

The background of the cover is a photograph of a wooden railway sign. The sign is made of vertical wooden planks and has several markings. At the top, there is a large, dark, stylized letter 'W'. Below the 'W', there are two large black numbers, '80' on the left and '50' in the center. To the right of the '50', there is a small rectangular sign with the word 'PLATE' and a circled 'C'. Below the '50', there are several lines of black text: 'EXW 10-8', 'EW 9-7', '2W 17 68', and 'CU FT 4750'. On the far right, there is another small sign with 'H 8-3', 'H 14-3', and 'NORFOLK and WESTERN Railway'. The wood is painted a reddish-brown color and shows signs of wear and tear.

The Walking Man's Best Friend

Essays

80

50

PLATE

H 8-3

H 14-3

NORFOLK
and WESTERN
Railway

21530

4500

EXW 10-8

EW 9-7

2W 17 68

CU FT 4750

Tim Thornton

Cover Art: "A Rolling Canvas" - Nancy Stark - Roanoke, VA

The Walking Man's Best Friend

Tim Thornton

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When HAL Takes The Wheel

Just before I boarded a bus to Tanglewood, my cell phone buzzed with an alert about a wreck. An automated Uber had hit a woman in Arizona. She died. A few days later, news came of a Tesla traveling on autopilot and driving into a concrete barrier. The driver died. There have been other stories like that, but they always seem to contain a paragraph or two about how 37,461 people died in automobile accidents in 2016 – and all the automobiles involved in those accidents were driven by people, not sophisticated robots.

Automotive automation is going to eventually save us all by replacing us all behind the wheel. At least, that's what experts keep telling us. With sensors collecting data from every direction, autonomous vehicles can divine trouble before it exists, adjusting speed and direction so seamlessly, we superfluous passengers won't even realize catastrophes have been averted. Besides, computers don't get distracted. People seem to spend a lot of time thinking of new ways of creating distractions. If you've spent any time on streets or highways, you've probably noticed drivers futzing with a GPS or a stereo, checking text messages, talking on a phone that's occupying one of their hands that should be on the steering wheel, or waving their hands around excitedly while talking on a hands-free phone. (At least, I think the drivers I saw were talking on hands-free phones. They may have been having an animated conversation with the voices inside their heads. But I digress.)

In the early days of automobile racing, physicians worried about race car drivers' survival because doctors were convinced humans could not endure sustained periods of traveling at 60 mph or more without blacking out. Now, of course, it's fairly common to see people hurtling along at speeds higher than that while they stuff burgers and fries into their faces, looking down occasionally to wipe detritus from their clothes before reaching for that barrel of soda pop riding in one of their car's 6,000 cup holders. A few days ago, I cautiously passed a tractor-trailer I'd followed for miles as it weaved and wandered from rumble strip to center line and back. It was a double trailer, so the whip-like effect looked like a clumsy amusement park ride. The poor guy must be tired, I thought. He should pull over and rest before something bad happens. As I passed – with my left wheels on the farthest left-hand reaches of the passing lane – the driver seemed alert. He was fidgeting with something on the center console. Every time he leaned over, the truck turned with him, then he fumbled back into his lane.

Perhaps my most memorable distracted driver experience came so late one night it was early in the morning. As I was driving on a long, straight stretch of interstate, I saw a car in my rearview mirror begin, almost imperceptibly, to ooze into the passing lane. It took a long time for the car to complete that maneuver, but it closed on me quickly and quickly swooshed by. As it passed, I could see the driver had a book spread across the steering wheel and a reading lamp aimed at the pages. I can't say for sure what kept his attention so completely off the highway, but it was exam week, and he was headed toward Blacksburg.

Settled into a seat on any Valley Metro bus, I didn't have to watch weaving semis or my rearview mirror. I watched riders, and I watched bus drivers.

I watched bus drivers explain to people how to insert their bus cards so they would work. When the machine that accepts fares rejected an elderly lady's dollar bill, a driver smoothed the currency's wrinkles, so the machine would take it.

