

The Barstools of Yutopia

Production Script

We all have ideas about utopia.

To some people, the Yukon might seem like a perfect place. It's got a Wal-Mart, direct flights to Germany and electricity that works most of the time.

The thing is, Mark and I have been so preoccupied with finding and solving local *problems* that we never gave much thought to the idea of Yukon as utopia.

That is, until we heard about a Whitehorse bar that brands itself around that very word—but with a “Y”, as in Yukon, added to the front.

Suddenly, the lights came on. Mark and I thought that investigating the Yukon's utopian qualifications was a great story idea—and doing it in a place that serves shooters would make it even better.

Is Yukon a utopia? And if it isn't, why not?

These are the kinds of questions we had in mind as we canvassed opinion from the barstools of Yutopia—at 4th and Main.

[CLIP: Anna R says “Being your own boss, starting your own business, empowering yourself—that's kind of a Utopia...” Mark asks “So would you say that Yukon is your utopia?” Anna says “I would say so, yeah—I think it is, very much.”]

That was Anna Radzimirska, who owns Yutopia along with her sister, Jo. The Yukon is the place where she realized her dream of opening a bar called Yutopia—and to her, that makes it a kind of... utopian paradise.

But, surely, if utopia is like a recipe, we thought Anna would agree that the Yukon maybe could be missing at least a few ingredients.

She wasn't buying it.

[CLIP: Anna says “For the most part, it's one of those things if we don't have it, chances are you don't really need it...”]

Apparently, Anna had never heard of a little chain called Hooters. Or single men. Or good satirical writing for public radio.

And neither had the happy soul drinking alone at the end of the bar.

[CLIP: “The Yukon needs nothing. It is what it is. And um, it is whatever you make it... It's perfect actually.... The Yukon is the Yukon.”]

As other Yutopians echoed this disturbing sense of contentment, Mark and I became obsessed with making someone—*anyone*—admit some healthy skepticism. If that meant badgering a visiting Brit who was just trying to eat his plate of chippies, well... so be it.

[CLIP: Mark asks “Can you tell me, what is Utopia?” Pete answers “A perfect world, isn’t it? Heaven on earth, yeah.” Mark asks “Would you say that describes the Yukon?” Pete answers “It’s a very nice place—it’s pretty much the nicest place I’ve ever been, so yeah, it probably does to me, yeah.” Mark replies “You don’t sound completely convinced—I’m thinking....” Pete replies “That’s a difficult question....because of what it is.” Mark asks “Alright, what about our ugly buses here—wouldn’t this be better if we had two-story red buses going around Whitehorse? I mean, wouldn’t *that* be utopia?” Pete answer “I don’t think so, no.”]

But, eventually, our persistent line of questioning and willingness to plant suggestions started to pay off—if only a bit.

[CLIP: Sports team guy]

At last, we were getting somewhere.

Our bartender, Len, was yet another booster of ‘Yukon as utopia’ idea. Fortunately for us, he was also far too professional to deny two paying customers a sympathetic word.

[CLIP: Len says “I guess the only thing that really ever occurs to me about the Yukon that could be improved and I’m pretty sure it’s a pretty sad old story, is the weather a little bit. The winters could be a little bit short, the summers and little bit longer.... “MAYBE ADD SOME STUFF ABOUT CONCERTS ETC?]

We pinned our remaining hopes on Ryan McNally. A Yukoner for all of 3 weeks, he was playing blues guitar in the bar that night. We had a good feeling about this guy. After all, what use would a true blues man have for a perfect world?

[CLIP: Mark asks “From what you’ve seen so far, does this place in any way, shape or form qualify as a utopia?” Musician answers “I wouldn’t say ‘utopia,’ but it’s definitely spectacular—it’s something that, uh, most people should experience.” Mark replies “Can you think of some stuff that the Yukon would have to have before you could ever consider it a utopian place?” <Long pause>. “Uh....”

Okay, so maybe our fresh faced bluesman hadn’t been here long enough to know what the Yukon needs to get—or *get rid of*—before it can achieve utopian status.

But at this point, Mark and I were happy to just *give* him the answers.

Bring in more ultimate frisbee players and maybe some decent fields... Lose about 900 trillion mosquitoes... Connect Whitehorse’s downtown buildings with underground walkways.... Knock down every last highway billboard.... Get an airport with a parking lot. Eliminate that horrible smell from the gas station between KFC and A&W....

ENDING #1:

I’m summarizing our list here, because we don’t have all day you know...

Both Mark and I find that in everyday conversations, people often yearn for things the Yukon does not have.

But on that night, we found out that, when pressed, many Yukoners, new and sourdough, a pretty content bunch.

ENDING #2

We could have gone on. And on. And on.

