

Off the Beaten Patch: One state. Two states. Blue state. Red state.

Oh, how things are different at this end of the interstate.

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© November 17, 2011



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Has it really only been a month?

It sure feels like more than 720 hours since I moved from Walnut Creek to Arizona; but maybe it's because the two places already feel light-years apart.

I loved the 30 years I spent living in Walnut Creek. Those of you who are regular readers to my Off the Beaten Patch column know that I decided to move to Scottsdale to be nearer to my mom and dad.

Well that's a bit of an understatement – because for the last month I have been living with my mom and dad. We have one of those rare and enviable relationships where we actually enjoy each other's company. They live in a gorgeous community near Surprise, Ariz., which is about an hour away from Scottsdale.

And it's no surprise that after a month, there's things I miss -- and don't miss -- about Walnut Creek.

I always knew that living in the Bay Area was expensive, but I had no idea just how expensive. The price of fill-in-the-blank costs less here. Gas is a little over \$3 a gallon. Groceries? It seems like everything is 3 for 88¢. Even California avocados are 3 for 88¢. And it doesn't stop at the grocery store -- dry-cleaning, taxes, real estate and eating out – it all costs 50 to 80 percent less.

At only \$10, even my Arizona driver's license was a bargain. I made it in and out of their DMV in less than a half hour – no appointment necessary. And the best part – every single employee was incredibly helpful and downright nice. They suggested I re-shoot my photo because they said it could be better. Imagine my surprise when they handed me my new license -- right on the spot. I drove out of there humming instead of swearing.

And speaking of driving it's weird seeing the various license plates from all over North America. It's not unusual to pass a car from Saskatchewan or Alberta and see license plates from 10 different states in the span of 10 minutes.

Some things here are just plain different. Coyotes and cactus instead of earthquakes and ergonomics. Cigarettes and Fords instead of sushi and Ferraris. But I doubt I'll ever get used to seeing stones instead of grass or people carrying handguns instead of umbrellas. Did I mention it's a Red State?

I know it's early days but I can tell I am going to love living in Arizona. I am excited about moving into my new house next month. I love having family dinners with my family and being able to pick up a chocolate babka and a Kosher rye on the way home. I am having absolutely no trouble whatsoever adjusting to the gorgeous weather, wearing flip-flops day in and day out, and walking my dog on something they call sidewalks.

But not everything is better in Arizona – and it certainly doesn't feel like home yet. In addition to my friends and neighborhood, I miss the morning paper, the emerald green hills, stricter cell phone laws and designated U-turn lanes.

And, after my next story, I will really miss writing for Walnut Creek Patch.