Easy Does It

~ pilot ~

by

# Michael Beninate

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created and written by Michael Beninate

New Orleans, Louisiana. 2005. Rustan Bentley runs an upstart Internet website design firm along with his brother and small staff of friends.

Main Characters:

**Rustan Bentley.** An artistic, middle-aged tail-end baby boomer who’s professional and freethinking. He is cynical but optimistic. Owner of Bentley Internet Designs.

**Evan Bentley.** Rustan’s slightly older and moderately dysfunctional brother. Co-owner of Bentley Internet Designs. He is confusedly conservative and is equally and oppositely opinionated.

**Diana Guilbaut.** Rustan’s longtime friend and office manager. She is a middle-aged mother of Acadian descent who is known for her common sense fairness and humor.

**Roxy Lafreniere.** A Creole New Orleans native artist and designer. Articulate and assertive with a well-read and informed political outlook.

**Denison Thompson.** Bentley Internet Designs’ computer systems man. Young and talented African American student with a poor background and a great soul.

INT. STUDIO. DAY.

Diana and Roxy are at their workstations. Evan is puttering in the kitchen. Rustan enters exasperated dropping his things on his desk.

### RUSTAN

(frustratedly)

I’ll tell you *what*. Taking the

*bus* in this city has become *one*

big practice in *patience!* Before

I even got on, four school kids

crowded in around me to get on

first and another one coming out

proceeded to throw his fast food

*garbage* into a neighbors yard,

even though there was a *trashcan*

standing right there. And as I

was *trying* to read my book, this

woman sitting behind me was talking

so *loudly* on her cell phone, I

could hardly *concentrate.* I had

to get up and find another *seat.*

### ROXY

Having a good day, Rustan?

### RUSTAN

Hmm. And I will *never* understand

when it’s *ninety* degrees outside

and the bus is *air-conditioned*

why *some* people feel the need

to open the *windows*! I *swear*

I’m going to slam one *shut*

on somebody’s *hands* one day.

### DIANA

He’s having a *very* good day.

### EVAN

Maybe you’ll start thinking about

buying a car like I’ve been

suggesting for years.

#### RUSTAN

There’s *no reason* why *I* or *anyone*

*else* shouldn’t take advantage of

public transportation. I like to

walk, I enjoy the sense of community

and it gives me a chance to read.

Anyway, you know how I feel about

too many cars on the planet.

**EVAN**

Well, if it will make your life

easier and help keep you from

*bitching* so much, I’ll make the

down payment.

##### RUSTAN

It’s not the *bus* that irritates me.

It’s too many people’s *behavior*

that I don’t like.

##### DIANA

I know what you mean. People

just don’t seem to pay that much

attention to common courtesy anymore.

Just last week when I was downtown

making our deposit, this man walking

in front of me kept spitting on the

sidewalk right where everyone was

walking.

###### ROXY

(disgusted)

Ooh, gross.

**DIANA**

I just wanted to tell him,

‘*Those* aren’t the kind of oysters

we like in New Orleans.’

##### ROXY

You should have.

### DIANA

Not me. I mind my own business.

Mostly because I was afraid

I might get *shot* if I confronted

this person. He looked like he

just got out of prison.

###### ROXY

He probably did.

###### RUSTAN

(using exaggerated hand movements)

This is *another* thing that

people do that just gets on

my nerves: the classic

handholding couple. They’re

walking together hands clutched

out to *here*, moving at that

maddeningly slow tourists’ pace

on a sidewalk that’s just

*this* wide, completely oblivious

to anyone and *everyone* who

might be behind them trying

to *get* somewhere!

## **DIANA**

(taken aback)

There’s nothing wrong with

holding hands. I think it’s nice

that people are affectionate

in public.

## **RUSTAN**

I do too. And I *know* it’s not

that much to complain about.

It’s more an act of *inconsideration*

than lack of courtesy. It’s not

only that. I notice too many times

that coupled people are less likely

to allow a single person *space*

when passing in opposite directions.

It’s like you’re invisible.

It’s just rude.

## **EVAN**

You only think that because

you’re *gay*.

## **DIANA**

(to Rustan)

Just ignore him.

