

Western 49

by William Jones

Everyday I take the Western 49 bus, a Chicago public bus that travels from the up and coming Lincoln square, to the almost forgotten north end of west Rogers Park. I take this bus to and from the EL train in the morning and also in the early evening every day. Its patrons are a mixture of single working mothers, drug addicts, eccentric senior citizens, and young working people like me who use the bus en route to downtown Chicago.

Every day I see these people who have no future. It is not they are soon to die, it is just that the lives they are leading will never change. They are essentially in Limbo; trapped within their mundane existence.

The near poor mother with children in hand will remain near poor. Her struggle to put food on the table for her kids, and create a better life for them will continue. She will continue to work hard, long hours for minimum wage at a dead end job. Yes, her underprivileged children will grow older, yet they will remain destitute, one day creating a penniless family of their own. A perfect example of the vicious cycle of urban poverty. They will all continue to spend their mornings and nights taking the Western 49 to dead-end jobs.

The cheaply tattooed drug addict will continue to use. He will continue to live on the streets, spending every dollar he accumulates to feed his addiction. He will never be sober. He will steal from anyone; he has already stolen from everyone who cares about him. He will pretend to be clean, ask help from the people who care about him, and he will steal from them again. He will continue to hate himself, and he will always be weak; slowly killing himself by needle and pipe. He will continue to take the Western 49 to the place where he can score.

The old woman, senile, and near insanity, will never again be young, or sensible. She is probably alone, and will remain so for the remainder of her life, in fact, it is quite possible that the bus is her

only regular contact with other human beings. That is why she talks to herself. That is why she rocks in her seat. Maybe she is not as crazy as she seems. Maybe she just wants to be noticed. Maybe she just wants someone to recognize the life that is still inside her; the heart still beating in her chest, the brain still weaving thoughts in her head, and the soul inside her body slowly rotting away. She will continue to die on the Western 49.

Then there is me in pressed khakis and an oxford shirt. I look around and believe that I am on my way to something more important. A life more worthy. I head to my posh job downtown, the starting point of a rich and successful career. A career filled with bonuses, big deals, and happy hours. At one of these happy hours I will find love, a person to spend the rest of my perfectly happy life with....Children, SUV's, vacations, swimming pools, gardening services and summer homes will follow... naturally. Or maybe I too will continue to take the Western 49; its long steel frame serving as my future's coffin. It's stuffy, particle filled air sucking the life out of my hopes and dreams. Maybe my career never pans out. Maybe I will be forced to work long, shitty hours at a dead end job. Maybe I never find anyone who truly loves me. Maybe I will start to hate myself, and find my only escape in needles and pipes. Maybe I will be alone forever, forced to talk to myself in order to get someone to pay attention to me. Maybe I too will fall into the abyss, the Western 49's humdrum cycle of desolation

