

"Time Slows Down in Texas"

Airplanes compress time. Wake up in New York and in less than ten hours you're in Paris, Rome, or maybe Texas. That's where I ended up—that big open space, flat and endless to the eye. This landscape is what a writer needs, a never ending span of time and space to build all those sentences, make all those connections, and if your lucky, find some meaning in it all. Texas wouldn't have been my first choice, but when I looked out and saw more sky than land, I knew it was right.

I'd been to the lone star state once before and it took me over three days to drive across its borders from right to left, or east to west depending on how you look at these things. As a New Yorker, the map spans outward in the direction of my hands and not those markings found on a compass, although I've never owned one of those. On that trip I got a tattoo while crossing El Paso to remind myself I had been there and that I still had some recklessness in me. The image of a star, the perfect symbol of the land, still burns on my left shoulder. I even stayed at the same hotel as Steve McQueen in *The Getaway*. I had visions of the devil thumbing a ride, corrupt Texas lawmen, Willem Dafoe with brown gums, Anne Savage and Fred Mac Murray but all I found was one bad grilled cheese sandwich after another.

This time wasn't about stars or sandwiches, although the wildcat café across the street from the Spur Hotel makes a mean one of thin yellow cheese and crusty browned slices. This time it was about that strange idea of space. Not the deep night that my eyes can't find the end of, but a much smaller step towards filling in all those blank pages with little black letters.

When I was told that I was being offered the opportunity to go there and write without the constraints of my day to day routine, I recoiled. What would it mean to have not one day or two, but an entire week to be a writer? I'd never been one before. Yes, I wrote. Yes, I studied the craft. But, no it wasn't an identity. In my street clothes walking my dog to meet the day I wasn't a writer. On the subway ride to work I wasn't one. But in that small Texas Town, a town I still probably couldn't find on a good map, I could be because that was all that was expected of my time there.

The first morning I woke up and had coffee I wasn't used to and ran for forty minutes down a road I will never see again. I showered, drank some water and sat down to work. The same me in the same clothes and habits. Outside my window I could see the trees getting batted around by the wind and the tall telephone poles strung together with their wires, but I couldn't hear a thing. I wondered what the people in the rooms next to me were thinking, but I didn't linger on it. My body still felt the rumble of the airplane and I thought about all the places I could go and see in the world. Maybe the places aren't as important as I would like them to be. All those airplanes up in the air compressing time fly over me every day and not one goes by without me wondering where they can take me, but they can only go so far.

Like all travelers I like to bring something back with me, but perhaps the best thing to bring back is nothing at all. Just that memory of space and time when you were free to walk without a deadline, or take an hour long shower, or to write. I'm not so sure I will ever consider Texas a writer's paradise, but when I think back to my window and the silent wind blowing outside, I see the page in front of me as not quite so endless. I block out the stree noise, look at my hands and see veins ready to reach out into words.

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