

We were both waiting to catch a tram that would get us back to the Depot in time to start the second leg of a broken shift , or spread , as it is known in 'trammie' parlance.

The two of us were immaculate in our uniforms. Freshly ironed shirts , caps set straight on neatened, close cropped heads , belts neatly notched around the waiste of our brown tunics, and the shoes on our well shod feet shining in all their polished glory, for in those days you could be sent off the road for being improperly dressed or untidy. Besides, we were proud of our uniforms and of our jobs.

As usual when in Jenson's company we stood in silence since my friend was never a one to air her vocal chords unless there was something really worth mentioning.

Suddenly a woman approached us waving her arms and yelling.

" Where are the trams, what's happened to the service. I've been waiting here twenty minutes! I'm late for an appointment. "

An ambulance weaving its way through heavy traffic cut short this verbal dissertation, its siren wailing a warning as it went 'hell fire' up the road toward the aerodrome.

" Madam," said Jenson, stepping onto the roadway. " There has been a terrible accident up the line. People are lying about in agony. You'd be far wiser to travel by cab. " Throwing herself wholeheartedly into the exercise she quickly flagged a taxi to the curb.

The lady chastened by this sad development thanked Jenson profusely as she was assisted and settled in-to the cab. It drove off after the door was firmly closed on the occupant still professing her gratitude.

Jensen stepped back on to the footpath just as our car came round the corner, right on time and in full flight.

Her one and only comment as we boarded the car.

" That will teach them Nan, not to annoy us when we are off duty. "

The Memoirs of a Tram Conducoress

Market Day

Page I

We'd slide into the safety zone,
And spray a little sand.
Against a sea of passengers,
That might get out of hand.

For they jostled one another,
In haste to get aboard.
And cluttered all the gangways up,
Before our car was moored.

The milling crowd would step on us,
And trample on our feet.
Or elbow every thing in sight,
To grab the nearest seat.

" Would yer move in from the doorways, "
We'd yell into the fray.
And try to turn the surging tide,
We met on market day.

Two bells and we'd be off again,
To face the heavy lurk.
Collecting all the revenue,
That was our daily work.

We'd scramble over cabbages,
And string bags full of beans.
Or packing cases full of chooks,
And mounds of fresh picked greens.

" Fez Pleez, " we'd ask of passengers,
And move among the rows,
Of swaying massed humanity,
That balanced on its toes.

Memoirs of a Tram Conducoress

Market Day

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We'd rattle up the Coburg line,
Or-out to Essendon.
Off loading some at certain stops,
While others clambered on.

The leather gear we had to wear,
Got heavy with its load,
Of two bob bits and copper coin,
We picked up on the road.

And when we reached the terminus,
We didn't tarry there.
'Punch the Bundy', 'up with pole',
Collect the waiting fare.

The old Victoria Market,
In nineteen fiftyone
Was work to time and work again,
Until the job was done.

The men in green provide the balance that is essential to organization in the smooth running of a public transport system.

Any member of the Tramways Board can attain the exalted rank of Inspector provided he has the wisdom and strength of 'aloneness' that goes with authority, for once placing himself beyond the ranks of the ordinary, he is cloaked in the mantle of responsibility and in this capacity functions as an intregal part of the service.

He is to be applauded for his ability and his ever ready apptitude for making decisions.

They are the unsung heroes of a system world renowned for its logistics. Forever on the alert, this is the body of men we all turn to in moments of stress. They have the calibre conditioned to withstand the strain of untangling a fouled up time table, dealing with situations that could result in personal injury and directing and restoring order at the scene of any accident no matter how daunting the prospect. They carry a heavy work load with dignity and fortitude.

I now relate an incident unique in its ingenuity in the flouting of authority with reservations as to its merits as a worthy exercise.

Conductoress Collins was the tallest girl at Brunswick Depot. Known for her politeness, efficiency and energy she was full of sincere and overwhelming enthusiasm in all she ever set out to accomplish both on duty and in our private lives. She was, and still remains, a very dear friend.

Becuase I stood, in respect of Mary's height, the smallest Connie on the job, we were known as, 'The long and short of it.'

On this occasion we had both completed the first half of a broken shift and planned to travel to town as passengers during our break in order to purchase...(I distinctly remember) a certain brand of lipstick at the cosmetic counter in the Myer Emporium, Bourke Street.

We boarded a car at the Depot gate that was carrying only a few passengers. This gave us the comfort of gaining a seat instead of lurching about within the confines of the back cabin where only one of us could sit while the other leaned over the controls.

We were glad of the opportunity to rest our feet since the morning rush was always horrific. We sat with our backs to the driver on a wooden contoured bench in the smokers saloon opposite a gentleman lurking behind the morning paper held at arms length.

We fell into profound dicussion in quiet tones and did not notice that a Braid, (Inspector) had boarded the car halfway to town until he stood towering above us .

" Are you aware," he boomed, successfully arresting the attention of every one within earshot," that crew members are not to remain seated while paying passengers stand."

The gentleman opposite lowered his newspaper and glared at us. So did the entire car load, including the person referred to as being done out of a seat. This was a man who stood up near the doorway thoroughly embarrassed by the commotion protesting a preference to stay where he stood while we ' hard working Gels rested on our laurels.'

