

What We Do Here

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The first and possibly last time I ever entered a chat room, I was about 10 years old. My dad was showing off this new dining room accessory called “the internet,” which I used to discuss professional basketball with a Texan who was four times my age. Or so I assumed. Maybe he was a 4th grader also. In any event, we talked, and he raised a question that blew my little mind.

“What is there to do in Idaho?”

It’s been posed to me countless times since, and for some reason, it bothers me. What is there to do anywhere? We have fewer beaches, unique restaurants, and indie music festivals, but that’s about it. Chances are my Texan interlocutor wasn’t frequenting the opera, and he certainly wasn’t skiing, like I was.

I was born and raised in Idaho Falls, spent weekends in Palisades, holidays in Sun Valley, and state tournaments in Boise, but I live in California now. It’s nice here. Warm. There are things to do, both indoors and out, and the scenery is really something. Years ago, a friend pointed west from the sand dunes south of I.F. and said, “Idaho is the only place you see sunsets like that,” but yesterday on the train home from work, an unbridled apocalypse of orange crested and rose over the Santa Cruz Mountains, expanding across the sky and enveloping homes and office buildings as the train passed by not slowly enough. I could hardly speak.

A lot of non-Gem states have sunsets, as well as mountains and fly fishing. Some even grow russets, allegedly. The point is that while there are countless reasons to be proud of Idaho, the same can be said for just about any place. Until recently, much of the substantiation for my pride probably pretty closely resembled a list of memorized facts for a 4th grade Idaho history test – a list that exists, with some variation, for every state. We’re good at this, we’ve got great that. True story: I have bragged to at least three people that we’re the nation’s second-largest producer of soybeans. I don’t even think that’s true, but it sure ended some arguments. In the 8+ years since I left it behind, details like these are the mighty bulwarks I have erected to defend my state from verbal attacks, both real and imagined. Until recently. Until now. Because I meet people from all over the world now, and I’ve begun realizing there’s something more significant that Idahoans do better than most anyone else:

Life.

But you already knew that. I can’t brag about it, though, because my conceptions of life and happiness are so foreign to coastline urbanites, the message doesn’t even compute. People inquire, and I respond, “Yes, I plan on moving back there someday. People are happier there.” It sounds idyllic, they say, then gaze off into the distance as though envisioning a bygone era rather than a real place. No private SAT tutors or Ethiopian cuisine or thousands of corporate ladders to choose from and climb? Preposterous. How would I explain Idaho on my resume? And for heaven’s sake, *what is there to do there?*

And then I stop, because I understand. Professionally, right now, there's nothing for me to do in Idaho either. I picked the wrong majors. I long to return somehow, and I will – hopefully sooner than later – but at least in the meantime, my 208 number and 8B plates will continue to serve as reminders that a simpler, truer happiness exists far beyond the rat race – I've seen it.