

SHORT STORY

BY ERIN BERNARD

On the Bus

Part one of "On the Bus" ran in last week's A&E section.

PART TWO

"This seat, is it empty?" the old man asks.

I look up, still a little dazed from my goodbye with Maribelle, and nod.

I look up into an ancient face, a mask of wrinkles and creases crowned by a gleaming, bald head. He must be close to the century mark and his eyes are all shiny and dark like two marbles. He's carrying nothing but a small knapsack and his ticket.

He sits down with intention, carefully resting his bag on his lap and smoothing out the layers of robe that cover him like an orange sea.

A monk.

He smiles quietly and introduces himself as Wan Yen, placing palms together and nodding his head toward me by way of greeting.

I tell him my name and stick my hand out, Maribelle-style. And, like me just a few hours before, he hesitates for a moment and then grasps it gently. Two gestures of hello, of goodwill, of peace. One ancient and unassuming, one forward, direct and distinctly American. It seems appropriate.

Then the bus driver is on the intercom, announcing departure. Family and friends stand around the door and edges of the loading lanes, waving or dabbing eyes, ob-

scured by exhaust fumes and the glare of the 3:00 sun. We pull away, moving forward. He has turned back to his own business, but I watch Wan Yen out of the corner of my eye, curiosity piqued. He sits quietly a moment with his eyes closed, and then pulls a worn book out of his knapsack, flips to a page, and begins to read.

The book is written in foreign characters and sideways lines and I forget myself and crane my neck forward, trying to decipher the language. Without looking up, he murmurs, "Chinese lettering."

My face grows warm and I quickly avert my eyes, watching the passing scenery. Trees and highway and pink-blue sky whirl past. I feel the weight of his eyes as they watch me, half-turned and rosy-cheeked.

"This is the Lotus Sutra. A most sacred Buddhist text." I look back at him and see his face and friendly, smiling eyes, and forget my embarrassment.

"Not just words, see. Pictures too, for each set of words. This here is Guan Yin. Bodhisattva of mercy, helps others attain illumination."

I look at the worn page and

see an ink etching of a monk sitting on top of a flower. He looks so peaceful and glad in his jewels and robes. I smile faintly.

We fall into a smooth, easy conversation. I learn that Wan Yen is going to Sacramento to join the Gold Mountain Sagely Monastery. This bus ride is the last leg of a week-long journey from South Vietnam, his homeland. He

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has come to America to escape the war. We talk about that and the way people are changing. Wan Yen has lost his country to war and death, but he seems at peace with it somehow. The whole thing makes me sad and angry and small and I don't understand why. Something in me feels I'll never understand. I tell him so.

We're both silent for a minute, until Wan Yen says, "The world, it always changing, sometimes for better, sometimes for worse. Just look around you." He nods toward the window. We're travelling down a random, dusty road somewhere in the heart

of America. Pollen specks pick up speed as we fly past, swirling dizzily in the wind. The land and the sky dapple with late sunlight. Children in bare feet and overalls play on old, rusty railroad tracks near the side of the road.

"We change with it, leave home to find home," he's telling me. "What we leave behind becomes what we seek out. Like the snake that sheds his skin to grow the same one back. All a circle."

And I keep trying to understand, wanting to understand. Thinking about Maribelle and where she is now, about my parents and being a musician. About the war. Wondering how the hell I ended up on a bus in the middle of nowhere talking with a monk.

Wan Yen knows I don't quite understand, knows how different our lives are, how different they have been up until now. He tells me, "The way of the world, it can only be understood here." He points with an old knobby finger to his heart. "Zen is this knowledge, holding it there, not just here," he concludes, pointing to his head. "And, see, doesn't matter where we come from. The lotus flower grows only in mud. We plant ourselves, knowing

we can become something better than where we are, what we begin as."

Something about this makes me crumble inside. I think of my past, so easily left behind, of Maribelle's past, of the future and what San Francisco holds for me. Everyone keeps talking about change, stretching and pulling towards something happier and better. All the protesters and the riots and freedom marches.

I look out the window again, watching the world speed past. Thinking about my dreams, about Wan Yen's dark eyes. I have the strangest sensation of moving both towards and away from something at the same time.

We pull into the next station. "Sacramento," the intercom booms.

Wan Yen smooths out his robe and stands. We share a smile and he nods towards me once again, saying goodbye, heading up the aisle and out the door, never noticing the stares and whispers.

I lean my head against the cool, smooth glass of the window and watch the people in the loading lane, the same as the ones in the loading lane before that, and before that. Then I feel the jerky movement of someone settling into the seat next to me.

"On the Bus" will conclude next week.

Mouth-watering morsels are coming

A sneak preview of the new face of cafeteria food at Clackamas

MANDY GOOD
Sports Editor

Fine Host, the new campus restaurant students will frequent on campus next year, proves there does not have to be a line between cafeterias and restaurants.

Print cartoonist Joel Gunderson and I went on a brave mission last week to the Mt. Hood campus to sample the food that will replace Chartwells' for the next school year. I have to say that when I go anywhere to eat cafeteria food, I get a little nervous. I remember my fair share of bad experiences and I didn't want this to be another. I had a picture in my head of a dark cafeteria and a food line, where Joel and I were just going to cruise through the line and sample a few things they had to offer.

If I was biased before, I no longer am. I have seen the other side. Fine Host offered a considerable variety of food and an atmosphere that was bright and

clean. A few things that jumped out at me as different from the typical "cafeteria" were: a salad bar that was plentifully stocked and looked fresh; a make-your-own sandwich bar (32 cents an ounce, with all the fixings); a pasta bar; soup variety; a wall of baked goods with another wall of coffees right next to it; and, in view as we walked in, a menu of items that were on "special" for the week.

The specials vary from week to week. When we visited, it was "Comfort Food Day," and the menu included Baked Rosemary Chicken served with mashed potatoes, gravy and a roll for the bargain price of \$3.75. I did not sample that meal but I did see it, and it looked like something my mom would make. A vegetarian-friendly Cheese Enchiladas served with beans and rice, again for a bargain price (\$2.95), was also a featured special.

The cafeteria also had a separate section that sold Tortilla Wraps and Chinese food. Joel and I went straight to the wraps.

The wraps, which will be typical at Clackamas, will be a hit. You may choose from cheese-jalopeno, garlic and herb, wheat, sun dried tomato or pesto tortillas. Then you may choose chicken fajita, chicken cordon bleu, turkey bacon club, chicken Caesar, or vegetarian wraps. The wraps cost \$3.75 and they were huge. I ate half of one and I was full. They would be ideal to split with another person, and they are so good.

Joel and I left with a brownie and a huge chocolate chip cookie for the road. Our bellies were full and our attitudes about cafeteria food were changed. I found the prices very reasonable for the quality of food we enjoyed. Fine Host will spend \$50,000 remodeling the Clackamas cafeteria and seems to have a lot to offer. It was obvious that there was a great deal of pride in their food service. Variety, atmosphere and outstanding food raised Fine Host above the cafeteria category.

It's a scientific fact – he's fuming inside

After just minutes of exposure to secondhand smoke, his immune system is weakened, blood thickens and his heart beats faster. Magnify that by a day, a week, a year, and he may as well be smoking, himself.

You want your teenagers to start working, not smoking.



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