

The Italian Bus Ride!
By *Michael M. Tickenoff*

A Bus ride, sounds simple...hah! Well, I've been on a few of them and I would guess that there are only three, maybe four now that I think about it, that were memorable enough for me to actually write about. Out of those three or four, this was or shall be considered the third down the list from the greatest; or should I say the one with the most feeling attached to it.

It was in Italy, think Molano, that sounds a little familiar. To tell you the truth, I myself, being an American from a suburban town in California was never found to be in need for regular bus transportation; so found myself like a lamb to the slaughter in this experience.

Having already traveled in Europe for a month, trains seem to do the job for me rather well. But here in this city, it became necessary for me and my traveling buddy Theo, to get around by bus and so this story begins.

Tired and hungry, returning back from a long day's tour at some forsaken mountain fortress in the distant hills, we found ourselves waiting at a common ordinary citizen's bus stop. We patiently waited for the next ride to come on by and pick us up. As far as I knew, it was normal for the bus to come to a gradual stop, open its doors, calmly dispersing some passengers at the front and patiently loading others in at the back...Not True in Italy!

Sure enough, the bus came into view down the traffic jammed road and right then the masses on the side walk began to congeal and merge into some organized form of what seemed to be a football play. Unexpectedly, we were roughly shoved off and out of our places and by the time I turned to see what the heck was going on, Bus #77 was pulling up alongside the curb. The crowd seemed to make some kind of mental calculation and like a team on the go, they began to run alongside the bus and left us standing in the diesel fumes and swirling dust...literally!

Yikes, the bus didn't even stop completely when the doors were flung open, and I saw a small group of men, women and children pop out of the front door like popcorn overflowing its popper! This was strange but what was really odd was the on rushing throng trying to claw, push and climb over one another to get into the ever moving back door. It reminded me of that scene in the Super Bowl game where 22 men are piled like a pyramid, all reaching for the game winning fumble at once! The bus never stopped, not at all, but still this entire crowd seemed to be pulled and sucked into the bus by an invisible force and in nothing less than 5 seconds, they were gone, completely swallowed up and we were left sucking exhaust fumes.

"Hey, that was rather a dirty play wouldn't you say," sputtered my buddy Theo.

“Yeah, guess they ain’t interested in perpetuating their tourist image to well,” I retorted.

“Ok, let’s get ready for the next one, since we know the game plan,” Theo clapped as he got into a quarter back stance while staring up the street in wait of the next approaching bus.

Sure enough, within a short time another crowd formed and as soon as the bus showed, the multitude began to attempt to shove us off, but no way, not this time, we were ready, we dug-in, blocked, threw elbows and made great yardage and barely made it up to the scrimmage line but we held our places. Just as Bus 99 came close enough, we along with everyone else began our trot alongside the rolling bus until the doors were flung open and “SQUEEZE-slam-SQUASH” and “PUUSSHH” we disappeared into the back doors and found ourselves being packed in from behind by the still pushing crowd. At least 30 more people piled in and made it onto the bus, but the thing was, that the bus was already packed to overflowing, and I mean packed, standing room only.

You think its tough being sort of cozy on an elevator with a few strangers, try having a 300 pound Italian woman's wrestler breasts hanging over your shoulders, while the local garlic and onion champion tester is breathing into your face from 3 inches away and you can feel at least five pairs of hands going through your pockets and you can’t even reach down to stop them...WHATSO-THATSO?

Immediately Theo disappeared in and among the sardines (weren’t sardines invented in Italy) and I could hear him gasping for air. I remembered that he was sort of claustrophobic, well, perhaps more than a little. For I heard him screaming out-desperately for my help. I climbed up on someone’s bag and stuck my head out of the mass throng and looking over the sea of faces and my eyes bulging and all turning red from being squeezed, there I spotted Theo a few bodies back. I thought it better to reach for him rather than go backwards against the tides and finally got hold of one of his ears and began to pull. He screamed, and must have began to kick because the sea of flesh that had him held tight began surging in a circle around him and he was slowly moved and nudged towards me.

It was the end of the day party, everyone was jabbering in Italian, breathing out their days rations of potent fumes of garlic, fish and onions. As we surged with the turns and sways of the bus everyone simultaneously lifted their arms up grabbing for the overhead rail, thereby smothering your face into a sea of hairy and very stinky arm pits. Without any discretion (who would ever know) this throng openly expelled, with what seemed to be serious pleasure, great quantities of gas! All this and they gaily laughed at us too, as we were

engulfed into the higher knowledge of the Bus Riders Code Of Ethics in Italy, the hard way!

