

Rick Campbell

My People, My People: Riding the Rails in Coach

Everybody loves the sound of a train in the distance

Chicago, Union Station

I rolled my cheap thrift store luggage into the overcrowded and intentionally ugly waiting area for the Capitol Limited, east bound, Chicago to DC. I wondered what was limited about the route—service, style, class, chairs in the boarding area? The lack of empty chairs, and the prospect of sitting next to anyone I saw there, made leaning against a pillar seem a good option. In 20 or 30 minutes the train should board, but there were no Amtrak personnel around to answer questions or check tickets. There was no line in front of the gate. At least a hundred people were milling around, ready, I guessed, to rush to the door when the call to board was made.

The gates were not really gates, but portals, sort of openings in the wide wall. A woman's voice was screaming last call for a train at another gate over a very bad PA system. She called last call five times, and still, some 30 minutes later people were still rushing through the hole in the wall.

I heard a loud thump on the other side of my pillar and, when I looked around to see what happened, a man was lying on the floor. He had fallen off the bench as he slept. He sat up, confused, way drunk, and seemed surprised to find himself on the floor, and maybe surprised to that he was in the train station. It was clear that he was not going to ride any trains tonight.

While he was on the floor, people's reactions were many and varied. Some laughed, some just said "oh"; when he tried to stand and wobbled around, some said "a drunk" and turned back to what they were doing—which was mostly just waiting for a train. The man's stuff was scattered around him, hat on one side, his paper sacks and plastic bags on both sides of him. A woman tried to help him up, but it was so hard for him to rise and gather his stuff that she had to give up. Eventually, the man stood, walked three steps and fell again. This second fall earned him more laughter but no help. I had been riding trains for 12 days, and I had lost any interest or sympathy for train people. I

went back to leaning on my column and kept it between me and almost everyone else. Drunks fall a lot. We all assumed he was drunk and chances were very good that he was, but if he was a disheveled man with a serious medical condition that affected his balance, would we have afforded him more sympathy and help?

He shuffled past my pillar and it seemed that he was leaving the gate area, but about 10 minutes later there was another thump as he fell again. He was closer to me now, maybe as punishment for my elitism. He rose again—it was like a prize fight with a very crappy prize. The ref should have stopped it after the third time he fell; it was clear he was in no condition to go on, but there was no ref, no one in his corner either. Why was he here? If he was homeless then Union Station was certainly a warmer place to crash than on Chicago's streets, but why at the gate? No chairs, nowhere to spread out. There were probably fewer cops around here; the almost absent Amtrak personnel seemed to be in charge of the gate's crowd. He fell again and this one was bad. He hit his head on one of the poles that hold the ropes that the lines of people snake through. He was bleeding around his mouth. Stay down, I thought. Stay down, there's no sense going on with this. Someone will surely stop the fight now that there's blood. The security guy came over to him. Where had he been the first three times the drunk man fell? Security spoke into his secret agent lapel mike and then said to the drunk, "how you doin' buddy." Which is security speak for *we are going to get your sorry, drunk-ass self out of here*. The man could not or would not answer. Maybe he did not know how he was doing. Honestly, sadly, I just wanted him out of here too.

I was waiting for a train.

2.

"Ridin' that train . . ."

In the last two weeks I'd ridden trains from Cumberland, Maryland, to Chicago, from Chicago to Portland, Portland to Seattle, Salt Lake City to here, and I still had to ride from here to Cumberland. Fourteen days and nine hours on trains, so far. Every train I rode was late. Why are you doing this, some people asked me? Because I could, really; I had more time than money and I had this long held desire to take a cross country train trip. Now, my desire was fulfilled and waning. My desire had been held so

long that maybe I was too old to take a long train trip, especially in my cheapo, cheapo style. No sleeper, no meals in the dining car. But one thing had become clear; I was too impatient to ride chronically late trains. This was, to put a good face on it, a noble experiment. I can't say that the experiment failed, but it was not a success either. After I got to Seattle, I walked like Popeye, but not as fast.