**RUSTAN**

(sarcastically)

I *think* it because that’s what

usually *happens*. I think you’re

*ugly* because I’m gay.

## **ROXY**

No, really, Evan. He’s *right.*

I’ve noticed myself moving an

unfair distance out of the way

for a lot of couples, too.

##### RUSTAN

You see?

## **DIANA**

(to Roxy)

That must make you a lesbian.

## **EVAN**

You both sound like you’re

resentful of couples. Pretty soon

you’re going to be telling us that

straight people are trying to

run you off the road.

## **RUSTAN**

Keep it up. I can find a straight

person to run you off the road

right quick.

## **DIANA**

(motherly)

Alright, you two.

## **RUSTAN**

I used to think the best behaved

people were the wealthy, but not

anymore. Back when I was a

manager at one of the finest

hotels in New Orleans, I had to

check in a titled “Lady” from

England. Anyway, it was only

ten in the morning and the

hotel was full and housekeeping

hadn’t finished preparing her

suite. After I politely explained

that to her, she began to hem

and haw and foam at the mouth

and basically had a first class

hissyfit right there in the lobby.

It took all the strength I could

muster not to tell her *right*

to her face, “Woman, I’m more

of a lady than you’ll *ever* be.”

## **ROXY**

There *are* a lot of obnoxious

rich people. Having money

doesn’t mean you have class.

## **DIANA**

When I used to work at Charity

Hospital, I knew this woman who

had a *lot* of money, but you’d

never know it. Sometimes she

would anonymously deposit money

into needy peoples’ bank accounts.

I thought she had a lot of class.

##### RUSTAN

You know, I used to pride myself

on being a progressive thinker,

but sometimes I just wish we

could go back to simpler times;

when people politely offered,

“You first,” and said, “Excuse me.”

That’s something I would go

back in time for.

##### DIANA

(to Rustan)

You’d go back in time for a

full head of *hair.*

##### ROXY

Don’t forget a flat *stomach.*

##### EVAN

Have any of you stopped to think

that maybe it’s not that people

are getting *ruder* but that we

are just getting older?

##### RUSTAN, DIANA & ROXY

(simultaneously)

No.

##### RUSTAN

I’d like to find out how many

*other* people feel the same way.

It would be interesting to take

one of those public opinion polls;

you know the ones you’re always

trying to avoid, to uncover what

people are *really* thinking.

##### DIANA

You know, there are a lot of those

Internet forums, bulletin boards,

blogs, whatever they’re calling

them now that focus on all sorts

of topics. Why don’t you look up

one of those?

##### RUSTAN

I have an even better idea. Why

don’t we set up our own forum and

see what kind of responses we get?

##### ROXY

That’s good, but you’re limiting

yourself to people who use computers.

My momma won’t even *touch* the

computer I gave her for Christmas.

She thinks that if she hits the

wrong key, she might launch a

nuclear attack that will start

a war to end the world.

##### EVAN

Once I installed a computer for

this woman Uptown, and when I

told her it came with a mouse,

she asked me, “Where should I

put the poison?”

##### RUSTAN

Then we’ll set up a voice mailbox

too. I can send out an announcement

to get people to participate and

then we’ll see what happens.

CUT TO:

INTERIOR. STUDIO. DAY.

Several days later. Rustan, Diana and Roxy are going over some of the responses to the Internet forum. Evan and Denison are setting up electronics.

**DIANA**

(excitedly)

Rustan, you won’t believe all

the postings we’ve gotten from

our rudeness forum. Look!

There’re stacks of them.

It seems that a lot of people

are just as fed up as *you* with

people with no manners.

**ROXY**

Here in New Orleans?

**DIANA**

(displaying papers)

Mostly. But look. Here’s one

from Apalachicola. And Sydney.

**DENISON**

Sidney who?

**DIANA**

Sydney, Australia.

**ROXY**

I didn’t think they *had* rude

people in Australia.

**EVAN**

(negatively)

They’re *everywhere.* Period.

**RUSTAN**

(fantasizing)

Ooh, give me a hot sandy Australian

and I’d be happy, happy, happy.

Denison, have you finished

connecting the voice mailbox?

**DENISON**

Yes, I have. Here. Listen.

