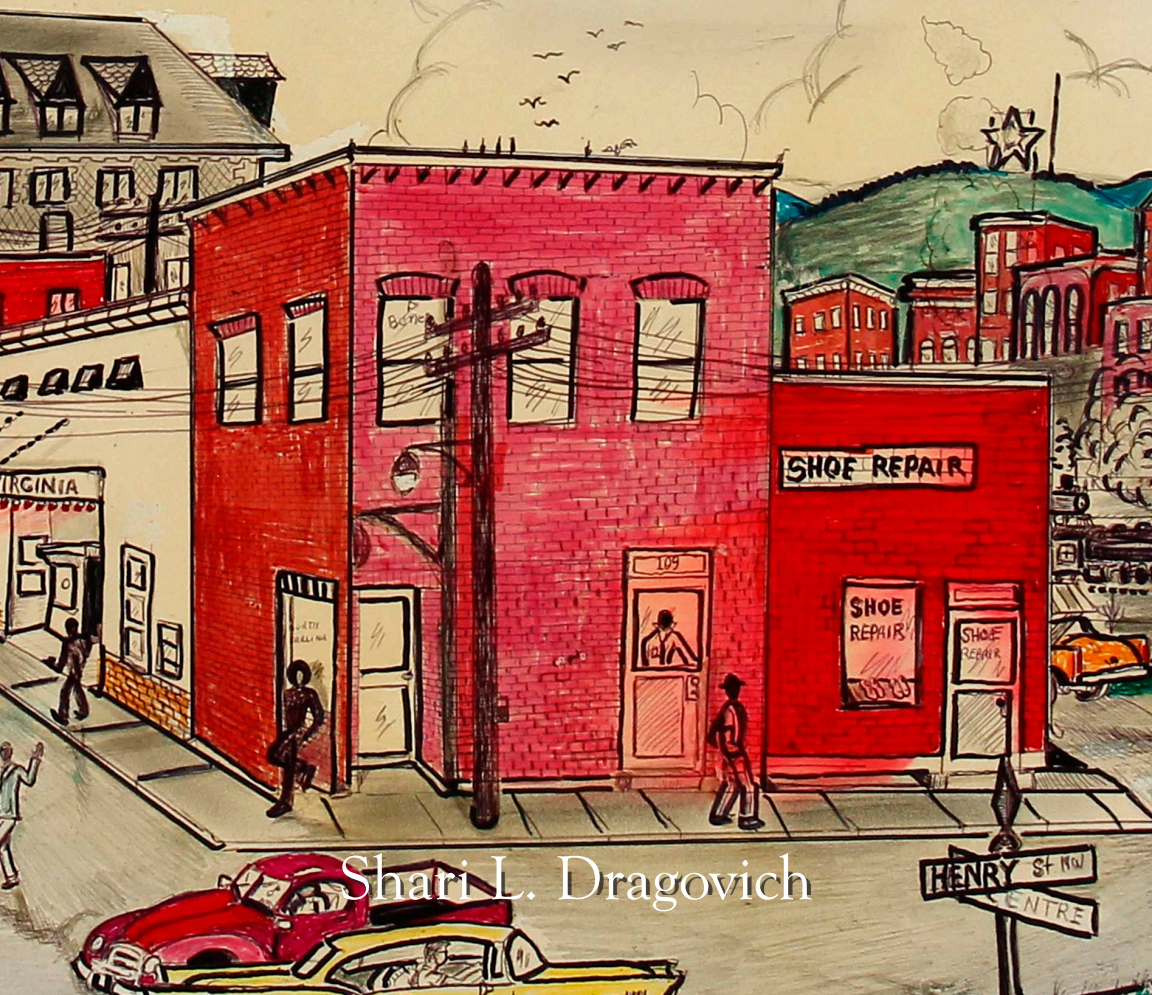


# The Thirty Minute Neighborhood

Essays



Shari L. Dragovich

## A Note From David Ramey Jr.

From the time he came to Roanoke as a small child, my father lived around the corner from Henry Street. For a country boy from Martinsville, Henry Street was like Times Square of New York City. The lights, entertainment, smoke rising from the buildings every night...it was so exciting to him. It captivated him. My father loved everything about Henry Street and he lived it fully.

Sadly, he watched his beloved Henry Street deteriorate and fade away with the broken promises of urban renewal. This is what prompted him to pick up his pencils and start drawing. He used his photographic memory to capture and preserve on paper Henry Street, Old Gainsborough and all the many places that made up the scenes of his life: Pie Man, the Atlantic Sandwich Shop—all of it; He didn't want the places and people he grew up with to blow away like dust in the wind. His drawings were done out of a passion for remembering the past and those who came before; their struggles as well as their triumphs. He wanted all of us—present and future generations—to experience the positives and learn from the negatives of those who've gone before. He was also passionate about small children and protecting their innocence. This was the other side of his art and was the subject of most of his religious drawings.

A collector of my father's artwork once told me that without his art, not much would be known about the history of Henry Street and its people. It would be lost forever. My desire is to continue my father's passion for Henry Street and for Roanoke. I want his art and his legacy to live for future generations. As such, I am working to establish a foundation in my father's name that will provide art scholarships for young, aspiring artists in financial need. For now, all proceeds from the sales of this chapbook will be donated evenly to the following three organizations: West End Center for the Youth, the Oliver White Hill Foundation Mentoring Program, and the David Ramey Sr. Estate.

I would like to thank the Roanoke Arts Commission, RIDE Solutions and the Valley Metro System for offering me this opportunity to donate to causes dear to my father's heart, and for bringing attention to his art through the Art by Bus Program. I would also like to thank Charlene Graves, Kay Dunkley and Evelyn Slone for their tireless efforts at helping my father, and now myself, to bring his art to forefront of our community.

With Deepest Gratitude,  
David Ramey Jr.

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# The Thirty Minute Neighborhood

Shari L. Dragovich



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## On Remembering; Part One

I am standing on the concrete platform, waiting for my bus. Light streams in from the giant transfer station entrances on either end, but I stand in walls of concrete shadow. As the time for the buses to arrive draws near, more and more people make their way onto the platforms. Spaces tighten, shadows expand. The pungency of cigarette smoke laced with musky cologne traces itself to the back of my throat. Time rolls me under, until I am no longer standing at a bus station in Roanoke, Virginia. Rather, I am eighteen years old, waiting in the dark underbelly of Chicago's Union Station for the Amtrak train—the one that will take me back to my farming home in South-central Illinois for the first time since coming to the big city for college. I am standing as straight and adult-tall as possible, never feeling more like a child lost and unsure of where I am headed.

I read recently that of our five senses, smell and taste are processed in the same area of the brain as emotion and memory. Our capacity to smell and taste is deeply connected to our capacity to remember. I'm not sure I needed a study to tell me this. One whiff of Aqua Net hairspray or Baby Soft perfume (which I rarely come across these days) and I'm back in middle school, bumping elbows with my girlfriends at the giant mirror in our small parochial school's locker room, spraying one more coat of hairspray to my teased out bangs, adjusting my cheerleading skirt, and making sideways glances at Mindy, who I just found out from Neely, has been telling everyone what a snob I am.

