

PIPE DREAMS & SHORT CHANGE

Dear Diary,

Today I got in a fight with a homeless busker. No, it isn't something I'm proud of, but it really wasn't my fault!

It all started when I was walking through the tunnel from Wynyard Station to Kent Street. Occasionally there'll be a busker there flouting their wares (at times literally) to earn a bit of dosh. And there are certain days where, you know - the birds are singing, the sun is shining and sometimes you just decide that today 'I am going to do something good for humanity. Today is the day I make a difference to someone's life'. Today was that day for me.

So there I was, jostling along in the mob doing my best to find a bit of space that wasn't co-inhabited by a thousand other blinkered, overworked slaves being horded into their corrals (professionally referred to as cubicles or work spaces), when I saw him - the homeless busker. Quite a traditional specimen too - long hair, ginger beard, head down as he flittered away on his pan pipes.

That started me thinking.

In the cut throat world of street theatre slash begging, I like most others am looking for something a little more out of the ordinary than the sad tale on cardboard or a shoebox beside a sleeping body. A little bit more bang for my buck if you like. We are in a recession you know. Every cent spent counts. Pan pipes - whilst not exactly getting me hot to trot - were at least something I suppose. Not as good as the spoons or contortionism, but an effort nonetheless.

(A couple of weeks ago I watched an old woman ambush a homeless guy who was asleep, back turned to the foot way, on George Street with a can out front of him and a wee sign asking for spare change. She kicked him awake and said that he epitomised all that was wrong with the younger generation of today - they were too lazy to even beg properly anymore. I think she wanted a whole lot extra bang for her buck that lady. She wanted him tap dancing to a six shooter bouncing around his toes!).

Anyhoo ... as I spied the busker who unknowingly was about to hit a small windfall, I attempted to casually flip the coins out of my jeans little pocket (AND by the way, what is with that tiny pocket? You know the one that's a pocket in a pocket? In your jeans. I call it the attic pocket - you know it's there, and you occasionally use it for storage, but deep down you know if you ever want to retrieve anything from the 'attic' it is going to be a lot of hard work and possibly end in tears. Or even arrest. Who invented that pocket anyway? Tom Thumb? You cannot conceivably get anything out of the attic pocket without appearing as though you are suffering severe gastric cramp. Without it looking like you're playing your own pan pipes if you know what I mean. It's not a real pocket. I don't care what anyone says. It's the winger of pockets. You know the old saying - wingers hang around with footballers. Well the attic pocket hangs around with real pockets).

After eventually extricating the coins from my attic pocket, I dropped some silver coins in the open guitar case. (And since when do panpipes come in a guitar case? HmMMM... talk about an

entrepreneurial busker). As I wheeled to leave, all self satisfied and at one with the universe for the good deed I had just carried out, I heard the muttered words 'tight arse'.

I flicked around quicker than a teenagers ponytail to see who it was who had uttered these words of contempt. There was no one around. Just me and the homeless busker. It was him! If there is anything in this world that I despise it is ungrateful homeless buskers/beggars. Hey - put a price on it if you think it's worth it!

'What did you say?' I said, pushing the words through clenched teeth.

'I beg your pardon?' The homeless busker retorted, acting all innocent. 'I didn't say anything.'

'You called me a tight-arse. You know you did. Where do you get off sunshine, poncing away on your pipes from a guitar case and then sledging people for donating money to you? Hey?' I was fired up.

'I didn't call you a tight bum or arse or anything. I was playing 'Fernando'.'

'By Abba?'

'Yes.'

'Nice choice. There was something in the air that night, the stars were ... enough of that! You called me a tight-arse for bothering to give you some money.'

'You gave me sixty five cents you tight arse. I saw the goldies you had in that little pocket. You kept them didn't you? Why didn't you give something that hurt?'

'Hurt?' I said 'Hurt? My ears were hurting from the moment I got off the train listening to that half goat, half man gibberish pipe playing you claim is Fernando! I'll give you hurt you ungrateful ...' and with that I grabbed his beard and proceeded to swing him around like I was trying out for the Olympic discuss event.

After goodness knows how many revolutions I flew into a wall, his beard strands in my hand, and slumped to the ground. I was dizzy and feeling a wee bit nauseous as well.

The busker was jumping around like a scalded cat grabbing his chin. Shouting, yelling abuse. He wasn't playing 'Fernando' anymore that was for sure.

Before long a small crowd of passersby had gathered and thinking he was performing some sort of abstract artistic dance they began to shower his guitar case with piles of shrapnel. He wasn't dumb our Mr Homeless Busker and he played it up no end. I could see him smiling and lapping it up as I watched him between the legs of the crowd. He was producing moves that would make Elaine out of Seinfeld blush.

Just about ready to rise and leave the dancing busker to his fortunate ways I was kicked brutally in the ribs by an old woman. The same old woman I had watched assault a homeless beggar days earlier.

'You young folk...' She bellowed '... can't even be bothered to get a begging box now, hey. Lazy!' She trotted away muttering to herself like a mad woman.

I guess some days are like that - no matter how much you want to change (or short change)the world!