

Still Here After 40 Years -And Still No Adequate Restrooms

I have just passed the fortieth anniversary of my first day on the job. I was 22 years old when I decided I would like to see what it is like to drive a taxicab in NYC. Having grown up in NYC and having had extensive experience traveling in Brooklyn and Manhattan through my teen years I didn't think it would be too difficult for me. And, it wasn't.

The business was a little bit different then. The only legal vehicles that were permitted to solicit business were medallion taxicabs. There was not yet a T. L.C. Not all the medallion taxis worked in Manhattan.

I worked a majority of my shifts in Brooklyn. You could do so fairly easily in the 1970's. Street hail business throughout the boroughs was plentiful. I would base myself at the "Junction". This is what we called the intersection of Flatbush and Nostrand Avenues. Lots of taxi fares are generated at this location. Medallion taxis would wait at the subway exit that is the last stop of the I. R. T. Nostrand Avenue line, as it was called in those days. The bus from Bell Harbor terminates there. Brooklyn College is also located at this location. There are lots of taxi fares to be had all day and all night. I would start there and wherever I wound up I would always head back in the direction of the "Junction". If I didn't find a fare by the time I got back, and most of the time I did, it was certain I would find one at the "Junction".

At this location there was a small diner and a bar next door. If you had to use the toilet it was easy to leave your taxi for a few minutes in the unofficial taxi stand that wrapped around the subway entrance and either grab a quick bite to eat or use the rest room facilities. But that was then. It's hard to believe that was from 35 to 40 years ago.

It is now 2010. If you pass by the "Junction" you will see livery cars illegally waiting for street business there. These same livery vehicles cruise the streets of Brooklyn as they do Queens and the Bronx and take any opportunity for street hail business away from the medallion taxis. It is not possible for medallion taxis to operate in Brooklyn as I did in the 1970's. All medallion taxis are now reduced mainly to working the streets of Manhattan and the airports.

We all know the difficulties of working in Manhattan. The difficulties of parking for the purpose of relief. The limited available legal parking spots. The limited

number of places where drivers can find clean sanitary rest room facilities.

Well, I still drive one day a week. I guess that's about all I can stand of the difficulties. I drive every Sunday. It's a bit easier on that day. The traffic isn't nearly as bad as it is during the week. So, I don't have to struggle that much. But as we all know, working in this business in Manhattan is never struggle free.

One thing I had told myself many years ago is I would like to see in my lifetime the wrongs that affect this industry corrected. This is why I use this column from time to time to express things I think should be corrected.

Some people who read what I write take me seriously, I'm not sure if those who have the power to change are among them. In the last two issues of Mini Press I challenged our new T. L. C. chairman to form a committee of experienced drivers to discuss ways that we could make it easier for drivers to access clean restroom facilities in busy crowded and difficult to park Manhattan, as well as in the other boroughs of our city. I have had no response from his office. I said I really didn't expect one. But perhaps I'll be pleasantly surprised yet.

I did get a phone call from someone in our industry. This man had what may be a good idea if there were an easy way to implement it. His idea was to make up stickers for businesses to display in their windows that say they are friendly to the taxi industry. This would mean that their restroom facilities would be available to us. All we would have to do is show our Hack license. This in turn will give them more business. We would at times spend money there and buy their services. The only problem is who will pay to print these signs and just how will they be distributed? This is something that can be discussed if this committee I'm suggesting is ever formed. So, I'm still hoping and waiting for the day this happens.

While I was working this past Sunday I did go into a business in the Greenwich Village area that I had never before been in and asked if I could use the rest room. I was granted permission. It occurred to me that if I had such a sticker sign with me I would have been able to offer this to the business owner. So, this is one way it could be accomplished. But first these stickers would have to be bought, paid for and distributed to all drivers that wanted to help.

A Tale of Two Wallets

Ever wonder how many wallets must be lost not only in taxicabs, but everywhere. In the past week I returned two wallets. Let me tell you about them.

I have a driver who drives my taxi. He is a very honest man. He always returns lost property, even if he loses time and money in doing so. A few years ago he returned \$20,000 in cash. The T.L. C. recognized him for this unselfish and honest deed. However because of his disability in speaking clear English, he usually asks for my assistance when he finds something.

A woman lost a wallet in the taxi he was driving. There was a little over \$100 cash, credit cards, her drivers license and other stuff in this wallet. He phoned me and I was unable to understand clearly over the phone what her name was. He was trying to read it from her drivers license. But I was able to clearly understand her address. It was an address in Baltimore Md.

I know a few web sites that for no charge will reverse search addresses. I put in the address he gave me and was able to get her name and telephone number. I phoned the number but was not able to speak to any one. We were hoping we could locate her in New York before she left. I left a message. I let her know that we found the wallet and it was safe. We decided to hold on to the wallet and wait at least a day before considering other action.

My call wasn't returned that night. So, I tried again in the morning and this time the woman who lost the wallet was home in her house in Baltimore. She was very glad that we went to this trouble of finding her. I told her that I would mail the wallet to her. She said that the driver can keep the cash as a reward.

I mailed the wallet to her with a note that she should email me to let me know she received it. I could tell from her email that she was very happy to have it back. We should all do these things. It helps give us a good name. It helps to negate the bad name that newspapers like the NY Post give us!

It was only a few days later that a woman got into my taxi. This time I was driving. She said there is a wallet back here. I asked her to give it to me. There wasn't any cash in the wallet. But, there was a driver license, a debit card and a few health insurance cards in the wallet and a membership card from a theater workers union

After dropping off the woman at her destination, I drove to a spot where I could

legally use my cell phone. I called directory assistance. There wasn't any listing for the person whose driver license was in the wallet. I decided to hold on to it because there were other clues as to how to find the person.

The next day was a holiday, Labor Day. But I went on the internet and found the person with a matching photo of his driver license photo on the web site "Face Book". I left a message how to get in touch with me. I waited all day but he didn't respond.

The next morning I decided to try a few things to find him. First I called The Chase bank that his debit card was from. I asked if they could contact him and give him my number. They refused to do that. That is unbelievable. I next found the phone number of the union he belonged to. They were very friendly and gave me his cell phone number. I called and left a message. I would later find out that the number was obsolete.

In a search online for his phone number, I did not find his number. But, I found a man with the same name in New Jersey. Based on some bank receipts and the person's age on the drivers license vs the person's age of the man I found in New Jersey I concluded that this man must be his father. I phoned and I was correct. It was a few hours later that the younger man who lost the wallet would phone me. I then mailed his wallet back to him.

Now there is more to this story:

It turns out that this man was never in my taxi. So, how on earth did his wallet wind up in the taxi? After speaking with him I came to this conclusion: I had picked up three men on 44th st and 10th avenue around 2pm. I wasn't really paying attention to what they were talking about amongst themselves. But I did hear them say something about a wallet. After I dropped them off on 34th and 3rd avenue, I drove to McDonalds on E 23rd street and took a 20 minute break. It was right after that I picked up the woman who found the wallet.

The man who lost it said he parked his car on W44th street just before the time I picked up the three men. He believes he dropped his wallet on the street at that time. Apparently what happened was one of these three men picked it up and then discarded it in the back seat of my taxi. It turned out that the only thing that was in this wallet that was not recovered were some photos. I asked if there was any cash in the wallet. It turned out there was not. The photos must have fallen out when the

wallet was lost. What a world we live in!