When I think of my childhood, it often comes back to me in rushes of odors, tastes, and textures before it does colors or sounds. The time and place of my childhood leant itself in this direction: growing up on a hog farm is—if it is anything—a potpourri of smells and textures. Pungent manure, damp straw, black mineral soil, sweet grass, sunshine captured in line-dried linens, cracked open grain, tomatoes on the vine, lavender and mothballs of my grandmother's closet, dusty air stillness charged with humidity right before a thunderstorm. These were the smells that wafted and wove me in like a cocoon. I knew who I was and where I was headed, in part, by the smells of my childhood.

When I moved to Chicago, everything smelled foreign: degrees of concrete, synthetic cafeteria food, Bath and Body Works sprayed too liberally, hot steel, cigarette smoke and overused brakes. All was new and strange and uncertain. I felt like an unmoored boat, drifting and exposed. None of it resonated. None of it offered me a compass to navigate my way toward remembering.



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The buses begin turning into the station. Exhaust fumes, glaring blue, green and white moving sidewalls, headlights and electrified orange numbers all rush at me. Doors open and humanity pours out like water let out of flood gates, with me caught in the middle of the flow. I try standing taller, stiffen my back, grip tighter to my book bag and my purse, feeling as uncertain as I did at eighteen. Everyone seems to know exactly what to do, certain of where they are going. Not me. I walk from platform to platform, squeezing myself between buses and people, looking up at the signs where my bus is supposed to be, trying to match platform sign to bus number with no success. Gasoline and dirt sting inside my nose. I become utterly confused.

“Which bus you need, ma’am?” a man touches the side of my arm, his face creased all over, his skin a deep and stunning shade of brown, made even darker by his gray curling hair and wiry beard.

“Um, Tanglewood. I’m going to Tanglewood.” Why am I so stupid? I think inside myself. Why can’t I figure this out? Why do I make everything so hard?

“You in the right place. It just hadn’t come in yet.” He smiles at me and walks on down the platform, disappearing into another bus headed the opposite direction.

Sure as he said, a late-arriving bus pulls into the station alongside my platform. I wait for its passengers to exit, then make my way up the steps, asking the driver if, indeed, this bus is headed to Tanglewood. He offers me a patient smile and says it is. I smile back, relief flooding, and sit in the first open seat I find.

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## On Remembering; Part Two

At a stop just past the hospital, an elderly woman wearing a white collared sweatshirt, purple slacks, and fanny pack gets on the bus. She walks past me and sits one seat away. The faintest hint of lavender and mothballs lace through the air after her. Her hair is short and feathery white like a dove's. Her water-colored eyes are framed by a pair of small, round, gold-wire rimmed glasses. Her porcelain face is a thousand wrinkles that fan upward when she smiles—which she appears to do without ceasing. Hanging from her fanny pack by its handles is a reusable fabric-type grocery bag, folded into a square and held secure by a large rubber band. What a smart way to keep your grocery bag compact and out of the way, I think. I'm surprised there isn't some overpriced gadget out there, being sold for this very thing.

I feel for the purple rubber band around my wrist and lightly pop it against my skin. I started wearing it several weeks ago. Like tying a string around one's finger, it's my effort at remembering; not a grocery list or doctor's appointment, but a way of believing and behaving. Over the years I have spent excessive amounts of time and money trying to replace faulting reasoning with that which is good, right and honorable. So far the rubber band has worked best.

The bus travels along; the lavender smelling woman and I are its only two passengers. I think back to twenty minutes earlier at the transfer station; the smells, noise and chaos. The way I can so easily forget myself: who I am, what I'm doing here, why I wanted this bus riding—and writing—assignment, this career, this life. I look over at my fellow bus companion. It took great effort for her to get on the bus. Make it to her seat. And she sits here next to me, hands folded on her lap, persisting in her smile. A prayer and a thanksgiving.

The woman gets off at Kroger. As she walks past I smell again her lavender and her age. Her grocery bag swings lightly from her fanny pack as she shuffles with deliberate focus toward the front of the bus. Just before she gets off she stops at the bus driver, smiling at him with her thousand smiles, and says, "Thank you. God bless you!"

"You're welcome, Ma'am."

I close my eyes and take in the lingering smells of lavender, letting its wisdom and its peace settle deep inside me. Remembering all that has cocooned me in the past; honoring all that has been placed before me now. A prayer and a thanksgiving.

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## On Bus Rides and Gratitude

I am on my way to Campbell Court. Clouds hang fat and low in a muted sky. I watch them through the tinted bus window looking for signs of rain. It was a mild winter, tricking the flowering trees to bloom weeks early. Then, like a pouting child insisting on being noticed, winter blew one last gasp of freeze on everything. Judging by the fully bloomed cherry trees, waterfalls of yellow forsythia flowers, and rusty green haze creeping up the mountains, I think the pouting winter didn't get its way.

The bus is heading up a hill in South Roanoke, when I notice the driver slow abruptly, pull open his window, and gesture with his hand to the bus stop half way up the hill. He inches the bus forward several more feet, stopping at a smallish white rectangular sign with the same bright green and blue lettering that decorates the sides of every bus in our valley. Until I started riding the bus, I never noticed the bus stop signs. Now I see them everywhere; most of them along roadsides without sidewalks or benches.

We remain stopped longer than normal—tilting with the hill like a on a roller coaster, half way up the first climb, suspended, waiting our turn to peak the top and go screaming down the other side. I don't understand why we are waiting. Typically if there is no one at a stop and no one inside the bus pulling the yellow "Stop Requested" cord, the bus drives on. But then a woman climbs on, huffing and exhaling. She clutches her purse to her side with one hand and grabs onto a chrome handle with the other, using it to pull herself onto the bus. A man follows after her. His jeans are baggy and gathered in bunches where his belt cinches tight around his waist. His sweatshirt hangs loose on his frame that looks like it once carried more heft. In his left hand is a cane. He, too, is breathing hard and takes time to ease his body slowly into a seat across from the woman and next to me.

"Thank you. Oh, thank you so much, Sir!" The woman says to the bus driver between gulps for air. "If you wouldn't've stopped for us, we'd be stuck another hour." Then she turns and looks at me. "My husband," she nods her head toward the man next to me, "he just had heart surgery a month ago. Back surgery, too!"

"Really?" my eyes go wide at the thought of this man rolling the dice on his newly repaired heart and back: subjecting them to the effort of hauling his body half-way up one of Roanoke's hills, just to catch the bus. She shook her head, then unfolded her husband's story in a series of declarative statements. His heart wasn't pumping right. He needed surgery. They did the surgery. All seemed well, but it wasn't. There were blood clots and a torn aorta. They had

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to open up his back. Stints and smooth blades and slices along his spine. Sutures and stitches and surgeons' fingerprints all over him. And here he is, a month later, running up a hill to catch the bus.

