



Why Spokane is the Best

“Oh my gosh that is *sooo* Eastern Washington!” The words had become so common from my friend that they should have gone in one ear and out the other, without me giving them a second thought, but they didn't. Every time she made a disparaging comment about life on the east side of the Cascades, I owned a bit of it. Though she spent her high school years living in Spokane, she left as soon as she could, heading for the great beacon in the sky – which in this case was the light at the top of the Space Needle. As her joy from living on the west side grew over the years, so too did her belittling comments about Spokane.

Spokane wasn't diverse enough, big enough or cool enough. Everybody here drove slow, thought slow and was culturally deprived. The pace of life and the actions of people here were 20 years behind the times for her. The west side was so much better, she argued. Culturally diverse, not just in population, but in arts and entertainment, it was like a breath of fresh air to be there, saved from the boring claws of Spokane.

As is so often the case in life, having heard the disparaging comments for so long, it became difficult to doubt them and even more difficult to argue against them. Bright lights and the big city did have a certain dreamy appeal to them, and the hustle and bustle of the greater Seattle area was difficult to argue against. So, her constant laughs and dings about Spokane became par for the course on any of her visits home.

Last winter, while in Seattle, I made plans to drive down to her house. The traffic was horrific on the way there. I called her and said, “I don't know what is going on, but I am at a total standstill in traffic.”

“It's called rush hour,” she said. “It's probably going to take you another 40 minutes.”

“Rush hour? It's 3:07 in the afternoon,” I replied. “Doesn't anybody put in a full day of work anymore?”

“It's the west side,” she scoffed, “people work staggered hours.”

How silly of an east side buffoon like me to not know that, I thought.

As the sun set and daylight faded away into night, the headlights from the oncoming traffic and the endless red line of taillights in front of me illuminated the road. It was difficult to tell where one suburb ended and another one started because there was no line of demarcation in the never-ending stretch of car lots and warehouse sized stores lining the sides of the freeway.

Seeing the sign for her town, I maneuvered into the right lane and took the next exit. So this was it, her beloved west side hometown. I drove down the inside lane of a six lane divided road flanked by strip malls, fast food places and gas stations. It continued this way the entire length of the road, which was the main one through town.

“That's it?” I thought, as I pulled into her driveway after the trek through town. *This* is the place that is so much better than Spokane to live in? How? Why? Thinking back to all of the talk about how much better life was on the west side, compared to Spokane, seemed suddenly empty. I couldn't help but notice that she lived in a town that had no identity.

Where was the downtown core? Where was the clock tower rising above the beautiful river that carves its way through the center of the city? Where were the streets filled with the world's largest timed road race and the world's largest three-on-three basketball tournament? Where was the restored historic theater that is home to the city's symphony? Where was the arena where the hometown hockey team plays - when the arena isn't filled with sold out shows from international artists? Where were the historic hotels, the U.S. Figure Skating events, the Elite Eight level basketball teams, the Best of Broadway shows, the gondola Sky Ride and the community steeped in history? In Spokane, all of that is within the downtown, not to mention what spills out beyond.

Her town doesn't have any of those things. Her town doesn't have an identity, a history or a sense of community. It has beautiful houses, and paved roads that lead to on-ramps that lead to an over 40-minute drive to a big city. It doesn't have what Spokane has. It's *soooo* Western Washington.

Bigger isn't always better. That big city on the other side of the state has a lot of great things to offer, but we're pretty certain life on this side is best. Need proof? Take a trip through these pages, and see just what we think makes this city the best of the best. In celebration of our 11th Annual Best of the City Readers Survey, we're highlighting all the people, places, events, businesses and experiences that make living in Spokane the best!

For all of us, whether we hail from here, the west side, the east coast, the south or any other long off land, no doubt our hometowns are places for which we have great pride and appreciation. Home is where you hang your hat at night, where your feet go up and your stress level goes down. So, while I'm not wild about my friend's hometown on the west side, I take no joy in bashing where she lives. I would just like to remind her of what is so great about living here: We are *soooo* Eastern Washington!

Happy Reading!

Blythe