I'm writing this tonight in the Lounge Car—a good place to write, except that the rocking and bouncing train is making my bad handwriting even worse. I am heading east again, toward home I guess. We just pulled into a small station somewhere in Indiana; the real Indiana, I supposed, not Martone's Blue Guide state. I did not hear the station announcement because they speak quieter at night so as not to wake the sleepers contorted and twisted in their seats, wrapped in blankets and sleeping bags, feet hanging out in the aisle. Maybe the conductors knock on the sleeper cabin doors. It seems like an awful lot of my people can sleep all night in these awkward positions, but I can't. I sleep awhile, wake, shift about, and then sleep again. On the Empire Route, most of the stations look like bland little strip malls framed by ridges of dirty, ploughed snow. When I'd get out to stretch my legs and wade through the smokers, each town, each station was as just as cold as it looked from the train.

I don't know where we are and I don't really care. On the trip west I had my schedules, timetables, station names; I was paying attention. I tried, religiously, to know not only where we were but when and where we would arrive next. What I found out, early on, was that we were really late and the times listed in the schedule meant very little. This train left Chicago more than an hour late and it feels like the engineer is riding the throttle pretty heavy—we are lurching and bouncing more than ever before. An old lady trying to walk the car banged her hip hard on the table as she went by me.

I wish Amtrak would just admit that these long distance routes always run late and change the times in the schedule. I had already told myself that a 44-hour trip from Chicago to Portland is ok and I bought the ticket. I would have still bought a ticket even if I knew it was a 48-hour trip. Now, the more I pay attention to the schedule's supposed arrival times, the more impatient and frustrated I get.

3.

“She’s a railroad lady / just a little bit shady”

Train people have really bad luggage—mismatched suitcases, garish colors—and many have suitcases much larger than what one could take on a plane. They are larger than what one is supposed to take on a train too, but Amtrak personnel don’t seem to care about luggage size restrictions except on the commuter runs. When I boarded the Portland train for Seattle, it was the only time the clerk was making people check oversized bags. A lot of train people don’t, if we are to be precise here, have luggage. They carry their belongings in paper sacks, pillow cases, and large plastic bags from department stores. Some outdoors types have giant, but good, backpacks. Some also carry skis, shoe shoes, snow boards, and other large things that I can’t identify.

Most train people don’t get dressed up for their travels—yes, plane passenger’s attire has gotten alarmingly informal in the last 20 years, but train people are a rung or two below informal. The older ones are dressed pretty square, one might say. The young ones have a lot of tattoos, wear hoodies and look like they could be in a gang. They probably aren’t, unless Litchfield, Nebraska, or Galesburg, Illinois has a lot of gang activity.

In the Salt Lake City station, which is really just a big glass cubicle in a parking lot that it shares with the Metro trains, a cubicle where all the windows need a good washing and will probably get them when spring comes, a skinny guy wearing mirrored sunglasses at 3 a.m. got up every ten minutes to sip water from the fountain. Once he glided over to the trash can and threw away an old pair of jeans. That was his only luggage. He sort of flowed like an interpretive dancer dancing what it’s like when a strung-out man is waiting, hard, for someone to bring in some drugs. The westbound train was four hours late. He checked the clock a lot. When the conductor asked for his ticket, he said he wasn’t going anywhere; he was just waiting for the train.

We were all waiting for the train, and I couldn’t help but wish that we were in one of the two fine old train stations that Amtrak had abandoned and Salt Lake City had made into malls or whatever. I could see Rio Grande station on the night sky line—its neon lights made me more discontented every time I looked at them.

It was about 30 degrees when the eastbound train came in only 45 minutes late. We showed our tickets to the conductor

and walked across the tracks to where the train waited, and then another conductor asked where I was going and I said Chicago. He said go five cars down and get on. I'm wondering why the engine is parked where we cross the tracks and the cars are strung out down the tracks. Why are we walking a few hundred feet to get to the cars? This happened in every station large enough to have a long platform—DC, Chicago, Seattle, Portland—in all of them we walked a long way in some pretty cold and rainy weather.

In Cumberland, Maryland, about two weeks ago at a cubicle smaller than Salt Lake City's, but just as dirty, where this long odyssey had begun at around 9:30 at night, the train rolled in from DC an hour late. Before I could take two steps toward the car, or back away, people started scrambling off the train. They were lighting cigarettes as they took their big last step. The conductor would have said "watch your step" but he had been through this before and he had moved to the back of the platform. People were lighting up in mid air.