But as our “student” returned to his soulful finger plucking, Mark and I suddenly realized how much we’d been enjoying ourselves in Yutopia with a “Y”. As it turns out, a cozy bar with a warm laid-back atmosphere, happy people and good music is one thing the Yukon definitely *isn’t* missing.

Which ultimately, is the key ingredient for a utopia.

And besides, if we did have every little thing that everybody wanted, it would become more popular and then we'd become flooded with people.

And that wouldn't be cool. Because the best part of living in a utopia is keeping it to yourselves.

So, our advice to you is this:

Whatever makes the Yukon *your* utopia—or close enough to it—savour those things while you can. After all, utopias are a lot like bars at Fourth and Main: they don't last forever....

Clips:

SLY M1 Track 36 (anna, owner, fairly new arrival)

0:33 being your own boss, starting your own business, empowering yourself, that's kind of a utopia. 0:38

0:39 Q: so would you say that Yukon is your utopia? Q: I would say so, yeah – I think it is, very much. Q: any reservations about that? A: no, not at all. I think it kind of really depends on the person you talk to – generally, if they're from somewhere else, they're coming here for a reason – if they stay, then they've found what they're looking for. 1:04

1:25 I actually don't think my utopia is a perfect world. I'm not perfect, society's not perfect, the place I live will not be perfect, and that's fine by me. 1:37

3:21 for the most part, it's one of those things if we don't have it, chances are you don't really need it.

SLY M1 Track 37 (dining woman, long timer)

0:10 everywhere you look is a postcard picture. I mean, we're surrounded by mountains, and trees, and we have some of the most beautiful scenery in Canada. 0:21

*not a great clip, but interviewee says that an improvement would be for local, non chain businesses offering more shopping opportunities. This point was a fairly common answer by many people.

SLY 4 Track 2 (musician, new arrival)

1:09 Q: so, from what you've seen so far, does this place in any way, shape or form qualify as a utopia? 1:14

1:51 A: I wouldn't say utopia, but it's definitely spectacular – it's something that most people should, uh experience 2:01

2:26 Q: can you think of some stuff that the Yukon would have to have before you could ever consider it to be a utopian place? <long pause> A: uh.. 2:37

SLY 4 Track 3 (English dude, new arrival)

0:30 Q: can you tell me, what is utopia? 0:33

0:47 A: perfect world, isn't it? Heaven on earth, yeah.

0:53 Q: would you say that describes the Yukon? A: it's a very nice place – it's pretty much the nicest place I've ever been, so, yeah, it probably does to me, yeah. 1:08

1:09 Q: you don't sound completely convinced – I'm thinking maybe you might be able to name a few things that the Yukon either needs to get or get rid of before it can really qualify as a utopia? A: that's a difficult question. I'm not too sure really, because I like it as it is and it's got its charms – it's everything which the country I come from isn't – and that's why I like it. Lots of open spaces, not over developed – they're the reasons I like it – because of what it is. 1:49

2:31 Q: alright, what about out ugly buses here, wouldn't this be better if we had two-storey red buses going around Whitehorse? I mean, wouldn't that be utopia? A: I don't think so, no. 2:43

Track 5 (bar guy, long timer)

0:01 Q: can you tell me, what is utopia? 0:03

0:12 A: (mutter: what is utopia?) it's the place everybody lives for. 0:15

on what Yukon could use or get rid of...

0:48 the Yukon needs nothing – it is what it is. And, um, it is whatever you make it... it's perfect, actually. Other than – let me just say the seasons. Winter's way too long, summer's way too short, but (laughs) if you can see past that, it is absolutely a utopia. 1:17

2:00 no, the Yukon needs no changing. The Yukon is the Yukon. It's perfect. 2:08

Track 7 (bartender, long timer)

0:14 Q: can you tell me, what is utopia? A: um, I guess utopia is sort of a paradise on earth, and earthly paradise as opposed to ephemeral, somewhere in the sky – it's more real. 0:30

0:31 Q: what do you think the Yukon is missing what do you think the Yukon would need in order to make this place a utopia? A: well, I guess frankly, it is a form of utopia in a ways, um, I guess the only thing that, uh that really ever occurs to me about the Yukon that could be improved and I'm pretty sure it's a pretty sad old story, is the weather a little bit, the winters could be a little bit shorter, the summers a little bit longer.

*Keeps going.. 1:21

*he remarks on how when he first moved up here 15 years ago, it was a bit harder to get certain things, but now it's pretty easy. He misses going to concerts, big museums. But it's more than made up for the things we do have here.

4:31 Q: working behind a bar, you must listen to a lot of people, and not all of them as charming and witty as us <laughs> ..we're interested in knowing if you hear a lot of common complaints about the Yukon, or a lot of common things people are really enthusiastic about. A: uh, I certainly don't hear a lot of common complaints... but certainly the local people that come in here generally, I think are fairly content. That's one of the things that strikes me when I go down south is how unhappy everyone looks. 5:17