Once we were rolling, drivers helped riders remember where to get off (and where not to). They helped folks with walkers make it onto the bus and into their seats. They helped folks get their wheel chairs secured safely. Oh. And they drove, too.

We hadn't gone far into one trip when the driver found a way to get the bus out of the way of an ambulance wailing up from behind. Then he stopped at a traffic light, not blocking a side road and letting people know they could pull out before the bus started rolling again. He noticed the motorcycle coming from another side street looking like it might roll right through the stop sign. A tap of the horn warned another car that was about to roll into the bus' path.

Drivers swung buses around turns that the rules of physics seemed to exclude buses from making. They snaked buses through orange and reflective white construction barrels, under bridges, around corners and past a trench that took up the space one side of the road used to fill.

In the Tanglewood parking lot, they stopped and dodged to miss pedestrians who didn't seem to notice a vehicle the size of small house bearing down on them.

Drivers did all this so they could return to the big bus terminal at Campbell Court where construction created tighter turns and tighter parking and sent more people crossing more bus paths to get to the bus they wanted to ride.

“Don’t get up while the bus is moving,” one driver cautioned when a passenger did just that. “We don’t want no accidents. “Y’all work with me,” she said, “and I’ll get everybody where you need to go.”

Robots may replace the rest of us, but not bus drivers – not today, at least – and not for a long time to come.

###

Places To Go

A big television hangs on a wall in the Campbell Court waiting area, staring down at the rows of chairs. They're not chairs, exactly, because they're all anchored together – sort of benches with individual parking places.

I found an unoccupied spot and joined the group of people. On the wall, people were worrying because the Dow Jones Industrial Average was down more than 700 points. (That's about three times the value of the whole stock market on the day of the big 1929 crash, the one at the beginning of the Great Depression.) It's the kind of news that can make a person close to retirement uneasy.

Teachers were marching and chanting at the Kentucky capitol, agitating for more pay and better pensions. Kentucky teachers were ranked 29th in pay, but the commonwealth had under-funded teacher pensions – and it planned to introduce something called a “cash-balance plan,” something sort of, but not quite, like a 401k. For teachers who don't get Social Security, it added uncertainty to teachers' retirement plans.

In the waiting room, most people weren't noticing the frightening news on the wall. They were on their phones – not talking on their phones but texting, emailing, maybe reading the news. Maybe not. Little kids were on cell phones, too, playing games to distract themselves from the way time seems to pass like molasses flowing uphill in winter when you're young.

I got sucked in by the big screen. I was watching crowds of teachers chanting and raising their fists in the air. I looked away from the screen. I was nearly alone. Almost everyone who seemed planted in their chairs moments earlier were up and out the door, lining up where buses were pulling up and more buses were due any minute. These people had places to go.

Wall Street and Kentucky might be in chaos, but at Campbell Court, the buses were still running on time.

###

Celebrity Bus Riders

A dog named Eclipse rides the bus in Seattle. I read it on the internet, so it must be true. Eclipse and her owner were waiting for the bus one day, heading to a dog park. When the bus came, Eclipse's human was finishing his cigarette, so he wasn't ready to board. Eclipse was ready, so she hopped on. She recognized the dog park stop, and hopped off there. Her owner came on the next bus, about 10 minutes later.

The dog became a regular bus rider (with and without her human) and the star of a King County Department of Transportation video about getting to cool places by bus. (It's on YouTube.) Newspapers published stories about Eclipse. She got her own Facebook page.

Riding the bus is different if you're a person.

Jacquelyn Carr, who used to ride the bus in Los Angeles, did get a little story about her in the Los Angeles Times, but that was four months after she started blogging about riding buses. Her blog was called "Snob On a Bus."

"I felt like I was too good for the bus," Carr told the Times. "I think there's a social understanding and a construction around that if you take the bus, you take it because you don't have money. There's a social standard. Obviously I had bought into that."

