



English EDUtain SAT and higher...

Chris

::+Alienated Youth+::©

While touring through the US, on our way from Las Vegas down to San Diego, we stopped in Barstow, CA. This small town is not only a very important railroad track but its' mainstreet is the legendary ROUTE 66. And this is where I met Chris.

I have recognized him pretty soon, sitting outside Starbucks, in a corner, with his book and his dog. Silently reading and the dog was sitting next to him - tail-wagging and friendly. No barking. Seemingly pretty young. Chris looked like living on the street , but somehow dignified. We were waiting for our "Caramel Macchiato" as Chris came in. I thought he might not be welcomed with the same overwhelming politeness that the young lady behind her counter was flowing over with. And there we went: her smile somewhat froze. We took our coffee and went outside. A few minutes later, Chris came out - either with a cup, and slipped round the corner. While drinking and sitting on the chair in front of Starbucks, I took a closer look at the people passing Chris: Most of them didn't even care, some of them had scornful looks, very few leaned down and supposedly gave him some dollars. They opened the door with a feeling of relief, having done their good deeds for today.

I was curious and therefore I took my camera and two dollars and went over to him. Short before I was close enough, he looked up, smiled at me. He really smiled at me - openly, friendly - no trace of a doubt or mistrust. He must have gone through things, but seemingly, it has not changed his way of somewhat being like the weather here in California: sunny and bright. So I started talking:

Me: "Excuse, me..."

Chris: "Yes, mam'...."

Me: "May I take some picture of you and your dog?"

(I handed the two bills over)

Chris:"Sure..."

He tried to sit his dog, it was jumping around, happy that somebody might be willing to play. I took some shots and sat down. His cutie came up to me again and started nibbling my hands - joyfully excited that someone took the time to pet him.

Me: "May I ask you some questions? I got a youth project in Germany called Alienated Youth



and I collect stories. Would you tell me yours?"

Chris: "Sure, what do you want to know?"

Me: "For how long have you been living on the streets?"

Chris: "I have been hitting the road with fifteen, and have fed myself with odd jobs ever since."

Me: "Where do you come from right now?"

Chris: "Me and my friend have been to my cousins' place and worked there for a couple of days. We jumped on the night train and left it here at the station."

Me: "So you don't miss your family?"

Chris: "Hell, no! My home was a drugs place - my family is in Meth and i only saw my parents 'in and out' of prison. I also saw people taking the stuff and I knew, I don't wanna end up like this. So I left."

Me: "And how do you make your living?"

Chris: "We take the large freight trains moving on this track. So we pop in and out at places, looking for jobs, do them and then move on."

He starts to grin and adds: "You'd better not get caught - could be mean!"

Me: "Is there something like a home for homeless people, we got something called homeless hostel in Germany."

Chris: "Jaaa, we got accommodation like this, but I don't go there. It's dirty, you got bugs everywhere, and people steal your stuff. No, I don't want to get sick because of the dirt and the ticks, and I wanna keep my things with me."

Me: "Are you somewhat safe?"

Chris: "(nods)... Well, you need to watch your back - so city authorities want to keep their places clean and there is wackos outside. They are either drinking or taking drugs, or both - those are the ones who really bug you. But somehow they don't seem to mess with me - maybe because of my tats.*(Chris smiles and points at his tattoos)*

I don't drink, I don't do drugs - I sometimes smoke, but that's' it. Keeps my head clean."

Me: "How do people react?"

Chris: "Most of them simply ignore you. Some hand over a few dollars, but they live and let live. Some parts you better avoid to go, to stay overnight. Police is picky sometimes, we are the streetbombs. But you know the places after a while."

Me: "You don't want to settle one day?"

Chris: "Not now - I like my life. I can do whatever I want. Maybe one day, I don't know."



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Me: "many thanks for sharing your story with me. May I take some pictures again?"

Chris: "Sure, no problem... and thanks for listening!"

I take a few more pictures of the two and hand over my two business cards.

Me: "Could you accidentally get on the internet?"

He nods and takes the cards:

Chris: "Yeah, from time to time I could do so."

I explain my project quickly and he likes the idea.

We say goodbye, I wish him all the best and leave. While walking back to the car I am still a bit stunned by his kind and cautious way. I ask myself right now - here in this moment - when writing this, whether he really gets to reading this. Maybe he remembers the German, chatting him up and how his dog was nibbling my hands because he wanted to play.

Right now in this very moment, Chris, I wish you luck, hope, that you and your two buddies are safe, maybe sleeping, maybe jumping off the train right now, maybe working, or even sitting at the corner at Starbucks and reading another book. Maybe this time it is another one.

Take care!

