



## Aubrey Cumberledge

### WINNER OF THE 2022 WRITING APPALACHIA CONTEST

#### MAJOR

Biology

#### HOME

Wallace, West Virginia

#### ESSAY

This short non-fiction piece on my perception of time after growing up in Appalachia was inspired by my partner's chronic lateness that in reality is chronic on-time-ness.

#### WHY WRITING MATTERS

Writing has always been a form of self-care for me, a way for me to process my situations and feelings. It's a way that I've connected with myself and with others, which has really helped me during the last few years that have been difficult and isolating for all of us.

### Time Moves Differently in Appalachia

The party starts at 6:00, and I'm by the door at 5:15. Coat on, keys in hand, anxious as my partner starts doing his hair. "Are you ready?" he asks, as if I'm not bouncing in the foyer of our apartment, one hand on the doorknob already. We make it to the car at 5:37, and so begins the curation of the 10-minute drive's playlist. We're there at 5:49.

Maybe it's because I grew up with a dad who whole-heartedly believed that "Early is on time, on time is late, and late is unacceptable." Each time I wait by the door, I remember the early mornings he would signal he was ready to leave by sitting in the running truck. He always was so frustrated with my sister who was always last out of the door. I think of the Progressive commercials that plague my reruns of Criminal Minds and wonder if I too am turning into my parents.

Maybe it's because, rather than electrical impulses and ATP, it seems I'm powered solely by my own anxiety. I can't walk into class late. We can't make our friends wait on us. You never know what traffic in Morgantown will be like or how my decade-old car is going to act up today. We need to leave early in case we hit every red light and road work is on our route. At least they're fixing the potholes, I guess...

Maybe it's just one of the many East Coast vs. West Coast differences we learn about in our relationship. I say lightning bugs, he says fireflies. He thinks Pittsburgh is a small city, and I'm just happy to live in Morgantown where there are things to do. I'll drive through rain, sleet, and snow, and he refuses to leave the house after the first snowflake falls. He moves at a slower speed while I feel the pressure of each second passing by.

I grew up in rural Appalachia, where the biggest news to hit my hometown in recent years is the paving of Route 20 and the surprise announcement of a Dollar General being built. Now, you can go the speed limit without fearing for your life and your tires. Now, running out of milk doesn't mean a half-hour trip to the nearest Price Cutter.

I grew up with time as a major factor in every decision I made. It was budgeted right along with our finances. My childhood gave me plenty of practice in time management as every event plan went something like "Well, it starts at 5, so we need to leave by 4:15 at the latest. Probably 4 in case we get stuck behind a tractor going 15 mph again. That means I need to start getting ready by 3, which means I'll take a shower by 2:30. Which means I should finish working by 1 so I can eat." I'm used to being early to everything and staying later than anyone else because with two working parents, extracurriculars had to work around when they could drive me to and from school that was 25 minutes away. The number of early band practices that started even earlier for me could not be counted.

Unlike other kids you hear about online, we couldn't ask for project posters and glue at 8 pm the night before a due date. When Mom called after work, you had one chance to ask for last minute things. And if you needed groceries, they went on The List. Because our time was limited, Walmart runs only happened once or twice a month on weekends. If it wasn't on The List and you forgot it, you wouldn't get it until we could make the next 35 minute drive.

The culture shock of college hit me in the form of time. Public transportation, a Kroger within walking distance from my dorm, no longer waking up at 5 am to go to class. It continues to hit me as I try to understand my partner's need to make multiple grocery trips a week. While I come prepared with my own List to stock up for the next few weeks, he plans for tonight because he can stop tomorrow after work. It hits me when I wait and wait by the door because it feels like we needed to leave ages ago. It hits me as I plan out my days, amazed at how much you can fit in when you're actually close to where you need to be.

Time seems to move differently in Appalachia. It goes by much faster. There are fewer hours in the day. But it also makes you appreciate each moment you have. That movement makes you prioritize the things you love because if you only have time to do one thing after your drive, you better make sure it's something you want.