



HONKERS

shrieking scream pierced the air and rattled my brain, but seemed to completely bounce off of his shell shocked parents, who were seemingly completely resigned to their fate. Maybe in one of the loudest, densest cities in the world, the kids need to truly hit those high notes just to be heard?

Amid all the noise and bustle, the city was actually pretty densely vegetated. This meant that when the whole thing got too loud, that some solace could be found in the often gigantic parks. Sitting deep within a park one day, a man with a shaved head and monk robes approached a friend and me.

He gestured to his stomach emphatically, and then to his plate of coins. Regardless of what we said, he repeated this action, and stared at us expectantly. I reached into my pocket, and gave him a handful of coins, a move which in Australia would have been an ok haul, but which had failed to account for the comparatively miniscule value of the Hong Kong coin, and our new companion made a great show of offense at this in response.

And so, like a dumb tourist eager to please, I gave him a twenty (about four Australian dollars) and in return he gave me a wooden bead bracelet, branding me with the mark of a sucker.

We read later that dressing up in robes and masquerading as Buddhist monks was a common tourist targeted grift in Hong Kong, but four dollars for some dumb beads, a classic tourist experience, and a lesson learnt wasn't too bad at the end of the day.

I wish I had the luxury of being able to spend more time in Hong Kong, and really meet the locals beyond that of brief encounters, but before I knew it I was touching down in Canberra airport and coming to terms with the comparative barrenness of the place. Of course, being able to walk outside, extend my arms, and rotate in a circle without smacking multiple people in the face is a luxury I never knew I cherished so much.

However, I will miss the sheer quantity of new and interesting faces I saw while over there and am quite keen to see what other wonders the rest of the world has in store.

Of course, the subway had its own share of interesting people and when it got truly packed, you really got to know them well. At one point, a man sheepishly approached me and delicately inquired how large my feet were. Baffled by the sudden approach of what surely must have been a foot fetishist with a taste for the exotic, I had barely time to respond before he obviously saw fit to abort the mission, and quickly disappeared off the train as it stopped.

On one of the few times I scored a seat, the man directly next to me was unashamedly undertaking a deep and seemingly meaningful excavation of his nose. I'm certain that he was at least two knuckles deep, and every delight found within himself was treated with much multi-sensory interest.

I worried that if the train jerked suddenly and I bumped into him, that the shock would cause him to instantaneously lobotomise himself as his finger collided with his brain. However, as testament to the smoothness of the Hong Kong subway, this terrible vision did not come to pass, and he lived to pick another day.

While the subway was considerably smoother and quieter than the train systems here, Hong Kong was still a pretty noisy place. At one point a child near where I was waiting made me realise that Australian children seem to really half-ass their screaming, at least compared to what I'd occasionally witnessed over there. The kid I saw was on another level. He sounded like he had seen the face of death, as if he'd beholden the infinite agony of the afterlife and needed to express that terror to the world around him using the only language he knew how. His

Two weeks in Hong Kong was an interesting experience. A land of mountains and skyscrapers, malls and subways, everywhere I looked huge, brutalist buildings exploded across the landscape and blanketed the mountains. After a lifetime of living in very small towns, as well as the somewhat larger town of Canberra, the sheer density of buildings and people in Hong Kong was consistently intense. However, this meant that I had ample opportunity to encounter many strange and interesting people during my time there, some of which I will describe for you now.

Straight off the plane, and after a quick train ride, I found myself on a bus without a busman. While we sat and waited for the driver to arrive and manoeuvre the bus to our lodgings, from my elevated window I was able to gaze over the shoulder of a man leaning against a nearby wall, and join him in watching his phone.

He was viewing what seemed to be a street fight compilation — shaky footage of young men pummeling each other as crowds looked on and cheered. The video would end, and he would start it again. He probably watched it about four times before he pocketed his phone, reaffixed his cap, and climbed into the driver's seat of our bus to pull us away from the station.

Maybe repeated images of violence was the stimulus he needed to successfully motivate the chaotic Hong Kong roadways? Maybe it's just not possible to drive in Hong Kong with a gentle spirit? The Hong Kong roadways were indeed madness, and I was glad to spend most of my transit time smoothly riding the subway instead.

POLITICAL COMMENT

Putting people first

Bryce Wilson is the Country Labor candidate for Monaro

My name is Bryce Wilson and I'm the Country Labor candidate for Monaro. My wife and I are raising our daughter in Queanbeyan, and we wouldn't have it any other way.

I'm proud to have grown up in country NSW. When I finished school, I trained as a surveyor at TAFE. I'm passionate about education, so I later retrained as a science high school teacher.

There are many reasons why I want to be your representative but I firmly believe if you want to build a better community, you have to stand up for and be an active in it.

We will put schools and hospitals at the heart of this election.

Country Labor will put the health and education of your family and your community at the front and centre of our priorities. We will address the mainte-

nance backlog in country schools that has tripled during eight years of National Party neglect. We will ensure every school has air conditioning instead of using public funds to install them in the corporate boxes in Sydney stadiums. A Daley Labor Government will introduce nurse-patient ratios, so our local hospitals will have the same number of nurses for each patient as big city hospitals.

I have seen how John Barilaro and the National Party have treated our region. Privatising rural health services, cutting funding to our local schools, forcibly merging our councils, undermining our national parks while at the same time spruiking a nuclear future for NSW. Under John Barilaro's leadership of the National Party, they caused a man-made disaster that's killed millions of fish across far-western NSW.

Labor will deliver clean affordable energy for half a million households across NSW. There are hundreds of homes across the Monaro from Quean-

beyan to Bombala that could benefit from the program.

Labor's Solar Homes policy will provide a rebate up to \$2,200 for adding solar panels to owner occupied households, where combined household income is under \$180,000. On average, households could expect to save up to \$600 a year off their electricity bills.

The Nationals and Liberals have privatised the electricity grid and overseen a massive jump in power bills, our solar homes policy will provide the help that families need.

Labor takes climate change seriously, and will support renewable energy across NSW.

You can vote for more of the same — more being ignored on what matters to you, more of a government not investing in services, more of the Nationals neglect. Or, you can vote for the values and vision put forward by Country Labor. We will listen. We will stand up for country people and put people first. We will give you the choice — to put our schools, our environment, our hospitals ahead of Sydney stadiums.