

Hoofing It: One Girl's Guide to Walking the Streets of Dayton

June 1, 2011 by [Kristen Wicker](#)

Originally published on www.DaytonMostMetro.com



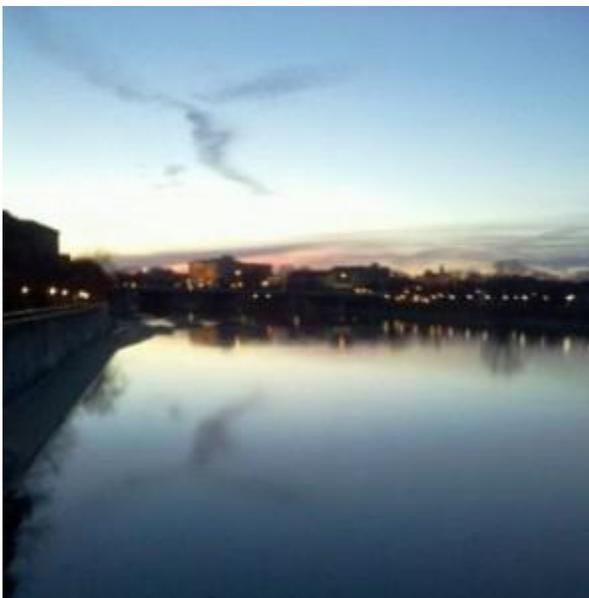
Things I remember seeing during my 20-minute commute: Tree limbs swirling in a rain-swollen Great Miami River. Aged buildings with elaborate cornices rubbing shoulders with their modern-day glass and steel counterparts. Phil staggering down the sidewalk asking for spare change to buy a muffin.

Things I remember hearing during my 20-minute commute: The splash and giggle of kids jumping into a puddle. A glee club of birds overhead. The distressed screech of an ambulance .

I live in a historic neighborhood downtown, and since I live, work, hang out and work out downtown, I can walk pretty much anywhere I need to go.

Key words: Pretty much.

Places I drive: Kroger. DeWeese Park. Village Thrift Store. *Taqueria Mixteca*. Cookouts at friends' back yards. And, I admit it, sometimes places as close as Drake's Downtown Gym and the Dublin Pub.



One of my favorite shots taken during a walk home, shot from the Main Street Bridge looking east toward the Dayton Art Institute and Masonic Temple.

I'm about to find out exactly what "pretty much" means as I join Megan Cooper in an experiment in using alternative transportation to get from here to there. We're both ditching our gas-powered rides for at least one week starting June 1. Megan will be trekking across town primarily via bicycle and the bus. Be sure to [read her columns](#) leading up to and during this adventure, in which she gives a frank and funny account of going car-less.

I will continue to get around primarily on foot, but I'm also going to figure out how to ride the RTA and rediscover my inner cyclist. The last time I rode the bus, I ended up at Children's Medical Center while trying to get to Five Oaks, which is closer to Grandview Hospital. The last time I rode my bike any significant distance, my now- 19-year-old son was in a kid seat on the back.

But, like Megan, I'm determined to give this a whirl. Unlike Megan, my research and preparation for this adventure is a total zilch. Well, I did grab a fresh journal in which to chronicle the sights and sounds of this voyage. When I finish writing this, I'm going to try to figure out how to work a pedometer a friend gave me two years ago. I made a solemn vow to look at RTA's web site tomorrow night. And cross-my-heart-hope-to-die, I plan to check my bike's tires really soon.

I'm rolling ad hoc because I figure I can hoof it most places. I mean, perhaps my favorite thing about living downtown is the ability to walk so many cool places. I like having to step around Canadian Geese and their goslings on the gravel pathway atop the levee. I feel lucky I can stop at the RiverScape Metro Park concession and grab a cone of soft serve to enjoy on my way home. I even like the pitter-patter on my umbrella on rainy days and getting away with wearing rubber boots to the office.



Daffodils in full bloom at RiverScape MetroPark, taken during a recent springtime walk home.

Really, though, I am in denial.

I may live in a handy little city where I can walk from one end to the other in less than 30 minutes, but getting around is about to get a lot more complicated without a car. While visiting my sister in Piqua on Memorial Day, I realized I'd have no way to get up there to play cowboy and Play-Doh with my nephews without a car. Mulching some new plants tonight, I realized I'd have to travel toughman style if I needed to grab another bag of this heavy, goopy stuff and lug it on a bus.



View during my 20-minute commute on a recent May morning.

