

Trying to welcome my new life

Off the Beaten Patch: There's no recipe for making the right move. An Arizonan reminisces about Walnut Creek.

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Every morning the welcome sign in my kitchen reminds me of my new life in Arizona. After 30 years in Walnut Creek, I moved to Scottsdale at the end of last year and thought by now I'd be loving it. No such luck.

I have been coming up with excuse after excuse as to why I couldn't turn in this column. But the truth is that, every time I sat down to write it, I got depressed. Writing about my new life in Scottsdale only reminded me of my old life in Walnut Creek.

Not talking about it hasn't seemed to help, so maybe talking about it will. So let's give it a go, shall we?

From the mundane to the magnificent, there is so much I miss about Walnut Creek and California that it's hard to know where to begin.

I miss the weather. I miss the morning fog and the breezy evenings. I miss knowing that regardless of how hot it might get on a summer's day, it always cools down at night. I miss

having my windows open and the cool air drifting through my screen doors. I miss the sun rising above Mount Diablo and I miss the sun setting into the Bay.

I miss being able to walk to Target, Hubcaps and Trader Joe's. I miss the big purple chair at the Starbucks by Lunardi's. I miss my doctor, my dentist and my needlepoint maker. I miss McCaulou's and Milner's at Countrywood and I miss everything about Broadway Plaza. And I really miss running in to people I know everywhere along the way.

I miss knowing my way around and every secret parking place there in town. I miss the surrounding areas, too – especially Lafayette. I miss Uncle Yu's, Misto Lino and Pinky's. I miss the reverence when passing the makeshift crosses on the hillside. I miss driving through Orinda, being in awe of the rolling hills. I miss driving up the Moraga Road and having breakfast at 'the dirty place.' I miss going through the tunnel and just after the curve at Telegraph Avenue, being able to see the San Francisco skyline and the Golden Gate Bridge. I miss it all.

I miss the media and my daily dose of Tony Hicks, Chuck Barney, Gary Bogue, Dan Ashley and Spencer Christian. Hell, I even miss Finney's Friday Free Stuff. And I especially miss Comcast because they don't charge you to watch Forrest Gump On Demand. You should hug your newspaper and your cable box because you just don't know how lucky you are.

I really miss my old house. My front porch, my back yard and the panoramic views. I miss my street, my neighborhood and every single one of my neighbors.

But most of all I miss my friends.

New life

Yes, I miss my old life. Which brings us to my new one.

I live in a city that has 15 freeway exits instead of three and in a state that allows guns in Tommy Bahamas and texting while driving. I live in a city where the elected officials are still questioning whether the President of the United States is a United States citizen.

For someone who hates hot weather it's almost comical that I live in Arizona. It's days like today, (when the temperature is 119°) having just brushed my teeth with warm water, that I really miss the Bay Area. I can't believe I am driving around with tinted car windows like Tony Soprano, and planning how in the hell I am going to get my popsicles home from the grocery store before they melt.

Some days I just can't believe I live here. Getting stamps from the Hopi Indian post office and taking Map Quest instructions with me every time I leave my house. Arizona may border California but it feels like a world away. Now I'm a stone's throw away from coyotes and casinos instead of famous beaches and fine wine.

Most days I just go with it but many times it gets the best of me. One night I just broke down sobbing and called my friend Paige. It was almost as if she was waiting for my call because she was 'on it' in a second. "Look DL," she told me, "You had a big life in Walnut Creek; you knew everything and everybody. You went from being totally visible to being totally invisible and it's going to take time." She reminded me that I've made big moves before and they always worked out, and she is jealous and blown away by my gumption and courage.

I immediately felt better and Paige is right; It's going to take some time.

Scottsdale is my home now and I have to stay positive. I see the welcome sign and try to focus on the good. And there is so much good.

I love that I've cut my living expenses by 70 percent. I love that everything here is so new and incredibly clean. I love that nine months of the year the weather is absolutely perfect. I love that there are no parking meters and more stores and restaurants than I have ever seen in my life. I love that we never change the clocks and that our primetime is from 7-10 p.m. instead of 8-11. I love having real Chicago and New York delis that serve the 'food of my people.' I love that my cousins live here half the year and I love that Scottsdale is such a great tourist destination that I have already had lots of visitors.

But most of all I love being so near to my mom and dad — which is the reason I moved here in the first place. I love being able to help them with all the heavy lifting and how we can get together just because we feel like it. I love being able to go with them to the doctor and that in case of an emergency, I am 45 minutes away from them instead of 45 minutes away from the airport. I cherish being able to spend holidays and birthdays together and I love that for the first time ever, I get to take the leftovers home! I love that my living here has brought them joy and sense of peace, and quite frankly, at this time in their life, their happiness trumps mine.

It's still early days and hopefully I will start to feel more and more 'welcome.' It is getting better and the more people I meet and the more things I do, the better it gets. I just have to be patient, be positive, stay calm and carry on.

The real test will be in a few weeks when my job and a wedding bring me back to Walnut Creek. It is going to be very interesting to see what happens. I wonder if I'm seeing Walnut Creek through rose-colored glasses and a double dose of rush hour on 680, coupled with a few cold mornings, high prices and petty pretentiousness, will make me want to run back to Scottsdale faster than I can shake a palm tree.

I'll let you know.

Walnut Creek Patch has invited me to continue writing my Off the Beaten Patch column. Maybe they miss me as much as I miss Walnut Creek.