



The Loudersons, Part Deux

Description

I walked into the urgent care waiting room, hobbling on a cane, and there they were already, running their pie holes at full volume. The woman spoke like she was auditioning for a bullhorn, her husband murmured his obedient “yes” like a punctuation mark, and their adult son—pushing thirty but carrying himself like a teenager freshly promoted to head dishwasher—beamed as his parents narrated his restaurant job as though it were an Olympic career. They weren’t talking *to* anyone. They were talking *at* everyone. Wine tastings, olive oil tastings, and other pretentious nonsense spilled from their mouths as though the entire room had been waiting for their commentary. I’ve come to think of people like this as the Loudersons. Credit for the term goes to the Robb Spewak of *The Mike O’Meara Show* (podcast), which nailed the archetype years ago. It fits too perfectly to resist.

For context, I’ve traveled the world. I’ve seen the entire west coast of Latin America. I’ve seen China, Hong Kong, the Philippines, North Africa, the Middle East, and all of Europe. I’ve been around and witnessed things that tourists usually never touch. It’s the strange gift and curse of the career I’ve had: not just sightseeing, but stepping inside real lives, real homes, real kitchens. I’ve learned more from meals at a family’s table than from any guidebook. That’s where my understanding of the world comes from.

The Loudersons had piled their bags and coats on the one raised chair meant for people like me who struggle with a genetic form of arthritis and find it hard to get up from the low seats. Not sitting in it, not even aware of it—just occupying it because that’s what they do. Oblivious. Inconveniencing others without even realizing, or maybe without ever caring. It set the tone before I’d even had the misfortune of engaging them.

The Loudersons don’t travel, not in any traditional sense. They weave stories about olive oil tastings and the provenance of various wines, reciting details about the regions where they grow, and how Malbec is only cultivated in a few places in Europe. Then they shifted seamlessly into plans for Argentina and Chile, talking like connoisseurs, though it was more performance than knowledge. Listening to it, I was stunned. Because having been in that part of the world with local locals, I knew the real story: Malbec nearly disappeared in France after disease and frost devastated the vines. It only found new life in Argentina in the mid-19th century, when cuttings were brought over from France by an

agricultural engineer named Michel Pouget. Those vines thrived in Mendoza's high-altitude climate, where they became Argentina's signature grape. The only reason the Loudersons can sit there and act pretentious and elite about sipping Malbec is because of a deliberate reintroduction and reinvention across an ocean, not some inherited birthright of French terroir.

That day, the topic eventually circled to Northern Chile and Southern Peru. The woman called it 'deserty.' I said, politely, it's the Atacama Desert. Have you been, the woman queried? Yes, I responded. Should we go? I wouldn't recommend it. The Atacama Desert is the driest desert on the planet. It's amazing to see, but you don't want to be there very long. And just like that, I had stepped into their current. I mentioned my travels—houses I'd been in, food I'd eaten, people I'd met. She looked at me with the kind of smug dismissal only a Louderson could summon and said: 'Well, you don't get to see anything. You must not have much of an opinion about the world.'

I smiled and told her, honestly: 'Actually, I have a lot of opinions about the world.' I don't think she appreciated my response to her pretentious bullshit.

And this, to me, is the perfect sketch of a certain American baby boomer strain. Not all, of course, but enough to form a type. Travel, for them, is a highlight reel. It's sunsets, entrées, beaches—things to consume and report back on, evidence that they were there. What they miss, or maybe never wanted, is the people. The lives behind the landscapes. The conversations at the dinner table that tell you far more about a place than any postcard ever could.

The irony is that in chasing 'glorious experiences,' they flatten the world. They make it smaller, safer, a checklist. Meanwhile, those of us who spent years working, traveling, actually listening—we've had the richer lives. We've learned not from the view, but from the people who live inside it.

And maybe that's why they're so loud. Because when you're unwilling to listen, the only option left is to keep talking. Which brings me to her parting wisdom. As I was leaving, I smiled and said to her: 'Enjoy your trip to South America. You should definitely go and see Peru. You'll enjoy it.'

• She waved it off and replied that she didn't need to go, because her daughter had already been and told her all about it. That, right there, is the Louderson worldview in its purest form. Certainty without curiosity. Story without substance. Presence without awareness.

If travel broadens the mind, the Loudersons found a way to make it narrower.

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