

our Jewber s Here

By

Neal Gardner

WHY I LIKE IT: *Drama Editor JOHN SULLIVAN writes...* The structure of this short autobiographical play mirrors the actual details of an Uber driver's daily grind. Only this playwright chooses to focus primarily on the positive / joyful elements of his interactions with passengers and his efforts to learn from, joke with, comfort and commiserate with his fares – all with a deftly light touch. The author transitions from passenger to passenger via short monologues that put what he's learned in perspective, and offer personal details on his own motives for doing this work. There's nothing dire here, nothing off-the-charts traumatic, but the author does manage to comment in a short exchange with his passenger on our current anti-immigrant social dynamic. All within a positive exchange that briefly assuages the anxieties of one of his fares, but also underscores the damage done by racism to the necessary systemic trust that undergirds pluralistic democratic societies. A very positive experience with an abrupt, but perfect, conclusion to this piece.

Your Jewber Is Here

A One Act Play

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SYNOPSIS

The view from the front seat of an uber by a mature Jewish male. Externally expressed inner thoughts about the good, the bad and the bizarre passenger stories that slip through the rear door and settle in the back seat.

Cast of characters:

Male driver

1 Female passenger(s)

1 Male passenger(s)

SETTING

One car interior represented by 1 chair in the front, 2 chairs in the rear

PRESENT DAY

SCENE 1

A car. Front seat, back seat, accessories

DRIVER

It's 7 am and my Uber app pings for a pickup on Palm Beach Island. I make my way through downtown, over the bridge, passing my old synagogue and a quick left to pick up a guy in his late thirties. Off we go to Boyton. I hop on the highway and learn he's coming off his shift as a concierge at one of those ritzy condo buildings. After 15 minutes I see in the rear view mirror that he's fidgeting. Something's not quite right. He leans forward and asks me to pull over. I-95 is bumper to bumper, so I work my way over to the shoulder. As he's getting out he asks me if I have a tissue. Nope, just a towel, so I reach down onto the floor and hand it to him. Then it hits me. A tissue? To take a pee? . Huh uh. He walks 20 feet away, in clear view of passing traffic, down go his pants and yeah, you guessed it, . Right there. Squatting on I-95.

I assume I have your attention now, right?

See, all of us are surrounded by our usual crowd. Co-workers, buddies , Facebook friends and family. How often do we get to REALLY meet the outside world? People not in our circle. Maybe standing at the checkout line, looking at their food choices, what they're wearing, how they take money out of their wallet. Or the gas station, watching jalopies pull up next to Jaguars? Asking ourselves why each person ended up with their set of wheels? Which life choices made the difference?

Every day, I get to open 12 to 15 presents. The car stops, the door opens, and that gift slips into my back seat. I can't wait to open it. I can't wait to unwrap the horror, the funny, the sad and the irony that comes dressed up as humans. Sometimes you reach across the street, other times...it's around the world...Your Jewber is one minute away.....

A man of Indian descent gets in

DRIVER

Good morning !

PASSENGER

Hello

DRIVER

Hey, (*pointing*) help yourself to some water, there's power for your phone, there's even wifi if you want to log on.

PASSENGER

Thank you. This is very nice.

DRIVER

I have you going to F P & L on Metro ?

PASSENGER

Yes

DRIVER

What do you do there?

PASSENGER

Computer engineer.

DRIVER

I gather from your accent, you're from India? What part?

Chennai

PASSENGER

DRIVER

Chennai? Don't think I've....How long have you been here?

PASSENGER

Almost two years

DRIVER

Well, if it's not too late, Welcome !

PASSENGER

(smiling) Thank you

DRIVER

For whatever it's worth, people like you who come here with your expertise....you make this place a better country. Sothank you.

PASSENGER

(Slowly) That's not something we hear too often. Especially now.

DRIVER

Yep, not a fan of The Orange Guy.

PASSENGER

(momentary silence)

We are very scared. *(his voice starts breaking up)* . We don't know if we can stay and work....We don't know if there is going to be a knock on our door.....we don't...