One woman cursed nonstop. She had no narrative of her grievances; she just ran through a string of *fuck, motherfucker, fuck this, fuck that, fuck*. She wasn't talking to anyone in particular. Most people just laughed at her between desperate drags, like it was a really bad block party or something. They knew they barely had time to finish their one hard-craved cigarette. This gang of smokers—some looking like bikers, some like maybe they had seen better days or that better days might not ever come—knocked me back on my heels. Do I want to get on this train? Do I have to ride in their car? But I did and I got on and found a seat near the front. I figured if train passengers were anything like bus passengers, or students, the tough crowd would be in the back.

It was quiet for awhile, my fears seemed unfounded. Then the woman started walking the aisle, pacing and cursing, and a conductor came and told her that if she did not stop cursing that she would be "put" off the train. For the next few hours she would be quiet for awhile and then break into a torrent of cursing. Then the conductor would threaten her and she would be quiet for a spell. No one seemed to be traveling with her; certainly no one tried to calm her or quiet her. Maybe she was drunk. Maybe crazy, but I doubt that she had Tourette's. For some reason I wanted all of the drunks to have some sort of more respectable medical affliction.

The conductor threatened to put her off again and then I fell asleep for awhile. I woke as we slowed to enter Cleveland. The scene was spooky. It reminded me of what I thought Dresden looked like when I was reading Vonnegut. There were walls without buildings, buildings without roofs, empty streets, and lights that all seemed yellow. As we neared the station there were some sort of large ghostly yellow lamps on poles, like a baseball stadium, but not high enough. The factories, storage yards, junk yards, either abandoned or just closed till the morning came, had the surreal look of the opening scenes of an apocalyptic movie.

I fell asleep and woke again as we were entering Toledo. This time the movie was *Apocalypse Now*, the scene where the river boat makes its slow way into the base that was being shelled by the VC, the sky full of tracers, the Hendrix sound track, soldiers tripping.

I had been wondering how being “put off the train” would work. Unruly airline passengers can’t be put off the plane until it lands and that might be where they were going. These days they would probably be arrested. Airlines don’t use the word “unruly.” On a train, ok, they won’t throw you off while it’s moving and send you tumbling across the ground like a movie bad guy leaping from the train to escape the law so they need to wait until a station comes along, but there are quite a few stations between where a problem person gets on and where she thinks she is going. In Toledo, I found out how it works, sort of.

The conductor came and asked the cursing woman (who had, ironically, been quiet for some time after she moved to the front of the car in order to hide from the conductor) to come with him. She complied quietly and docilely. No curses, no argument, no crying. It was as if she knew she deserved to be put off the train, or she was used to being kicked out of wherever she was. As they passed me I heard him say that she would be taken to a nearby motel where a room had been reserved for her and that tomorrow she could board another train. Not really a bad deal, I thought, unless she had some important appointment later this morning in Chicago. I doubted that she did. I wouldn’t have minded being put off the train in Toledo if I got a free motel room and a ride back to the station the next day. I wanted to see Toledo. Philip Levine had recently told me he really liked it, but, “you have to remember I lived in Detroit.”

4. Companionship

Lots of train people talk too much, but few are very interesting. Many of them seem not to have traveled very much, except to go from where they live to where they used to live, maybe to see family or friends. They act like you too have not traveled much and so they tell you lots of things that you already know about where you are and where they are going. They have a limited sphere of geographical interest that's constrained by their limited experience and imagination. They might express a desire to someday explore the region that their train is passing through, but they seldom want to go much further or farther. Train people are also pretty convinced that what they know is correct and that what they have experienced is all they need to get by. Yes, lots of people think this way, maybe most Americans, but trains seem to concentrate them in one spot and set you right down in the middle of it. A man sat next to me as we left Cleveland and he immediately fell asleep. I envied how quickly he dropped off and how he could sleep without curling up in the seat. He almost looked comfortable, like a man in a Lazy Boy recliner. When he woke the next morning he started talking and I had to talk too. I'm quiet, I'd rather read and stay to myself, but I am not intentionally rude.

He told me about his family in Providence; he told me about being a truck driver, about highways, about traveling in the Sixties, about California, about the Red Sox and the Pittsburgh Pirates. He never assumed that I knew anything at all about what he was telling me. Every now and then I had to say something, like "man, I have been a Pirates fan my whole life. I've been to Forbes Field, I saw Clemente play; I have suffered through the twenty losing seasons." He just sort of shrugged that off and went on. I tried to hint to him that I was old enough to have hitched through the Sixties, that I knew a bit about what it was like, that I too had been to California. He never got the hints.