"So, you rely on the bus a lot?" I ask, calculating doctors' offices and appointment times with bus routes and schedules.

"Well," she says, "our car died on us about a year ago. It wasn't worth it to sell, so we took it apart and sold off the parts. We been ridin' the bus since."

Doctor's visits? I ask. They are near the bus stop, she says. Work? I ask. McDonald's in Salem and it's close to a bus stop, too, Thank God, she adds. Surgery? I ask. Carilion, she says, her eyebrows pinning up and curling into one another. Now that took coordinating; getting back home on Melrose, cleaning up—fresh clothes, get what he needs, then back to the hospital, she gestures with her finger in an arcing, point-to-point pattern. I tell her how impressive it is she's managed all this. She clutches the top of her purse. It is large, reaching across her entire lap, and sequined in pink and silver. It coordinates perfectly with her pink lipstick and the parade of shiny silver earrings lining the length of her right ear. She shifts in her seat.

"Oh no. He's the one that's impressive," she points to her husband, who smiles like a boy just handed the game ball. "No one can believe him. Four surgeries in one week. No one can believe he's gettin' around the way he is." She turns and looks toward our bus driver. "I owe you a McDonald's meal. I'll be there tomorrow nine to five. You stop by, okay? It was so good of you to stop for us. Really, it was." She speaks to him like a friend.

Our driver looks up in his mirror. I see his easy grin. His graying, wavy hair is pulled back in a low, short ponytail. The creases around his eyes smile outward from the sides of his sunglasses. "Okay, then. I'll do that," he says into the mirror.

I wonder if he knows her personally; if he will take up her offer. When was the last time I noticed someone showing me a kindness? And if I noticed it, did I stop to express my gratitude? I mean, stop. Focus my attention. Express my deepest gratitude.

I can't remember.

Remembering, like gratitude, requires space; moments spread open and illuminated, the way morning rays light up forest floor. The way bus rides suspend time.

I glance at my bus neighbors. They are discussing where to eat lunch. I close my eyes and listen to my own breathing; absorbing into myself this suspended time—all its gifts; all its space—opening my hands for it to saturate my soul.

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## On Cable Cars and Paradox

In San Francisco, one of America's most progressive, visionary cities, an archaic form of public transportation thrives: the cable car. I have a secret love affair with the cable car. It probably began years ago while reading Virginia Lee Burton's book, *Maybelle The Cable Car* to my young boys. The story was more involved than their little minds could grasp at the time; they preferred *Katy and the Big Snow*. But I loved *Maybelle*. I loved all she revealed about her particular place.

If you've been to San Francisco, you immediately see the difficulty facing any public transportation there. The very hills that make the city glorious, are also its bane.

Enter the cable car.

The mechanics of the cable car involve an underground cable, giant pulley system, and gripman operating a large lever inside the car. The gripman pulls back the lever located near the front of the cable car. This causes a vice to grip the cable, which is moving at constant speed of 9.5 miles per hour. To stop the cable car, the gripman pushes the lever forward (releasing the vice) while pumping a large brake peddle with his foot, activating steel brake shoes around the cable car's wheels. There is no engine inside the cable car. It travels up and down San Francisco's hills by simple mechanics and human strength.

Of all the ways I've experienced San Francisco, it is the cable car that gives me the greatest sense of San Francisco's place. By its design it reveals San Francisco's topography. By its ingenuity it reveals the inventive and progressive spirit of San Francisco's people. By its existence today—despite the fact that newer, faster modes of public transportation have developed—it reveals the moral integrity of San Francisco's citizens who fought for its preservation, understanding there is a fine line between progress and losing one's soul.

My own city's public transportation isn't so nostalgic. Roanoke utilized the electric street car from the late 1800's until the late 1940's, when the last car ran down Grandin Street on July 31, 1948. Now we ride buses powered by plain ole' diesel. We do have a trolley line that runs along Jefferson Street connecting our city's largest hospital system to our Market Square. The trollies look like Roanoke's old electric cars, adding to the historic feel of the city. That's as nostalgic as our buses get.

The bus itself doesn't stir within me a sense of Roanoke's place. But riding it does. To begin, Roanoke's bus lines operate on a pulse system. This means every hour the buses "pulse" like a heart beat

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out of Campbell Court transfer station and into the city like blood full of oxygen being pumped to muscles. Approximately a half-hour into the route, the bus “pulses” back to the heart of the city where passengers unload and load again onto different routes, and the process repeats itself. When I ride my city’s buses, I can feel the geography of a place that requires a pulsing bus line instead of a grid. Squared off streets uniform neighborhood to neighborhood are required for a grid. Flat land without undulation is required for a grid. Grids are for the Midwest and large cities like New York. In a place like Roanoke with its winding streets and sprawling neighborhoods, a pulsing bus system is required.

The buildings and neighborhoods also gives me a sense of my town’s unique place-ness—those that have been valued and preserved, and those that have not. Ours is an old city with a wide history. We have the Roanoke River and the factories built along it. The old Norwich neighborhood, for example, began as a series of row houses for factory workers and their families (who were also factory workers). Out of this history comes the greater history of cotton mills, childhood labor, the beginnings of compulsory education, and a series of photographs now housed in the Library of Congress depicting young children working dangerous machines in Roanoke’s cotton mill. We have the history of railroad manufacturing and all it brought with it: big business executives building mansion-like homes and a prosperous downtown; as well as hard laborers—largely emancipated slaves looking for a safe and dependable place to find work and raise a family—who built their own kind of homes and prosperous neighborhood. Being a city of the South, we have the history of Jim Crow laws and the separating of the races; whites on one side of the tracks, blacks on the other. Subsequently, we have the history of urban renewal and all its unforeseen consequences. And we have the more recent history of downtown restoration and preservation, with fresh faced businesses vying to be part of our city’s second wind.

All this history exposed in the buildings and homes running along Roanoke’s streets—those stately and those abused; those new and those in every state of renovation.

All this story viewed from Roanoke’s bus seats.

The old factory and row house feeling of Norwich still exists today. In Northwest Roanoke, once stately homes stand in near or total ruin from urban renewal and the fleeing of whites to suburbia. A community medical center in Old Gainsboro is covered in kudzu (nature’s version of urban renewal across the South). All around the city, boarded-up church buildings silently witness to neighborhoods that once buzzed with Sunday life; while

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further down the road large billboard signs declare a piece of land the future home of such-and-such congregation. Well-kept yards and a community garden look bright next to ramshackle porches. Giant smokestacks stand solidly mortared across the highway from a gleaming art museum looking ready to take flight.

The word that comes to mind as I ride Roanoke's buses is paradox: "A person, thing or situation that exhibits inexplicable or contradictory aspects," says the American Heritage Dictionary. At first glance, paradox seems an undesirable label for describing one's place. But consider the following: pruning a vine to foster new growth; the simple loaf of bread that reveals the intricacies of flour; the tiny seed that grows into a shade tree; David killing Goliath. Inside paradox is mystery, messiness and a measure of faith. Inside paradox is process, cooperation, and stewardship. Inside paradox can grow true, authentic community.

