

Never mind where the sun is

I thought there was nothing to compare to California redwoods, the Pacific coastline, or even the wine country – well, with the exception, of course, of Yosemite National Park.

Still, one never thinks of the clogged freeways, bumper-to-bumper traffic, and road rage we put up with to get to jobs and maintain the outrageous standard of living we had in Santa Cruz.

Did you know that housing in Santa Cruz is the third most expensive in the nation? The sad commentary of that lifestyle is that “people live to buy the house, not live in the house.”

Living in Howard Lake these past few months has brought a new awareness and appreciation of the peace, tranquility, and timelessness we missed, amidst the insanity of a 24/7 career that nearly killed my husband. Now, I’m thinking that being away from the relentless blitz and sensory stimulation of consumerism and running on an endless treadmill, has made all the difference in the world.

I think that is why it is a constant shock to me, the things that I notice – like driving along country roads and seeing white egrets coursing in pools of blue/green water in wetland marshes, with a smattering of pink mauve color thrown in for good measure.

Various bright and tertiary colors of red, orange, yellow, and green are played across the landscape. It puts a Monet impressionist painting to shame.

There are moments, however, when the pang of memory endures.

New beginnings really began for us when my husband and I got our Minnesota drivers’ licenses. The last vestiges of our California identity were stripped

Musings of a transplant Maria Stolz Howard Lake

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 license plates with the Minnesota Loon on it. It’s a colorful plate, much more trendy than the plain white and blue plates most Minnesotans have. How California is that?

But, there are brighter moments too, blessedly too numerous to count. One day, I saw two 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 my husband 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 instead. I’m kidding, of course, but I did think of it.

So, we make our way, learn, and drink up the scenery in huge gulps. We know that 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.

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Pathfinders we are 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 – my husband being a former Boy Scout and all.

The Brickwedde’s (our newfound friends) are in Greece, for heaven sakes! 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 now had a compass. We were in the middle of a trip when we bought and mounted it, proud in the thought that we would 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 no, we bought that compass in a little out-of-the-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, my husband 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 my husband wearing a Cheshire cat-grin.

James Fenimore Cooper, eat your heart out. We’re pathfinders now!