**OLD YAT WOMAN VOICE ON MAILBOX**

*Messages.* Yeah. My name is Cecile Benoit

and I live in Nin’t Ward. The other day when

I was coming home to my house on Japonica Street wit’ my hands full’a groceries (I have to take the St. Claude bus now dat my husband Henry died of cancer last year, Lawd bless him) and when I got to da house, my neighbor was z’ere and instead of holdin’ the door open for me to get in, she went *right in* and let the screen door shut *right* in my face! I had’a put da bags down and then hold da door open with my *leg* to get in. My *eggs* broke and my bread got squooshed. I was so *mad*. And I’m an old *woman*! Now, d’ere just ain’t no *reason* for dat! And I’m *always* looking out for her three children when she ain’t home, which is *all’a* da time. She comes and goes all hours uh’da night and she wears these *real* tight outfits dat make her look like a prostitute. I always tell her she ain’t *never* gonna get no decent man lookin’ like *dat*. And da *eye* makeup! *Lawd*! She…

**RUSTAN**

(rotating his hand)

Moving along.

**DIANA**

That’s *classic.*

**ROXY**

Play another one.

**DENISON**

O.K. Here goes.

**(FEMALE VOICE)**

*Next Message.* I was driving home from work

last night on Royal Street and when I got to Canal, the light was green and the car in

front of me just stopped in the middle of the road to talk to somebody they knew on the sidewalk. They couldn’t care less that they

were blocking traffic even though there was

room for them to pull over. Everyone was

blowing their horns but they just didn’t care.

**DIANA**

Typical.

**EVAN**

People in this city can’t drive.

That shouldn’t surprise anyone.

**ROXY**

(leafing through emails)

Here’s a good one. “I’m a U.P.S.

worker and the other day I was

pushing a hand truck stacked with

four heavy boxes and when I got

to the corner where people were

passing, instead of letting me

pass first without stopping, these

two women just walked right in

front of me and made *me* stop.”

**RUSTAN**

I’m telling you, it’s out of

*control*. Too many people have

lost their sense of decent behavior.

**DIANA**

That’s if they’ve ever *had* it.

**RUSTAN**

I wonder what could be the cause

of such rampant bad behavior. Is

it that there are just more people

now and it seems more exaggerated?

**DENISON**

That’s part of it. But there are

lots of other reasons: social and

economic backgrounds, broken families, inadequate education and discipline,

self-centeredness and low self worth,

and most importantly, poor parenting.

**ROXY**

You hit the nail on the head *there.*

It all boils down to the way you

were raised.

**DENISON**

We were poor and I don’t even

know my father, but my mother

and grandmother were always there

to straighten *my* ass out. Once,

when we were kids, a bunch of us

thought it would be funny to

play a little trick on this other

kid who had bad eyesight and wore

these big thick glasses. We told

him there was a big green hairy

caterpillar on his head and he

went crazy, threw off his glasses

screaming and rubbing his head.

Then we played keep-a-way around

him in a circle with his glasses.

My grandmaw saw us and *whooped*

my ass all the way home and yelled

at all the kids. And you know what?

That kid is now a corporate attorney.

And I still have an unnatural fear

of caterpillars.

**DIANA**

One summer when I was little,

my momma put my big brother *Andy*

in charge of me. I was supposed

to stay in the backyard but I

was always climbing the fence

and running out into the street.

He finally got tired of chasing

me down, so one day he took me

over to play in our neighbors

yard and let me try to get over

*their* fence. He didn’t tell me

it was an electric fence. I

*swear* I almost got electrocuted.

I never left the yard again.

**RUSTAN**

It was probably just a shock.

**DIANA**

I *swear* I almost got electrocuted.

**EVAN**

So *that’s* what happened to you.

**DIANA**

Leave me alone.

**EVAN**

I knew there was something amiss

with you. That explains why you

*repeat* yourself all the time.

**DIANA**

I do not.

**EVAN**

Sure you do.

**DIANA**

I do not!

**EVAN**

You just did.

**DIANA**

Leave me alone.

**DENISON**

…And why she never knows how to

*get* anywhere driving when she’s

lived here *all* her life.