"Paradox is the only basket large enough to hold Truth," writes Robert Farrar Capon in his book, *The Supper of the Lamb*. He's right.

To say Roanoke's sense of place lies in its many paradoxes isn't as romantic as historic cable cars. But that's okay. It's real and it's true. And it's mine.

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## The Thirty Minute Neighborhood

A wizened man in a wrinkled, disheveled shirt matching his wrinkled, disheveled face declares if he makes it to Monday he'll celebrate another birthday. He looks like the Marlboro Man with his thick, sandpaper voice that carries throughout the bus for anyone willing to listen. In a stroke of good fortune there are plenty who feel like chatting today. This is not always the case. Some days the bus is a vestibule of silence, but today it is a watering hole. The old man's comment is just the thing needed to spur on bus neighbors and a branching conversation begins. We shower Marlboro Man with birthday wishes. The gentleman sitting across from me turns sideways and props his knee on the empty seat next to him. He is wearing bifocals and white t-shirt with a giant American flag printed on front. His shaved head shines like a decorative garden globe lit by afternoon sun. He tells me he's gotten to where he's feeling old all over—knees, back, brain—and he ain't even forty. Life will wear and tear on you, I say. You ain't a kiddin'! He shakes his head and grins like it's the funniest trick time's ever played.

The conversation branches further; topic to topic, mundane to mundane. Marlboro Man converses with a neighbor he seems to know personally. American flag guy shows everyone his St. Patrick's Day necklace he just bought at Wal-Mart in preparation of this weekend's parade. "I wouldn't've bought it if it didn't come with batteries," he declares. I take in his reasoning and wonder what measuring stick I use to determine a thing's worth.

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The bus does its own branching while we do ours; away from the straight arteries to downtown, instead moving deeper along north side veins, past rows of small, tight-knit houses and brick duplex communities. It is a section of town born of Roanoke's version of urban renewal; a decades' long initiative that—at its inception—was considered brilliant, progressive, visionary; but now lingers like a cankerous wart bulging from the side of an otherwise beautiful, black walnut tree. There was Henry Street, Old Gainsborough, Northeast; the places of Roanoke's African-American population. There were neighbors and neighborhoods. A hive of commerce, worship, education, medicine, neighborliness and social happenings. Garden vegetables grown, harvested and left on front porches. Feeding another family poorer than your own. Watching out for one another's children. Community aid and fellowship at—



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what we now call—the grassroots level; when community really was community, not an organization.

“...a section so unified at one time, you could call the names of everybody on every street...’Hello, Brother John. Hello Sister So-and-So,’ hollering on both sides of the street.” \*

Yet, from the outside, this community didn’t appear thriving. It looked run-down, the children all ragamuffin; “a slovenly and unsightly approach to the city,” as editorialized in the Roanoke Times and World-News in 1957. Pool halls, gambling quarters, and bootleggers all swung toe-to-toe with Baptist churches, barber shops and grocery stores. It was more ragtime than waltz. City leaders couldn’t suffer it.

“There was this kind of naiveté in the ’40s and ’50s that assumed if you simply tore down poor neighborhoods, that you got rid of poverty,” said Peter Salins, a New York City urban affairs expert, in urban renewal’s aftermath. Roanoke’s version of “getting rid of poverty” included tearing down 1,600 black-owned homes, 24 churches, more than 200 small businesses and some of the city’s most historic schools.

“That broke up the cooperation of fellow man.” \*\*

It makes me wonder: Is poverty the worst thing in the world? Or maybe the better question: Who decides how a community is valued, and what measuring stick do they use to determine its worth?

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Our neighborhood bus conversation has branched into batteries. A woman who has been sitting silently in front of me speaks up, turning her head over her shoulder. What she does is keep a full stock of batteries of every size imaginable. Her two year old son, he loves those little cars that light up and make noises. Dollar Tree has large packs. She just runs by there and picks up several at a time. That’s smart, I say. But what I wonder silently is what “running to the Dollar Tree” really involves when the bus is your only ride.

“Tell me about your son,” I rest my hand on her shoulder. She turns around to face me better. Her hair is turquoise streaked, long and thin, and pulled back in a loose, low-hanging ponytail. Her nose buttons on her face that looks young except for the lines of perpetual seriousness drawn across it. She is wearing a royal blue fleece jacket—it looks like part of her work uniform. Our American flag neighbor has shifted to the aisle seat so he can better engage. He looks eager to hear about her boy, too.

“Well, I’m actually going home now to get him,” she says, then

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explains how they were at the park last night and he went down the slide wonky—his leg caught behind him. There was no obvious damage done, but he wouldn't stop whimpering and refused to walk. She finally called the paramedics—she has no vehicle, and the bus doesn't run past 8pm. They couldn't find anything obvious, and told her to give it some time. But her boyfriend called her at work. Her son is still fussing and now won't let anyone change his diaper. And he's refusing to eat.

We are close to downtown. I can see the Wells Fargo Tower popping in and out of view. A new neighbor gets on with his laundry basket of clean clothes. He sits down near us. The bus turns to fresh soap and warm linen. The mother continues her story, strangely calm. Until she gets to the part where she questions her judgement—for taking him to the ER now, for letting him go down the slide, for every blessed decision she's ever made as a parent up to this point. Her voice cracks and her eyes go glassy.

My heart hurts for her, but it is our American Flag neighbor who reacts first. He reaches across the aisle and takes her hands in his own. He looks at her through his bifocals, straight into her tearing eyes. "Hey," he says, his voice alive with feeling, "you're right to take him to the doctor. You're the mama. You do what you gotta do."

"Yeah, it'll be okay," she says, wiping an escaped tear with the back of her blue jacket.

We are almost to the transfer station. She looks back at me and says she hopes the bus driver lets her leave her son in his stroller. "Oh," I say. "I bet if you explain. Our bus drivers seem understanding." She nods and smiles. I see a kind of renewal on her face. It is the look of motherhood: that continual dying-to-self love that burns and hurts as it blesses and fills. Like a community thriving in the most unlikely of places, it is a reality not seen from the outside, only understood from within. It is the one thing so far on this bus ride I don't wonder about.

The bus pulls into the transfer station. Everything goes dim, then florescent glow. The driver opens the doors and our thirty minute neighborhood files out, disperses; never to exist in the same way again.

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\*Mr. Charles Meadows, resident of Roanoke's Northeast who lived through urban renewal, quoted from *Local Quarterly Magazine*, Summer 2013 #2

\*\*Mr. Charles Meadows; *ibid*

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## In the Whale's Belly

I wait for the bus in bitter cold. What highway robbery, I think, to have cherry trees in full bloom, forsythia bushes spilling forth their waterfalls of brilliance; then—bam!—like a deer running in front of my car on a winding back road, a last gasp of winter comes barreling through. Some storm the Weather Channel calls “Stella,” bringing freezing temperatures, and delayed school starts these past three days; a biting disappointment to every kid and teacher and parent across our valley. Not to mention how Stella has wreaked havoc on my work schedule. My sister once had a cat named Stella. We called her “Stella, spawn of Satan.” What is it with that name?

