

Coast to coast: 'Jersey girl finds a bit of 'heaven' in Oregon

By Andrea Jansen
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I'm from 'Jersey, and the past few years I've become even less proud of that fact, if that's possible. Despite the hype, we're not all Chris Christies and Snookies; although truth be told, elements of their personalities innately run through the fibers of most of us who call The Garden State home.

Yes, we're feisty, maybe even ornery; but as any sociologist could explain more adequately, it's largely a result of our environment. We just can't help ourselves. We're surrounded by toxic waste and organized crime. The Amish are gathering to the west, and our backs are against the Atlantic. Wouldn't you come out swinging?

Amongst ourselves, we're not conscious of our flaws. It's only when we venture out of the safety of the state that we're smacked with a dose of reality: Most Americans are polite to one another.

Even New Yorkers are horrified at us, and that's saying something.

To locals, when I'm home, I'm from Oregon. I own up to my East Coast upbringing. Oddly enough, in both places that helps explain my behavior. This past summer, I spent some time assisting Mom, who lives along the Shore. Dog-walking along the rebuilt pier each day, I had an opportunity to speak to many of my people, to whom I was now a foreigner.

Briefly summarizing my relocation from coast to coast, reactions were overwhelmingly similar. Eyes glazed wistfully as they repeated, "Ore-a-gone." Most people had been affected in some way by Hurricane Sandy, and I was told that while everyone came together immediately after, it shortly turned into survival of the fittest. Hotels gouged the displaced, and limited resources turned people snarly. Life in Oregon sounds like heaven, and they'd come if they could, just as people in warring nations flee to safety.

"THAT's why you're so friendly," I heard more than once. Gee, tell that to the Oregonians, would'ja? Around here it's, "So THAT's why."

We New Jerseyans can identify one another within one or two utterances and excitedly compare notes, like how we must try harder to speak more slowly. Our decibel level is another source of annoyance, apparently, but we're used to hollering at one another as if we're on a trading room floor. We're totally misunderstood.

Every Yin needs a Yang. You people need us to make you look good. But I must confess to a few pet peeves: Jersey Steamers and Oregon Goopy Ducks are not the same thing; real chicken salad doesn't have fruit and nuts; and our concept of graffiti differs immeasurably.

But considering 50 individual cultures are held together by a single Constitution, we're not doing so badly.

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