Then struck dumb with horror, I realized that Bus #99, wasn't even the bus we wanted...TOO LATE!

"Hey, a guy could have a lot of fun under these conditions on these bus rides," Theo gasped out.

"Sure thing, if you love sweat and garlic and only if you got the right person close to you," I murmured and just then a hand grabbed a hand full of my rear-end! I turned to see an old toothless woman smiling her gums at me and I turned my face away in revulsion. But soon reconsidered this judgment call; better her than that giant lumbering hulk of a man smiling at me, just out of reach, I hoped!

We were about half way back in the isle when I realized that I had no idea where the heck we were and at what street we were going to be stopping at, couldn't see a thing through this throng. Then I pondered the fix we were in, even if we did know where we were at, in no ways could we get to the front door. I began to panic a little and wonder how the heck this bus driver brought his passengers to the door. Then in an instant, this question was answered when the driver Alfonso, seemingly for nothing slammed on the brakes and...GUTTISO-CRUNCH!

In an instant the 200 passengers were jammed even tighter into the front quarter of the bus and if we thought it was packed a second ago, we were very, very wrong. For now the passengers sort of merged into one happy family, and I knew for sure that this is where women became mothers and young men like myself became unexpected fathers, yes it was tight and extremely close!

I realized then that the bus was once again cruising along another bus stop, scooping up another football team, while disgorging a crushed throng through the front door. Wow, what a job I thought. This guy is slick, passengers get on with a days shopping and leave with five minutes of purchase, the rest is probably stuffed tight into the seats and walls. After work the bus driver goes around prying loose all the left-overs and sells it back to the stores for a handsome price...no wonder why most rich Italians are all bus drivers!

By the third slam Theo and I were forced near to the front, and all without our own efforts. By the fourth forward packing, I knew what it felt like being digested food in an intestine! It was sort of a natural progression, maybe like evolution, hey maybe this is where that guy (Darnet) really got the idea, brain storm on an Italian bus ride!

Ok, ok enough I thought, can't take the pressure, and I mean pressure. Let me tell you one thing, never, and I mean never get onto an Italian bus without first having gone potty! I mean this, and I mean a complete and full emptying, or believe me, this football brigade of anxious "want-to-get" home Italians are gonna do it for you.

Then at the next slam brake crush we found ourselves directly behind the happy singing bus driver Alfonzo, for he knew he had a fortune hanging around the floor today. I thought this would be a great racket, just carry along your own company of pick pockets and split the take at the end of the day.

I was wondering why we were now smashed up against a steel screen, sort of like a jail cage, hey then I realized that is exactly what it was, Alfonzo was encased in steel mesh and that is why he was able to escape the crushing hoards being piled up against his cage each time he slammed them forward in an expert packing job. My face actually had grooves impressed onto it for at least three days after this ride.

I seemed to have joined some special unnamed club for I also saw others with the same marks and they would give me a special smile and sort of want to nudge up to me a little. I realized that they too had been touched by Bus 99 and the cage experience!

Finally, in one last desperate push, I guess sort of like what a mother feels like at that last few moments before her child comes into the world and sees the light. With a tremendous slam on the brakes, I am sure Alfonzo did this for our benefit. For he saw that Theo was near death and no longer able to stand on his own. He was being supported naturally, by at least twenty happy Italian grandmothers, five pick pockets and a few far reaching grabbers. Bus #99 screeched to a jamming halt for an instant. Then Alfonzo immediately punched it, throwing everyone backwards and at this moment he hollered out something to a few Italian garlic wrestlers. And with forty pairs of hands on us, we were expelled in a gut wrenching shove, catapulted out onto the sidewalk where we both fell in a sprawl, like two human waste products blasted into another dimension.

Theo lay gasping for air, I crawled around looking for our stuff, just as I figured, most of it was gone. I looked up in time to see the bus being chased by another team of experienced Italians, jostling and pushing for position to catch that door when it would fling open for only a second and admit them into the Italian chamber of "SQUEESH THE PISH AND FLEECE THE FOOLS!"

No matter, we were alive, we got up, dusted ourselves off and tried to figure out where the heck we were. Oh sheee-etskees, we are on the other side of the river," I blurted out.

Should we try and catch the next bus,” Theo asked as he clamored to his feet.

I smiled and said, “Sure, lets go, maybe we can get back some of our stuff this time, you get to be the pick pocket and I’ll be the guy that reaches out and touches things!

However, after serious contemplation, we decided to walk the three miles back...INSTEAD!

By Michael M. Tickenoff

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