The bus pulls in to Tanglewood right on time. Doors open and I rush in, my spine letting out a shiver as my cold body hits the stale warmth inside the bus. I sit next to the window, hoping the sun—making a feeble attempt at warming Roanoke— will continue to thaw me through the tinted glass. I wait and hope, but nothing. I look around to several other passengers all trying for the same effect. There is a strain on their faces I can feel on my own. The cold has lessened us; turned us—each one—into ourselves and our private malcontents. The silence on the bus says it all.

As we weave our way back toward Campbell Court station, the bus's brakes moan and whine with every slowing down; an aching bellow of weariness. Their squealing cuts through the silence, filling the cavity of the bus with its lamenting; long-strung, pitch-adjusting groans sound like whale language. A giant whale in great lament. And we ride along in its belly.

There is a story I know of another man who found himself inside the belly of a whale. It is an ancient story from the Jewish tradition, and this is how it goes:

There was a prophet named Jonah, who was given a special message by God. It was a message God wanted to send to a nation called Nineveh; a message calling them to repent, turn from their ways, or else. But Jonah had no respect for those pagans. Besides he had better things to do than be inconvenienced for such a deplorable people. So, he hopped on a ship headed the opposite direction.

God was not happy about Jonah's decision. He caused a storm to rise up on the sea. The sailors were terrified; but Jonah slept like a baby below deck. The sailors, out of desperation and utter fear, decided to cast lots to see who was responsible for the storm. The lot fell on Jonah. They marched down below, shook Jonah awake and demanded he tell what he knew about this awful storm building itself into a fury. Jonah confessed the storm was his fault.

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His Hebrew God was angry with him for disobeying orders. He told them to toss him overboard and the sea would calm. At first, the sailors balked. They tried rowing back to drop Jonah off politely by the shore. They didn't want blood on their hands—especially Hebrew blood, given the severe temper the Hebrew God seemed to possess. But the storm continued in its increasing rage.

“Just do it!” Jonah yelled as waves crashed over the ship's sides, threatening to drown them all. “Toss me over!”

So they did.

The sea went instantly calm. The sailors rejoiced. And Jonah didn't drown. God provided a 'great fish' to swallow him whole. Jonah spent three days and three nights safe inside the fish's smooth walled, tropically warm belly, the smell of sourness stuck inside his nose. Perfect conditions for contemplating the wisdom of his runaway scheme, and how he might choose differently next time.

I think about the Jonah story as I listen to the bus continue its moaning lament. As I kid, I always thought of Jonah being swallowed by a whale as a punishment, not a protection. It wasn't taught to me that way. I know my teachers and my parents and even the rhyming Arch Book in which I wore out the pages, told the whole whale-swallowing-Jonah thing from the angle of Jonah's God having mercy on him and giving him a second chance to do the right thing. But, I could never imagine being swallowed by a whale as a good thing.

The bus fills nearly to capacity, but remains silent except for the bus itself. Faces I recognize—people I've ridden with before and engaged in conversation—sit bundled and frigid. Even the little toddler girl I've played peek-a-boo and silly face games with, sits in her mother's lap unmoving, a scowl on her face, her ponytail braids pressed uncomfortably to her cheeks from her stocking cap pulled down tight over her ears and eyebrows. I don't feel like chatting today, either. I sit in my seat, brooding over my lost week of work, the stupid cold weather, and all the other things I now drudge up that are wrong with my life. All while listening to the bus's wailing like a dirge.

Near the end of my ride, the bus driver tells me that the bus's groaning and whines are really new brake pads. The pads are so thick, he says, that it takes several weeks for the bus to settle in with them and stop its squealing.

The bus's wailings were really a result of it getting exactly what it needed. For its protection. For its own good. I consider this as I get off the bus; spit back into the world, with hours still left in my day for salvaging.

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## Digging in Dirt

I can't stop thinking about that woman. She boarded the bus at the Veterans Affairs Building amid a crowd of folks dressed in clothes I instantly recognized: gray marshmallow windbreakers with reflective v-shaped stripes sewn in front and back, dusty green stocking caps, black baggy parachute-style pants, gray t-shirts with the word "ARMY" in all caps printed across the chest. Remnants of military life. I have piles of similar items gracing the closets in my home.

The woman, though, she wasn't wearing any of these things. She wore a bright blue nubby turtleneck sweater and had her rain jacket draped over her shoulders. She carried a cane in one arthritic hand and a large, slouchy leather purse in the other. Her thin, sand-colored hair was pulled back in a ponytail at the nape of her neck, thin wisps of it falling like confetti into her face. She eased herself into the seat behind mine.

"Off four hours early!" she exhaled with a sigh and slow blink of her eyes.

"Nice," I said, turning to face her. "What do you do?" At that, a lengthy conversation ensued.

She is both a patient and employee at the V.A. She has a son earning his Ph.D., and a daughter on the run. She is raising her teenage grandson. They live in Grandin Village—it's nice, her grandson can walk to school. In the early 2000's she had a series of mini-strokes; now she chooses not to drive. She wants to take her grandson to D.C. for the Science Day March. They can take the Smart Bus to Lynchburg, then the train to the city.

Somewhere in our conversation, we chatted about spring gardening plans. I asked if she was sad the V.A.'s greenhouse closed. She leaned in, looked at me through pale eyes, her face becoming draped in sadness.

"Oh, yes," she answered slow and deliberate. "I would sometimes work in the greenhouse. Not too much, mind you, but a few hours a week in there would lift the spirits." She paused, gave another slow blink, and shook her head. "Oh, and our patients! They are really the ones to suffer from the greenhouse being gone. It was its own kind of therapy. You see, our gal—the woman to run it—she retired. So then?" At this, she shrugged her shoulders, pulled escaped strands of hair back from her face, then turned toward sharing some other aspect of her brimming Roanoke life.

I was 26 when I first tried my hand at gardening. Where I grew up on the Illinois prairie, dirt is black and loamy. Every spring my father took his plow, hooked it to one of his John Deere tractors

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and turned over the soil of his fields in preparation for planting. Then he'd pull the red tiller from our shed and do the same to my mother's garden. What he exposed every time was rich fertile soil matching the color of his hair before it started graying. As the soil aired out, it dried to the color of bark on the old oak tree at the edge of our yard. But when it was fresh turned over, it was black.

