

Don White

Time is like a baggage handler at Newark International Airport.

No thing that has ever been done, no thought that has ever been thought, no stress or dread that has ever been felt by any human being who ever lived has had a measurable effect on time.

The sun comes up. The sun goes down. The planet tilts a bit while it rotates. That's it. When I emerge from a period of confusion or anxiety I am comforted to know that while I was gone time clicked off every second with precision so that I could return to a world that has at least one thing in it that has never wavered—a thing completely unalterable by human thought or action. If you asked time how it felt about the human condition it wouldn't respond because it doesn't give a shit. Time heals all wounds because it is smart enough to not let any temporary life form distract it from doing its job.

My favorite state is New Jersey. That's not something you hear often from someone who isn't a native of the garden state. When I see New Jersey on my travel schedule I get giddy. It's not the rural western part of that great state that is the object of my affection. I love Newark, Hoboken and the not New York side of the Holland Tunnel because that's where the Jersey attitude is strongest. I love the way people from eastern New Jersey navigate their world.

One time my luggage got misplaced at Newark airport. I walked up to a woman with an identification tag around her neck. I told her that my luggage didn't come out on the belt. She stared at me with a look that clearly said, "Thirty minutes and my shift will be over and here comes this sorry motherfucker." I immediately got a deep warm feeling because I knew that I was with someone who was going to find my suitcase. I recognized it in her attitude. My mother was like that. She would make sure you knew you were a pain in the ass while she was methodically solving your problem.

My comfort with this is almost impossible for midwesterners to grasp. They come from a part of the world where politeness accompanies almost everything. Being from Boston, it took me a long time to get used to the midwest. They're too friendly. It made me nervous. Here's how I explain the difference between the kind of friendly you find in the Northeast and the kind you find in the middle of the country.

If my car goes into a ditch on a snowy night in the heartland, a chatty, friendly, well-mannered local resident will stop and pull me out of the ditch. The exact same thing will happen in the Northeast except for the chatty, well-mannered parts. When a New Jersey or a Boston or a Brooklyn guy pulls you out of the ditch he does not want to hear about your family. "I saved your life. That should be enough. Now stop talking. Go away. I ain't your buddy."

So my new best friend at the airport walked me over to a staging area and found my suitcase. She didn't ask me anything about myself. She didn't engage me in any way. She got the job done in a way that was steady and completely unaffected by anything good or bad that was com-

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ing from me or anyone else. I know that this is a minority view but I am most at ease when I am around people who get things done in a no non-sense way. If you are trapped inside a car that is on fire the best thing you can hope for is to be in New Jersey because in all likelihood a local resident will pull you out, call you an asshole for driving a shitty foreign car and drive away.

Steady. Reliable. Unattached. Solid.