She also became that, at least, sort of. After she lost a publicity job, Carr decided she couldn't afford a car. As she wrote on her blog, Carr "got rid of [her] car to 'go green,' well, and because the lease was too expensive. So I have a beach cruiser and the bus system."

Carr was never exactly destitute, it seems. Her blog posts prominently mention Lululemon jackets and workout clothes, Nike Dunks and purple aviators. Not typical bus rider's attire. To be fair, judging from the photos I found on line, that's not typical attire for anyone except Jacquelyn Carr.

In the Roanoke Valley, according to the local daily newspaper, a 2014 Valley Metro rider survey showed that 84 percent of bus riders didn't own a car and 71 percent had a household income below \$20,000. So, generally speaking, bus riders are not at the top of the

region's economic ladder. A lot of them have the kind of jobs that require a person to wear a uniform to work. When I rode the bus, I saw folks dressed for their shifts at McDonald's, Taco Bell and Hardee's. One group traveling together seemed headed for a more formal dining establishment, judging from their matching white shirts and black pants. Other folks were on their way to or from jobs at Kroger and Lowe's. One man's name tag identified him as "Manager," though it didn't say what he managed. People with Carilion badges are on buses, too.

That's hardly a surprise, since Carilion is the region's biggest employer, but it underscores that buses aren't just for food service and retail workers. People who need to get to Carilion and its services use the bus. So do people who need a break from hospital vigils, so they head downtown for a respite and repast. People who spend money at Kroger and Lowe's and Walmart ride the bus, too. Virginia Western Community College students get to and from their classes by bus. Parents and children ride the bus to get to Center in the Square and the rest of that Roanoke Market area that's been put on a "Great American Public Place" list beside New York's Central Park.

Maybe a lot of the people who ride buses, the ones who need buses the most, are poor folks, folks at the bottom of the regional economy, folks who are holding the rest of us up.

###

Driving The Bus

The Monday after I graduated from high school, I went to work.

I spent most of that summer digging footers and assembling rebar reinforcement for a building that, miraculously, is still standing. I didn't know very much, and very little of what I knew had anything to do with constructing buildings. But even I knew our boss would have a hard time actually doing the work he was supervising, and not just because he was old and out of shape. For example, he instructed us to construct a reinforced concrete pillar intended to be one of the building's corners. He'd misread the blueprint, so we built it in the wrong spot. Just before some of his bosses came by to see how things were going, we used a backhoe to dig up the misplaced pier and bury it where the bosses weren't likely to look for it.

One thing I learned that summer is to appreciate a boss who understands the work they are overseeing – and to really appreciate a boss who knows how to do the work their people are doing. Those folks aren't as easy to find as they should be. But they're out there.

A few weeks ago, I interviewed Darren Whitmer. He manages a string of factories that makes whisky barrels. One set of factories makes the staves – the thin strips of oak that make up the barrels' sides – and another set of factories wraps those staves with metal bands and adds the heads that turn that pile of wood into a whisky-tight container. That requires an unusual set of skills, so I asked how the company found people to do the work.

“We train them,” Whitmer told me. He and another man train all the coopers the company hires.

“When we opened up our stave mill in Millboro a couple of months ago,” Whitmer said, “I was there in gloves and jeans and safety glasses, with a smile on my face, teaching guys how to run a stave saw and make a stave.”

Workers are apt to respect a boss like that.

“It carries a lot of weight with your people,” Whitmer said.

That's why I like Kevin Price's story.

Price was a music education major at Virginia Tech when he stepped onto a Blacksburg Transit bus.

"I sat up front and saw the guy driving and said, 'Man, I want to try that,'" Price said. "The bug bit me, man, and I started my voyage through."

That voyage began as a part-time driver.

"They were always hiring because at that time it was mostly student run, so they were looking for operators all the time," Price said. "So I just put my application in and they called me in and I went through the testing and the interview and started driving."