This wasn't the case in Central Texas, where my husband had his first real Army job and we bought our first home. I can remember taking my brand new shovel and making my first dig into the soil, fully expecting the shovel's end to slice easily through earth, revealing a happy pile of loosely packed, wormy black dirt. I expected it so much, in fact, I didn't know I was expecting it, until—upon making my first dig—my shovel barely skimmed the ground. I knit my brows and repositioned the shovel, this time with the idea of utilizing my body weight. I jumped on the shovel head like a pogo stick. The shovel dug half-way then cracked against something hard—a rock or old brick, I can't remember now. I jolted, steadied myself, then strained to turn over the small bit of dirt I'd penetrated. This is when I realized: not all soil is black.

I claim only two gardening successes from our time in Texas: planting and keeping alive several lantana in a small flower bed under my son's nursery window (lantana grows in Texas under extreme neglect); and cutting back a leggy rose vine so much that my husband was sure I'd killed it. Instead it grew back a profusion of deep magenta blooms and waxy green foliage. I remember my mother telling me once that most shrubs will grow thick and healthy when you cut them back with a vengeance. This corroborated nicely with my general belief that if some is good, more is better, Not great wisdom to live by, but in this case it worked.

For all the mishaps I've had over my 16 years gardening, you'd think I'd have given up on it by now. I often forget the names of common perennials. Growing vegetables is a struggle. And for all the years I've had to learn my limits of time and experience level, still, every season, I'm out with my shovel, fertilizer, spade, and truck-bed load of new plants, digging up soil, playing in dirt.

It's because that woman on the bus is right. Gardening is therapy. It is participating in the life cycle miracle contained in soil, sun and air. Yet, we take the miracle for granted. Why is this? Is it because it's the first thing we learn in science class? Or because we see it in the seasons, year after year? Maybe its familiarity breeds—not contempt, necessarily—but commonness. In soil is the death of a thousand living things, broken down, wormed through; layer upon layer of death. And yet, it is this very dead matter my father

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tills over with his plow and I with my shovel; breaking it open, loosening it, then planting a seed (another miracle) into it, actually expecting it to grow.

It's a ridiculous proposition that proves itself true over and over again. It shatters my sensibilities, restores my sight. Gardening helps me believe that good things—beautiful, vibrant, flourishing things—can, and do, come from awfulness. I dig my hands into soil and become part of the life-from-death miracle. If that's not therapy, I don't know what is.

Gardening also gifts me with a sense of my place. With each move our family made, I had to learn to garden under new land conditions (clay in Maryland, sand in North Carolina, red rock in Southwest Virginia). In France, this kind of intimate understanding of one's land is called *terroir*. *Terroir* is used primarily as a culinary term: the flavors imparted to a food or wine by the conditions under which the food and grapes are grown and produced. It is understanding a place through understanding its soil and how that soil cultivates the culture built upon it. Because in France, food and society are connected inexplicably to land. “[*Terroir*] combines the social construction of a space (town, district, etc.) with the agricultural role of the land,” explains Thomas Parker in the introduction of his book, *Tasting French Terroir*. It is a word we have no direct translation for in English; a word we must feel our way into understanding.

In order for a particular food or wine to carry within it the *terroir* of its place, those who are responsible for cultivating the land must be good stewards of what they've been given. Rather than fight against its natural elements, farmers and vintners work with the land to the best of their abilities to produce food and wines that will reflect the bounty of their particular place.

Through gardening I learn I will fit into my given place when I dig into that place's dirt, accepting it for what it is, and not what I wish it to be. I don't often start this way. I only want to get my hands dirty. I need the therapy. But as I examine those first piles of upturned soil, as I begin to consider my place's *terroir*, I slowly transform my thinking from what I need to what I've been given. I become a cultivator of my place. A steward within my community.

Just like the woman on the bus.

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## Mr. Ramey's Henry Street

*Time present and time past  
Are both perhaps in time future,  
And time future contained in time past.*  
—T.S. Eliot; *Four Quartets*, Burnt Norton

I am standing at Mr. Ramey's front door, waiting for his son, David Jr., to answer my knocking. It is warm for this early spring afternoon. Even under the wide shade of his porch, the sun's oily heat radiates in at me from the busy street beyond. Smells of hot pavement, car exhaust, and freshly cut grass all layer like sediment in the surrounding air. A group of young men come walking down the street. I can hear their cavorting banter, but as they approach the house I hear them go quiet. I feel their stares like a spotlight on my back, and I know why. They are wondering what this tall, skinny white woman is doing in their neighborhood. The same thing happened moments earlier when I parked my suburban near a group of men conversing in a yard. They were laughing and carrying on until they caught sight of me. They went silent and stared as I parked, got out, gave them my most casual stranger smile (which, I am sure, looked anything but), then turned and walked the opposite direction. I hate how nervous I feel in this part of town. I know it is a fear bred out of ignorance, the way mold breeds on old bread. I hate feeling like old bread.

I have rung the doorbell twice already, and knocked once with fervor. The front door is open with only the screen door between me and the front entryway. I saw the home health nurse leaving as I made my approach. I know they are home, but no one is answering and I'm beginning to feel uncomfortable (on top of being nervous). I don't wish to knock again and become "that" person. Yet, something tells me, if I don't persist, if I don't stay put on this front porch, I won't have this opportunity again.

In local Roanoke artist circles, David Ramey's name is of legendary proportions. A self-taught artisan, Mr. Ramey spent decades creating dozens upon dozens of colorful drawings and paintings depicting Roanoke's African-American community before urban renewal; back when Henry Street was alive and about the business of its community. Every scene Mr. Ramey depicted was done from memory, places and life from the early 1950s, up through the 1970s. Mr. Ramey's art is some of the best historical recording African American Roanokers have of their rooted place in Roanoke's time.

What makes Mr. Ramey's works most fascinating is their detailed

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simplicity. Each of his works is a supreme execution in the basic elements of drawing: the use of lines, shading and dimension. Through these foundational techniques, Ramey created scenes of vivid and striking detail: the dry goods lining the walls of Weeby's Grocery Store, electrical lines, shiny cars and fancy ladies outside Nick's Cafe, railroad ties and train smoke blasting up to the Henry Street Bridge, children dancing streamers around a May Day pole outside the Old Gainsboro Library. Every picture is a photograph of captured time. Only better than a photograph; these are pictures filtered through the lens of Mr. Ramey's memories.

I first met Mr. Ramey on a windy March morning at the press conference officially kicking off the 2017 Art by Bus program. His painting, *Henry Street*, was one of four works being displayed on the sides of Roanoke's buses. He sat near me—or rather, his son, David Jr. guided him to a seat next to mine. I remember having this school girl stardom sensation; like I was about to rub elbows with Micheal Jackson or Bo Duke. I tried to think of the many things I'd like to say, ask, or wonder about with him. Here was a man who lived through Roanoke's urban renewal, who knew what it was like “back in the day”. Not only did he know what it was like, he recorded it as an artist historian with a passion and long-sustaining verve. In the same way Alexander Hamilton wrote letters and papers and American ideals like he was “running out of time,” (as told in the Broadway musical, *Hamilton*), so David Ramey seemed to draw his side of Roanoke like he, too, was running out of time.

