

# Finding philosophers and storytellers in the back of the bus

BY ROB SADOWSKY  
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

This is part two of a story "One bad accident puts healthy streets in a whole new light" that first appeared in Street Roots in July about Rob's experiences with transit and

mobility while he recovered from a broken collarbone. That article explored struggles with maneuvering around the city. This article explores the joyful experiences of

riders who look for the first open seat, or the seat that gives me the least contact with others. I go straight to the back of the bus where I surround myself with personalities, with talkers.

While riding TriMet during the time I was recovering from my crash a few months ago, I got to know a new part of the city through a different panorama. Sometimes it meant looking out the window and seeing the city go by me, a slide show that captured bits and pieces. Unlike riding a bicycle, I was rarely alone on my travels. I had troubadours who entertained me with their life stories. I heard sad stories that made my heart ache but at the same time made me realize I have an easy life. I remember outlandish stories from long board skateboarders flying down twisting curves only to end up in casts as brightly colored as a parrotfish shimmering in the sunny ocean.

I would move from being an active storyteller to audience in the same trip, as these troubadours pulled out modern moral stories fit for a 1970s art film cutting room floor. Some morals I've learned include important lessons such as "It never pays to be a computer hacker. It's very lonely in prison without computer privileges," or, "Three friends drinking hooch in the morning watching Johnson Creek roar by is

better than any espresso bar downtown."

We are by nature philosophers and storytellers. We love to gossip, to feel a part of an intricate web. Riding on a bus is more interactive than reality TV; the stories are intricate and not interrupted by commercial breaks — stories that carry you to your next destination. We are full participants in a drama that unfolds quickly.

Capture your own stories, all for the price of transit and no need for an Ira Glass introduction. Join me in the back of the bus someday and tell me your story. Maybe I'll share my story about my friend Lew and the duck.

While on the topic of TriMet, I'd like to take a moment to thank Colin Maher, the Bike and Pedestrian Access Planner for TriMet for all his great work to make this region a better place to bike and walk with transit. Colin's position is ending and he's off to travel to Australia after working for TriMet for more than four years coordinating such great projects as new bus parking facilities at transit centers and stewarding design change in the Rose Quarter. Colin acted as a solid advocate from within the system. We'll miss you Colin, your impact on our region will last a long time. Thanks for making it easier to reach my troubadours.



## HEALTHY STREETBEAT

Bicycle Transportation Alliance

Healthy Streetbeat is a monthly column for Street Roots written by the Bicycle Transportation Alliance (BTA). Our contributors are Rob Sadowsky, executive director, and Margaux Mennesson, communications director.

transit.

I'm a regular bicycle commuter. I see my city through the height of my bicycle with a full panoramic view of my surroundings. I can hear and feel the city as I pedal through neighborhoods, a full participant in so many ways and all alone in many others. I can get some thinking done while I ride, mull over my feelings and occasionally get inspired. This experience keeps me riding even on dull rainy days.

Yet I occasionally yearn for another experience that provides a completely different participation. I love that bumpy, shoulder-to-shoulder squeezing phenomenon of riding a bus. I'm not like some transit

## PEOPLE'S PARK, from page 12

noticed the street seemed eerie and quiet. There was no traffic. Then we heard shouts from a distance and looked toward University Avenue. People walking backwards came into view — a large crowd, a thousand or so, were being pushed back by guardsmen marching in cadence with bayonets drawn, pointed at the throng. We heard helicopters and looked up. Tear gas was being dropped near the Berkeley campus.

As a counter measure, veterans of anti-war marches helped organize a big People's Park demonstration. Pacifists dominated the planning and trained a large contingent of parade monitors. Paranoia sparked rumors that the FBI would sprinkle "agent provocateurs" throughout the crowd.

On the momentous day, May 30, 1969, over thirty thousand people marched. I

remember seeing the guy in front of me about to throw a rock, but people in the crowd closed around him, and someone took the rock out of the man's hand. The march stayed peaceful, and the sheer number of marchers had its effect. The fence came down; People's Park stayed.

