

Baltimore on Wheels

By Jane Powers

If you've grown up like me, which many Loyola students have, your family owned a car or two and you were driven around to all your suburban adventures, activities and practices. At the age of 16 or 17, depending on your state, you got behind the wheel and started navigating yourself. For the directionally challenged such as myself, this opened up a whole new world. I got to see an entirely new side to the town I had lived in all my life, and created a mental map that connected all the places I had been going. Ultimately, freedom of transportation at Loyola let me see the entirety of Baltimore.

My first view of Loyola was through the window of the tour shuttle that drove my mother and me from the Fitness and Aquatic Center to the Student Center. We got a view of the walkway that runs along Sellinger, Maryland Hall and Boulder, and would every so often open up to expose the immensely green Academic Quad. All the prospective students and families walked through the Student Center, taking in the view of Loyola students eating lunch, picking up packages and grabbing coffee before running off to class. Eventually, we made our way out to the Humanities building to begin our tours. One by one our guides dispersed to take us through the serene chapel, soaking in the sun spilling into pools of color through the stained glass. As our heads

were filled with information about Messina and meal plans, an image of life at Loyola began to take shape. You could see yourself hanging out in the suite in Flannery, studying late at night in the library and having an outdoor class in spring on the quad. When it came time to move in, I got a view of my dorm, Hammerman, out the window of the family van and crowded by all my belongings. As my own family piled out of the car, other families yelled to each other while pushing green carts full of dorm supplies toward the red brick buildings that loomed ahead. All I saw was a bustling scene that would become my first year of college.

Later on that night my roommate and I crowded onto a humid school bus functioning as a shuttle, and we were taken to Ridley Field to watch the girls' soccer team battle Cornell's team. On the way, I peered through the bus window to get my first taste of the Baltimore that surrounds Loyola. I looked out on the Royal Farms, Miss Shirley's, Smoothie King and the other small institutions stacked together on West Cold Spring Lane. We went on to join the screaming crowd of green, led by the Loyola SuperFans. Everyone wanted the free draw-string bags or to snap a picture with Iggy, our

mascot. There was an amazing spirit that could be felt among everyone: all of the class of 2020 was finally together cheering the team on toward a common goal.

And that's not all the Loyola shuttle allowed us to experience; one Saturday morning after much urging from sophomores who had been there and our Messina advisors, my friends and I packed ourselves into a school bus teeming with college students in their most hipster clothing. Together we all rode southwest to the Hampden neighborhood, and after ten minutes the bright yellow vehicle dropped us at a corner just outside the festival: Hampdenfest. Wandering through the celebration, we eyed beautiful pieces of handmade jewelry, sampled the kettle corn and watched people get henna doodled on their hands for only \$5. Nothing could have prepared me for the vastness of the fair; the blocks of commotion and chatter seemed endless. It was amazing to experience this environment—one where you can sell clothes out of a bus and race toilet bowls down a hill—that was so incredibly



“consider the small steps you take every day as you grow up”

different than that of Loyola's campus. Baltimore has so many hidden eccentricities and experiencing a new local secret evokes a feeling of belonging in your new home. Once you've looked at all the wares and knick-knacks at Hampdenfest, you begin to feel like a resident of Charm City.

Most of my Baltimorean ventures can be attributed to Uber. My first Uber ride was with Amber, who packed six of us into her small, white Jeep Compass which had beads dangling from the rearview mirror and a jeweled grasshopper fastened to the dashboard. I gazed past the insect through the windshield, as the city opened up and became a maze of people rushing around and waiting for lights to change with Royal Farms coffees in hand. On this ride I could feel the spirit of Baltimore shine through. The relaxed, yet busy feeling is so characteristic and you can feel it in the people strolling in and out of restaurants and stores. Many are dressed in Baltimore teams' apparel, but there are also people of all ethnicities in traditional clothing. Young girls take selfies in their Converse and graphic t-shirts alongside women walking with headscarves. Through the window of my Uber I witnessed the mix of culture that can be seen anywhere in Baltimore, from York Road to the Inner Harbor to Hampden.

Loyola itself does a great job of integrating its freshmen into their new home: the Messina program serves exactly that purpose. My first Messina trip actually involved no transportation, as we walked to a local farmers' market. It was great to get a change from dining hall or processed dorm snacks, plus we got to get to know each other and the neighborhoods around us. For our second trip, our Evergreen got us all tickets to *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* at the Senator Theatre. That was one of the coolest experiences I've had here, since the inside of the Senator is completely unique from any other movie theater I've been in. The York Road institution has retained its old-fashioned marquee in the front, with its name in huge glowing letters. The inside looks exactly like a theater, draped in maroon and gold velvet as if the front should hold a stage instead of a screen. After the movie, we emerged from the theater only to have the first snow of the year drifting onto our heads. Running down the street in light jackets and trying to keep warm, we shared in the excite-

ment of our friend from California who had never experienced this phenomenon of white flakes falling from the sky. It was one of those college adventures that you wouldn't find at just any school in any old city. Where else would I emerge from a theater preserved from another decade and scramble into an indoor market to try out my first real ramen venue (complete with chopsticks)?

Once my friends and I became more comfortable in the city, we used the Baltimore bus app, navigated our way to the bus stop, and got on the Charm City Circulator. Taking the purple route, we were ready to shop and see for ourselves the famous Inner Harbor that everyone had photographed for their Snapchat stories. The free bus dropped us off right by the Harborplace, where we were immediately absorbed into a swarm of purple jerseys, eager fans ready for the Ravens game. After going through all the stores in the Gallery Mall and devouring burgers at Shake Shack, we had seen a photo shoot in front of the boats on the water, a couple beating drums under a tree, and the workers at the Fudgery sing Miley Cyrus and Beyoncé songs.

One huge part of coming to Charm City was the independence I was forced to gain: I could no longer shoot a quick text to a friend for a ride or just hop in my car. My friends and I had to plan out group trips to the CVS on York Road or the Towson Shopping Center by figuring out the route of the Collegetown Shuttle. There are bits you don't consider before coming, such as the fact that this is our first year being away from family for the holidays or that the convenience of groceries isn't just a short walk away. Everyone back home expects you to return with stories of visits to the Baltimore Aquarium or endeavors to Fell's Point for dinner, but they don't consider the small steps you take every day as you grow up more and more.

In coming to Loyola and taking advantage of all the transportation services, I have been able to experience and become a part of a culture I simply couldn't experience anywhere else. Through Uber, shuttles and buses I witnessed an entirely new world unique to Baltimore.

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