After driving for a while, Price cleaned Blacksburg buses. After that, he spent a couple of years as a bus mechanic. All that came before the supervisor's spot Price had been waiting for opened up. The next step after that was becoming a training and safety supervisor. Price spent a year working in Denver, then came to the Greater Roanoke Transit Company as assistant general manager. Now he's the system's general manager.

Price still knows how to drive a bus, and he still gets in the driver's seat once in a while.

"That's my favorite part," Price said. "I'll get one and just drive it around, especially if we get a new one. I'll take it for a little test drive."

A music educator becoming so immersed in public transportation may seem odd, but in Price's case, it might have been predictable.

"I'd always had a thing for big vehicles," Price said. The first toy he remembers playing with was a green and yellow bus.

Before Price was a bus driver, of course, he was a bus rider. That's how he caught the bug. All these years later, he's a bus rider again. When his daughter started driving, Price said, he began riding a bus work.

He didn't say if he still sits behind the driver.

The Walking Man's Best Friend

Jerome likes working at Habitat for Humanity's ReStore. He worked at the Rescue Mission's thrift store for a while, but there he mostly took in donations. A person doesn't see a lot of people in that job. He takes in donations at the ReStore, too. But he also stocks shelves and does "a variety of everything."

"I like dealing with the public and everything," he said. "It's a big open area. There's more room to move around and I like dealing with the public."

Jerome got his ReStore job through a program managed by Goodwill Industries of the Valleys. It's the Senior Community Service Employment Program and Jerome can't say enough good things about it.

"It took me a little while to get on with that program," he said. "People was telling me about the program, and I just thought I'd go on up there. Went up there and they helped me out and I've been doing good ever since."

SCSEP is a federal program aimed at low-income older workers. The program helps those workers find a part-time job with a non-profit and then helps them try to find full-time work. A person has to be at least 56 to get in. Jerome is 57.

"The last three or four years, I been doing pretty good," Jerome said. "Before that, it was hard."

Jerome says he's been a cook, a brick mason and a construction worker. He's taken food to people who might not have a hot meal otherwise, delivering Meals on Wheels to people "in Fincastle, Buchanan and then all over Roanoke, elderly people."

"Most of the time all my life I've had a job," Jerome says. "I just couldn't maintain it, keep it, you know?"

"It's hard to get a job and stay on. I worked at McAllister's for two years. That didn't work out."

Jerome was born in Roanoke. Back in the day, he was an athlete at William Fleming High School.

“I played a little bit of everything,” he said, “baseball, football, basketball. I ran track a little bit. I was a shot putter. I was a good football player, basketball player, too.”

He saw one of the greatest basketball players of all time, Julius Erving, play for the Virginia Squires at the Roanoke Civic Center.

Jerome really likes working at the ReStore, but he’s not sure he wants to join in a Habitat for Humanity trip some of his coworkers are taking to help build houses in the Caribbean.

“I might not get back,” he said. “My boss man, he spent four weeks in Haiti.”

Jerome’s boss was doing good works, but he came back with an awful cold and missed work.

“When you go to other countries like that, you’re supposed to get shots,” Jerome said, “but you never know.”

For now, Jerome does most of his traveling on Valley Metro buses between the apartment he shares with his wife, a few blocks from Fallon Park, and the ReStore over on Melrose Avenue. “I like riding the bus,” he said. “It helps a lot of people out.”

The bus is more than transportation to Jerome. It’s a social outing.

“I do a lot of talking to people,” he said, “different people, regulars and new people; it doesn’t matter.

“When I want to go to Salem, when I go out and get a hamburger, or I want to go down to Bojangles’ in Vinton, I catch the Valley Metro. That’s my only transportation. I’m a Valley Metro fan. That’s the walking man’s best friend.”

###

They Call Him West Virginia

When Ronnie boards the bus, it's not exactly a party, but things do get lively.

