

6 May 2017 – 2 Jul 2017
Lower and Upper Galleries

ICA

Stuart Middleton Beat

As directed I spent all yesterday cleaning the chrome outside. I cleaned it until it was like looking into a mirror. I just want to say - thank you! It made me realise something that's been bothering me for a long time. I saw myself in the reflection and it shocked me. I'm young! Youthful eyes in a youthful face. I asked myself; why do I go home feeling old? And you know what I realised? It's your fault. You guys. It's nothing personal but you drag me down to your stinking level. Some of you (I won't mention names), I know you're unhappy with how your life has turned out, and I'm sorry about that but you can't level all your blame at me. It's as clear as day that my optimism, my hunger for adventure cheeses you off. But I won't allow you to crush it, I will not!

This chicken's flying the coop. The irony of it isn't lost on me; a place built on the ideals of freedom, The Dream, the Wild West, rock'n'roll, the open road for god's sake! would turn out to be a trap. American Diner? What a joke ha-ha! I'll tell you what it really is; it's a run-down old caravan in a motorway lay-by, staffed by a bunch of tiny minded idiots. A capsule of bitterness. A giant metal bitter pill full of twits! Well I won't be swallowing it. You can kiss my ass! I've known since day zero that it was too small for me. I mean it's physically too small for more than two people at a time (especially with Marylou wedged in there behind the griddle). But I mean it's metaphorically too small minded, too low ceilinged. I'll be damned if I'm going to give the best years of my life to a horse-burger van on the boulevard of broken dreams.

I know what you're thinking, "He's mad! He doesn't give one damn about this place." Not true! It more than bums me out to throw in the apron. Do you think that an idealist like me could have worked somewhere that he didn't truly believe in? I've been here every weekend for over 2 years, and although some of you have worked here for over a decade, those two years feel like a lifetime to me. On my first day I said to myself "Just a summer job, save some cash then you're gone, smash and grab", but here I am two years older, and at least ten years wiser (in terms of life experience).

I want to get a few things straight before I go; first of all, the culture here stinks. It could really be something special in the right hands. A real destination. Not just somewhere for desperate parents to direct exploding baby butts or somewhere for white van men to dump piles of old fridges. It's the sheer laziness culture that's to blame. I just noticed even the little cactus over there by the window is wilting out of sheer neglect. I am that cactus. I can survive in an emotional and intellectual desert but even I need something, a drop or two now and again to stop from dying of thirst. A drop of appreciation for my raw creativity. On some days in this sweaty Air-stream a-hole it's quiet as a tomb. I've often caught myself daydreaming, gazing into the little mini desert landscapes in the planter box, the sweet wrapper tumbleweeds and tawny fag ends stuck between the little sandy pebbles. On the rare occasion that the sun blurts weakly through the window frosting I put my face close to the musty grit. I imagine waking up in the Mojave stiffly unfurling like a desert flower after a night of hallucination fever-dreams, scalding my mouth on campfire coffee and hitting the blacktop to eat up another 500 miles of nowhere, road snaking beyond me like a typewriter ribbon. I've lost my train of thought now. But that precisely illustrates my point guys, my imagination is wasted here.

Have I been an angel? No. I confess; I have lied. That time my mum called and said I was having heart palpitations? That was B.S, sorry. I went to G-Fest and popped a pill for the first time. I had an epiphany that hit me like a steam train. Oh jeez, it screwed me up for days afterwards. I realised no matter what you do it's bound to be a waste of time in the end so you might as well go mad. I couldn't stop crying. I could barely lift my head from the pillow. Another pretty major one was when the till was light by fifteen quid and I said it was Dean. Well that was me. I needed it to put credit on my phone (it was when me and Lucille were breaking up). I was actually meaning to pay it back now but I'm really tight because of the trip. Sorry (I mean it). But really when it comes down to it life's just a giant funk-fest and nothing really matters because it won't be long

now before we're nuked or wiped out in a pandemic or forced into battery farms by A.I.'s or something so in the grand scheme of things I wouldn't waste time being too peed off about it.

I've booked my flight and packed everything. Anything that wouldn't fit into my backpack I left outside Barnardo's in a bin bag (if it's still there you're welcome to go through it there's some quite decent stuff in there actually) Don't bother coming after me because you won't find me. I took the tips jar. I'm sorry. But who else worked for them really? I don't think that anyone if they were really honest would begrudge me after all the extra miles I went to ensure good customer service. So it's beside the point if it's theft or not, the point is that I go away from here with a clean conscience. In my opinion I don't owe you anything. You've had your pound of flesh off me. The best teacher is experience (and not through someone's distorted point of view.) More than likely I'll fall in with a band of indigenous nomads and slip off grid for a while.

There's some other stuff I want to get off my chest too whilst I'm at it. I could have excelled if I'd wanted to but this job was just a means to an end. That's all it's ever been to me. Do yourselves a favour and listen up; most of you, I suppose, are interested in climbing the (short) career ladder of motorway network hospitality. Maybe you see yourselves working your way up to a supervisor's position in Welcome Break or even at the Travellodge. Well I want to tell you that in the end, you won't remember the time you spent wiping down tables or filling ketchup bottles shaped like tomatoes. "You'll remember the extraordinary things you did. The mountains you climbed, the rivers you swam in." Want an example? Remember Rickey? Remember how jealous you all were when he handed in his notice so he could work 3 days a week as the General Manager over on the southbound carriageway at The Adult Store? Well newsflash; I saw him last week at the Boot and Slipper car boot sale and he looked like absolute crap warmed over. He told me he wished he was back in the diner with us and all that fuss

he'd made over how the new paper hygiene bonnets were demeaning seemed trivial in comparison to selling pornography and pleasure pockets to lorry drivers day-in day-out for a few extra quid and a star on his name badge. Anyway I said I'd run over there when there was less traffic one of these nights and take him a plate of nachos and he really brightened up, but I won't have chance now so I was wondering if one of you could do it? He'd really appreciate it.

I've often thought I was born in the wrong era. These modern times just grate on me. Like how it's not safe to hitchhike apparently. I sat out on the road with my cardboard sign saying 'ANYWHERE' and not a single person stopped (one car slowed down but I assume that was so the passenger had a better chance of hitting me with the dirty nappy she flung). Come to think of it maybe I looked like I wasn't really serious and also people can be put off by vagueness, like if the sign had said 'KETTERING' that might have worked better because people would have known what they were getting themselves into, and they'd think "oh Kettering ain't that far, even if he turns out to be a nut- case it's only the next junction or so". But it's fear culture on the road nowadays. People don't want to talk to strangers. To be honest given some of the characters that come in here and wolf down slice after slice of ancient freezer-burnt apple pie I can't say I blame them, but that's not my point.

I'm writing this sitting at a plastic table looking out over the hedgerows, with their grey coating of road grime and listening to the ravens cawing to each other in brittle bits of woodland. I'm watching the sky go red over the rapeseed and thinking about my life so far. I ask myself - what's in store for me in the direction I don't take? One day I will find the right words, and they will be simple. But for now my friends this will have to do;

I quit.

Upper Gallery

2, 2017

Stop frame animation with
sound 5'14'' (looped).



Lower Gallery

1, 2017

Removal of gallery walls
and ceiling, re-used structural
timber, Correx, reclaimed
boards and joists.

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