The next 20 years were marked by on and off conflict — the City of Berkeley and UC students trying to keep People's Park open, the university attempting to close People's Park down. There were political battles over the serving of free food and the playing of amplified music — battles which People's Park activists won. The university paved over part of the land in 1979, intending to charge students parking fees, thus sparking another melee. A couple hundred people used pick axes to break up the asphalt. In 1984 the Berkeley City Council determined that the park was a landmark and should be

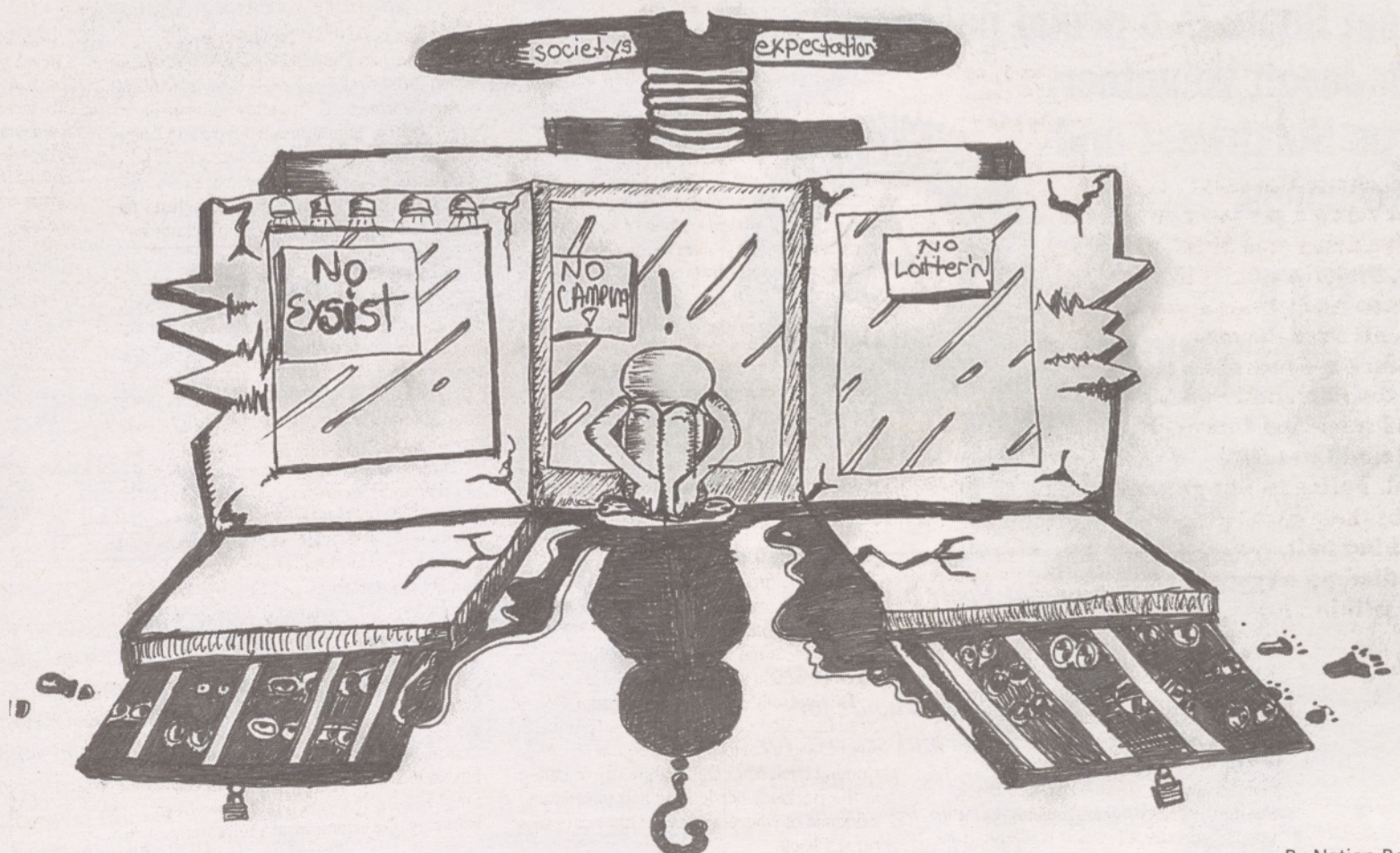
preserved. Seven years later the city and the university reached a five-year agreement for joint management, but when the university's bulldozers started to clear part of the land for volleyball courts, twelve days of rioting followed.

January of 1996 another agreement was reached between the City of Berkeley and the University of California: The city would manage the park; the university would retain property rights.

Today, the park serves as a daytime haven for many of the area's homeless; students play in the basketball courts; volunteer gardeners tend the organic gardens and native plants; rallies and concert's occasionally grace the People's Stage.

"The price of liberty is eternal vigilance"  
— WENDELL PHILLIPS

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By Nation Roper