DRIVER

(beat) I'm sure you'll be fine.....*(short silence)*...
So what do you miss most about your home?

PASSENGER

The food ! And Family ...

DRIVER

Do you get to go back and see them?

PASSENGER

No...Facetime...

(thinking) I miss the smell of my country. Does that make sense?

DRIVER

I keep a bottle of Febreze in the car to remove the smell of some of *this* country...

PASSENGER

The uncertainty is very tough...

It's not easy, every day to worry about someone maybe harming you. When you least expect it....walking to the store, waiting for a ride....

DRIVER

I hear ya. I'm a liberal Democrat living in Ibis Golf and Country Club.

STOPPING CAR

Well, I got you here in one piece.

PASSENGER

Thank you.

DRIVER

You're very welcome.

PASSENGER

(reaching out and touching the Driver's arm) No, really...thank you.

DRIVER

(as passenger gets out) Good.....*(door slams)* luck...

“

SCENE 2

DRIVER

(Out of car, center downstage)

The stories, the lives, the dreams of people come and go every day as my Uber sign illuminates the windshield and leads me into the strange, the uplifting, the bizarre and the WTF moments.

I mean, one time an elderly woman got in and quickly announced “Dammit, I forgot to put my teeth in.”

Or the morning a blind young man, using a white cane to feel and tap his way through life asks me if my shirt was dirty.

It’s 5:10 a.m. and I’m sure every driver has a story like this but in mine I discovered two things. One was: When else was I going to get the chance to speak to a stripper for 15 minutes and SHE’S paying me?

BACK SEAT DOOR OPENS, SCANTILY CLAD WOMAN IN HER 20’S GETS IN.

DRIVER

Welcome ! Make yourself comfortable...*(gesturing)* Help yourself to some water, power for your phone, there’s even wifi if you want... Good morning....or evening...

PASSENGER

Thanks...

DRIVER

Good night tonight? Crowded?

PASSENGER

Not bad...pretty busy.

DRIVER

How long you been working at here?

PASSENGER

Dancing? I've been there about 2 years. Hey, can you turn the music up? I love this song..

DRIVER

Wow, two years...What's your stage name?

PASSENGER

Chardonnay

DRIVER

So I assume I have to be over 21 to be around you?

PASSENGER

(she laughs) turn it up, turn it up ! I love this part *(she mimics the lyrics)*

DRIVER

Is Rachel's a good place to work? Or are all the places pretty much the same?

PASSENGER

Rachel's takes care of us. The girls know that down in Miami the only way to make real money is to have sex with the guys. It's better up here in Palm Beach. Ft. Lauderdale is okay too. You don't have to do that other stuff to make a living.

DRIVER

Interesting...hey , just curious...What was it like the first time you took your clothes off in public?

PASSENGER

(after a small laugh) Honey, I was so drunk I had no idea what the fuck I was doing.

DRIVER

Last week I picked up a guy leaving Rachel's and he was drunk as hell. He gets into the car and kept muttering " I can't believe how much money I spent, I can't believe how much money I spent." I asked him how much, like a couple of hundred bucks? He says "She took me for \$4000!

PASSENGER

I believe it. Happens a lot.

DRIVER

I asked him what happened and he says "She was so nice to me" I said "of course she was nice to you. She's a stripper and it's her job to TAKE MONEY FROM YOU".

PASSENGER

Some of these guys get out of control

DRIVER

Who's your best customer? Is there a certain type of guy that sets off alarms and you know you've got a live one?

PASSENGER

I try and stay away from the young guys. They don't have much and they have no problem getting laid. But guys in their forties and fifties....they get it. To them it's just about the fantasy.

DRIVER

And your parents? What do they think about what you do?

PASSENGER

My father has no idea. I told him I'm a bartender. But my mother knows. She isn't crazy about it but she knows it pays the bills. She worries though.
(she takes out her phone and scrolls through pictures). Hey, look at this...

