

15 MINUTES

Buy the ticket, take the ride

Life at the Greyhound bus station

BY EVAN WILLIAMS
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Amanda Manzo, thin as paper in a bright red dress, was waiting for her husband Marcos, who was returning from a court appearance in Atlanta. The 17-year-old was among the sparse crowd at the Lee Tran/Greyhound bus station in downtown Fort Myers, where a smattering of travelers stood outside in the sun or dozed on benches in the lobby.

"He's been there three days," she said. Sitting next to Manzo was a woman who could have been her mother, but wasn't. The 45-year-old Lehigh Acres resident, who declined to give her name, said she hadn't been on a bus since she was Manzo's age. But she sat alone in the waiting room surrounded by a set of worn bags, ready to board a Greyhound bus headed for Raleigh, N.C. It was scheduled to arrive there the next day at 11 p.m.

"When I was 17, I traveled on a bus from Chicago to West Virginia," the anonymous traveler said. "It was only supposed to take 18 hours. It ended up taking three days."

That's because one bus broke down, the second one had an accident and the third one drove off in the wrong direction. She hopes this trip, to visit her sister who recently had a stroke, will be an improvement.

"I haven't seen her in seven years," she said. "It would be better if it was on good terms, but I'll be happy to see her."

She has lived in Florida for 21 years, and is

originally from West Virginia.

"I got divorced, didn't want to be around that situation, so I uprooted with my three boys and moved to Port Charlotte," she said.

Her youngest child, 25, lives in the area and manages a Kohl's department store. Her 27-year-old just got back from Afghanistan, minus his spleen. He was there for six months and is now stationed in Watertown, N.Y.

"When he went over there he witnessed for the first time that one of his battle buddies was attached to a bomb," she said. "And he had to go to the mess hall the next day and try to eat."

Her oldest child, 30, is an electrician in West Virginia.

Outside, where a bus had just arrived, travelers filled the platform, among them Manzo's 24-year-old husband. The couple — she smiling and light, he dazed and disheveled — left the bus station and walked off into a balmy January day.

Standing to the side, observing the crowd, and wary of a Florida Weekly photographer, was security guard Alethia Gloverhall.

She moved to Fort Myers from Atlanta, Ga. one year ago. For the past 13 years Gloverhall worked security there at the Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport. Normally, she works from noon until 9:30 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday and said she likes her job.

"It's very comfortable," she said. "Cuz it helps you situate what you want to do

physically and mentally. It's also what you can consider a job you can depend on."

Still, the occasional rough customer crosses her path.

"Sometimes people get annoyed, but once you sit down and talk to 'em they understand," she said.

About three weeks ago, a woman got frantic in front of Lee Tran, Gloverhall said. But it was because she had lost her elderly mother, who had wandered into an antique store across the street. But an average day, she said, is pretty quiet.

Gloverhall, an astonishingly young 50, was born in Chattanooga, Tenn. Her father had brought the family to Atlanta for "a city education." Then he spent 35 years there working two jobs to support them — for the railroad and Mead Packing Company. Her mother was a private duty nurse. Gloverhall is currently taking courses through the mail, with the Stafford Institute, to do the same.

"She had diabetes and hypertension and because of the combination ended up with lymphatic cancer," Gloverhall said. "She didn't even drink, and didn't smoke."

Gloverhall lives in Dunbar with her husband.



FLORIDA WEEKLY PHOTO BY EVAN WILLIAMS
Alethia Gloverhall in front of the Fort Myers Greyhound bus station

She reported back to Operations Supervisor Barbara Hanley, who manages the downtown station, that things out on the platform were looking good.

"With what's going on in the world today, you can't have too much security as far as I'm concerned," Hanley said. "You don't know who is getting on these buses." ■

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