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Spring has turned to summer and the land is alive with a vibrant palette of color. Everyone quickly planted perennials, beautifully lined in round boxes in front of their homes, around the bases of large maple, pine, birch and oak trees. The view of Howard Lake from our bay window, however, is somewhat obscured. In winter, the lake was expansive and quite impressive to former California green horns like us, but nobody mentioned that the trees lining the lake in front of us, would fill out as massive puff balls of green, leaving few pockets of blue water to see. There are enough of them to appreciate the lake, but still, one tends to feel a little ripped off...ahem!

We had a sprinkler system put in, ending up with 8 different watering stations, which has the most sophisticated operating system that includes a weather reading mechanism to know when not to turn on when it's raining. Have I mentioned that Minnesotans are proud of their lawns? I have never, in my life, seen so many manicured lawns –farms too, in fact the entire countryside –no unsightly tall, dried or withered grass, anywhere. Most properties, particularly in our development, have large swaths of lawn to take care of, and take care of them they do. I mean everybody –not a slacker among the bunch.

Some cities have ordinances requiring that you take care of your lawn. The grass can't be longer than 5 or 6 inches –I forget exactly; I know Howard Lake has an ordinance. That's why we put in a sprinkler system. Our lawn constitutes about $\frac{3}{4}$ of an acre. It took Howard over 3 hours to mow ours. The neighbors must have had a belly laugh watching these neophytes mow their lawn with their puny little lawn mower from California. They, on the other hand, sit comfortably on their large 4-wheeler lawn mowers, cutting large swaths of grass in one pass. That's why Minnesotans have 3 garages, I come to find out –2 to park their cars, and one for their Tonka toy lawn mowers, tractors and what not. Remember Tonka toys? It makes me think of my 3-year-old son and his beloved toy trucks and tractors strewn all over my carpet, which several times I nearly killed myself tripping over. Well, there's no tripping over these things and they take up a lot of garage space. Anyway, wimps that we are, we're using a lawn service now to mow and care for our lawn once a week through the month of October. They have this down to such a science that they have figured out that they will come out 24 times in any given season (March through October). Mercifully, How is off the hook on this particular chore.

Suffice it to say, I am not a country girl. Howard loves the country, being in the woods with lots of trees. That's where I met him –in countryside Santa Rosa. That is why living in Santa Cruz was so perfect for us; we were 5 minutes from the country and redwoods, and 5 minutes from the ocean. I'm an ocean person through and through, but this is an incredibly beautiful part of the country so I'm not that spiritually destitute. There are moments when I absolutely love the landscape. For example, there is an amazing place around here where, for a few weeks, swarms of fireflies can be seen at dusk, lighting above bulrushes and tall grass like 4th of July sparklers.

Then there are the trees and birds. I'm trying to inform myself about different kinds of trees that grow in my region and I'm scouring landscape books to try to break up the massive expanse of lawn I have in the backyard. Additionally, I'm finding that I need to get a book on birds because so many colorful species flock onto the grass in the backyard. Sometimes they come right up to the sliding glass doors so one time, I lay on the floor on my stomach, trying not to make large movements that might scare them and we began to touch noses on the glass. It's kind of childish, I know, but I couldn't help it.

Another thing you notice is that you don't see a lot of dogs or cats roaming around like you do in California. That seemed strange to me until I saw a little tiny dog tethered to a mobile basketball pole. I mentioned to my neighbor how sad I thought it was that that little dog couldn't run free. I mean, I didn't say this, but wouldn't you expect your pets could do that on such large spans of open space? The neighbor looked at me with a bemused expression and said, "Not if you don't want your pet carried off," cocking his thumb toward the sky..... Oh...okay. I looked back at the

dog and I immediately imagined cupping my eyes from the sun, watching him being carried off by a bird of prey –“Bye, bye, Fido!” The things you have to think about living here, but you see so many other interesting things too. Like lighted crosses over garage doors.

The subtext of this in your face Christian environment is a bit suffocating and oppressive. One day, I found my Jewish Fair T-shirt and in an adolescent pique, I just felt like wearing it suddenly ...a sort of 'thumb your nose' to the community in which I live –not an emotion I'm very proud of, but you can understand the source of agitation for us as Jews. We're not the only minority in our neighborhood, however. Right next door to us is a practicing Muslim Afghani family with children and grandparents living there, dressed according to their religious beliefs. How weird is that? Anyway, a couple of weeks ago I had a meeting with the editor of the local newspaper to discuss the paper's content...just a dialogue about diversity and asked them to consider looking through a wider lens when reflecting upon the character of the community. I got tired of reading about Jesus Christ and how we as a community need to heed HIS call, etc. It was very telling when I called and learned that I was the first (ever) to raise an issue about the Christian slant of the newspaper. Nothing like bringing in a little tension to turn the Titanic. It was a good meeting. Howard says Howard Lake doesn't know what they're in for.

