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Accounts of Personal Phenomena
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Time Stretching

When Distance Becomes Fluid

The distance between Oregon City, where I live, and a city to the south called Albany is about 66 miles. My GPS says the estimated time between the two places is 73 minutes, traveling the most direct route on Interstate 5. One Spring day in 2015, Christine and I drove to Albany to visit friends. We arrived at their home shortly after noon.

We'd been at our friends' home a short while when our daughter Brigitte called me from Oregon City and asked if we could pick up our granddaughter Grace at her bus stop after school. Grace was 9 years old at the time and Brigitte usually met her at the bus stop and drove her home, but this day was unable to do it. The bus would drop off Grace at 2:30 p.m., so that's when we needed to be back in Oregon City. I figured we'd need to cut short our visit and leave Albany by 1:15 at the latest to get to the bus stop on time.

But time with our friends got away from us, and the next time I looked at my watch, it was about 1:30. By the time we left our friends' home, it was nearly 1:40. At best, we would be 20 minutes late in meeting Grace at her bus stop, which would not be a good situation.

Yet, we made it, with about 5 minutes to spare. We must have made the trip from Albany to Oregon City in 50 minutes or less. I say "must have" because I can't explain the details of that trip that, based on raw data, was an impossibility.

The traffic on I-5 was normal, which means some congestion around Salem and even heavier traffic as we continued heading north toward Portland. Looking back, there was an unusual smoothness to the ride. Though we were destined to be late in picking up our granddaughter, I was not speeding, just keeping in the flow of traffic. But every time I looked at the dashboard clock, it had only moved a minute or two. Christine and I usually talk quite a bit while traveling, but I recall this trip as being uncharacteristically quiet – just traveling along on a sunny highway with dreamlike smoothness.

We exited off I-5 and headed toward Oregon City through the city of Canby, which has a series of stoplights on the highway, but I don't believe we encountered a single red light. We drove on into Oregon City, drove into the neighborhood where Grace's bus route was, and arrived at her bus stop shortly before 2:30. We waited a couple of minutes for the bus to arrive and then we drove Grace back to her home, where her dad would be arriving shortly.

Christine and I were aware as we arrived back in Oregon City that something quite uncommon had happened. Even if the interstate had been deserted, we would not have been able to arrive in Oregon City on time, under normal circumstances.

When I've told this story to other people over the years, I've learned the same sort of time expansion has been experienced by others. The universal response is puzzlement and disbelief, even for those of us who've had the experience.