DRIVER

I don't want to kill us *(he strains to turn and look quickly)*

PASSENGER

I design custom jewelry...here, here *(she is scrolling)* . Look at this one....

DRIVER

Nice. Really cool. Where do you sell it?

PASSENGER

On line mostly. Sometimes Rachels lets me sell there. I want to do a bunch and go to a flea market or something.

DRIVER

Sounds like a plan. How did you learn to do this stuff?

PASSENGER

I don't know...just picked it up...got pretty good at it don't ya think?

DRIVER

I do...good luck with it...

PASSENGER

I don't want to dance the rest of my life, you know what I mean?

DRIVER

I do.

PASSENGER

What's up with you? How long you've been driving?

DRIVER

Me? A couple of years, I just do this a few times a week to stay off the golf course, otherwise I'd be out here like 7 days a week.

PASSENGER

You like it? You don't look like the usual UBER driver. Nice car....

DRIVER

I do...it's interesting....I hit the road about 3 in the morning ,work until about 10...I dictate all the crazy shit into my Ipad and someday it'll find it's way into a book.... (*contemplating*) I've always wanted to write....

PASSENGER

Hey, (*she laughs a bit*) we can share a booth at the flea market. My jewelry, your book.

DRIVER

(*squinting out the window*) 2250....is it on the right or left?

PASSENGER

(*she points*) Just past that green van. (*pausing*) right here...great...

DRIVER

Alrighty Miss Chardonnay, thank you very much....have a good one.

PASSENGER

You don't mind if I tip you in singles do you? *(she is counting out one dollar bills and hands them to him)*

DRIVER

(holding his hand out, palm up) God knows where these have been.

PASSENGER

Actually, these are from a bracelet I sold today. *(she gets out)*

DRIVER

You've got a head start on making our dreams come true !

PASSENGER

Ha! You'll catch up.

DRIVER

You're right, because this is going in my book !!

DOOR SLAMS

SCENE 3

DRIVER

I'll never forget the time I had a gay man in the car who was attending a Young Republicans Convention. I asked him how he can support people who want to deny him the right to pursue his private, happy life ? He said he wanted to work from within, to be an integral part of that party so they can see his value as an American and being gay didn't mean he wasn't worthy of their respect. If nothing else, I admired his thoughtful approach and I wished him luck.

A man in his 40's gets in the back seat.
(Darkened back seat)

Uber is pretty adamant about not discussing divisive subjects with your passengers. They actually recommend that you talk about the weather. Which always confused me how far to go. Do I stick to the usual, "we need some rain" or "it's going to be a hot one" or do I veer into the world of isobars and the Southern Oscillation Index? Sometimes, I just can't help myself....

A man in his 40's gets in

Good morning....everything work out? I don't get too many calls for Emergency room pick ups

PASSENGER

Good morning..yes, it was nothing. I thought I had Covid but everything was negative.

DRIVER

What made you think you had it?

PASSENGER

I was having trouble breathing.

DRIVER

Did you lose your taste?

“

PASSENGER

No, but I haven't eaten in a while....

DRIVER

They could never ask me if I've lost my sense of taste. My wife is such a bad cook I haven't tasted anything in 40 years.

PASSENGER

(laughs) I'm sure she isn't that bad.

DRIVER

She's not, but that line always gets a laugh...

PASSENGER

How long have you been married?

DRIVER

Almost 45 years .

PASSENGER

The Good Lord has blessed you.

DRIVER

I like to think we did this on our own.

PASSENGER

Not a believer huh? I turned my life over to our Lord Jesus Christ ten years ago and he saved my life. You should consider accepting Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

DRIVER

Thanks, but I'm good. I was Bar Mitzvahed 52 years ago and never looked back.

PASSENGER

You're Jewish?

DRIVER

In a cultural sense.

PASSENGER

I love The Jew.

DRIVER

You make it sound like we're a thing. Like I love my Buick

PASSENGER

I've been an ordained minister for nine years. I am following God's plan.