There are some things, however, you don't see. There are no mountains, for example, and I find I miss that very much. Sometimes I will have a startling moment, when I see a mirage of mountains when they really are, in fact, outlines of a mass of clouds. In a flash of realization, my spirit sinks a little, but I usually bounce back. Evenings are the hardest for me. When all is quiet, Howard is asleep and I can't read or watch TV anymore, I think of the Monterey Bay coastline and then I'm suddenly desperate for the sound of crashing waves on rocks. Who would think you could miss the sound of water crashing on rocks? Many, many nights, I cry myself to sleep at night. But then, I think of How, that he's alive and well and physically and emotionally healthy; he's put on 10 lbs on a frame that's never weighed one ounce over 165 in his life. And once again, he goes off to work --happy, like he used to, before the layoff of '01. I think of my husband, and like coming out of a cold shower, I'm right as rain again.

Lest ye all despair, there are brighter moments, blessedly too numerous to count. My house is bright and open –lots of sun. I didn't realize how dark the inside of my other house was. The sun rises from my kitchen window facing the cul-de-sac, and sets from our bedroom window. Sometimes, particularly at the end of Shabbos, before we *havdalah*, the sunset is so dramatic that it grabs our attention and forces us to sit on the bed and watch it lapse around 9pm. Can you believe it? The sun sets at 9pm! You see, so many wonderful experiences.

The weather can be remarkably capricious too. One moment it is sunny, warm and humid –the next, it rains with spectacular thunderstorms and hail --all in the same day. Sometimes the cycle happens more than once in a day. It's the kind of weather you should never travel without an umbrella. One day, I saw 2 rainbows, a few feet apart, stacked on top of each other. I had never seen anything like it before. I didn't know it was even possible. Of course, I barely understand meteorology, what makes a cloud and all that, but they do roll in rather fast –the dark gray ones, that is. The thunderstorms themselves are bone chilling and scary. Once, it got so bad that How and I moved away from the windows and glass doors. It was probably nothing to our weatherworn neighbors, but to us...well, for a moment I thought I'd welcome an earthquake first. I'm kidding, of course, but I did think of it.

As I mentioned before, farms are spread out and the land is quite flat and expansive, as far as the eye can see, which means that if you're traveling the twists and turns of country roads, you can easily get lost. Never mind where the sun is. Pathfinders we're not, so we broke down and bought a compass, which we mounted on the dashboard of our CRV. It's a funny thing. We kept saying we needed a compass, but I think somewhere deep inside of us, we both harbored a resistance to resorting to gadgets to find our way around –How being a former boy scout and all. The Brickwedde's are in Greece, for godsakes! We can't keep calling them to help us find our way out of the woods, much as they're happy to oblige. So we caved in and bought one.

We were so happy we had a compass now. We were in the middle of a trip when we bought it mounted it, proud in the thought that we will never get lost again. So, we're watching it bob and weave as they do, meanwhile we're traveling west. We know we are traveling west because the highway signs say we are, but the compass is pointing south. Oh my God, we bought this in a little out-of-way town and it's broken! Will we ever stop getting lost? That was it --we gave up. We stopped at a store and while I ran in to get something, How stayed behind in the car. Ever the inquiring engineer, he took the compass off and started twiddling with it, found a screw and turned it, which it turns out, recalibrates the compass. I came back to find How wearing a Cheshire grin. James Fenimore Cooper, eat your heart out. We're pathfinders now!

On to more trivia, we both got our Minnesota drivers' licenses --the last vestiges of our California identity stripped away when they snipped our California drivers' licenses --just a little snip on the bottom right corner, but oh, the sting of a thousand cuts. To assuage our wounded pride, we bought personalized license plates with the Loon on it, which is the state bird. It's a colorful plate, much more trendy than the plain white and blue plates most Minnesotans have. How California is that? Anyway, the inside joke around here is that the state bird is really the mosquito. More about that later.

You'll remember earlier I said that we might have found a temple home at reform Bet Shalom? That early assessment was premature, I'm sorry to say. Part of our decision to find a temple home...well, let's just say, a large part has to do with what kind of commitment to music-making the temple has. How said he won't join any temple I'm not singing in, so I met with the cantor. What a disappointing and edifying experience that was. First let me say that the end result was not a complete surprise to me. As I mentioned before, we have been going to this temple for some months now and over that period, had met the cantor and heard her sing etc., but from the first introduction, I sensed something was a little off. I pride myself on having fairly acute antennae, and my impression was that she didn't warm to me at all. Actually, I found her cold and distant.

