxis flocked there. But for those of us who still wanted to do street hail work in the boroughs as we had done in the past it was becoming more and more difficult. That is because there was no cap on the number of radio cars that were licensed. The more that were licensed the more these cars would illegally steal the street business in the boroughs. There were many more cars licensed to do radio calls than were needed for the job. The rest would steal the street work. And to make matters even worse, as they did so they would fraudulently inform their passengers that it was ok for them to hail the radio cars on the street.

The medallion taxis were shut out of the borough work! The medallion taxis had no radios to compete with the radio taxis and the radio taxis were stealing work from the medallion taxis on the street. What choice did the medallion taxis have other than to flock to Manhattan?

So now perhaps the tides may be changing back in the right direction. Thanks to Queens City Councilman John Liu there is a move on to create taxi stands in the boroughs to encourage medallion taxis to work there. More medallions have been issued and it should be easier for this to happen. But let's not forget how we got to this point in the first place. Let's not be fooled because time has passed and the history forgotten that this is something new. No, this is not news. This is an attempt to bring justice where it belongs. Let's not be fooled into thinking that a Taxi stands here and there will cure this disease. All the unnecessary radio taxis must be removed and not permitted to take what doesn't belong to them. Also, it should be taken into consideration that there are many passengers that want to be

able to call a medallion taxi by radio

Are We on The Right Path?

Recently I saw two films that have convinced me that we are not going in the right direction with the energy policy in this country. Perhaps you have seen one or both of these films. If not I would recommend that you do so. But before going I would suggest that you have an open mind and consider what these two films have to say. Nothing less than the future of this planet is at stake. The way we conduct ourselves in regards to the sources of energy we use is critical. Time is running out and if we don't make the right decisions our future is very bleak.

The first film is titled: "Inconvenient Truth." This film is narrated by former Vice President Al Gore. Mr. Gore's presentation of the science that is referred to as "Global Warming" is an outstanding education on the subject. If you don't have an understanding of this subject, I can assure you that after seeing this film you will.

I have heard some people say that the film is propaganda designed to help Mr. Gore and his political ambitions. I can assure you that it is not. But on the contrary it is an education that we all need to know. Time is most important because we are running out of time to reverse the situation. I can assure you that it's not political ambition that is Mr. Gore's motive for doing this film. But, rather it is his conscience in that he is aware of the problem and has been for many years that motivates him to get this message out.

Had the presidential election that many, including myself, felt he won been handled fairly, regardless of the international situation, we would more than likely be on the right track toward an intelligent energy policy. Instead the current administration acts clueless while pursuing their own selfish goals to keep us in oil.

Not only is oil in short supply and controlled by people who want to see us suffer, but the use of this source of energy is dangerously creating a situation that will eventually kill all life on earth. I personally came away from this film with a firm belief or our impending doom if we stay on the track we are on. I also believe that if intelligent unselfish people can get control the problem can be dealt with positively.

The other film is titled: "Who Killed The Electric Car." In this film you will be

given facts on an “All Electric” car that was being produced for use in California during the 1990's. This vehicle was produced when the California legislature passed a bill calling for a zero emissions vehicle.

General Motors produced the vehicle and leased them to many high profile people who loved them. They ran as smooth and as fast as any similar gasoline or diesel vehicles.

After the vehicles were produced, the California legislature amended the law under pressure from both General Motors and the oil industry. Since General Motors only allowed the cars to be leased, eventually they were able to recall the cars when the leases ran out. To the dismay of those that leased and operated them General Motors refused to renew the leases and ultimately destroyed the vehicles. They claimed the vehicles were not practical because you could only get limited mileage from them and people wanted vehicles that would go more miles.

