

# ADRENALINE RUSH

EXAMINING THE PSYCHOLOGY (AND SANITY) OF PEOPLE WHO PARTICIPATE IN EXTREME SPORTS »

+ VISIT FORT GREENE, BROOKLYN / PROFILE OF IMDB'S CREATOR / WHEN A ROAD WARRIOR'S OFF THE ROAD



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# AMERICAN WAY

AMERICAN AIRLINES + AMERICAN EAGLE

## HEART + SEOUL

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is American's  
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TWICE MONTHLY





# I Don't Believe This

**NEW YORKERS ARE** territorial. After they've chosen their favorite spots, they don't just settle in; they outright entrench. Unlike a lot of neighborhoods around the world where people build their residences first and then wait for the infrastructure to grow around them, in New York City, people move to various neighborhoods in various boroughs because of what's already there. Once there, they assimilate. Once assimilated, they become creatures of habit. And that's when things start to get weird.

When I moved to New York, I tried to become a New Yorker by mimicking what I saw on the streets every day. First came my fashion. Regardless of the season, I wore only undershirts and jeans. Soon, I was wearing only black clothes, which meant black undershirts and jeans. Next came the headphones, which I had sutured into my ears. Then I got a gold chain, followed by a Yankees hat, accented with a Jets jacket. I started talking about the Knicks and how they were playing like a bunch of bums. I always hit my TV because exacting blunt force and fracturing my palm got me better reception. If a cab stopped too close

to me while I was crossing the street, I slammed on its hood and yelled, "Come on, I'm walkin' here!" I started talking to pigeons. I ate my meals on the subway.

All that was left in my metamorphosis from a modest Midwestern caterpillar to an elite East Coast butterfly was to find a neighborhood bar. I lived on 97th Street between 2nd and 3rd avenues. My neighbors were a mosque on one side and a hardware store on the other. A hospital was catty-corner, and the 14 buildings of the Washington Houses projects were across the street. I loved the neighborhood because of the convergence of cultures and the constant motion. But there were no bars.

So I had to take my sandwich on the 6 train in search of my local watering hole. My buddy Scott was bartending at a place called No Idea located at 30 E. 20th St., "Between 19th and 21st" his T-shirt told me. The website elaborated on the atmosphere with the No Idea theme song:

*No Idea bar is a happy place,  
With puppies and rainbows in your face.  
At No Idea bar all your dreams come true,  
You'll ride a whiskey pony,  
And dance with a kangaroo.*

My kind of joint. Many wonderful times were spent at No Idea. My buddy was behind the bar, and on a few occasions, he hired my fiancée to work the beer trough. It didn't matter that I lived five miles away and was beholden to the 6 train or the M15 bus to get me there. On any given night, that's where you'd find me. I got to know the people in that neighborhood, and the storekeepers knew my face, if not my name. For years, I went to No Idea. I could tell you the different colors of bricks of the different buildings from memory. I recognized which cars were still parked on the street — illegally — from the night before. I even knew — by sense of smell — when Scott forgot to clean the bathroom from the night before. And yet I didn't realize, for years, that a bona fide national treasure was right next door.

One night/day, after Scott's shift ended in the early-morning hours and after I tried, albeit unsuccessfully, to relieve the bar of its Stella Artois inventory, he locked up and we walked next door to sit on the stoop and shoot the breeze. It wasn't our stoop, but for all intents and purposes, this was my neighborhood, so I figured no one would mind. I was in the middle of a brilliantly articulated argument about why the Yankees and the Knicks should play each other in a game of BASEketball when I noticed something out of the corner of my eye. I stood up and read, in absolute bewilderment, a plaque that was mounted to the building. I had

to convince myself that the Stella hadn't gotten on top of me, so I read it aloud to Scott: "Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace." Scott started laughing. I can't print what he called me and how he colorfully voiced my daftness, but it was along the lines of: You goofy goose. After all the times we've sat on this stoop for all these years, you never noticed what was right in front of you? You're a silly bird! To heck with you!

This issue of *American Way* takes what's on the surface and uproots it. Fort Greene, Brooklyn, for instance, used to be a forgotten, neglected section of the city. Now it's one of those places where people move on purpose, and not just because they got evicted from their apartment in Prospect Heights (page 32). You've probably visited IMDb.com a thousand times to figure out who played, for instance, Dr. Phillip Barby in *Back to School* (of course, it was Paxton Whitehead). But did you realize that an Englishman who spent his Friday nights pre-Internet watching movie credits and cataloging them — for fun — started the site (page 36)? You road warriors out there: You know the best places to go, for instance, for tofu-infused, Peking-roasted, all-vegetarian beet tips, but do you know how you should interact with your spouse and children when you return home (page 40)? And as for the cover story on Seoul, virtually every other sentence will teach you something new (page 42).

These days, instead of a local New York bar, I have my every-once-in-a-while Dallas-neighborhood ice-cream parlor. But whenever I buy a cone and wander around Dallas, sometimes sitting on random people's patios (because it's my neighborhood too), I keep on the lookout for random plaques. And for all-around general weirdness.

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