But I barely said anything to him, for fear of disturbing him. He looked like a frail bird sitting next to me; beautiful and glassy. I leaned in to him and told him how much I admired his artwork. After I had finished my remarks as the Writer on the Bus, he leaned in to me, his eyes a deep and marbled brown, and said, “That was a very nice speech.” This—besides making me soar—emboldened me to ask his son about meeting sometime to: a) purchase Mr. Ramey's book, *The Times and Life on Henry Street*, and b) hear some of his father's stories for myself.

Which is how I came to be standing on Mr. Ramey's front porch now. I hear stirring from upstairs, but still no one answers. I remember how much effort and gingeriness it took to transport Mr. Ramey from his car to his seat at the press conference. He was dressed sharp, and his nails were perfectly manicured (I kept my own ragged nails and calloused palms tucked discreetly from view). When he leaned over to whisper his compliment to me, I caught whiff of his musky clean aftershave. By the love of a dedicated son, a father maintained his dignity into his old age.

I would eventually be welcomed by David Jr. and led to Mr.

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Ramey's kitchen where I would wait some more at a small kitchen table, as David readied his father for visiting. I would look at all the photographs and newspaper clippings taped across his kitchen wall and back door. I would notice the tidiness of his home and how, though the house revealed evidence of its age in bulged ceiling tiles and cracked plaster, it maintained its dignity, even in its old age. Mr. Ramey would come into the room, slow and steady, with a smile on his face, despite the effort it took. David Jr. would tell his father I wanted to hear stories about growing up in Roanoke; stories that inspired his art. After a couple rabbit trails, Mr. Ramey would tell me about the time he took the lock off the door so he could sneak out late and meet his best friends—the twins—on Henry Street for a hot dog. But when he got home, the lock was back on the door and he was trapped outside. Seems his daddy noticed the lock down and thought it'd been an oversight on his part and put the lock back on. Mr. Ramey would tell me how he knew he was gonna have to take his whoopin' because it was too cold outside (being as it was around December time). But his daddy was too tired to deal with whoopin's, and so told his son he'd have to wait 'til the morning. Mr. Ramey would laugh then and tell me he knew if he could make it 24 hours, he'd be free; and sure enough, his daddy never whooped him. Not that time anyway.

David Jr. would bring out his father's book and Mr. Ramey would tell me different stories connected to each picture. He would tell about The Pie Man and how much everyone loved Pie Man pies. An individual pie baked fresh every day from the Pie Man cost nine cents. Mr. Ramey would show me the picture of him and the twins digging their pockets trying to find their pennies to buy a pie. I would ask if they shared the pies and he would answer with an emphatic, *No! If you don't have no money, you don't eat no pie!* David Jr. and I would laugh at that, but he would look pretty serious.

There are other stories Mr. Ramey would tell me: about May Day and Big Jerry White always winning the pie eating contest, getting chased off Henry Street at night by the older kids, going to the movies on Saturdays to watch westerns, collecting soda-pop bottles for spending money, and eating fish sandwiches at The Atlantic Sandwich Shop.

Over the next few days, I would pour over Mr. Ramey's book, studying his pictures and reading his stories; hearing his clear, honest voice come through his prose, as though he were reading to me out loud. I would notice how his stories read similar to the Psalms: a listing of remembrances, heavy in detail, moments of lament, ending in praise. In his stories and his drawings, Mr. Ramey holds open history as a hope and motivation—a passageway

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for the taking—as we move our community forward; staying on course as we remember well our past.

One month and two days later—Mother’s Day, May 14, 2017—Mr. Ramey would pass away while I was flying home from my own grandfather’s funeral in Illinois.

But I don’t know any of this yet.

Right now, I am waiting on Mr. Ramey’s front porch, anticipating my first meeting with this giant of Roanoke artists, feeling the heat from this unusually warm spring afternoon, refusing to turn around and walk away.

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## A Postscript...

I could fill books telling the stories of the people I met this spring riding Roanoke's buses. Each person—each encounter—convicted me, humbled me, and dared me to live each day a truer version of myself. And so, before closing the back cover on my *Writer by Bus* experience, I must commend—to myself, first, and then to my reader—these final five people I hope I never forget from my bus riding time:

The elderly woman with white tangled hair and too many clothes on for the mildly cool weather outside, who kept pulling her fleecy purple coat up over her head when the conversations around her became too noisy. When she exited the bus at Kroger, she walked several feet then stopped in front of a trash can. Without pausing, she stuck her head and one arm down into the trash can, rummaged around, came up empty, then shuffled away.

The older, hunched over man in the brown and orange plaid flannel shirt, and thinning chin-length hair, who got on at the same Kroger. He rode for several stops then wanted to get off. But he couldn't get turned around to pull the "Stop Requested" cord. His face looked strained, eyes wide and worried. A young man sitting across from me, in a Wendy's work uniform and slouching low like he was dozing, quickly sat up, yanked the yellow cord, then slouched back in his seat again. The man, who didn't see the Wendy's worker pull the cord, exhaled and readied himself to exit. It never dawned on me to pull the cord for that gentleman. I smiled at the young man. I wanted to say, 'Thank you'. He never looked my way.

The elderly fellow who lives around Grandin and rides the bus every day, frequenting his favorite Roanoke eateries. Every day I saw him he wore the same loose-fitting violet colored sport coat, a tourist sweatshirt (different every time), boat shoes, and carried with him a tote with howling wolves screen printed on it. He told me one time he walked along Brambleton (which has no sidewalks) from the Brambleton/Red Rock line to eat at Burger in the Square, then on to Country Cookin' for some home cooked vegetables. That's nearly two miles one way. Did I mention there are no sidewalks?

The gentleman wearing a shiny gold-billed Bulls hat, who revealed several spaces between his teeth when he smiled: We

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chatted about weather (he likes summer, I like spring), our children (he has two, I have five), living alone (I had nothing to contribute), moving (he's moved more than me, though he's never left Roanoke and I've lived across the country). After a lull in our conversation (I assumed our chatting had ended), he looked at me in all earnestness and said, "You like church?"

"Yeah," I said. "I like church." Then silence for a block or two.

"Do you like church?" I asked him.

"Oh yeah," he said and smiled. "I like church a lot."

The young refugee mother in a bright colored dress and swept-up hair wrapped loosely in a bun. She was juggling multiple bags, had her toddler son at her side, and infant daughter strapped to her front. As we exited the bus at the transfer station, her son wandered out into the bus lane just as the #42 was pulling in. I grabbed his hand, then asked if she needed help. She studied me, her eyes the color of goldstone. I could tell she was trying to process what I'd said. She then handed me her wallet and one of her grocery bags. She set her purse on the ground, squatted down and continued her searching. A baby blanket fell off her daughter and onto the dirty concrete floor. I picked it up, shook it out, and held onto it, along with her wallet, grocery bag and son. Then she stood up and smiled at me, took back her possessions, and turned down the aisle toward another bus; another point of refuge.

