

# Tales From the End of the Bus Line: Boscawen Boy in Boyle Heights

written by Megan and William Broughton | August 14, 2015



[Tales From the End of the Bus Line](#) is a long-distance collaboration between daughter/father Megan and Bill Broughton to collect the many adventures of Bill's young adulthood in Van Nuys, California. Installments (and photos that should or shouldn't see the light of day, if we're lucky) will be penned by the two of them.

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*In my third year of college, I took a class dubbed "LA Urbanscapes" which consisted of tooling around various areas of the city with upwards of 20 other people and our instructor, Harry Gamboa Jr. Early on, Harry lectured us on a street corner to always be aware of strangers' hands in a crowd, and to monitor them. Several weeks later, he instructed each of us to give something, whether a physical gift or a simple "hello," to 100 strangers on Broadway between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>. He floated us through the USC Medical Center while murmuring ghost stories of human medical experiments gone awry. Later still, we paraded east on Cesar Chavez Blvd for hours, ducking into bodegas and discussing the politics of freeways, and losing factions of the class to taxis along the way. At some point, he herded us across Alameda toward the Japanese American National Museum's steps, shoved candles in our hands (I'd like to think he had a stash in his Mary Poppins backpack, though it's more likely he bought out a street vendor in a flurry of action too quick to track), and arranged us in rows to join a televised vigil for the Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami.*

*One of his unofficial side benefits of the class was to see how many laws he could get us to unwittingly break. There's probably a section of this city where you aren't allowed to breathe, so this wasn't too tricky of a feat. Standing shoulder to shoulder on a Gold Line platform in the middle of the 210 and wordlessly yelling at the San Gabriels is fresh on my mind. There is a fine for that in the triple digits, by the way. Harry orchestrated each minor offense to be poetic.*

*Shenanigans aside, Harry first and foremost taught us how to walk in this city (this was an unpardonably difficult skill for some people to comprehend), how to adapt to and respect your environment, and most of all how to experience and value it fully.*

*Dad was very amused to hear about our walks through Boyle Heights in particular.*

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It was a very pleasant summer evening in 1981 at a restaurant high up on the hill near Universal Studios. At the risk of sounding ancient, none of the

Universal City Walk even existed. It was just the Universal City Studios tour and a restaurant that you had to ride a tram up to. For the life of me, I can't remember the name of that restaurant. You could put a gun to my head this minute, and not even stir the suggestion of name, not even a whisper. All things considered, this thought is hilarious to me now.

I was having dinner with a beautiful mini-skirted girl named Carmen, and thought I was making a good impression, mostly by not being myself. It was actually a double date – my friend Paul had brought his fiancé and we had joined Carmen at the restaurant, since she worked just down the hill. She and Paul's fiancé were friends and had a party one night that I got dragged along to because Paul wanted me to meet Carmen. He thought we would make a good match and since he was engaged thought everyone else had to be too. Paul was not really the best judge of ladies though. This same woman later married him, then divorced him after a year and let him know she was starting court proceedings by moving everything out of their home while he was at work. Paul went home that afternoon to an apartment so empty it didn't even have a roll of toilet paper left in it, and a bank account so empty he couldn't afford to buy one. But all that came later.

That night we ate steak and lobster and bought a bottle of champagne, then spent a few hours working all those calories off on the dance floor. It was a fun time and was over much sooner than I would have liked. We closed the place down at 2 a.m. and walked downhill to the parking lot. Carmen knew I didn't have a car, owning instead a twin cylinder 750 cc Kawasaki, and I kicked it over and let it warm up while she gave me directions to her mother's house in East Los Angeles. We got on the 101 south at Barham Boulevard and rode through Hollywood at sixty miles an hour, cruising slowly, the wind in our faces. This was years before you were required to wear a helmet, and I usually didn't, goggles being the most protection I used. Carmen was snuggled tight against my back, although in retrospect it was probably from the cold, not affection.

All too soon we arrived at a small house in Boyle Heights a few miles east of Downtown. She got off the back of the bike, and laid a hand on the front of my leather jacket. She said she'd like to invite me in, but it was late, and there had been some trouble in the neighborhood with gangs, and maybe it wouldn't be safe. I thought that maybe the night had been more enjoyable for me than her, and she didn't want to be blunt and so was giving me a nice brush off. So I was polite in return, absolutely no reason not to be, and thanked her for a wonderful evening and kissed her goodnight. On the way back to the freeway I had to stop for a red light. There were a group of kids across the intersection with a big old mongrel looking dog, and when I say kids, I mean the oldest looked no more than fourteen. He pointed his finger at me and yelled something I couldn't make out, both because it was in Spanish and also because I was suddenly a lot more focused on the dog, which was hauling ass across the street straight for me. Then just as quickly I refocused on the kid, since I realized he wasn't pointing a finger but a handgun. I ducked, he got off one shot, and I twisted the throttle all the way back and let go of the clutch, skewing the bike slightly sideways, but blasting through the red light and down the street. The freeway entrance

loomed up quickly; by that time I was in third gear and moving about sixty miles an hour, hunched over the handlebars, a hard target to track, much less hit. I held the Kawasaki to a hundred miles an hour all the way north up the 101 until I was back in the San Fernando Valley and didn't go south of the Cahuenga Pass for a couple of years. Never did see Carmen again, either.