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It was a situation fraught with possibility of Mary and myself being made to look very foolish in front of the public.

Quick as a wink we hailed the conductor, one of our work mates, who gaped in amazement as we both dug in our pockets and offered him money for our fares.

" Two to the City Peter," we requested and he quickly issued us with tickets.

Frozen in time and silence, the Braid stood confused by this militant manoeuvre; but not for long.

He got off the tram at the next stop and hailed the Board motor-car that was cruising between stops.

The Memoirs of a Tram Conductoress

The Thwarting

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That story did the rounds of every Depot in Melbourne and Mary and I learned later that every rule in the book was scanned to see if our transgression warranted disciplinary measures which would have earned us a trip to head office..

However, we heard nothing further and over the years we have grown accustomed to dredging up this episode as an entertaining and lighter moment in a history of hard work.

Memoirs of a Tram Conductoress

The Collision

Page I

Coming off the late shift one winters night a few of us waited in the lee of the Depot Starters Office for the first "all nighter" to pick us up and take us half way home.

The bitter wind sheared through our great coats, biting into our very bones and swirled eddies of grit and dust down deserted street suffused with the harsh indigo light of a time slot far beyond midnight.

The last cars off the road had run in and other crew members assisted in the frantic scramble of cashing in for those who still had piles of pennies and silver to hand in to the revenue office.

There was no traffic on the road. Motor cars were as yet a luxury few could afford and the huge transport trucks that carry interstate loading in this day and age were few and far between.

The milkman and the baker still made their deliveries in the early morning in horse drawn carts often lit by the light of an old kerosene lamp.

The all night service provided by the Tramways Board was the only means of transport for shift work and late night revellers.

It was a one man operation, the driver collecting the fares and issuing tickets. He had plenty of time to do this as he seldom had a packed car.

Presently the old car came bobbing up the hill dipping and swaying like an ancient windjammer breasting a heavy sea.

Bill Arnold was at the helm. A driver of some years service . The older generation of men nearing retiring age and capable and quiet.

We swayed down to Puckle street where we came to a sudden stop and looked like propping ther forever.

The old car was of a different structure to the ordinary service cars and the driver was not confined behind a closed door so we could not understand why the delay was not explained to us.

Mr Arnold made his appearance from behind the heavy canvas curtain that had kept him secluded. He seemed to be somewhat embarrassed and somewhat confused.

" Errr ! Humph !! " he said reluctant to make any comment whatever. " This car will not be proceeding for some considerable time."

We all got off to face a longer walk home and soon discovered why.

There was much producing of handkerchiefs and anyone sporting a woolly scarf made good use of it to cover the breathing apparatus.

The local night cart with its full compliment of the waste material it collected had come to grief spilling its load of sewerage across the tram line from one side of the street to the other,

We left poor Bill to deal with this disaster as best he could and hurried off int the night.

The Memoirs of a Tram Conductoress

The Lost Knickers

Page I

We took over a car at Flemington Road one morning with a capacity load on board coming from West Coburg.

The work force on its way to the city was packed neatly in like sardines, eyeball to eyeball.

I made my way to the back cabin to stow my gear. A tin box of tickets, and, if you please, a brown brief case I always carted with me. It held my emergency kit and contained, one long woollen scarf, a cake of soap, a small hand towel, the book I was currently reading, a pair of gloves, and a spare packet of fags.

I have no doubt that this bag was a great nuisance to all the drivers I ever worked with because the space in the drivers cabin is very limited. He hardly has room to place his feet and the bag continually shifted from the floor was often propped up on the control unit out of the way.

However ! This particular morning I was never so grateful for anything more than the fact that it was there at the back of the tram.

Somewhere between Royal Park and the St. Kilda terminus I felt the elastic go on my bloomers.

The complications of the under garments we wore in those days almost defy description. 'Bloomers' had elastic in the legs and reached halfway down the thighs, (Ugh !) They were worn over a girdle that held up our stockings by metal suspenders. (Double Ugh !)

Panty hose was as yet a boon to feminine attire undreamed of, to say nothing of the fact that all these mysterious things were never mentioned in public.

Imagine ! I felt my knickers slowly slipping from around my waist and knew that here was an emergency the like of which I had hitherto not been called upon to cope with.

I remained calm. Panic in the face of adversity gets you nowhere.

I continued to collect fares wading through a regiment of bodies pressed together ' en masse ' in doorways, gangways, and every inch of floor space where a foot could secure a toe hold.

I stumbled over string bags, crossed legs , jutting elbows, raised eyebrows, and a wall of intractable flesh.

Finally I reached the door of the back cabin.

There was, ofcourse, someone leaning against it.

" Pardon me," I said as I wrenched it open and passed through just as my pants slid down round my ankles. Whereupon I stepped out of them, unzipped the brief case and stuffed them inside.

I conducted that tram to St. Kilda in fear and trembling lest my ghastly state of undress be discovered. I climbed out on the bumper bar as usual to unhook the pole and floated to earth hoping to God that an errant breeze did not blow my skirt and petticoat up around my ears. Need I have worried ?? I could just as well have been wearing a chastity belt, my heavy overcoat would have defied a hurricane.

Nevertheless ! I returned to home base at Essendon in mortification and embarrassment but was wise enough never to mention this incident to a living soul.
