Creativity in Small Towns



Writer Samantha Becerra-Taylor discusses tapping into creative lifeforces in her Southern Ohio hometown, why big cities don't have ownership of creativity, and the ways you can be the community.

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As told to Samantha Becerra-Taylor, 2147 words.

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Creativity does not belong to a place. It is an energy. And in relationship to humans, that energy is held by those who create thoughtfully, who make time, and who choose to care deeply about what they are creating—without strings attached.

Growing up, creativity was not a currency. Not in my household, and surely not within my school system. Coming from the Midwest, my mind was hyper-fixated on sports being a pathway to a good school—you know, a full-ride mentality. That, combined with always being at the top of my class, thanks to a mother who never allowed anything less. She knew what it would take for me to be the first in our family to gain a degree, and in her vision, it didn’t include spending time on the arts.

Let the context of my family paint a picture.

My great-grandma, Evelyn, better known as “Cookie Granny,” was born in a small rural town called Gassaway, West Virginia. My roots come from the dead center of one of the poorest, most isolated places in the United States of America. The town was created only 20 years after a railroad line was built, and according to the 2020 census, it was home to 759 residents. Her daughter, my grandma Dorothy, or “Peach,” lived in a small town in the north of Ohio her entire life, married to my grandpa, Pedro. He was the son of an immigrant from León, Mexico, and followed in his father’s footsteps, working in the same factory until he died. My grandma accompanied him, both with different roles, but both working class. My mom, Michelle, raised us in a small town in the south of Ohio, home to around 5,250 people. And the other side of my family is from said small town. Generations on generations.

I mention each of these characters of my life because not one of them had much access, influence, or creative inspiration from the outside world. None of them traveled, went to theaters, saw many live concerts, or exchanged stories with people from different places around the world. Though, it wasn’t because there was a lack of interest—it was because they were working harder than most people you and I know. They were not able to choose how they spent their time, and even if they could, those resources and opportunities were not where they resided.



Alleyway in Southeastern Ohio

In those years living in Ohio, the focus was on staying afloat, making safe decisions, and trying to create a stable future for yourself. Even as a kid, I was thinking about how I must stay on track. *A kid.* Everything was a strategic decision, and nearly zero of my decisions came from any creative or artistic desires. And today, I share my outlook on the topic of small-town creativity, because I wish I had these words in front of my face when I was a kid. I wish I understood that while I can't step out of my home onto a busy sidewalk to feel inspiration at every turn as they do in the movies, there *is* creativity around me, it just looks and feels a bit different.

Residents of big cities do not have ownership of creativity.

Because the moments that make us feel inspired to create are not always birthed from big cities. Life is happening everywhere, all the time. Residents of big cities do not have ownership of creativity. While cities offer access to people, ideas, and energy, creativity itself is not born from access alone. It often comes from attention, from noticing what is already around you.

Funnily enough, I'd argue that the times when many artists, writers, or actors feel deeply inspired are when they sit in isolation. I mean, it's the storyline to countless movies, TV shows, and books—escape the noise and find solitude. Get isolated, get inspired. Create time, create your best work. That is the equation, right?

It rings true for me. When I arrive in my hometown, my days get longer. I have more time to connect with myself and the community. Both of which are integral to my personal creativity. When access is limited, attention often expands. You notice more. You listen longer. You sit with things instead of moving past them. If you reframe your thinking just a bit, you realize that you already have the currency. It is all around you. I wish I realized this sooner, but as they say, everything in due time.

Back then, I had so much time to learn. Less distractions, less traffic, fewer events on my schedule. I was constantly watching YouTube, reading books, and writing nearly every single day. Now, as I live in one of the most active, creative places I have ever stepped foot in, in combination with the fact that it is the largest city in North America, I realize that at times I crave the pace and simplicity of my hometown.



FUKT Magazine Nature Edition

People from small towns and rural corners of the globe may be seen as people who don’t understand enough about the world, who don’t know the “right people,” or who don’t have jobs that make people’s ears perk when they are eavesdropping on your conversations. But, I believe they are resilient, observant, humble, and connected to their communities in a way that breeds a type of creativity I am in awe of.

I’d say small-town folk often operate from a place of giving, not giving to receive.

They do not create work so they can add another project to their portfolio, and let’s be honest, they most likely do not have one to begin with. They don’t create to become widely known or to make another check for their bank accounts (many that I know have never been paid for their art). They don’t spend all day online: they are busy being embedded in the real world, whether it be working a normal day job, spending their spare time outdoors, or talking to their neighbor. They aren’t necessarily worried about their legacy or what will be left behind from their work; they are doing it out of pure love for their craft. Whether it be painting, woodworking, music, glassblowing, storytelling, or another craft entirely, I’d say small-town folk often operate from a place of giving, *not giving to receive*.

