

Travelling Tales

My very earliest memories do not include public transport. In the Lancashire mill town where I was born, everything seemed to be within walking distance of home. The shops, and the market with its noise and bustle - stalls piled with produce: banana boxes we were told not to touch in case a tarantula spider had stowed away in one, boxes containing only broken biscuits, and, my favourite, the pet stall where on the top shelf perched a raucous mynah bird, which delighted all of us children by swearing loudly at passers by! Even the school I attended, a mile away up the gently sloping main road, was within walking distance. In fact I can only remember a few occasions when I did not walk to school and back. These must have been days of severe weather, maybe torrential rain or icy underfoot, and I was allowed to spend, I think, 6d on the bus fare, catching one of the buses numbered 2 or 5 from the corner of our road. In later years we visited nearby Bury market, travelling in the back of either my service-engineer father's van, or my mother's friend's Robin Reliant car. The latter gave me one memorable experience when, having loaded the shopping and us kids into the back, "Auntie Pat" set off along the road, whereupon the rear door flew open and all of the shopping spilled out along the road behind us. Such excitement!

Once every couple of years the family undertook a longer trip, to London, to visit relatives. These involved either whichever of a series of variably unreliable cars (of the Zephyr/ Zodiac/ Wolseley varieties) my father had at the time, or, more often, a hired Ford Anglia into which we all fitted and fretted on the long journey south. I think it was during one of those trips that my mother had left either her purse or her handbag on the car roof and forgotten it. My father, totally unaware, set off on the next stage of our journey, and it was not until much later that my mother realised her loss. On one occasion I recall making the journey by coach - a large sunny-coloured vehicle of the Yelloway fleet, this being an adventure in itself, as it was the first time I had ever travelled on a coach. As a result of this paucity of road travel, I suffered from motion sickness until into my early twenties.

The only other time I went out of the town was on the occasional Saturday morning, when I was allowed to take the train into Manchester to meet my father at lunch time, when he left his office. This was a great adventure indeed - departing from my home station at Radcliffe, with the train stopping at every station until it reached Manchester Victoria. My favourite halt was at a place called Besses o'th'Barn where, inexplicably to me, the platform was always on the wrong (other) side of the train!

Moving to Westmorland when I was 12 meant a substantial increase in the use of the bus, as school was 5 miles away in Kendal. It was always a source of great amusement to me, a town girl, that the bus could become stuck behind a herd of cows on the lane at Oxenholme, thus delaying it and making me late for school. As an excuse for tardiness it was perfect,

especially as one of our teachers often caught the same bus, and could substantiate my "reason for being late" story. Then, as now, many school children used the regular service buses, and sometimes other passengers felt, probably correctly, that our spirits were a little too high. Periodically we were chastised *en masse*, by our scandalised Head Mistress at morning assembly, and our noisy exuberance would be curtailed for a short while. I think it was thoughtlessness on our part, rather than trying to deliberately shock or cause a nuisance, although I do recall once being given a strong telling off by a woman passenger for being, what she considered, impertinent.

Living in London for five years was a total culture shock - buses everywhere and often, not just 6 or 8 per day, or one each way on market days, but every few minutes going everywhere, or so it seemed. However, the greatest novelty was the tube. Prior to going to London I had only rarely used an escalator - in those days there wasn't one anywhere in Kendal - indeed, on several trips to visit a friend who used to work in Lewis's, in Manchester, she would be highly amused when, having lost me in the large store, she would find me riding up and down between floors just for the fun of it!

The tube, then, was the greatest experience for me. I regarded it as a huge model train set, and used it as often as I could, even for short journeys, frequently travelling much further in underground tunnels and on escalators than I would have by walking directly on the streets above. On one of my earliest journeys, whilst heading for Euston, from Victoria, I managed to take the wrong train, and found myself miles from my destination, at Perivale, in Middlesex. Another time, whilst travelling to Finsbury Park on a winter's evening, I fell asleep, and awoke as the train pulled into Southgate, just outside Enfield, and I had to stand on a cold, dark, wet platform awaiting a train going back into town.

Moving to a new flat in an area not served by the Underground meant a return to the bus - these were the wonderful red Routemaster double-deckers, with the open rear platforms and a conductor as well as a driver. The number 73, which took me into work near to Euston, was a marvel - on it I could travel right across London, from Tottenham to Kensington and back - a round trip of some 20+ miles, at a cost of a mere £1.60!

Returning to the north in 1986 brought me back to a less-frequent, and considerably more expensive service. It has, however, had its more enjoyable moments, and the regularly-seen drivers became like friends. I've met lots of people whilst travelling, and had some wonderful conversations. One day I found myself sat alongside an American visitor, who was doing a spot of sight-seeing before his trip home at end of that week. He hailed from Florida, and I spent the miles into Kendal listening, as he described Florida's everglades and the keys, telling of the huge trees which grow from the water, and the types of wildlife found there. As we were suffering from a dry spell, he recounted the effects that similar weather had had on parts of his home territory, and then described the severe storms they also experienced. On another day I shared

the top deck with a group of oriental girls, who chattered continuously, like birds. To my untutored, western ears, the conversation was, of course, unintelligible, except for the odd English word incongruously interposed into their own language. Thus, and with apologies in advance for any unintentional libel or insult, the conversation seemed to go along the lines of, "Hwang se ho pizza tee, so fung da ti MacDonalds?".

On another occasion a young, blond-haired girl boarded the bus outside of Dallam School, and, much to my amusement, asked the bus driver for, "...a return ticket back to here please." She seemed quite taken aback when he asked her where she was going to! The highlight of my recent local bus travel must, however, have been when the new water main was laid through the village, and consequently all traffic was diverted around the perimeter. Travelling up and down narrow lanes and around very tight road junctions was not an experience for the faint-hearted, but my main concern was that the brakes should not fail whilst coming down steep Vicarage Lane, at what seemed a great speed, back to the edge of the village.

However convenient it may be, travel by car never seems to be quite as interesting as that on public transport!

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