

A Chance Encounter

I've been without a van for several years now having become a willing convert to public transportation. I take the bus from Lancaster to Ephrata every Tuesday and Friday when my wife and I do our "locally grown" vegetable shopping at the Central Market in Lancaster, the oldest continuously operating farmer's market in the country. We go in together, then to market and then part ways for the day—she to her work and me to mine after a brief stop at a local cafe. Tuesday, December 10, 2013 was no different except for what was about to transpire on my way back to Ephrata.

I was seated in my usual driver-side seat in the back "raised platform" section. Directly across the aisle from me were two young Hispanic men, probably in their twenties, who were rapidly speaking in Spanish. As the bus rolled along they would break with their Spanish in favor of English and back again--back and forth and back and forth. Seemed like another usual trip for me, that is until one of these guys, the youngest at the aisle seat, saw me take out my iPad from my market bag and turn it on. He said something to me, but I didn't catch it, especially since I kind of "tune out" fellow passengers. "Say what?" I responded, and he repeated in broken English, "What computer is that?" I told him it was a first generation iPad from Apple. He gave a nod and repeated, "iPad." "Yep, I use it to read my email and to search for books." The second slightly older fellow, the one farthest from me right next to the bus window, asked "what do you do?" presumably for a living. I told him I sell old books. "Ah," he nodded, and then told me he has some old books. Oh boy, I thought, here we go with another story of Grandma's attic. He proceeded to tell me that he has a set of old books on wit and humor. I nodded. "I also have a set of books," he seemed to proudly say, "that take up this much space on my bookshelf," while extending his arms to around three feet. "They're called *The Bibelot* and they have an Index book in the middle." I quickly perked up. "Yeah, and they're by a guy called Thomas Mosher," he exclaimed, "you ever heard of him?" Now I do not lie. There I was, on a public bus, rolling through the countryside and farmlands of Lancaster County, and here's this young Hispanic asking me if I ever heard of Mosher! Me... ever heard of Mosher?!

I guess I must have grinned a little and after saying I indeed know about him, I quickly typed in my Mosher Press website and brought up a picture of myself and positioned the iPad across the aisle. The fellow nearest me reached out his hands and his eyes alighted while trying to grab the iPad. I pulled back a little and he said jokingly, "sorry, I thought it was a Christmas present" and both the fellows chuckled. I sort of gave a nice-try smile and pointed out that this was a website devoted to Thomas Bird Mosher, the fellow who put together your set of *The Bibelot* and pointed to my picture. "Hey, cool," the older fellow said, "that's you." "Right, that's me, and this whole website is about Mosher." The older fellow then pointed to the website's picture of Mosher and said, "That's the guy who's pictured in the front of my set of *The Bibelot*." I nodded in the affirmative and threw out a few facts about the books and their editor. He told me he got the set at a library sale in Lancaster

and has been reading it. Good lord! Young, Hispanic, has a set of *The Bibelot*, and actually reads from it! I mean at that point I was totally flabbergasted and amazed that in this hinterland foray into public ‘across culture’ chit-chat onboard a bumpy bus I should be talking about Mosher. I mean what are the chances?!

It turned out that the owner of that set of *The Bibelot* had the interim Index to the set, and not the final Index volume which I explained to him. That quickly the driver pulled over to my bus stop, and I hurriedly got my things together, said a quick good-bye while they were mentioning they were on their way to WalMart, the bus’s last stop of the circuit. I presented the driver with my ten-trip ticket, and stepped off the bus. Off it roared with a slight trail of smoke and I stood there saying to myself, “what just happened?”

Codicil: Only after reflection while walking to the post office did I realize that I never got the fellow’s name, nor ever gave him my name or email address. He didn’t have the final Index to the set which I certainly could have provided him at no charge and which would help to further unlock more of the contents of *The Bibelot* for him. Will I see him again? Chances are about nil. The next day I visited Mark Samuels Lasner at the University of Delaware and told him this little story. He immediately appreciated the funny strangeness of this coincidence and told me I should write it down. Today you read what MSL commanded.

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