Finally, he asked where I was coming from and I told him that I lived in Tallahassee and I was a professor there.

"What school," he asked.

"Florida A&M," I said. He finally listened. His eyes lit up and he told this story; when he was in high school he ran track and came to Florida to run in a big meet. When he was there he saw Bob Hayes run.

"The world's fastest man," he said.

“Yea,” I added, “and one of my school’s most famous alumni.” We talked a little about my being on sabbatical and my writing, writing in general, and then he told me about his brother who was a professor out in Arizona and what it was like to be a professor and to be on sabbatical. I started to drift off then and he went to find coffee.

5.

“Pass the paper bag that holds the bottle”

A short list of train people observations—

- They don’t read the signs about where the toilets are located
- They don’t usually know where they are and when their station will show up
- They did not pick up a schedule or timetable
- They bring their own food and drink
- Many look like times are hard, even if they aren’t
- Many need a haircut
- There are not many good looking women (or men) on a train

I am a train person. My duffel’s cheap and patched on the bottom with duct tape. My backpack used to be my daughter’s and it’s got weird stains here and there. I have been wearing the same pair of jeans for four days. My boots are at least ten years old and look older. I have on a flannel shirt, a ball cap; I have long hair curling from under my cap. I have not shaved for at least four days.

I also think that I know a lot of stuff and that I am, most of the time, right about everything I know. If I talk to people, I talk about myself. I don’t ask them what they know and what they do.

There are not a lot of good looking people on this train. Granted, they have been sleeping contorted in their seats; they may not have bathed for 24 or more hours. A lot of the men wear hats, and all of that fucks up your hair. I am pretty confident, though, that most of them did not look that good before they got on the train. I fit right in—bedraggled, disheveled, unshaven, and with hat hair. And I have probably never been all that much better looking than I am now.

I am still working in the Lounge car and listening to my IPOD. It's late, just a bit before midnight; there are a few people in the car reading but no one else is writing. No one has tried to talk to me tonight; do they suppose that a person writing on a train is pretty much a weirdo? Maybe if I did not have the protective cocoon, the cone of silence headphones on, they might ask *what are you writing?*, but I doubt it. Sometimes I write in bookstores, coffee shops, airports, in other public places and no one asks me what I am writing. Writers are weird and I bet train people might even find writers scary.

I don't really like it that I am writing in the Lounge car where everyone can see me. I imagine that they are looking at me and wondering not what I am writing, but why am I writing. Truth: probably no one has looked at me twice, if they have looked at all.

My ticketed seat, a few cars back, has a woman in the seat next to it and she is like a big marshmallow. She seemed to somehow squish down and out and then ooze over to my seat. The border between our seats was ill-defined, especially after her scarf fell to my side and she, getting softer and wider as the minutes groaned on, started to slide right too. Imagine an ice cream cone as it starts to topple; nothing has really happened to shake the cone, but the ice cream, like the universe, tends toward disorder. This woman does too, and we were a long way from Cleveland or Toledo or wherever she said she was going.

This is the first night in the many nights that I have been riding these trains that I have had someone in the seat beside as I tried to fall asleep. The other guy, the talking man, got on at like 3 a.m., and I was asleep as I mumbled hello. But there have been too many twisted-in-the-seat nights now, and I regret not having a sleeper like I have come to regret my stubborn promise to fish only with lures. I have decried live bait for the last six months of fishing and not caught any fish. I hooked something on a Gulp shrimp below a popping cork, but I had gone to my car to get a different lure and something so big hit the shrimp that when I came back everything was gone—shrimp, cork, rod, reel, a 100 yards of line. That was about as stupid as this. I knew I was not going to get to sleep tonight. I couldn't twist and turn, couldn't get my legs up on the seat and cram my head into the window. The marshmallow kept coming my way. That's why I went to the Lounge Car.

I decide that I can sleep in the Lounge Car. The bench seat is hard but it's long. I am not comfortable, but at least I am almost alone. There are two other men and one woman sleeping farther back in the car, but there's no one beside me. No one spilling over on me. No one sleeping next to me, making it even more obvious that I am not asleep.

6.