They did this despite that there was technology available that would allow for the manufacture of vehicles that could get up to 300 miles before needing to be recharged. Even if this were not the case, still a vehicle that was run on electric even for a limited amount was crucial in conserving gasoline supplies. Although we all need vehicles that could go further than the limited mileage of the electric vehicles, most car trips are made for only a few miles. People could own these cars and get much use from them. They could charge them in between trips at their homes. This would be crucial in the conservation of gasoline for vehicles that must use gasoline. The demand for gasoline would drop considerably and would then be more affordable for those who needed it. This electric vehicle could be a great second car for the short trips. You could even say the long trip gasoline vehicle was actually the second car since that would probably be used less.

After seeing these films you can draw your own conclusion. I have drawn mine.

No Gasoline surcharge! So what's next?

When will they get it? We need help. It was totally irresponsible for the TLC to deny us a gasoline surcharge. They say we are making more than \$12. per hour. This trivial amount of money is what they say is a “Living Wage.” Don't make me laugh!

Has any one of these people ever tried driving a taxi for 12 hours a day six or seven days a week? Well that's what one must do in order to have this "Living Wage" count enough to buy the bare necessities of our society. I would also point out by the time these bare necessities are paid for there is not enough left over for health insurance. It also is above the amount allowable for Family Health Plus for a family of four. Healthy NY is available for this family of four but rates range between \$600 and \$800 a month depending on what insurance company you purchase from. Besides, even if one can pay for this, no one should have to work 12 hours a day six days a week in order to do so. If you want to weigh this expense in relation to the rising gas price, you can easily see that \$150. a week more for gas that drivers are now paying more than two years ago could have easily gone for health insurance. It would appear they don't see this, or do they?

They can help us! They can create an atmosphere where we would make more money without charging more. How? They can enforce the rules and stop the illegal vehicles from stealing business that should be ours. That would help us to earn the difference. But they don't.

They want us to buy hybrid vehicles. Well maybe we all will eventually buy hybrid vehicles. But certainly this will have to be a slow change over. If we had to purchase a vehicle within the last year or two, hybrid vehicles weren't yet available. So we are not going to ditch a vehicle that we paid for and are still paying for before its time to do so. That would be throwing money away. We need to make more money now.

They got what they wanted. They sold 1300 medallions that they were authorized to do. They want to add another 150 and it appears that they may be able to do that. They want us to spend thousands of dollars on GPS and it appears that will happen also. So why do they sit on us and not let us make what is really a "living Wage." It's all political. Whatever puts them in a better light with the public is what they will do. They don't care one bit about us. If they did, we would have what we needed!

Queens

Just a short note on the potential that sometimes is overlooked in a borough like Queens.

On Sunday, Aug 6, I was working the night shift. It was one of those not so busy

summer Sunday nights. I was struggling to make a decent dollar this night. Knowing that my gas bill was going to be around \$50 for the shift I knew I had to get lucky.

But luck sometimes comes to those who look for it. Here is the sequence that got me through the shift. At 10pm I got on line at the PA bus terminal. After a few minutes I was given a fare to Roosevelt Island. I was tired but I knew the Mets were playing a night game at Shea Stadium. So after dropping off my fare at Roosevelt Island I decided to head over to Shea Stadium.

I arrived there just as the game ended. I was a little dismayed to see that the traffic police were directing the traffic away from where I thought I could find a fare on Roosevelt Avenue. You would think that they would allow a taxi to go by. After all maybe there may be some one looking for a taxi after the game. So I turned with the traffic onto 126th Street on the east side of the stadium lot.

People were walking out of the stadium into the street. I was pleased that there wasn't any traffic on the side of the street where these people were exiting. I couldn't believe there weren't any taxis there either. I thought what a great spot for a taxi stand. Surely there has to be people who want to take a taxi here.

And Yes, I was correct. I sat there where the people were exiting the stadium for no more than three or four minutes before I had two gentlemen who were very glad to see me and take me for a \$30 ride back to Manhattan. I have to believe that there were many yellow taxis sitting at the airport waiting for nothing when they could have done the same. I think this should be taken into consideration should they establish more taxi stands in Queens.