"I'm moving to Miami in May," he announces. "I'm getting out of this cold weather. I'm going where I can see bikinis all year round and sit in 100-degree weather."

His name is Ronnie, but everyone calls him West Virginia, because that's where he's from. At least, that's where people think he's from. They heard that. Somewhere.

West Virginia rolls himself onto the bus and down the aisle, but gestures toward a younger man who steadied West Virginia's wheel chair as the ramp raised him up from the sidewalk.

"He's my helper," West Virginia says.

West Virginia is wearing a prosthetic leg. He says there's a problem with his other one – something about a piece of bone that gets in the way and won't let it fit right. He says he has to go into the hospital to get the bone cut away. He's left the ill-fitting leg at home.

"Yeah, it's at home walking around the room like a guard dog," West Virginia says. "You open the door, and it will bite you."

West Virginia catches his helper's attention and points to an empty lot.

"You know what used to be right there?" he asks. "A Hooters. See the palm tree?"

"They had good chicken wings there."

"Didn't they have good chicken wings there?" he shouts toward the driver.

The once-Hooter's is quickly passed and West Virginia is talking about his Miami trip again. It will take him 24 hours on a Greyhound, he says. That includes the time taken up by two layovers and three bus changes. West Virginia is looking forward to

every bit of it.

“I like riding the Greyhound,” he says from his perch by the bus window. “You just sit there and ride.”

“You see the country,” West Virginia says, looking like a man who enjoys a good back road. “They don’t stick on the interstate.”

Post script: I got West Virginia’s phone number, and I gave him mine. We played phone tag for a while, but we could never catch each other. Eventually, the phone-tagging stopped. Maybe he got tired of it. Maybe he found something better to do. I like to think he rode that Greyhound to Miami.

###

Crowd Of One

The first time I prepared to board a bus in Roanoke, I had a little of that seventh-grade feeling of being far outside of the in-crowd. Everyone else seemed to know where to go and where to stand and when it was time to go stand there. I kept checking to make sure I was in or near the place I needed to be to catch the bus I wanted to ride.

Nearly everyone but me seemed to be headed home after a workday. They had a tired but anticipatory look, even the guy wearing a red do-rag, the man who took a last deep drag on his cigarette before pinching off the glowing end and saving the rest for later.

When the bus doors opened, the crowd moved through purposefully, finding and filling seats in a practiced migration. I put my fare card in the wrong way. The driver explained, patiently, how to do it correctly. I didn't disrupt the boarding choreography for too long.

I settled near the back of the bus, expecting to observe a sort of mobile community interacting as it rolled across the city. Instead, nearly everyone settled into a seat and onto a cell phone. A couple of riders made calls. Most were texting. One book reader sat alone, about halfway back on the driver's side.

This was a crowd that didn't want to be a crowd. Its members left in ones and twos, stepping out of the bus with a "Thank you and have a nice day" for the driver. Some offered just a "Thanks." Some gave a salute. Others never acknowledged, never seemed to notice, there was a crowd or a driver. When the right stop came, they rose from their seats, pocketed their phones and headed toward the side door. They'd duck their heads and go.

###

Through Students' Eyes

One of the things I do is teach English, freshman composition classes. A person can learn a lot by teaching. One thing I've learned is that no matter what an essay's topic might be, that essay will often tell at least as much about the writer as it does about the intended topic.

One standard freshman writing assignment is a description paper, an exercise in telling readers what the writer sees, hears, smells, tastes and feels. It's a manifestation of the writing cliché, "Show. Don't tell." Don't tell readers a sunset is beautiful, I tell my students. Describe that sunset in a way that, at the end of the passage, readers say to themselves, "That's beautiful." Don't tell them something stinks. Show them how the smell brought water to your eyes, ringing to your ears and a sensation of sulfur stones scraping hairs from your nostrils.

I gave my most recent classes the option of describing a Valley Metro bus ride. Those who did ranged from daily riders to former riders to folks who'd never ridden a bus around here before. Confusion can make a person feel uneasy, vulnerable.