"I'm sitting in a railway station"

After I am pretty sure that the marshmallow woman has detrained, I stumble back toward my seat. It's about 4 a.m. I need something beneath my butt and hips that's soft. She is gone and so I sprawl out across both seats—hers and mine, two for the price of one. I fall asleep in eastern Ohio. Sometime later, not some time like a long time of sleeping soundly, I am sleeping but also hearing and I someone says Rochester. I wake up even more. This is my home—Beaver Valley. It's not where I am going but I realize that I am about to pass through the town where I grew up. Where I sometimes crossed these tracks to get to the river and throw dough balls to carp and catfish. I struggle to sit up and wake up. In the window I see my face. It's still dark, late February 5 a.m. dark, but even in the dark I know this place. Rochester's few lights slide past and Freedom's oil refinery is next. Then we enter Conway Yards where night-shift workers are switching cars and trains.

Then it's dark again. We are in Baden and no one seems to be awake. The tracks drop down closer to the river and the land rises so that I can't see my quiet little town. I know it's there though. About here there's a baseball field, a few seconds later a darkened McDonald's, then just fields and a creek that, though it never had much water, slides through the bottom of a deep hollow. As we are crossing it I remember that on the rise above sits the little Ehman family graveyard. A few hundred yards farther is a flat plain where Mad Anthony Wayne trained troops, George Washington passed through, and William Clark (of Lewis and Clark) received military training. During my childhood here these historic fields had been almost forgotten and left to weeds and gravel. We practiced Little League baseball here on crappy fields—uneven, full of grass tufts where there weren't supposed to be any and with stones and rocks in the infield.

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I can't see any of this. It's too dark and the train and I are below the river's escarpment. A few seconds, later dark monsters' shadows loom on the hills—the abandoned Armco mill, another mill and another. All dark. Ambridge is next. We are about 20 miles from Pittsburgh and I am suddenly sleepy again; it's too hard trying to see in the dark and put everything back where it used to be when we all lived here. I nod off and miss the rich folks' station in Sewickley. The train doesn't stop there anymore. A long time ago business men and lawyers lined the station platform and caught the commuter train that took them into downtown Pittsburgh. Then they walked to the Mellon Building, the U.S. Steel building, and past Gimbels, Kaufmann's and Horne's.

When I woke again we were in Pittsburgh's Penn Station; it wasn't a long stop. Not one where we could get off to do whatever people would do in fifteen minutes in the still dark before dawn. Penn Station, (Amtrak calls it Union Station, though few local people do so) opened in 1903. It used to be majestic, rivaling anything Chicago and New York had to offer; it had a rotunda where train cars could be turned around and a great dome. It was called one of the great pieces of Beaux-Arts architecture in America. It was, but now much of it has been sold to private interests. The concourse is closed to the public and the rotunda is no longer operable either. It's almost the same sad story one finds in Salt Lake City. A few minutes later we rolled out again into the dark and I looked at the city, the Golden Triangle; for a moment I thought we were clacking up the Northside along the Allegheny, but I soon figured out that we were rolling down the Mon and that we would pass more dead mills in lots of small steel towns joined like rosary beads and eventually we would leave the waking city behind and climb into the mountains as the sun rose. I went back to sleep.

7.

"I wish I was a headlight / on a northbound train"

Where are we?

I don't know. The conductor said we just went through Lincoln, or somewhere. I wasn't listening.

Where's Lincoln?

I don't know.

A failure of geography. It does not matter how many times a version of that conversation goes down, how many times sleeping people wake and wonder where they are because they are on a train and it's going to take them somewhere and a voice on the intercom, maybe even a real conductor's, will tell them it's time to get off.

For me these geo-failures are annoying, sometimes even depressing, but that's what I get for eavesdropping. It's hard not to since we are in a confined space. I would like for people to be smarter. It's even more annoying to listen to people talk who think they know what they are talking about. This new morning we are in the Connellsville Station; I'm in the Lounge Car again and two guys close to me are looking out the window and talking. One guy, in a V-neck sweater and blue Oxford shirt, wire rim glasses, a soft spoken man, has an intellectual certainty about everything he says. He's not really a train person; he's a commuter. He's not lost, he's just curious and wrong. He and a fellow commuter are looking at the Youghiogheny River and trying to figure out what river it is. We are about 60 miles southeast of Pittsburgh on the way to Washington, D.C. These two, probably professionals of some sort, are weighing in about how amazing it is that this mountain river will empty into the *Atlantic a hundred miles away*.

