

Author: Kaiser Tareque

The Wilshire/Vermont station is a study in elegance. Luxury apartments, coffee shop, deli, shoe store, video game store and a chase bank. The place has changed a lot over the years. I remember taking the route 20 bus seven years ago from this station all the way to Wilshire/Westwood. We would visit the Hammer Museum, grab a bite to eat, and visit the campus of UCLA. It was my favorite part of the weekend and the thought of boarding that bus gave me a warm comforting feeling inside my stomach. I loved walking with my father, his smile plastered in his face at the thought of his son one day attending UCLA. He told me getting around this town is a tough gig, but you just have to learn to use the metro connections properly and life becomes a lot simpler. I adored the student lifestyle of waking up every morning and going to the bus stop, reading my text book on the forty minute journey across town and start my day. At around eight in the afternoon, I would make the trip back home watching the crowd from Westwood, Beverly Hills and Wilshire beat the afternoon traffic. Today I am one quarter away from graduation. Still take the bus to campus, go to lectures, finish my studies at the library and come back home around 8. I only wish my father was here to watch me graduate from UCLA and take a ride around town in the 20 one last time...

A lot has changed over the years. The Wilshire/Vermont station used to have plenty of open spaces, open air and a clean, reformed look. Today it is a bustling city center. Plenty of office staff come to lunch at the many eateries, the subway as usual draws a large following from the North Hollywood crowd, and the residents enjoy the urban lifestyle from their perched view of downtown. I enjoy the station simply because it has such a profound effect on my everyday life. Can you imagine the attachment to a bus stop for someone who has frequented the place every weekday for the past seven years. At first, it was an obsession with city life, the views, the people watching, the beauty of the road. In my freshmen/sophomore years, it became a necessity. The morning commute gave me enough time to review my notes, prepare myself mentally for the day and perhaps even a chance to brush off those sleepy eyes from having to wake up so early... Today it is a trip down memory lane. I am more consumed with nostalgia of times past, of people I met at the bus, and the places I enjoy.

Even the bus drivers have changed faces over the years, each were a special friend to me. I had some of my best ideas in the 720, something about the journey brought out the creative side in me. I always had a notebook handy. I always sat in the window aisle in the rear of the bus. That was my comfort zone. There were times when I craved that forty minute journey because it helped me relax after a long final, or brainstorm or a research paper, or simply steal me away into a conversation with someone on a bus. I met my best friend on the 720, an Australian expat looking to get into screenwriting in Hollywood. Like numerous waiters that rely on the 720 for their daily commute, Jake has an incredible positive attitude. Throughout his many misadventures with the screen writing community, he has held strong and is starting to find his niche. He was there for me when I needed him most, our conversations always the highlight on my day along the 720 heading to downtown LA from Westwood.

People from all walks of life take the 720. Such is the nature of this city, it attracts professionals, artists, athletes, students, seniors, and the occasional job seeker stretched across the long, slithering body of the Rapid. Some people like to read books, other tab through the local newspapers, some hastily fingering their flip phones, while others playing along with the bus tv. I personally like to tilt my head towards the window and enjoy the passing view. To me, the view is delectable. Its a live sociology class, on urban gentrification, class clusters, and of course, the lifestyles of the extremely wealthy and the abject poor...yes, all this in a forty minute ride across one of most classic routes of Los Angeles. There is so much history, architecture, culture and entertainment across the stretch of Wilshire, its little wonder I have been a fan of the 720 for so long. The Solair Wilshire complex, the Wilshire/Vermont complex, Blu residences, and the numerous Wilshire high risers have been sprouting all across Westwood for the entirety of my college career. I have seen life change all around me. The ladies I met four years ago are now working professionals, my boys are now moving to their own business ventures along Wilshire, some of my senior friends who I talked politics with on the bus are no longer in this world. Change has brought a new president in office. The breeze of change has changed the bus of choice from 20 to 720 to 920. All that has not changed is me. I am still the same guy. Still the same boy that traveled from Wilshire/Vermont seven year ago.

My father always said if you want something bad enough, no obstacles can stand in your way to your destiny. I have had to endure last minute interviews, blistering weather, congested traffic, fifty seven final exams, thirty two research papers, and twenty book reviews--*all* of which had a beginning, or final review in the rapid bus. I also made numerous friendships, had a job offer on the spot and shared a lovely, but short love affair with a wonderful woman. I have had a lifetime of stories on a forty minute ride across town. If I could write a book today, "my life on the metro" would be an appropriate choice. Lets leave that for another occasion, this one I dedicate to the loving memory of my "paa".....I only wish I could savor another ride with you.