

Naked Curiosity: The Fly-over People

"That's all well and good," a former colleague opined, in a meeting to consider a quirky new commercial campaign. "But will it play with the fly-over people?"

The so-called fly-over people are, literally, flown over by airplanes jetting from one cultural capital to the other. They've been the focus of much discussion and derision among the pseudo-sophisticated, creative movers and shakers on the East and West coasts. Those urbane types have little appreciation for anyone who doesn't live in either New York or Los Angeles — with occasional exceptions made for residents of San Francisco and Chicago. The fly-over folks, it's believed, are merely pitiful pawns whose reason for existence is to buy the things the product pushers and show business pimps are selling.

I have been among the

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fly-over people.

Martin and I have been on a three-week, epic motorcycle adventure. We've traveled more than 5,000 miles, crisscrossing twelve states. While our itinerary included stops in major metropolitan areas like Chicago and Minneapolis, we've spent far more time in smaller cities and rural areas.

For most of my adult life, I've lived in big cities. I value the dynamic energy and ready availability of cosmopolitan arts offerings and major-market athletics.

I'm an urban immigrant, though. I was born and raised in a small town but never appreciated the folksy lifestyle or slumbering pace. I couldn't wait to move to the big city where I felt a sense of true belonging. I immediately bought into the superior, center-of-the-



world mind-set. On my calendar, I referenced trips back to my hometown as visits to "the provinces."

In no time, I was dripping with the same uppity, condescending, cultural superiority as my friends and colleagues. I was a snob among snobs.

Then, I'd spend a day with my dear friend, Susan, at her home in a lovely rural area. We'd sit on the upstairs porch and sip iced coffee and chat for hours.

We'd enjoy excellent meals at local restaurants and take drives through the beautiful countryside.

Granted, much of the credit for the gloriousness of those days can be attributed to the fact that Susan and I have fun together no matter where

we are or what we're doing. But I can't deny the power of the peacefulness found in her bucolic surroundings. I can't diminish the outpouring of warmth and friendliness from the folks who lived in and around her town.

And so it's been on Martin's and my motorcycle journey.

We've met extraordinary people everywhere we've been. In each place we've stopped, we've asked the restaurant server or convenience store clerk to tell us about his or her town. We've become acquainted with the fresh-faced folks of Durango and Pagosa Springs, Colorado. We've learned about Ogallala, Wahoo and Lexington, Nebraska.

The day after the Supreme Court knocked down the Texas sodomy law, it made the

local morning paper but was far less important than a story and photo about a record-setting piece of hail. A radio show we happened to catch focused on the ruling but more than one local Nebraska caller denounced the hate-mongering host and provided perspectives that were articulate and compassionate. Hail that!

I lost my glasses somewhere in Colorado. The first chance we had to get a replacement pair was in Des Moines, Iowa. The Lenscrafters at a suburban mall turned out to be the source for much more than new frames and lenses.

Julie, the retail manager, and I bonded like old friends. We were laughing and exchanging life stories in a matter of minutes. In addition to a marvelous new pair of glasses, the married and pregnant Julie recommended a gay dance club for our evening's entertainment. When she and her co-workers want a fun night out, they head to the gay disco because "they have the best and we can just dance and have a great time without being hit on."

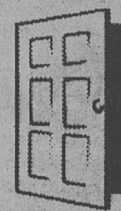
We've been warmly welcomed in places that are usually assumed to be bastions of anti-gay acrimony. We've made friends where it's expected that an interracial homosexual couple would get more glaring than caring.

Visiting gay meccas and exciting cities can be fun, but don't pass up a chance to see parts of the country where there are wonderful people whose minds and hearts are more open than we often assume. Don't make condescending comparisons between your own little world and places where the corn grows straight but not all the people do.

Play with the fly-over people. It's all well and good. ▼

D. Scott-Bush's work appears throughout the country. E-mail may be directed to NakedCuriosity.com.

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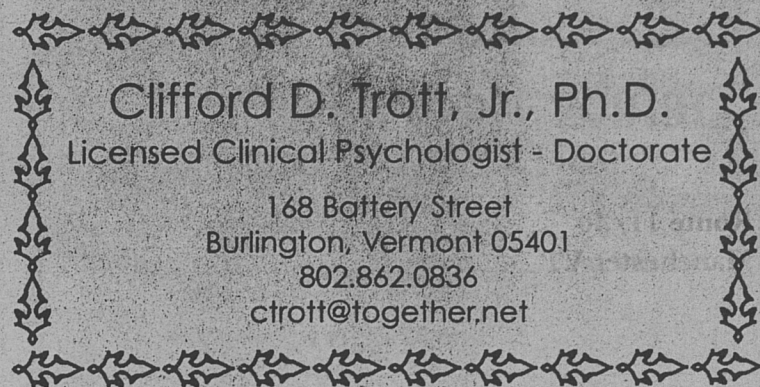
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