This Is A Trip

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Abstract
In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"The major advantages of commuting by public transportation are not having to drive yourself (so that you have time to accomplish something else, such as homework), not having to worry about gasoline and auto maintenance, and not having to cope with drive-time (rush-hour) traffic. But there are times when you wish you didn't have to take that bumpy bus."

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Kern: This Is A Trip

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The major advantages of commuting by public transportation are not having to drive yourself (so that you have time to accomplish something else, such as homework), not having to worry about gasoline and auto maintenance, and not having to cope with drive-time (rush-hour) traffic. But there are times when you wish you didn’t have to take that bumpy bus.

You try your best to be at the bus stop in enough time to allow for the variable time schedule of the driver. Never has a Regional Transit Service bus arrived exactly on time. You begin to wonder whether RTS doesn’t really mean “Ride Tremendously Slowly”, as buses always come late, if at all. The only time they ever go at the normal speed limit, you’ve noticed, is when they’re on the way back to the bus barn (located at 1300 East Main Street). Drivers are anxious to return to the coop, after a hard day of handing out bogus transfers which expire an hour before they’re supposed to. Of course, the issuer of the defective merchandise usually issues a recall, followed by a succession of shortened trips desiring an exchange.

After standing around the street corner awaiting the coming of the coach, you end up having to stand for a large percentage of the trip, as there is standing-room only. You have to hold on for dear life in order to survive the belching of the brakes at each succeeding stop, the rocking of the structure as it hits potholes after pothole, and the tilting of the floor when heavy people board and descend the stairs.

After a while, you’re able to find a seat as the bus clears out. The ride goes rather smoothly, until a lady, as she approaches the front, slips and falls on the floor. Everyone gasps, fearing the worst. The woman, though, gets up, dusts herself off, and sits back down. Just when you think that all is peachy, you realize that the bus has pulled over to the curb. The driver notifies the RTS headquarters, and makes all of us wait. And wait, and wait some more. “Oh, the driver has called an ambulance,” you say to yourself, “just to be on the safe side.” That isn’t the case however, and a half hour goes by before an RTS official shows up. Is he concerned about the lady’s well-being? No!! He came to take pictures!! It’s bad enough the woman suffered humiliation in the first place, but then pictures—almost to the point of recreating the accident. (Volunteers? Are there any volunteers?) This daytime drama causes you to be late for English, and you rush into the classroom pretending that the rain has slowed you down.

During this interval (more like, waste of time) on the bus, you stare at your seat, and at the others around you—they contain no belts, no straps (and sometimes, no padding). Even though statistics prove that buses are the safest mode of transportation, this incident causes you to wonder just how safe buses really are (as statistics can prove anything a person wants them to). New York State has a mandatory seatbelt law, requiring automobile passengers to buckle up. But has anyone ever seen a seatbelt on a bus—any bus—any time—before? And buses are safer than cars, you ask, even in this respect?

Judging by the schedules, you have two minutes to transfer from the East Avenue bus in the back of Midtown to the next one at Main and Clinton for the return trip home. This would only be true if both buses go according to the schedules, which, of course, isn’t the case. The East Avenue swings by Fisher anywhere from five to ten minutes late, so that there is a fifteen to twenty minute layover period because you missed the other bus you wanted to catch. This brings up the question of why, let’s say, a person standing in front of TV-10 on East Avenue will never catch—in fact, will never see—an East Avenue bus—even if he or she waits all year. As soon as the East Ave. bus hits downtown, it turns off to East Ave., and travels along a swerving route until it reaches the back of the plaza.

During your layover period, buses “pile up” at Main and Clinton so that all you can easily view are the route displays (for lack of a better term) on the right side of the buses. On the newer buses, there’s no problem, as both the front and the side displays are programmed together. On the older buses, though, the signs are changed separately with hand cranks. Usually, only the front one is changed, so that would-be passengers at Main and Clinton perceive incorrect displays, and don’t know which buses have arrived. Of course, sometimes, both displays are inaccurate, so that you’re literally taken for a ride instead of taken to a destination. Well, actually, some of the older buses don’t even have side displays, and you have to strain your neck and push your way through the crowd to see the displays, only to discover that they’re not the right route you want, anyhow.

As you stand impatiently waiting for the next train of on-rushing coaches, the reeking scent of tortured hotdogs turns your tastebuds off. Cigarette smoke, traffic fumes, and pages of last Thursday’s Democrat & Chronicle blow your way. You look up toward Midtown, at the Branch of Rochester Community Savings on the corner, you realize that the clock has been replaced with an “RC” sign.

More people crowd the sidewalk; the bratty little kids screaming and the police person’s whistle blowing irritate your ears. As the buses approach, your disappointment grows. Another Route #8 has arrived, within the last five minutes of the last one. Two Route #9 buses stop, both having different street designations. You wonder, “How can they both have the same route numbers if they’re not both the same route?” Your frustration mounts as a “Main and Clinton” bus shows up. “Oh, that’s a great route! I’ll really go far on that one!” you muse to yourself. You just get so annoyed when buses crowd the limited curb space just to drop people off. “Main and Clinton,” “1300 E. Main Street,” “Express,” “Lake Limited” (whatever that is), and “Nor In Service” displays try your patience.

When you finally board your long-awaited ride, you discover it’s the same old thing. Another one of those old buses—it doesn’t even have a push-button buzzer; just a string. And RTS rubs it in. Posted are signs declaring that

“The Federal Government is proposing to eliminate or drastically reduce financial assistance to RTS. If this proposal is passed, it would mean: increased fares, service reductions, [and] no further bus replacements.”
“This Is A Trip”

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This makes you feel ashamed that you opted to take advantage of public transportation in the first place.

As a bee flies in along with a passenger, you recall a children's book you read when you were young, *The Bus Ride*, by Scott, Foresman and Company (published in 1971). In it, several individuals (humans and animals) boarded, one at each stop, and “then the bus went fast.” The last to enter was a bee, at which time all of the passengers abandon the vehicle and “then they all ran fast.”

Too bad the real buses don’t travel at the same rate and have the same efficiency. Although some people will suggest that this government-subsidized monopoly known as the Regional Transit Service may be better than no public transportation at all, you realize that there’s room for improvement.

*Robert Kern*

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**REVEL**

We sat in a scene of revelry
Mulling over the moment
As though it was our last

An embrace
A kind word
A kiss wrapped in 364 days

A year
Borne on two hands
That clapped at midnight

What we portrayed was
Shattered like a crystal talisman
That a child dropped

Quickly falling in slow motion
We want to catch it
But it hits the driveway

My heart swelled through my eyes
Weeping Auld Layne Syne
Blinded by welts of mixed emotion

We sang in harmony off-key
Wiping anguish
Into our empty champagne glasses

*Elizabeth M. Cunningham*