

From the Big Apple to the Big Easy

Violin Monster Meets the Rideshare Road Kill Kid



Photo Credit: Delary Harborth

I was leaving New York City for New Orleans for a five-month adventure. I wanted to find someone who needed a ride, knowing it would pay to have someone along with me to split the gas money and for conversation. Maybe this person could drive part of the way also? Without that, I knew it could stand to be a long trip. I discovered my fellow journeyers on Craigslist and arrived to pick up my passengers on the morning of travel at an address in Brooklyn. I knew there would be a dog accompanying his human, but I didn't know their names yet.

I called the number I had been given. "Okay, I'll be right down," a groggy voice replied. The young man who appeared looked a little grungy and he had a weathered travel pack on his back. He put his gear and his dog in the back seat. "Hang on, I'll be back in a minute," he declared casually as he sauntered off. I was double parked in Brooklyn and it was a busy morning. Buses had a hard time getting around me and the drivers were using their horns emphatically as I waited. Fifteen minutes passed as I grew increasingly antsy.

Finally, he appeared again and got into the passenger seat. It seemed like he hadn't showered in a week and he definitely wasn't wearing deodorant. I immediately rolled down my window for some air. "Sorry man, I had to take a shit," he said by way of an apology. This guy left quite a first impression, but I tried to roll past it. I introduced myself, and after a few awkward moments of silence, I asked him his name. "Oh, I'm Spencer. And this is Scruffy."

It was time to take off and Spencer, Scruffy, and I were on the road at last. Spencer helped me navigate out of the crowded city and once we reached New Jersey, I started to relax a little. Spencer sat up and declared excitedly, "You know the *best* part about driving is that you can stop for the road kill!" I was shocked to say the least as I told Spencer that I *didn't really want any road kill in my car.*

“But I double bag it, man,” he said reassuringly

I remained perplexed as I asked, “Well, what exactly *do* you do with these animals?”

“Oh, I skin them, and take the furs,” then after a pause, “*But only if it’s fresh.*”

At this point, Spencer whipped out a knife bearing a six inch blade, apparently to illustrate the implement with which he would skin the road’s most unfortunate victims. Now that large detail was the most unsettling thing yet in the first hour of our journey!

I tried to diffuse the tension. “Oh wow, that’s quite the knife you have there,” I chuckled nervously.

Maybe, I thought, if he was insistent, I *should* pull over and let him skin a road kill? I didn’t get the sense that he was dangerous, but I didn’t know him at all, either. We continued on as we bantered about our travels and listened to the radio with me continually looking out the window, always hoping there wouldn’t be fresh dead animals on the side of the highway. A couple of hours into the journey, it started to rain. *What a relief!* I remarked that it seemed as though we would not be able to stop after all, because the road kill would be all wet. This comment was met with a stony silence ... and we kept driving.

I drove all day, toward the warmer climate and the raucous, vibrant, strange universe that is New Orleans. Spencer turned out to be a likable fellow in a lot of ways. He was considerate; he cared about the environment and social justice. He talked about going to Florida for a hippie/alternative medicine festival in the woods. He was a traveler kid, and he sometimes hopped on freight trains to get around the country. In New Orleans, people like Spencer hang around in groups on Decatur Street, mostly getting drunk and asking for spare change. They’re known colloquially as gutter punks, but I reserve that term for the ones who are belligerent and disrespectful. I once heard that traveler kids had dogs so they were hassled less by police officers. If an officer wanted to arrest someone such as Spencer for loitering, arrangements would have to be made with the humane society for the dog. My guess is that some police officers just don’t want to be bothered with all of the extra paperwork.

Around midnight I was getting pretty weary so I let Spencer drive while I tried to get some rest. Turns out, my driver, “Road Kill Spence” drove like an utter madman, going 85 miles an hour through the rain! There was no way I would or should attempt to get *any* rest through this. So as soon as I could, I hinted that we needed gas. We saw some roadside signs for fireworks, and Spencer suddenly wanted to stop. “Fireworks are great for distracting the police!” he excitedly informed me as he pulled off at an exit where one of these highway fireworks megastores was supposed to be. I pumped the gas, bought some snacks, and headed back toward the road. It was around 2 a.m. yet the fireworks store was still open. There were some strange one-way roads and we discovered that, alas, we could not get over to the fireworks after all. It was okay, and Spencer didn’t seem too heartbroken so we forged on.

I drove until 4 a.m. and then pulled over at a rest area. We were only a couple hours away from New Orleans, but we decided it was best to try to get some sleep. I folded the backseats forward and crawled through, headfirst, into the trunk. My legs could stretch out, although they almost reached the dashboard. Spencer reclined his seat and cuddled with his dog. We managed a few hours of sleep and then continued on after we were awoken by the sunrise. The rest of the journey was pretty smooth; I was relieved that we had made it, and finally arrived

safely. I dropped Spencer off and watched him as he disappeared into his friend's house in the St. Roch neighborhood.

And that was that. I haven't seen Spencer since. We shared the ride to New Orleans but escaped the skinning of rained-on road kill. I occasionally imagine Spencer on the road somewhere skinning a fresh find, or running around late at night setting off fireworks.

He was a strange character, but in my opinion strange characters make life so much more interesting, don't you think?

Violin Monster

Violin Monster is a 497-year-old werewolf who calls Ann Arbor, Michigan home. He performs his Irish and fiddle tunes on street corners all around the world because it soothes his soul and makes it less dangerous for humans to interact with him. You can find him in Ann Arbor on Main Street, at the Farmer's Market in Kerrytown, and on South University. Catch him at the many festivals A2 has to offer, including Hash Bash, Fool Moon, Top of the Park, Taste of Ann Arbor, and the Art Fair. In the winter, Violin Monster migrates south in search of warmer climes. He visits New Orleans annually, adding to the city's rich street performing culture. For more information, visit www.violinmonster.com.