

The fulfilling life of a commuter



PERSPECTIVE

Shannon Dea

It is 9:30 a.m. As I sort through the notes and stories that will occupy my workday, I smile. For, I realize I have finally arrived...in a manner of speaking.

You see, as appealing as my new job at The Tribune may be, the smile isn't prompted by a sense of career culmination. Neither is it the result of an inordinate amount of joy.

When I say I've finally arrived, I mean it quite literally. I have finally arrived at work. And I'm late again! (Never mind being out of gas for the third consecutive morning.)

Yes, ladies and gentlemen, I'm a commuter. Mind you, I'm not one of those intelligent people who travels from Ajax to Oshawa or from Markham to North York every morning. I should be so lucky. No, some time ago, I decided to

commute here from my home in Acton. That community, in case you're not familiar with it, is a favorite place of residence for commuters. Mostly, though, they work 20 minutes west in Guelph, not Stouffville.

The drive takes me two hours each way. Most of this can be attributed not to distance, but to rush-hour traffic. Rush hour, by the way, is a misnomer. Why any-

one would have coined that term for a time period when every road is occupied by hordes of painfully slow drivers, I still don't know.

I'll be fair: I realize that the sheer bulk of traffic on Metro roads at these times must result in a slow-down. But why is it that the car directly in front of me is always occupied by someone intent on stopping to smell every single rose that life throws him... even on Hwy 7, in rush hour? (Although I'm just not certain what kind of weirdo it takes to find roses under these circumstances.)

So, thanks to rush hour and roses, I'm a half-hour late for work. Quite an accomplishment, really. Until today; I haven't arrived before 10 a.m.

In fact, I might have been on time today if I hadn't had an overpowering McMuffin craving back around 7:45 a.m. when I still thought I was on schedule.

This is a common denominator among long-distance commuters. We all eat two out of our three daily meals in the car. Those of us who are really efficient have also learned to style hair, apply make-up, clean nails and scan the morning headlines en route.

Traffic hazard? Nah. Most of us spend 80 per cent of our time in neutral anyway while the guy in front of us smells yet another miserable flower.

The real threat from these pastimes is to oneself. Fortunately, injuries are seldom more serious than coffee stains on your new dress pants or mascara on your bangs.

Of course, the odd commuter has lost an eye to an overly sharp eyeliner pencil, but this can be avoided by limiting eye make-up applications to red lights.

In any case, the few valuable minutes afforded by this doubling-up of tasks is well worth the risk.

Think about it: I spend eight hours every day at work, four more on the road, eight (if I'm lucky) sleeping, an hour bathing and generally keeping my body in one piece and an additional hour going to the bank, getting gas, purchasing groceries, washing dishes or laundry or (Heaven forbid!) cleaning my apartment... you get the picture.

At last count, there were 24 hours in a day. This being the case, I want to use the remaining two hours that belong to me sparingly, savoring every instant.

How does one go about "savoring every instant"? So far, I've spent most of my leisure time phoning friends to whine about the trials of being a commuter!

Perhaps now that my new boss, Jim Thomas, has expanded my audience of "whinees" to 7,000, I'll be able to devote my time to something a little more productive — like getting to work by nine. I may even stop to smell a rose or two.

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