

THE FIRST TIME

Back when I lived in a city state with public transportation, I amused myself (in an indulgent way) watching the tourists try to work public transportation for the first time.

I would always think back to my first time. It was downright scary, I remember, not knowing where everything goes and what the rules are and where **you're** supposed to go and all the while still trying to look cool or—at the very least, for reasons of safety—to look as if this weren't your first time.

In some ways, the sight of someone using public transportation for the first time (the second time gets easier, as most public transportation systems work roughly the same) is a sweet reminder of how innocent we all once were.

Until I read Mary Ann Akers' description of Trent Lott's first time.

"I took the Metro for the first time," Lott told the *Sleuth* Thursday afternoon in the makeup room of MSNBC, where he and his new lobbying partner, former Sen. **John Breaux** (D-La.), were fixin' (as Lott says) to do a TV segment.

"He's been standing in front of his house waiting for his car and driver," laughed Breaux from the makeup chair, adding with a tinge of a low-country twang, "He's learning how to hail a cab." (Read: HAY-ul a cab.)

Life in the private sector isn't as cushy as Lott thought it would be. No more free lunches, no more taxpayer-funded car and driver, no more overprotective press secretary guarding him from the pesky media.

Lott says he doesn't drive. He doesn't own a car. Usually, he walks. One day, he says, he walked the 30 or so blocks

from his downtown office on 14th Street Northwest to his home in Southeast Washington on Capitol Hill.

Lott took his first Metro ride ever last weekend, when thousands of tourists were in town enjoying the annual Cherry Blossom Festival. Could there be a more perfect time for a prima donna first-time rider?

"I stood up the whole time," Lott said, smiling, as if he enjoyed it.

Lott really had no idea how to even go about taking public transportation. He didn't know how to use the Metro fare card machines, or how much money to put on his trip ticket, or how to add money to one of the fare cards his wife gave him. Truly: clueless.

It was disturbing enough to have to think about the fact that even Trent Lott would have a first time. That wrinkled old segregationist, indulging in his first time at such an advanced age.

But mostly it's the thought that someone can get through a long life as a public servant without, yet, having had a first time. How can a politician imagine he understands the average American without, ever, living the same commute they live? And for the matter, public transportation is such a celebration of human diversity interacting reasonably harmoniously in tight spaces. How can someone expect to legislate successfully without having every enjoyed such a celebration?