

New York NY

Life as a neophyte pedestrian in New York is quite a thrill. First, there's the unthinking step from the kerb followed by a moment of disbelief that a vehicle could be charging at you from that side. This is followed by a moment of relief when you catch the driver's eye and it seems you're safe. Then comes the full catastrophe moment of realising that you're actually looking at the passenger. The driver who is blissfully texting is about to notch up another dopey Australian. The second week is less stressful.

Living in Brooklyn made me realise what a dreadfully small-minded nanny state Australia has become. Here in the borough, people burn about on a wild variety of conveyances. Motor bikes, cars, scooters, skate boards electric and push-along, pedalling bicycles and those with motors — and not a helmet in sight unless it's worn as a fashion accessory. The NYPD is everywhere but they don't waste time on people walking safely through red lights or riding bicycles against the traffic.

New Yorkers seem to pride themselves on being cool. If you don't invade their private space, what you do or wear is no cause for comment. Stylish people

NEW YORK, NEW YORK



SUBWAY SIGNAGE: UNOFFICIAL SENTIMENT ABOVE, AND BELOW, OFFICIAL RECOGNITION OF ARETHA FRANKLIN.



abound, especially young African American women for whom no amount of intricate hair arrangement is too much trouble.

I tried my best to promote Australian dag; for instance, I survived the torrid steamy heat as I used to in the North-

ern Territory by wearing shorts and sandals, but the number of men in New York who have sockless sandals could be counted on the toes of one exposed foot. Nikes rule, man.

It's a funny thing that the American know-how that put a score of men on the moon, made an encyclopaedic algorithm to solve any dinner party dispute using only your phone has not helped the poor duffers to handle a knife and fork properly. It's painful watching them eat. They start off okay, knife in the right hand cutting the food using the fork to hold it still, then for some inexplicable reason they drop the knife, move the fork to the right hand and use it like a shovel.

I offered to show some diners at a restaurant one night how to use the cutlery more efficiently but they were quite dismissive. I don't know why the dude thought I worked in transportation, but he told me quite forcefully that he needed no lesson from another trucker like me.

The New York subway is an engineering marvel of lines criss-crossing up, over and around each other under the whole city. When it was first built it would have been a state of the art transport network. The subway still transports 4.3 million people every day

SOLIDARITY

but its age is showing. Signal failures, track maintenance and power outages force the operators to slow, divert or cancel many services all too frequently. After a few weeks of listening hard to the station and train guard announcements I penned this little ditty.

"Attention passengers. This C train is now running as an A train on the F line. Passengers should change next stop to an M or 5 train running on the Z line or a 7 minus 2 train makes a 5 train."

"Attention passengers. Due to a signal failure this C train is now a 1, 2 or 3 train running on the E line or, if there is unexpected track work, a W train running as an N train that thought it was on the G line."

"Attention passengers. Trains are now hopelessly lost and confused and will become uptown trains without delay. Consequently all services are now running as F trains and so the system is now a total F up. You're welcome."

There are quite a few beggars working the subway trains. The locals mostly keep their noses glued to their cell phones even more diligently than usual when the spiel starts. This can vary widely, from a proffered plastic cup and a sad look to a full performance, perhaps drums or pole dancing.

One day a woman took a beggar to



THE LABOR DAY PARADE SEEMED TO GO ON FOR EVER.

task. "I gave you money yesterday," she protested. "Lady," replied the man, "I never work the same train two days in a row."

The woman was insistent. "It was you for sure". As the train pulled into the station he said, "If you saw me yesterday, then lady, you're on the wrong train," and he got off.

As the train lurched into motion the woman asked her neighbour, "This is the E train to World Trade Centre isn't it?" "No ma'am," he replied. "This is an A train heading for JFK."

The Saturday after the Labor Day long weekend, delayed to allow workers to have a holiday as well I suppose, we watched the parade up 5th Avenue to



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