"...[O]ne of my friends dropped me off and pointed out the bus station and left me there," one student wrote. "The entrance was dark, scary, with poor lighting. The buses with different numbers were in the terminal. What did the numbers mean? I went to the waiting area where many passengers were waiting ... I saw a person in a uniform behind the desk. She would answer questions about bus stop locations and times, but there was only one person to respond the questions, so I had to wait in line."

The writer was surprised to learn buses run on an hourly schedule. She learned bus drivers don't give change, but they do give advice about which stop is best for a rider's destination. She learned that pulling that line running just above riders' heads will let the driver know a person wants to get off at the next stop. She also saw a driver help a rider in a wheel chair get on the bus and get secured before pulling out. Not all of her experience was positive.

"... [T]he driver was not on time and we had to wait ten minutes more to get on the bus and I heard people complaining about how this bus is always behind and caused problems for passengers trying

to get to a connecting bus ... When we got on the bus, it smelled like old, wet jackets left there for long time or perhaps a boy's locker room."

A much more experienced bus rider concentrated on sounds, explaining, "I usually wear headphones when I ride, but even when I don't wear them I hear music."

Traffic, wind, birds, people - they all contribute to the continuous composition in his head. The bus provides a drone that underlies the song. The bus was nearly empty as he boarded, but it soon filled with people and sounds, building a syncopated symphony with many movements.

"The sound of the bus moving only stops to change notes," he wrote. "Other noises, like the robotic voice of the 'Stop requested' or 'Please take transfer' prompts, make up what little melody there is.

"The bus fills with the morning regulars, adding to the melody that was almost absent before. We make a stop close to Downtown Roanoke, and I hear the beeping sound of the handicap lift ... After the bus plays its quiet song one more time, we get to the bus station."

One writer concentrated on her fellow passengers.

"Some were awake; others were asleep," she wrote. "The ones who were asleep were snoring, drooling, or jerking. The ones who were awake were reading or talking or listening to music. The ones who listened to music bobbed their heads to the beat, or off rhythm. The passengers who read sat quietly, with serious looks on their faces. Some people talked and others yelled across the aisle. One old man was wearing an old, yellow, out-of-season flannel shirt. He looked scared, like he never been on the bus before."

Another writer revisited the bus he used to take to work.

"I hopped on," he wrote, "paid my fare and shook hands with the bus driver who remembered me from past trips.

"The bus had a few people on it, maybe six or seven. Judging by the expression on their faces and what they were wearing, either they were exhausted and getting off work, or dreadfully headed

there.”

The bus stopped at the Bradley Free Clinic, drove through the Carilion complex, “almost as if it were its own small city,” and the writer saw people “walking their dogs, running, or riding bikes. Everything was moving.”

The bus passed fast food joints, shopping centers, a community college, a construction zone, and finally got to the stop where he used to get off the bus and begin his 20-minute walk to work. “Riding with a different mission and purpose showed me things that I had not seen previously,” he wrote. The ride was familiar, but the experience was richer. He noticed growth, both natural and economic, along the route. He noticed the other bus riders and realized they “revealed how their day was going with a facial expression.”

It was “all the same,” he wrote, “yet very different.”

Saeedah Badri, Kevin Hale, Jermey Owens and Kenesha Wallace contributed very heavily to this essay.

###

Snippets

Bits of bus conversation:

“I said, ‘You called my phone.’

She said, ‘Is everything all right?’

I said, ‘Well, I have a couple of cracked ribs.’”

“Ever since your sister stopped talking to me ...”

“I did some research. You hear so much these days.”

“They shot it and they took it to the vet and they had to euthanize it.”

“You’ll like butternut squash, I tell you.”

“Enjoy him while you can. They grow up.”

“Tell him I said hello. I never can catch him. I call him, but I can’t catch him.”

“They come from such awful broken homes. If they die tomorrow, they’re going to hell because they’re still so skeptical.”

