

TRAVELLING



Riding the grey slab to the Rose City

Entry ramps become new lanes. Narrowing, they shorten the distance between bumpers, taillights, corner panels. Autos merge and shift, quickening the pace of the rolling metal and glass boxes.

The two-lane highway grows to three, then four. Overpasses become larger, longer and more often. Commuters gaze at one another; passengers listen to the radio Disc Jockey.

On the inside track low, fast cars flash past long, heavy sedans. The grey slab rises, then aims down toward the canyon and forming the Terwilliger Curves.

Auto and driver submit to the centrifugal force of the turns. The central divider adds a new dimension, guardrails gain prominence.

The curves straighten, the grey slab of the roadway contrasts with the brown of the canyon walls. The road rises to part the canyon, revealing the bridges, buildings and river of the "City of Roses."

Road signs point the way to all destinations. The highway divides and divides again, like the branches from the trunk of a great tree.

Drivers take their autos down exit ramps. Some crossing in less than 30 seconds a river that took travelers of days-gone-by hours to forge.

□□□□□□□□□□

Waterfront Avenue makes the transition between the Willamette River and downtown Portland. The bridge supports are the transients' domain.

Sixth Street is the bus mall. Cobblestone walkways lie perpendicular to the planes of the building walls aimed skyward. Bums, freaks, merchants, shoppers, artists and people of all walks of life move about the avenue spotted with the works of various artists. The people move about as if the daily pace is a dance, the avenue a stage.

The dance continues into the Pioneer Square, but the performers change. The choreography here calls for bowed heads for the dance of the Pioneer Square project patrons. They look for their names embedded in the bricks.

The audience variety here is wider than anywhere else in town. The borders of the square mirror the variety of human activity in this place built by and dedicated to the people of Portland.

To the West, Nordstrom's is the stomping grounds of the affluent in search of the latest fashion.

To the North are business towers, a place of daily transactions of various kinds.

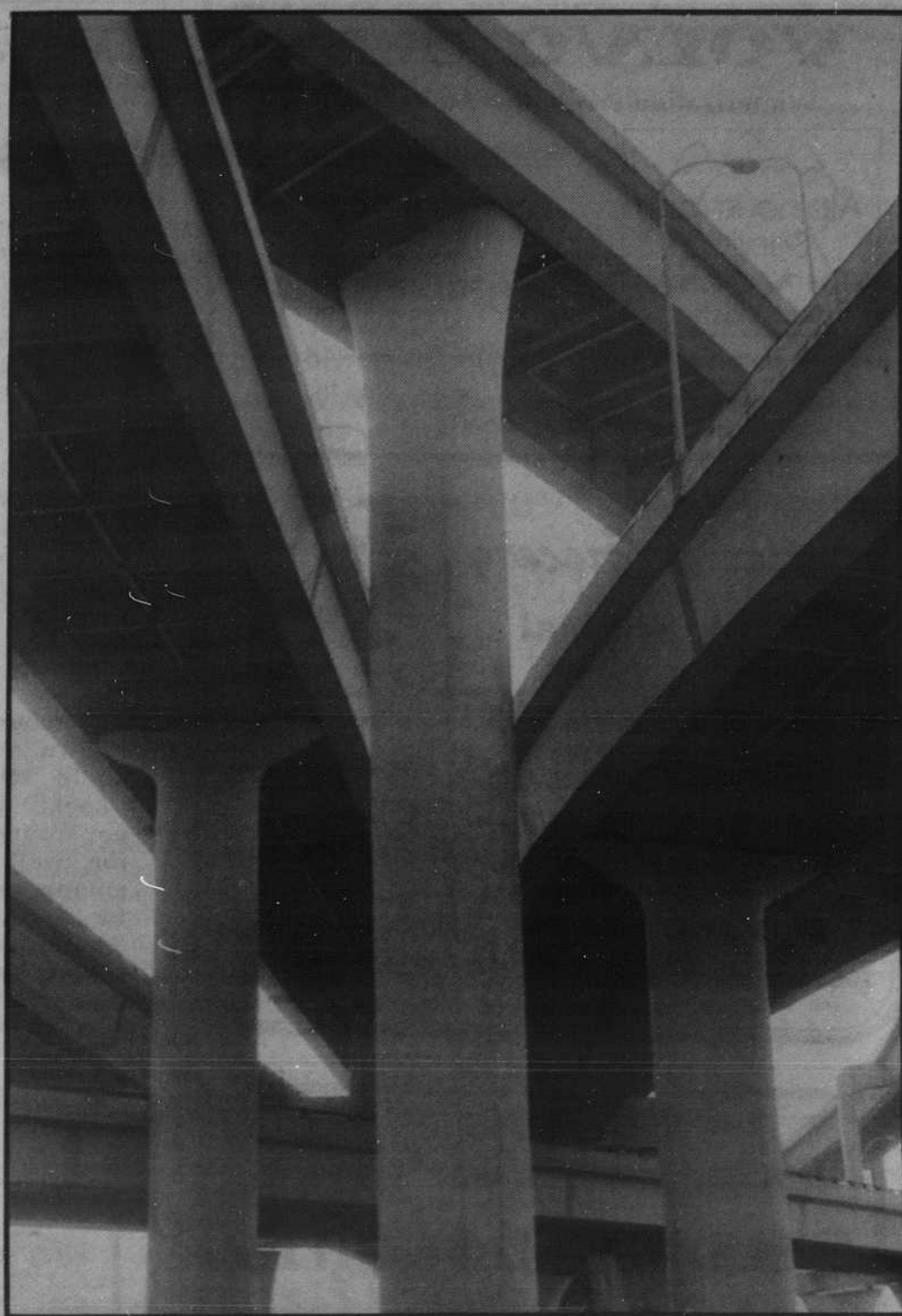
To the south is the Aero Club, where, until just recently, women were not allowed.

And to the West is the Pioneer Courthouse, with barred windows affording the captives a bird's eye view of all the dancers below.

□□□□□□□□□□

In *Candide*, Voltaire posed the question of one's state of mind and the perception of the best of all possible worlds. Possibly, regardless of where one is, one will find others with differing outlooks on their situation.

Robin sells pastries outside of Nord-



strom's downtown. She sees the day and people pass from under the shelter of the brightly-colored umbrella that covers her pushcart loaded with muffins, candies, and coffees.

"I really like Portland; it rains a lot, but I like that too. That's what people always start talking about when they come to buy muffins or a cup of coffee. The weather. Sometimes I think it cheers people up. It rains and people bundle up. When they get under a cover, they are almost always happy to get out of the rain.

"All different kinds of people pass by, and I see them all. One of the reasons I like this job is because I'm a natural born people-watcher. And Pioneer Square is a good place to watch. Lots of business people and shoppers buy pastries from me and then go sit in the Square. The bums don't

have any money and the Punks, well, they don't come over this way much."

Spit lives downtown "with friends" he says. Spit wears a mohawk with a lightning bolt tattooed on the side of his head. Unemployed, he spends most of his time hanging out. He doesn't ask for money.

"Why are you asking me all these stupid questions? Think I haven't seen TV? You're looking for a bunch of deep, meaningful crap that fucked-up people like me are supposed to think.

"This town's for spuds. I've got to get out of here. It's sucking me dry. There's some good places to go, but I don't like the people."

Story and photos
by Mike Duncan

