

Here's a memory . . .

Georgia, Chynna and I take a stroll into the city. In Northbridge, many cultures mix. On the sidewalks below, blood spatters the concrete. For a country that is described as a "cultural melting pot", the cultures clash too frequently for ones liking. Dollar coins lay close by to the dried pools of blood. Showing our lack of conscience, we pick them up, laughing. We walk past a bar. Inside are raised voices in a language I cannot pinpoint, but anger is a tone every human recognizes. Inside the many food stores, one can buy a meal with the "authentic" taste of any country they choose. Australians and immigrants work and live beside one another but there still continues to be discord within a so-called "accepting" society.

We catch the bus home as it's getting darker quicker seeing as its winter. And also because our parents have hammered in the "you can't trust the people who come out at night" line. What does that teach us? That we shouldn't trust people? That being taught to be cynical about people's intentions from a young age will keep us safe?

We go out that night. I hear Georgia swear and I look up ahead. I notice a strange glow just visible between some buildings. Georgia calls the police while we all look on in amazement at the car someone has just set on fire. We see a for sale sign on the windshield just before the glass cracks and the seats ignite in the front. A man drives past in his car then reverses back slowly to watch the car burning. A police wagon comes and a policeman jumps out armed with a tiny fire extinguisher. The little things spray is so pathetic that we burst out laughing. A man dressed like a Columbian drug lord saunters down the opposite side of the street. He notices us and calls out "Hey ladies!" Even with the police present, we panic and sprint for home.

The next day we walk past the burnt out car. Georgia sits on it eating an orange. I take a photograph.

We walk along a quieter route leading to the city stores. Unfortunately, the area is locked. A man makes a comment to us about how irritating it is. Georgia tells us it's to keep homeless people out as we begrudgingly make our way down the stairs, Chynna laughs. "What?" we ask. She points to the "nest" below. We crack up, far from understanding that the sample sized shaving cream, cucumber and "bed" of assorted clothing including lacy women's underwear would be all the occupant of this tiny space under concrete stairs has.

So many people, us included, are going into the city for end of financial year sales. And just metres away from the stores are the conditions of a homeless

person's living space. Our "lucky" country where everyone is supposedly considered equal.

Chynna's aunt drops me off at the train station. I sit on the cold benches. I strike up conversation with a man next to me while waiting for the Australind. The train arrives we pause, both thinking of how to say goodbye to someone you will probably never see again. We settle for "Have a nice week." As he gets up and walks away, I realise, the owner of the cane that I thought had been left next to him. Is it now the kind of world where experiences of kindness come from those who have suffered setbacks in their lives? Or is it we, the "able-bodied" and "lucky" inhabitants of the world that are suffering because of our unwillingness to accept and understand?

One of the carriages on the train I walk through, is almost entirely occupied by people with disabilities. A girl walks unsteadily up and down the aisle. On my way back, someone calls my name. I turn and spot a boy I travel to school with. He asks if he can come and sit with me. I answer yes hesitantly, thinking of how he can often turn into a monster on the bus. In the next carriage, he comments on those he was sitting with. "_____ speeds". I wince, trying not to feel like I'm betraying every single polite and friendly person by not saying a thing in their defence. I'd rather not make waves and by thinking this, I become another example of what it is like today, rather sit by than fail. I myself play the part of the deluded dreamer, expecting respect and rights but giving no indication as to why I deserve them.

The train arrives at Bunbury station and everyone rushes for the exit. A young woman struggles off last with two huge boxes in her arms. She goes back onto the train, emerging with several bags. She looks at the luggage uncertainly, unsure of how she will manage to carry the luggage to where she is headed with her little girl. It's 9 pm. I get that heavy feeling in my chest and I think it's from my conscience. I summon up the very small amount of courage in my body and walk over to offer help. Halfway over, a man who spoke to me on the train offers to help and takes some of the luggage. We walk to the taxi rank and then the man and I walk back to the platform. I spot my brother's car. I say goodbye to the man and tell him to enjoy his holiday. "I live here!" he replies. I laugh and say enjoy it then. I remember the crushed beer can in his hand on the train as he throws his hands up in the air and asks "How could I not?"

I smile, walking away while thinking of plenty of reasons. But not voicing my opinions because raining on the happy go lucky stranger's attitude with my idea of the half empty glass is not a view I wish to demonstrate.

By Teneal J Coad