“I know they know I know. When I get off work, I’m going to tell Mama I know.”

###

Artist's Statement

When I was six, my father got a job driving a Trailways bus. It meant we had to move to a town in Maryland, somewhere in the orbit of the District of Columbia. We moved from a house with a field out back to an apartment. There was a lot of pavement nearby, but very little of it I could ride my bike on. Worse than that, I had to go to school in a building with a paved playground even though school had already ended for the summer back home. And I got the chickenpox.



Neither I nor my dog thought much of the neighborhood.

But Dad went to work in a uniform that looked like an airline pilot's. I remember him driving charters to Philadelphia – a place I wouldn't visit until I was old enough to drive myself – but I think most of the time he was driving in and around D.C. Sometimes I'd get to ride with him on those trips. I'd sit behind him and look out that wall-sized windshield while he commanded a vehicle as big as a house trailer. It was a big adventure for my 6-year-old self.

I learned, because he talked about his driver's training, to pull into an intersection when making a left turn. I learned, because I saw him do it, how to shift without using a clutch.

Since we moved back from those few months in Maryland, I haven't been much of a bus rider.

I live far enough outside of town that there really is no bus for me to ride. For a very short while, the Smart Bus stopped at a library near my house, but not enough people rode it to make the side trip worthwhile, so that's long gone. I've ridden the trolley in and out of downtown Roanoke a few times, but I'd never really tried to work out a bus route and schedule until I became the Writer on the Bus. I think I got on the wrong bus only once.

Including my writing in the Art by Bus program may be stretching the definition of art past the breaking point, but don't let my shortcomings diminish your view of the larger project. Public art is

a gift we give each other, and art in general – fine arts, performing arts, music, dance, literature – is necessary to any society worth the name.

As Winston Churchill said, “The arts are essential to any complete national life. The State owes it to itself to sustain and encourage them....Ill fares the race which fails to salute the arts with the reverence and delight which are their due.”

I’m afraid I approached this as a journalist more than an artist, because a journalist is more or less what I’ve been since I was old enough to drive. I don’t deliver the flowery language and revelatory insight of a poet or the deep, thoughtful ruminations of an accomplished essayist. I try to deliver something for readers to think about.

I rode. I wrote. I hope I did a decent job describing what I saw.

I want to thank the City of Roanoke Arts Commission, RIDE Solutions and Valley Metro for giving me the opportunity to ride and write about the bus and for keeping this program going. I want to thank my students, especially Saeedah Badri, Kevin Hale, Jermey Owens and Kenesha Wallace, for considering their own bus trips. Thanks to everyone who offered encouraging words as I worked on this. Thanks to Maggie, my PhD-seeking daughter, for reading behind me. And thanks to Juanita and Matthew for putting up with the disruptions my riding and writing caused, though the regular version of me is so typically disruptive, they may not have noticed.

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About the Writer

Tim Thornton's family has lived in Southwest Virginia at least since Thomas Jefferson lived in the White House. Thornton's first writing job was covering high school sports when he was in high school. He's reported about many things since then, but he keeps getting drawn back to the people and the culture, the land and the water, in the section of Appalachia closest to his home.

Thornton's work has earned awards from state press associations, the Society of Environmental Journalists and the National Newspaper Association. He's been honored with the Phillip D. Reed Memorial Award for Outstanding Writing on the Southern Environment and the D. Lathan Mims Award for "editorial leadership and service to the community." His reporting has been broadcast on Virginia Public Radio, West Virginia Public Radio and National Public Radio.

Thornton teaches English composition and Appalachian literature at Virginia Western Community College and spends as much of each summer as possible traveling to fiddlers' conventions. He lives in Shawsville with his wife, their son and two large, loud dogs.

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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

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About RIDE Solutions

Ride Solutions provides alternative transportation options – ridesharing (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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RIDE Solutions

Connecting the Region's Commuters
ridesolutions.org



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Years
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