DRIVER

Really? This is great....You know, we are told not to discuss politics or religion with our passengers, but I've got some questions that always bother me....do you mind?

PASSENGER

Not at all...

DRIVER

I live my life with two beliefs. One, is do no harm. The other is whatever works. If something works in your life to help you deal with life's travails, go for it. So I totally respect anything you want to believe in. But the concept of God....I keep hearing how God is good...

PASSENGER

Yes, he is. He is a loving God.

DRIVER

So how does he let some guy walk into a school and blow the heads off twenty kindergartners? Where exactly was he that day? Who exactly was he loving?

PASSENGER

That's an excellent question...we don't always have the answers, sometimes we only see a portion of the answer. In Deuteronomy 29:29 we are told "the secret things belong to the Lord".

DRIVER

So here's the thing...that answer works for you, and I respect that, but can you see how it leaves me a bit lacking?

PASSENGER

Once we believe that God is in control, our response to bad things is completely different. God gave us free will and even though humans were created to do good they can also choose to do evil. We cannot blame God when humans choose to do the opposite of that which they were created to do.

DRIVER

That seems abnormally convenient.

PASSENGER

God created free will so that humans can truly love him and each other.

DRIVER

I'm just not buying it...but you know what? We have totally different viewpoints, and we were able to have an honest discussion. That's something to take away....

PASSENGER

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. John 15:12

DRIVER

Here we are...by the walkway okay?

PASSENGER

Perfect (*handing the driver a card*) here is where I give sermon. Come by some day, let me help you accept Jesus into your life. (*he gets out*). In the meantime , I will pray for you and your wife.

DRIVER

Thank you, that's very thoughtful. (*pause*). Maybe just have Him (*points heavenward*) send a brisket I can taste?

SCENE 4

DRIVER

I picked up a woman at 5 am at the Emergency entrance at a local hospital. She was being discharged and they sent her home with a number of hospital goodies. How delighted and appreciative I was when she offered me her unused barf bag.

One afternoon from a mansion on Palm Beach Island, I picked up Maria who was working as a maid at a private residence. I took her home, to a trailer park in not the nicest of neighborhoods and wondered what she must be thinking? To work in such opulence day after day only to come home to a place that looked like Central Casting for a Jerry Springer Show. Chaufferring her, sitting in my new Lexus, I thought if maybe just for a moment, she got to feel how the people she works for feels. She may never know affluence but for the twenty minute ride, maybe she felt equal.

A young couple (Passenger M is male, Passenger F is female) gets the car, lots of energy

PASSENGER M

Hey, Hey, Hey !

DRIVER

Hey back at ya ! How you guys doing?

PASSENGER M

Doing great !

DRIVER

PBI...which airline?

PASSENGER M

American

PASSENGER F

Honey, did you remember the passports?

PASSENGER M

I did. Wait, did you give me yours?

PASSENGER F

(slapping him playfully) Don't scare me like that ! Could you imagine if we forgot them and missed our flight?

DRIVER

Passports ? Sounds like a serious trip . Where are you off to?

PASSENGER M

Greece and then Italy !

PASSENGER F

It's our honeymoon!

DRIVER

That's great ! When did you guys get married?

PASSENGER F

Two weeks ago from tomorrow. The 7th.

DRIVER

Congrats ! Two weeks ? And they said it would never last... I'm coming up on 43 years! Wait, 43 or 44, I keep forgetting..., at this point it doesn't really matter.

PASSENGER F

Wow ! That's amazing. Give us the secret. I haven't run into too many people like you. That's a long time !

DRIVER

The secret? Never see each other. I work nights, she works days. *(they laugh)*. No, not really. I think the secret is friendship. You need to *like* the person you're marrying. Your spouse should be the person in a room filled with people, the one you would most want to hang with.

PASSENGER M

I can see that.

DRIVER

Because when the passion turns into predictability you'll always be left with a friend. And that's a good thing. There's comfort in comfort.

PASSENGER F

I worry about losing the mystery in each other.

