

A warm wind of Frito scent and wet TEVAs wafted out of the bright orange Dodge Neon as soon as the blonde with suspiciously perfect teeth cranked down the window. She regarded me blearily with the-luau-was-last-night eyes. I asked for \$10.

This was not, mind you, a curbside drug deal. I was just doing my job: emergency-hire fee collector, Kipahulu, Maui.

Ah, the human variety. I was partly prepared for the parading festival of weirdness by a book I had read years ago—a collection of truth-is-stranger-than-fiction battle tales from the fee collectors working on the Golden Gate Bridge. However, out in the jungly wilds of Kipahulu the working conditions were distinctly more relaxed in a lovely, sort of third-world way, and decidedly less foggy and cold. We didn't have a booth out here, for instance, but we did have a nifty green four-wheel-drive, all-terrain vehicle that we would park under a kukui tree at the entrance of the dirt parking lot. From this haven we would spring out to extract the necessary cash for the government from an endless parade of M&M-colored vehicles, most of them redolent of sweat and fast food moldering in the foot mats.

Looking down into innumerable car windows all day long, I had the feeling that I existed in some other, fractured reality. Human vignettes of infinite variety, framed by the dimensions of a car window, opened to me every few minutes. It was like opening a series of boxes designed by a benevolent and seriously twisted television miniseries writer who just happened to control this segment of my life experience.

There were, for starters, the ubiquitous honeymoon couples. Sunburned, exhausted, and over-stimulated, they lethargically handed me damp cash while the sun winked off as-yet unscratched and very screamingly new wedding rings. Some of them were in mid-argument, some dazed by the beauty of the windward side of the

From the Field

Kipahulu Roundabout



JOHN JENSEN

How many other fee collectors can boast of driving their fee station around?

island. Some were dazed by the illicit purchases they would make from a local kid by the highway on the way to the park, if you know what I mean, and I think you do.

There were the dreamy, distracted lovers, the families who had been in one small car too long, and the little old ladies in aloha-wear from Kansas or Missouri or Florida who tried to feed me through the car window or marry me to their doctor/lawyer/pilot/investment banker sons on the mainland. The locals in jacked-up-there trucks with their benevolent dogs, squirmy, big-eyed kids, and fishing gear in the back. The utterly dislocated Chinese.

There were the sweet Indian families with carsick kids and wives with

emotive brown eyes, the polite and expensively-dressed young Japanese, and local hippie kids, themselves the kids of hippies, finagling to get in free by wielding the potent easy charm of surfers. And, as on Maui everywhere, there were the young "Trustafarians," dreadlocked and wearing 100 percent hemp outfits in muted earth colors—ostensibly humbly living off the land, but in reality incubating turgid trust funds in some Princeton bank.

There were Germans in hilarious swimwear who had printed out a timetable of their day and wanted only coordinates to certain waterfalls, New Yorkers who were clearly disoriented by the natural beauty and lack of pressure to *be* anywhere or *do* anything, and sweetly chatty old folks—some of

whom insisted on knowing everything about my personal life as the chain of rental cars piled up behind them and spilled down the road.

The tour vans would rumble through, wave, and/or hand me a sticky Minit Stop mystery pastry and something cold to drink, smile big, and go on to deposit their geriatric road trip enthusiasts by the visitor center. Hana residents in mufferless "Maui cruisers" would honk and shaka me as they roared past on the road, trailing blue fumes. The occasional mongoose would trot by after a long morning of hovering around the trash barrels, often pausing to swing a pointed brown head in my direction to shoot me a look of pure disdain and impatience. Yellowjacket wasps would loop lazily around the roof of my vehicle, looking for all the world like they were trying to find an out-of-the-way place to grab a nap.

And I'd take a break during the calm periods, my dented and muddy green four-wheel-drive at my back and the view to the ocean in front of me, rain squalls inevitably tracking across the windy channel, thinking that life is the most surreal of all possible experiences.

I'd fold the \$10 bills in front of the bigger bills in my waistpack and think about the inscription on the base of the Statue of Liberty: Give me your poor, your tired, etc. etc. My inscription on the bottom of my own monument might read:

Give me your lost, your hung-over,
your stoned, your bleary
your delirious masses yearning to
be free from the car
and the irritating person you
married
and the whining of the teenagers.

But you can leave the stinky TEVAs in the trunk, if you don't mind, and small bills are always appreciated.

Judy Edwards was a short-term "emergency-hire" fee collector at Kipahulu, Hana. She can be contacted at P.O. Box 1350, Puunene, Hawai'i 96784, 808-579-6408, bodhi@maui.net.

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