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## Artist's Statement

When my editor at *The Roanoker Magazine*, Kurt Rheinheimer, emailed me the 2017 Writer on the Bus application and suggested I apply for the residency, I think I choked on my coffee. I know I felt my chest constrict with equal amounts of trepidation and thrill; my hallmark sign that this was something I needed to do. I'd been following Roanoke's Art by Bus program since its inception three years ago, not long after my family and I moved to Roanoke. The idea that local leaders would tap into their artists to add strength and vitality to an overtly pragmatic system was one more proof to me our family had settled in the right place.



While some folks may think it strange, to me marrying art to transportation just makes sense. Marrying art to anything a community wants to enliven, makes sense to me.

For all that, I never considered myself qualified to be part of the Art by Bus endeavor. I'm not a native Roanoker, nor a bus rider. I live in the southwest part of Roanoke County, five miles from the nearest bus stop. Besides this, I have five children and a giant pearl-colored suburban I make crisscross patterns in every day, taxiing said children to their many sports and extracurricular endeavors. I am my own public transportation system.

Despite our mere four years living here, Roanoke feels like home; more so than any other place I've lived since leaving my Illinois family farm 20 years ago and moving all over the country with my military husband. Roanoke has a strong sense of place; that marriage of landscape, citizenry and communities. It is a place and people that—even through its flaws—is diverse and connected, strong and good. As the 2017 Writer on the Bus, it has been my great joy to open wide to Roanokers the truth of their place by immersing myself in its public transportation system.

Through the weeks of March and April I rode the bus. I rode every route at least once; some routes I rode so often I became a familiar face within that bus's community. With each bus ride, my convictions about Roanoke and its citizens were both deepened



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and enlarged. Simple kindnesses and easy conversation are the rule, not the exception. They cross ethnic, racial and economic boundaries. In fact, on Roanoke's buses, such boundaries seem nonexistent. I spent my bus times both as silent observer and active converser. After each ride, I would furiously write notes of that day's ride—pieces of conversations, acts of kindness, details of lives, people and a community I quickly recognized and came to call the "Community of Bus." At the end of each week, I compiled my notes and created a Facebook post on the Writer by Bus page I called "Field Notes", sharing with the world the beautiful, generous spirit of my Roanoke.

These notes and weekly posts became the starting point for my essays. In addition, I did research at the Roanoke Public Library's Virginia Room, with the desire of weaving threads of Roanoke's history into several of the essays. Then, in April my family spent time in San Francisco, which inspired me to consider the different ways public transportation reveals a community's identity (see the essay, "On Cable Cars and Paradox"). Finally, I was honored to spend time with Mr. David Ramey Sr., and his son, David Jr., in Mr. Ramey's home only weeks before he passed away. He shared with me his memories of Roanoke—especially life on Henry Street. Through his drawings and his stories, I was given yet another rich and dynamic view for understanding all that is Roanoke; its past, present and potential. All these things inspired and informed my creative process for the final essays published in this collection.

Of course, none of this would matter had it not been for the opportunity I was afforded by the City of Roanoke Arts Commission, RIDE Solutions, and Valley Metro. To all these folks, I am grateful without measure. Thank you. To the librarians at the Virginia Room, thank you for patiently pulling files of newspaper clippings, dusty records of Roanoke's past, and teaching me to use online resources so I could research from the comfort of my home. To my parents, thank you for raising me on a farm so rich with its own identity. You taught me to bloom in all the many places I've been planted, and raised me with a faith that has spurred me toward stewardship of each place. Both these—place and faith—have been the root system to every essay in this collection. To my husband, Tony, thank you for pestering me endlessly until I finally applied to be the 2017 Writer on the Bus. Thank you also for helping me create space for writing amidst the chaos we like to call "just another day." To my kids: Wyatt, Isaac, Sam, JB and Risa, thank you for feigning interest in my bus riding adventures and even (Isaac and Risa) suffering public humiliation by allowing me to post our bus riding escapades on Facebook. To Kurt Rheinheimer, Editor in

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Chief for LeisureMedia360, thank you for having the audacity to think me capable of being Roanoke’s Writer on the Bus, and for always encouraging my creative writing endeavors. To David Ramey Jr., who filled his father’s final months with grace and dignity, and invited me into that precious time so Roanokers could hear from Mr. Ramey one last time—Thank you. A million times over, thank you.

These essays are dedicated Mr. David Ramey Sr., who—I’ve no doubt—is spending his eternity creating beautiful art for the halls of Heaven; and to all Roanoke’s citizens who make up the Community of Bus.

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## About the Artist

Shari Dragovich is a freelance writer living in beautiful Roanoke, VA. Her work has been published in regional lifestyle publications throughout the Southeast and is currently the dining writer for the Roanoker Magazine. She is also a member of the Redbud Writers Guild: a diverse and international community of women invested in community, faith and culture through words. Last fall, Shari eagerly walked back into the classroom, having enrolled in the Masters of Arts in Liberal Studies program at Hollins University. When not writing articles or working on school assignments, Shari enjoys exploring the art of fiction and creative essay. She is currently at work on her first book-length project and writes personal stories about the holiness of life's mundane moments on her blog: [sharidragovich.wordpress.com](http://sharidragovich.wordpress.com). Shari lives with her husband, five teenage kids, hyperactive beagle, and two spastic cats. When she isn't writing, dining somewhere in secret, or watching her kids' sporting events, Shari enjoys reading good books, crossfitting with friends, dating her husband, listening to Broadway tunes and drinking fine wines.

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## About Art By Bus

The Art by Bus program seeks to show how our communities and citizens are connected through public transportation. A partnership between RIDE Solutions, Valley Metro, and the Roanoke Arts Commission, Art by Bus turns our bus system into a canvas for painting, a stage for music, and a space for literature in an effort to bring attention to the ways that transit improves the quality of life in the neighborhoods it serves. We hope to show that if you aren't taking the bus, you are missing something extraordinary.

To learn more about Art by Bus, including our Writer by Bus residency program and the Star Line Series of musical performances, visit:

[RIDESolutions.org/artbybus](http://RIDESolutions.org/artbybus)

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## About RIDE Solutions

Ride Solutions provides alternative transportation options – ride-sharing (carpooling and vanpooling), biking, public transit, walking, and guaranteed ride home services – to residents living within the greater New River and Roanoke Valleys and Region 2000 regions of southwestern Virginia. Through our free services we partner with citizens and businesses to connect them with commuting options – beyond the single-occupancy vehicle – to access work and school.

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## Our Mission

Ride Solutions is a Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Agency – a program dedicated to expanding the efficiency and life of the roadway network and reducing the environmental impacts – air pollution – of vehicle emissions. By helping to promote and connect individuals and businesses partners to transportation options TDM agencies (RIDE Solutions) help to reduce traffic on local roads and improve air quality (link to our community or benefits section) by reducing the impacts of vehicle emissions. Fewer cars on the road during the busy rush hours of the day can also mean safer roads. Through incentive programs, education, and encouragement RIDE Solutions connections people to transportation options.

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# RIDESolutions

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