DRIVER

You want mystery? My wife won't let me see her butt. I think I caught a glimpse of it in 1974. It's kinda like Haley's Comet. You see it once and that's it for fifty years. My biggest fear is that one day, God forbid, she gets in a terrible accident and all that's left is her butt. When the police ask me to identify the remains, I can't. "Don't know what to tell you officer but I haven't seen her butt since Carter was President. It could be hers, but who knows?"
(they both laugh).

PASSENGER F

Does she know that you say those terrible things about her?

DRIVER

Know? She encourages it ! Sense of humor is definitely a necessity if you're going to be with the same person for half a century.

PASSENGER M

I need to remember that. I think we are on the same page.

DRIVER

Plan on having kids?

PASSENGER F & M *(simultaneously)*

F: yes

M: maybe

(they look at each other quizzically)

DRIVER

Timetable?

PASSENGER F & M *(simultaneously)*

F: soon !

M: in a few years

(they look at each other quizzically again)

DRIVER

Well, I'm glad we got that sorted out.

Here we are...got you here in one piece. Let me just pull in front of that Jeep and I'll pop the trunk.

(they get out)

Have a great time. *(pause)* And enjoy the journey...

PASSENGER M

Thanks man...looking forward to some great food in Italy.

DRIVER

Not THAT journey.

(he motions with his hand pointing to each of them).

This one...

PASSENGER F AND PASSENGER M

(slowly while looking at each other and simultaneously):

We will.....

DRIVER

(to Passenger M)

And take a picture of her ass...you never know when you'll need it !

DRIVER

Sometimes, the stories are just not believable. Robert told me he speaks 17 languages, including some obscure dialects. The CIA recruited him out of college. He told me while he was in the Jowzjan Province he overheard a group of Afghan men who were hired by the U.S. government to lead our soldiers to safety. However, the Afghans were planning to set up the Americans to be ambushed where there would be significant casualties. What the Afghans didn't realize was that Robert spoke Waigali, one of those seldom used languages, and unraveled the planned attack, saving countless lives. I kept thinking to myself, "Yeah, sure. This sounds ridiculous, right?" So when he showed me the story and photo of President Obama awarding a medal of honor to linguist Robert Shannon for his courage, I was speechless.

God damn ! I had a real life hero in my Uber.

(A woman gets into the back seat)

DRIVER

Good morning We're going to the Walgreens on Congress? Do you work there ?

PASSENGER

I don't want to talk.

BLACKOUT

END OF PLAY

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS: *For me, writing is the end result of observing. Be it an event, a person, an object... whatever. I am driven to tell the myriad stories that intersect our lives and our perspectives. When, out of boredom, I decided to try my hand at being an Uber driver, I had no idea what to expect. Soon it became evident that every time that back door opens and a passenger slips into the back seat, it's like opening a present. Their stories, appearances, accents and attitudes uncovered the complexities that is our world. From the preposterous to the tragic, the ridiculous to the passionate, their stories were told to me in snippets of time, measured by the miles we shared. Two of my literary influences, Woody Allen and Neil Simon have taught me to see the absurd and ponder it, witness the fragility of our condition and celebrate it.*

My car may glide effortlessly along, swallowing up the road on our way to places I never knew existed, but on the journey I am witness to emotions and dreams of people who with a swipe on their phone, have welcomed me into their orbit.

*And for you, just as I tell my passengers when our destination is met:
"We're here. Now get the hell out!"*

AUTHOR BIO: Neal has worn many hats in his journey but this latest foray into playwrighting has been the most rewarding. Born in The Bronx, raised in Roslyn, Long Island, his move to Florida became official when in 1977 he surrendered his season tickets to the New York Jets, replacing those tortuous Sundays with worse punishment, season tickets to the Miami Dolphins. Father to twin girls, Poppu to four grandkids and husband for almost a half century to an award winning actress who pushed him to move ideas into keystrokes .

Thank you Patricia.

Neal is thinking about writing another play, tentatively titled :

" Does My Rabbi Have A Hamstring?"

Look for it wherever hamstrings are sold.