

## INTRODUCTION

This is a true story about cab drivers. What they are really like.

Between the innocence of infancy and the recklessness of humanity lies a being known as a cab driver. Cab Drivers can be found in bars, in arguments, in bed, in debt, intoxicated and sometimes in cabs. They are tall, thin, dark, fair, fat, but never normal. They hate healthy food, tax returns, traffic and most passengers. They like tips, nude pin-ups, sympathy, complaining and beer. A cab driver's secret ambition is to change places with the owner of a cab firm, to win the lottery and to be loved by everyone who gets in his cab. A cab driver is Sir Galahad when taking a stripper to her next gig, a psychoanalyst with a couple of drunks in the back seat and a battered old copy of Reader's Digest in the glove box, Don Quixote on his days off, the saviour of mankind with his back teeth awash, Valentino with a tenner in his pocket and democracy personified when dealing the police.

A cab driver is a provider when you want to get home late at night and a parasite when he asks for the fare. No one is subjected to so much abuse or wrongly accused so often or misunderstood by so many people as a cab driver. He has the patience of Job, the honesty of a fool and the heaven-sent ability to laugh at himself. When he arrives home from a night shift to find the kids eating breakfast and the wife tidying the kitchen, no one else but a cab driver can create such an atmosphere as with tired steps he walks through the door with the magic words on his lips, "I'm home! Have you got the kettle on, love?" and he talks of his nighttime adventures. The kids rush to hug him because even though they've slept soundly, they've missed the sense of strength and security he brings to the household. They know he's been out there driving right through the night but they still want to wrestle him before they leave for school.

And in the evening, after reading them bedtime stories, he sadly says, "See you tomorrow," and returns to the twilight world of the drunk and the shit-faced. He will have to deal with freaks, oddballs and the criminally insane. He will have strippers and streetwalkers in his car, along with actresses, chefs, midwives, off-duty policemen, stockbrokers, thieves, ticket touts and rehab counsellors. There will be arguments and assumptions, speculation and debate, tears and sneers. His ears will be assaulted by cackles and bawls, giggles and snuffles, wheezes and whispers.

His passengers will be contemptible, crafty, corrupt and casuistic, even though most of them don't know the meaning of the word. They will be high-spirited, high-strung and hurried, while some will be hearty and hospitable, inviting him into their lives for ten or fifteen minutes. They will be alert, alive and attentive, rambunctious and raring to go.

While the men will often be rambling and retarded, the women will appear trashy and tipsy, lawless and lustful. Which is a huge generalisation because some of the women will be affluent and adorable, elegant and experienced, while some of the men will be loquacious and likeable

At various stages throughout the night, the cab driver will feel shabby, sensitive, irritable, confident, tentative, tough, tired, emotional, vulgar, intelligent, articulate, ignorant, mature and isolated.

Until finally he is weary of the whole human race.

I know, because I am one of these great men.

Karl Wiggins

## GLIMPSES INTO OTHER PEOPLE'S LIVES

They drain you sometimes. They really do.

"What's it all about then mate? What's the secret of life? You should know. You're a fucking cab driver."

Yeah, right. (As if I'll learn the secret of life talking to arseholes like you all night).

"Got any saucepan lids, mate? I've got two. I hate them. Bastards, they are. Ruined my life. I hate the bastards."

I keep quiet

"Don't try and rip us off, mate. I've got a key between my knuckles."

(Whatever).

The life of a cab driver. Glimpses into other people's lives.

Dr. Phillips. Station to hospital. Hospital to station. Always pissed off. Not surprising really, seeing as we're always late for him.

Big, happy Bill. Spends about £20 a night on cabs. From the Greene Manne to the Feathers to JJ's and back to the Greene Manne again. And he's on the piss seven nights a week. But that £20 is a measure of how much he values his license.

Olive. Nursing Home to Day Centre, and back again in the evening. Wears a nappy, which is just as well. Mind you, at least you can get a half decent conversation out of Olive.

Unlike Richard. "I've got a Rover car, you know. I used to be an electrical engineer. I've got a big house." Richard refuses to wear a nappy, and actually pissed on a driver's seat one day. The Health Authority wouldn't pay for it. Bastards. £50 to get it cleaned, let alone the money the driver lost while off circuit. "I used to be an electrical engineer, you know. I've got a Rover car. I brought it over from Holland. I've got a big house."

Whatever you say, Richard.

Pam. Still going through physio on her knee. She's a good laugh, Pam. And a good tipper.

George. Always pick him up from Plastics. Had his ear cut off with a Machete in Nigeria. They've built him a new one. You don't really notice it at first. Tends to panic in traffic. Mind you, so would I if some fucker cut my ear off.

Those three fresh-faced kids I picked up in Northwood and took to Wealdstone at about 2.30 in the morning. Hoping to get through the door of a lock-in. I grew up in Wealdstone, and they had TARGET written all over their faces.

The kid who'd had his nose re-set. Had a big white plaster over it. Didn't have enough money for the full fare. What could I do? Bash him up? Somebody else has already done that.

The Spice Girls, Bridie and Jayne. Cleaners at the hospital.

The two guys from the Prince of Wales. "Should have seen this little stripper tonight, mate."

I heard. A couple of other blokes told me about her earlier on.

"Had a fanny like a burnt-out fireplace. From Bethnal Green, she was. The barman in the Prince topped himself last week, you know."

No, I didn't know. Sorry to hear that.

"Hung himself, the cunt. Left two little kids behind. He was a mate of ours."

Well, he may have been a mate of yours, but he was fucking selfish to do that to his kids.

"Too right, mate. He's the second of our mates to hang himself this year."

Remind me not to drink in the Prince of Wales.