I also realize I am lucky to have a car, even an 11-year-old contraption missing the passenger-side window and in bad need of a new catalytic converter I lovingly call The Rattletrap. I feel like Barbara Ehrenreich as she recounted her experiences working as a maid and other minimum-wage occupations in *Nickel and Dimed*, a book I found so horribly patronizing I couldn't finish the first chapter. I hope to be able to give you, dear reader, an authentic and entertaining account of this adventure with respect to those who have no choice but public transportation to reach such destinations as their workplace, school and kids' day care. I hope to be able to examine the impacts of our auto-adoring culture on our health and environment with a fresh perspective. I hope to better understand the myriad ways transportation affects our daily lives.

And I hope you will help us: Do you get where you need to go without a car? If so, tell us your stories and (please!) give us some tips. Do you rev an engine to make it where you need to be? If so, tell us how you think your life would change if driving were no longer an option. Please share in the comments below.

And we're off: One foot in front of the other!

Part 2: A Lame Attempt at Car-Free Living

June 17, 2011 by [Kristen Wicker](#)



The Great White Rattletrap

The aptly named Rattletrap has sat idle on McPherson Street for two weeks now as part of [my car-less adventure](#) as I hoofed it around downtown — and I have to admit my life has been pretty much unchanged. Well, except for the fact that the act of walking has been a serious struggle.

See, I took a tumble — *ka-chump!* — square on my left knee at the time when I perhaps needed that knee the most. Banged it up to the point where I really should have gone (on foot, of course) to the hospital for stitches. (My doctor later confirmed this to be true.)

What I actually did, however, was declare, as blood dripped down my calf and puddled in my shoe, that it simply was a scrape a little peroxide and a Band-Aid could cure. Shortly thereafter, I rode my bike three miles in sizzling heat, squated into a kayak and paddled across [Eastwood Lake](#), and then biked the three miles home, my ad hoc gauze-and-medical tape bandage loosened in the fresh water and flapping in the wind as if I was an unraveling mummy. I was too excited about being back on my bike, which I had barely ridden since my now 19-year-old son was small enough to be in a seat on the back, feeling the wind brush my cheeks, delirious in the bluster of speeding by graduation cookouts and the [Mad River](#).

Of course, this happened on Day Four. So I haven't really *walked* many places. More like *gimped*, lumbering about town. Very. Slowly. Barely able to bend my left knee.

And that, my friends, is what caused me to cheat.

It was my honest intention to take the bus to get groceries for a dinnertime game of [Mah Jongg](#) I was hosting. I figured my first bus adventure might as well be XTREME: A trip to the grocery store. But on Sunday morning when a friend asked if I wanted to run errands, including a stop at [Trader Joe's](#), and offered to drive, I simply replied, my voice taut with pain, "Yes."

And so it was: convenience trumped principle. Justification? It wasn't my car. I wasn't driving. I admit that wasn't the only day friends picked up my gimpy self and gave me a ride. I never asked to be carted hither and yon, but it happened.

I also haven't stepped foot in a bus. After reading [Megan Cooper's awesome series of articles](#) chronicling her adventures riding the bus, it's clear I need to be able to bring my bike along. (I mean, why not learn from someone else's mishaps?)

And this knee ain't biking nowhere for a minute.

So my adventure will have to be continued at another time. Not to say I didn't encounter some interesting things limping around the past couple of weeks: A drag queen on roller blades. Some dude rockin' out with an '80s-style boom box on his shoulder. Another dude riding a bicycle with a seat that appeared made from the seat of a rocking chair. Walking forces you to be patient, slow your mind. Notice things. It leads to unexpected adventures.



At least I discovered a free boot camp at RiverScape I plan to attend -- once I'm able to walk.

For example, one evening (pre-fall), as I'm walking home from [Drake's Downtown Gym](#) and jabbering on the phone with my BFF, I realize I'm walking right by her condo building.

"Girl, are you home?" I ask. "Scoot downstairs and join me for a soft-serve cone at [RiverScape](#)." She does. We hang, chitter-chatter and get covered in melting ice cream. While there, we notice a big group of people doing jumping jacks under the pavilion. Come to discover it's a free boot camp. (Mondays and Wednesdays at 6:30 p.m. and Saturdays at 9:30 a.m.)

I wanted to live the month of June as if I have no car — which, considering the condition of The Rattletrap, could very well become the case. But in these two weeks it really hit me that if, like so many people, I did not own a car, the freedom of mobility to which I've become so accustomed would cease to exist.

Which brings me to this: In a country — a society, a culture — sprung from the idea that to be fully human is to be free, does that freedom include the ability to move about from place to place as and when one desires? Because if that's part of the USA freedom equation, one thing now is clear to me: freedom of mobility = owning a car.

Or does it? Readers, share your thoughts while I sign off to bandage my knee ...