(imitating Diana)

“Which way? Which way?”

**DIANA**

I’m not listening to ya’ll.

**RUSTAN**

It’s a shame so many people don’t

carry themselves in good manner.

I mean, how you act demonstrates

to the whole world what kind of

respect you have for it. You

would think people would *want*

to be looked highly upon by others.

We’re talking common courtesy here,

not finishing school. It’s not

that hard.

**ROXY**

Rustan, what year did *you*

graduate from finishing school?

**RUSTAN**

Are you kidding? I was exempt.

**EVAN**

Ya’ll act as if having bad manners

is society’s worst plague. What

about all the those street thugs

out there killing each other

over a simple disagreement?

**RUSTAN**

That’s a *whole* ‘nother can of

worms.

**DENISON**

You’ve all got to realize that

a lot of people weren’t raised

as fortunate as you. Most of

the people in my neighborhood

didn’t have parents looking out

for them. I knew kids who couldn’t

come home until they made at least

fifty dollars carrying drugs.

I’ve seen people shot in the

street for telling the truth.

I’ve known kids who couldn’t

spell their own names.

**EVAN**

They *sure* know how to collect

welfare. I’m sick and tired of

people not taking responsibility

for themselves, blaming everyone

else for their problems and

expecting the government to pay

their way. *Our* ancestors came

here, learned the language and

customs of this country and made

an honest living.

**DENISON**

(seriously)

They also came here on their own

free *will* and were given opportunities.

**EVAN**

Then what’s the problem *now*?

**DENISON**

(escalating)

The *problem* is…

**ROXY**

(interrupting)

Easy does it, guys.

**DENISON**

(pause, more calmly)

*Why* is it that you limit your

opinion of black people to the

poverty stricken? Don’t you

have any appreciation for the

vast amount of people who’ve

persevered through tremendous

hardships and against most odds

to become successful, respected

and admired contributors and

leaders of every known profession

in the world?

**EVAN**

(pausing, reflecting, sincerely)

I do Denny. I do.

**RUSTAN**

I was lucky enough to be raised

in a wonderful family in middle

class comfort, and I count my

blessings every day, but I’ve

had a lot of odds to beat too.

It’s taken me into my forties

to *begin* to understand what

growing up gay in a largely

homophobic society can do to

a young personality. Sometimes

it feels like the whole world

has parts in a grand opera,

and you’re the only one in the

audience, and the players are

*heckling* you from the stage.

I don’t mean to sound boastful,

but even under *these* circumstances,

I’ve still learned how to reinforce

my self-esteem and to treat people

with kindness and respect.

EXT. FRENCHMEN STREET. DAY.

START: “Yes We Can Can” by the Pointer Sisters.

Rustan is crossing the street with an armful of books and papers and puts a business card into his wallet. In his haste, he misses his pocket and unknowingly drops the wallet in the middle of the street and continues walking. A small boy oversees the event and runs into the street to collect the wallet.

**SMALL BOY**

(to Rustan)

Hey mister. You dropped your

wallet.

Rustan goes over to him, takes the wallet, smiles, kneels down and pats the child on the head.

**RUSTAN**

Thank you young man. I needed

that.

VIDEO MONTAGE.

END.

Yes We Can Can

Composed by Alan Toussaint

Now’s the time for all good men

To get together with one another

We’ve got to iron out our problems

And iron out our quarrels

And try to live as brothers

And try to find the peace within

Without stepping on one another

And do respect the women of the world

Remember you all had mothers

We’ve got to make this land a better land

Than the world in which we live

And we’ve got to help this man be a better man

With the kindness that we give

I know we can make it

I know that we can

I know darn well

We can work it out

Yes we can

I know we can can

Yes we can can

Why can’t we

If we want to?

Yes we can can

I know we can make it work

I know we can make it if we try

Yes we can

I know we can can

Yes we can can

Great gosh almighty

We’ve got to take care of all the children

The little children of the world

‘Cause they’re our strongest hope for the future

The little bitty boys and girls

We’ve got to make this land a better land

Than the world in which we live

And we’ve got to help this man be a better man

With the kindness that we give

I know we can make it

I know that we can

I know darn well

We can work it out

Yes we can

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