I find this to be an admirable way to move through the world. The idea of creative clout doesn’t have much place in conversations in these environments, because truly, who really cares? Are you creating something because you embedded yourself into a topic, place, or phenomenon? Or are you creating it because you want to add that gallery event to your CV? As someone who now spends a lot of time in major cities around the world, I find it easy to sift through works that are made from community care, innate curiosity, and guttural instinct versus those that are blatantly not.

And to be honest, I am more interested in these “secondary” cities or towns around the world—places where people are gathering and sharing their creative work that might not be acknowledged in bigger spaces. Whether that be because you couldn’t buy a space, didn’t have enough Instagram followers, or someone couldn’t recognize the school you studied at (if any at all). I am moved by the scrappy communities who are teaching themselves how to organize and share their visions when the rest of the world isn’t looking. Because that is the point. Creative work doesn’t need to be for the *other*. It can be a cathartic practice for you to embed, learn, push against your own assumptions, question others, and feel more connected.

And I get it, making space for this creativity to shine sometimes feels like a bigger challenge, because your community may not value it, right? But as you get older, you realize *you are the community*. You and your friends are the ones who have the chance to create that scrapbook club, host talks about the climate, and go on nature walks where you stop to draw the birds. You don’t have to start big either; gather your friends, partners, family, and co-workers, and create without shame. Share your poetry, that song you wrote when you were 16, or the website you built based on a YouTube tutorial. Eventually, others may join in, and over time, your community will start to understand that making time for creativity helps the collective. People meet, safe spaces are created outside the home (if you are lucky enough to have that to begin with), conversations about new topics come into play, and the community becomes a more inspired place.

There are many places to start, and to be frank, you should choose interests that speak to you. Below, I have outlined some areas that have impacted my creativity while living in a rural, isolated town. These can be used as examples of how you can remove barriers to your creative practice and begin connecting with it again, or for the first time.



Out in the woods in Southeastern, Ohio

Nature

There was a phase of my life when I felt trapped in my physical environment at home. It was a dark space, dangerous even. The tiny house had one entrance and one exit, and none of the windows opened properly. It was never going to be anything but suffocating (well, also a fire hazard). So I would pack up a bag of notepads, pens, and sometimes a book, exit through the one old wooden door, walk down the driveway, cross the street, and enter the forest. Once I jumped over the creek, I would walk up a steep hill, which was most likely privately owned now that I think back on it. I would sit at the top of that hill, by myself, being observed by nobody and heard by nobody. It was the time I felt the most freedom and safety—two things that I personally need to feel creative.

Once I took the time I needed to breathe, stare at the trees, and talk to the squirrels, I'd write. And write. And write. Some poetry, some journal entries, and some ideas for what I wanted to cultivate in my future life one day. My creative practice was to create space in nature and allow it to guide my brain by observing the raw, unbiased, innocent energy it so effortlessly gives to us all.



Cave system at Hocking Hills, Ohio

Sound

What do you hear when you step out of your home? Is it birds, a lawnmower, dogs, cars passing, or wind hitting the trees? For myself specifically, I always enjoyed that I had access to an abundance of sound. Everywhere I went, it was there—whether I was creating it or taking it in. I used to have a notebook dedicated to listening to music and allowing my hand to move in flow with the sounds of the song. The page would be full of lines, circles, swirls, and shapes that do not have a particular name. I never had the urge to make those drawings into anything more; I liked the simplicity of them existing on my paper. Now, I am starting a project around recording sound in my natural environment so I can archive trips, places, and days through an additional medium outside of photo and video.

Movement

Barefoot, grass, sun, shadows, wind, headphones, or no headphones. This was my lineup. I would find places to move intuitively to the sounds of the external world or through the music blasting through my huge orange Beats headphones. I think I tapped into my creative flow in a way that I couldn’t find through any other medium. There is something so special about physicality. I always look back and wish that I had been in dance or been offered any type of program of that nature. Now, as an adult, I make time for dancing and movement when I feel the urge—typically on my roof in the sun.



Nelsonville Music Festival, 2025

Again, these are just three very dialed-down examples of personal and, the majority of the time, accessible ways to tap into creative lifeforces. Then you get to see where that takes you. Maybe it’s just that moment, maybe it is shared, maybe it is replicated, maybe it is studied. That is the fun part—there are no bounds.

So while you small-town humans may feel forgotten or never known by the creative world, you must understand that it is because of *you* that it works. You are part of it. Please, take up the space.

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