They are so certain and so wrong. The things they do not know are many. How far away is the Atlantic? What river this is? Where it is going? The Yough, as it is known, flows northward and that's why the Indians gave it a name that means a river that travels in a contrary direction. The Yough flows into the Monongahela and then the Mon flows into Pittsburgh, joins the Allegheny and forms the Ohio. The Ohio runs to the Mississippi and to the Gulf of Mexico. Maybe at the cosmic, New Age level, all rivers might run into the same sea. But no matter how cosmic these guys are, and they don't look like New Age people, they should know that the Atlantic is certainly much more than a hundred miles away. Two problems converge here—being geographically suspect and being too sure of one's false knowledge.

Sport coat guy and Oxford shirt guy figure that the river they are looking at is the Allegheny. Why? Because it is a river they have heard of; every Pirates and Steelers home game broadcasters mention that we are at the confluence of the Allegheny and the Monongahela Rivers. My commuters know that they are sort of close to Pittsburgh, so they guess a name that's lodged in their

geo-challenged heads. These two know where they are on the train route, but not much else. They can't put Connellsville in geographical context. They don't have maps in their heads.

Shortly after we left Connellsville my friend who was meeting me in Cumberland texts me and asks if I am almost here. I'm late, that's a given, but when will I be there. I think I know where I am, somewhere between here and Cumberland, but that's pretty long line of track. Amtrak, in its false specificity, claimed that we would arrive in Cumberland at 9:19 a.m., not 9:20 exactly, I guess. But of course we were late pulling out of Pittsburgh, late pulling out of Connellsville, so who knows when we will really arrive in Cumberland. Since someone would be waiting for me there, I tried to make a good guess. I read my schedule, did the simple subtraction, 299—239. Sixty miles. I texted that we would be there around 10:30.

Where are you, she asks. I text I don't know for sure but we are in the mountains. I imagine her laughing because there's nothing but mountains between me and her. Where are we? There are no towns or road signs I can see and no way to figure where I am. Nothing says welcome to X Ville. It's like trying to solve a math problem: if a passenger is riding a train but does not know where the train is, which we will call Point A, and the train is running two hours late, how long will it take to get to the passenger's destination, Point B, and what time will the train arrive?

I know this: we are falling in elevation; we just passed through a small unnamed village. Fifteen minutes ago we passed a ridge full of wind turbines. We passed snow. We passed a deer. We crossed a creek. We went through a tunnel. None of this tells me or her where we are.

I've been reading these schedules for two weeks now, but time has become unpinned from reality. Amtrak gave me a schedule that said I would arrive at 9:19, nothing was ever rounded off; it was always immensely precise and very wrong. We never arrived anywhere at the time specified on the schedule. The itinerary was correct; we rolled into and out of the stations we were supposed to; we traveled in space, but sort of out of time. My phone told me what time it was outside the car but not when we would arrive where we were supposed to be. Now, I didn't know where here was. 10:30 came and went. So did 11 o'clock. When I looked out the window I saw mountains and each curve we came out of failed to reveal Cumberland. I looked at the

schedule again and saw that I had used the wrong numbers. I calculated the distance from Pittsburgh to Connellsville, not Connellsville to Cumberland. Two hours and twenty minutes after the schedule said we would arrive, we arrived.

I walked off the train and met my friend who had certainly spent more time in Cumberland, in the shadow of American Legion Hall, than she wanted to or planned on, and then we got lost trying to drive out of Cumberland. Streets dead-ended, cut off by train tracks and Interstate 40. In a final ironic blow, the crossing gates went down and we had to wait for the Capitol Limited to pass before we could drive on. When the gates rose, we drove west on the National Highway and the train continued southeast to Harpers Ferry and Union Station.

The lesson of all this is sort of a not-all-that-deep American Zen. In train time one should be here now. There is no early or late, just arriving and being. What if I had arrived anywhere on time? I missed nothing by arriving late and I would have gained nothing by arriving on time. It's not an easy lesson for me to live by, even if I admit that I had almost all the time in the world. Minutes, hours, days, weeks, they didn't really matter. Even where I was didn't matter most of the time because I was going where I wanted to go and I got there each time. Eastern Time, Central Time, Mountain Time, Pacific Time. Train Time. My Time.

In less than an hour I was in a diner; thirty minutes later, a bar; an hour later, a coffee shop. Five hours after I stepped off the train in Cumberland, I was back in Fairmont, West Virginia. The train journey was over, though I still had to drive to Florida in a couple of weeks.