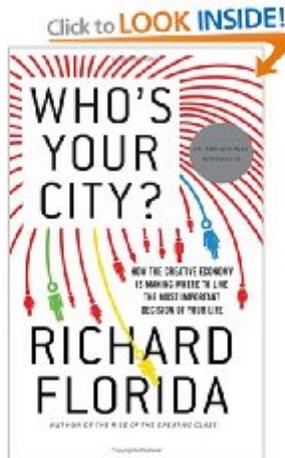


# The geographic cure: A personal perspective on how your city of residence brings joy or sorrow

March 26, 9:41 PM



***Who's Your City?: How the Creative Economy Is Making Where to Live the Most Important Decision of Your Life by Richard Florida. A personal review of a book that changed my life to the 416 (Toronto) and 415 (San Francisco).***

This book breaks apart the myth that you can be happy anywhere. People live in a social context and geography does play the main role in happiness. The Bay Area has been home to the alternative liberal culture and thus is a safe place for anyone who seeks a tolerant and embracing atmosphere. There is a reason to run away from less accepting places towards cities like San Francisco or New York. Every night I prayed for San Francisco and the chance to live there just as I had for Toronto during my childhood. Excellent book! From personal experience I agree that choice of where to live is the most important factor in one's personal happiness.

***Imagine people not sitting beside you on public transit because you are not white. Imagine Confederate flags on the back of pick up trucks and the Aryan nation alive and well. Imagine people calling you for being Asian derogatory names not heard of since the 50's. No, this not something that happened years ago. It happened to me twice in my life. First in the early 1990's and then again last year. I had been spoiled by several international cosmopolitan cities and as a minority female found myself dealing with a hostile environment for seven long months. Now I can say that San Francisco is a truly special city.***

I grew up in Canada in a Rocky Mountain town called Calgary (home of the Calgary Stampede) north of the Montana border. When I was 16 I skipped town and ran off to Toronto. I fell in love with the city at first sight because I felt welcome in its multicultural inclusive atmosphere. I spent well over a decade of my life in the urban metropolis before family obligation took me back to Calgary in the spring of 2008. My initial impression of Toronto was that for everything I was told was weird about me as an ethnic kid in Calgary ... it didn't seem to matter there. For example, I had to remind people I was a minority many times because they just saw me and not my skin color or ethnic origin. In Toronto I met people who could speak Japanese and French but were of British descent. The city had a global perspective that was really

attractive. People were actually interested in other cultures and religions and weren't afraid of them or called them derogatory names. Toronto taught me that it was OK to pursue what one wanted regardless of where they came from. While Toronto has been accused of thinking itself the center of the universe and being "cold" .... to its credit it is a tolerant city.

To be honest, Toronto and its citizens healed my heartbreak of a childhood experiencing racial slurs in the school playground and being called "brown girl" instead of my name into high school. That is why location, location, location matters number one in determining quality of life.

Being the most multicultural city in the world (by the United Nations) is a real treat. I love the diversity of people, sectors, and the hustle bustle vibrancy of it all. Most of the last several years I lived in Yorkville in the heart of the city and enjoyed the film festivals, easy public transit, Harbourfront and Toronto Island, and just the variety of life one can live in Toronto. The years in Toronto intertwined with sojourns in New York and San Francisco with a foray into London for a time but I always came home to Toronto.

Toronto is very intellectual in that Eastern way and my career has really benefited from the polished style of business there. What I enjoy most about Toronto is that its like New York but livable and still safe compared to other US cities. Its a hub so travel in and out of Canada is easy and hey, Toronto is on the map internationally.

Toronto truly taught me that being color blind was a good thing. The Calgary of my childhood gave me, as a minority, a different and far less kind experience back then. It could have been my imagination or just adolescence because kids do act different from adults. Nonetheless, I felt something back then that may or may not have been true. The Calgary I came back to now has a bit of Toronto 's cosmo flavor so my experience here as an adult has been as positive as my childhood memories were negative. I have met people who are well-travelled, friendly, and down to earth with a very grounded perspective of life. The city has the most sunshine in Canada and the Rockies are really nearby. Though if you're not an outdoors person it may not matter but once you get used to the physical beauty of Alberta you may be lured to explore more. The main difference to me is that Toronto is at 5.5 million people compared to a mere 1 million and change so I feel like I am in a small town and worried I will get bored.

P.S. I did get bored after 7 months and am now on the West Coast and back in the big city. YAHOO!

*Every day I ride the BART into the city and see the Golden Gate Bridge I thank my favorite Catholic Saint - Anthony of Padua - for bringing me back to the place named after his teacher - St. Francis of Assisi*

**Author: Rheba Estante**



Rheba Estante is an Examiner from San Francisco. You can see Rheba's articles on [Rheba's Home Page](#).