That may have been due to our dear friends, the Brickwedde's, who no doubt talked her ear off about me and what kind of musician I was. What they didn't know, however, was that I was not going to be a welcome addition to the choir or doing occasional cantoring, as I had been used to. She was pleasant enough, but she made it abundantly clear that she, and only she, did solos/cantoring, that it was her job, and that although I would be welcome to join the choir, I most likely would not be happy being in such a limited role. That's not exactly verbatim, but it's the gist of the conversation.

I don't think she meant to be insulting, shocking as it was to experience, but I was insulted nonetheless. I told How the closest analogy I could make was to imagine Eric Clapton moving to town and upon hearing there is a band of guitarists who get together every week, wanted to join in and jam. A natural assumption on his part, of course, only he's told that they have enough guitarists and thanks, but no thanks...ahem!

So, onto Adath Jeshurun (conservative & very liberal --with a capital "L") congregation, which is closer still than Bet Shalom, and I met with the cantor there. This temple was founded in 1884, and has over 1200 families. Musically, it's an entirely different world altogether, and in some ways, far superior to Temple Beth El's in Santa Cruz. The cantor is a completely delightful man and was giddy (I heard later) having met me. Furthermore, he's already planning repertoire I can do for High Holidays, so I'm completely elated. We've been exchanging emails about the music, and he asked me to send him copies of what I have in my own library. Prior to this meeting, I had been dreading High Holidays at Bet Shalom and knew it would be absolutely crushing to my spirit to sit in the congregation and not be part of the music making. Now, I'm looking forward to rehearsals in August and while I'm not going to take anything for granted, I'm going to be a little circumspect about not being the 600 lb. Gorilla in a new situation. Still, it's so exciting to think about being a part of temple life again. Now I'm crying happy tears.

Other delights to report have been the excursions How and I have been making to art museums, parks and music venues in Minneapolis. It turns out that the largest classical broadcast network is called Minnesota Public Radio (MPR) and the public heavily supports it. You can't imagine how delightful it was to drive around one evening and hear on MPR, the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra doing a live concert performance of the opera "Tosca." I was green with envy that we didn't have tickets to see that. Another weekend, after visiting the Minneapolis Institute for the Arts, which is in St. Paul, we walked across the street to see an outdoors studio of internationally renowned sculptors hewing massive rocks from local Minnesota quarries. I had no idea Minnesota had quarries. This traveling international program event was sponsored by the city of St. Paul, called "Minnesota Rocks" and it was the first time in 39 years they had brought the venue back to Minnesota. It was a serendipitous moment to watch and hear from a roped-off distance, 12 artists using their jackhammers, picks, sand drills and chisels to make these colossal art pieces, destined to be permanently displayed somewhere in Minnesota.

With regards to the arts, public support for the arts is a badge of honor in Minnesota, sports too, for that matter. Lest we fail to mention the brand new sports stadium they're going to build, that's going to be partially funded by the state. There was a substantial political fight on that one. I have to laugh when I think of a conversation How had with a work colleague who, by the way is a sports fanatic. He was outraged that his tax dollar was being spent in support of the arts, and How was quick to point out, "Why is that any different than supporting the sports stadium?" Ah, ...well, what's food for the goose, *'ain't* food for the gander. Took the air right out of his tires!

I think I read somewhere that 1% of the state's operating budget is earmarked for the arts, so you have a delightful plethora of music venues for adults and children, tons of live theatre, which host first run Broadway productions (Minnesota being the key mid-west stopover before hitting the Big Apple) dance companies and world class conservatory style garden tours, operating even during the heaviest snow of winter. Anyway, I decided I needed to get my studio going so I met with the executive director of an organization called Springboard For the Arts, funded by the state remarkably, which is a resource network service for artists. They help connect you to up and coming public commission work, create sources for insurance coverage and a host of other services artists' need.

First, however, I had to bring in my portfolio to be juried before I could avail myself the use of their services. Naturally I was nervous about it, but it turns out I had no problem whatsoever because my work more than surpassed their standards, whatever they were. I learned later that they thought the body of work I had done, was the 'best thing since sliced cheese'...ahem...I guess we can all throw up now! ☹ No...really, it's nice to hear. I just don't want to be in the running to do a skyscraper or something on the order of the Trump Tower. I personally know the guy who did it. He lives in Santa Cruz, very much under the radar --one of God's gifts to glass art and I'm nowhere in that league.

Okay, I think I've run out of gas and you're probably growing cobwebs by now. I have lots more to share, but I'll hold up on those things until next time. Hope this was an easy read. Eight weeks from now, chapter 5 will be in the hopper. Miss you all very much...Love, Maria

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