

181st**Street.**

This is where I began my life in New York City, eight and a half years ago. I'm standing on a subway platform I have stood on over 300 times before. And, all I can think is "So this is how an expat returns home."



175th Street. As far as expats go, I'm a complete sissy. I've only been out of the City for eight months. I'm back for a wedding. Currently, I'm riding the subway and contemplating an email I received from my Mom. "I know I'll sound like a non-New Yorker, but maybe you should walk or ride the bus or take a cab. The subway has been very dangerous lately," she says.

168th Street. Of course, it has been. She lives in Dallas. Everything about New York screams terror to outsiders. Take a bus?! I don't even take the bus in Ljubljana from Rakova Jelša to BTC. That's the New Yorker in me; no one but cross-towners ever takes the bus. Slovenians think my aversion to buses is crazy; they tell me as much every time I see them at my halfway point on Trubarjeva. I like to walk. Walking in New York is a form of meditation. It's a way to be a part of the crowd and beat the crowd at the same time. Whenever I had a big writing assignment or got dumped by a girl, I'd take to the streets and just hoof around until my mind was clear. I take the same approach in LJ. Column isn't done? Walk it into existence. Miss my friends in the States? Walk it off. But walking is a bother when it's 25 kilometers from where I am to my destination. And a cab?! OK, Mom, as soon as the DNA test comes back saying I'm a Rockefeller...cab it is. Till then...the strap.

145th Street. I'm ticking through all the stops I'll hit on my way downtown in a feverish surfacing of memory that says "Oh yeah, I once belonged here." I eavesdrop on conversations I know nothing about, solely because I have this inherent sense of belonging. That's the expat way. You don't force yourself into the mold you were given, but you move around while the die is cast and become a blurry, ugly version of what you imagine yourself to be.

125th Street. Language changes as you change locales. A Dominican accent here, an East Indian one there. I'm tempted to gesture "Ne hvala" when a woman offers me a deaf alphabet card.

59th Street. I'm immersed in a group of high school students speaking New York street. Idiolect rules in NYC. An unfortunate side effect of that is when I'm in Ljubljana I lapse into it with my colleagues who speak English extremely well. On a trip to Portorož, after spilling through all my American slang, a coworker says to me "I've stopped listening to you; it's too hard to follow." I jokingly reply back "That's OK. I stopped communicating with you hours ago." I don't mean it, but regrettably it is true.

34th Street. I know when I arrive at my old office in one stop, I'll be inundated with articles written in Slovene English. I'll have to cut 1000's of characters to keep cogency. It's daunting...truly.

14th Street. I walk through a gay neighborhood. I think about the college students to the east, the Italian neighborhood further down...the Chinese neighborhood even further. I think about all the Sunday morning dim sum I've had here. The pasta. The gai tom kah. I love this City. I always have, I always will.

Yet, expats are restless. And I can't wait to get back to Ljubljana. ■