

CALIFORNIA DREAMING

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I moved to Massachusetts determined to hate it. Moving to old Massachusetts, with its brownstones and cottages- just a few straw roofs shy of proving that the Industrial Revolution never happened. I moved to cold, snowy Massachusetts from sunny California, with its broad roads and million-dollar houses, which begs the question: *why on earth would you leave?*

The reason is not entirely important. I could have listed a fair few, but what did matter is that I left behind the warm weather, the farmer's market that popped up every Sunday, and the not-so-subtle drive that everyone had to make it big someday. I was a city mouse, enamored by the spell every Californian is under at some point in their lives.

California holds you in her hands, whispering words of assurance and guarantees that *you* will be the one to break the mold, find Atlantis, and become the shiniest pebble in a sea of rocks. She keeps you with her and invites you to her home, filled with all the glamor of new money and Hollywood-style stardom. She teaches you about beauty as well as danger, and convinces you that you have every right to be here-even if you feel the most out of place in her home.

I loved being in love with California. I loved sinking into the beige seats of my car, delicately peeling off my sticky skin from the burning leather. The air conditioner was on year-round in our house, as well as in our prayers when we stepped foot outside. Summer in California was filled with us shaking our fists at the scorching sun, vowing to never leave the safety of our home again. Still, we traversed, driving to the local library or walking around the

dog park by Wintergreen Drive.

My family and I often frequented the Cupertino public library and walked out with more books than we could carry. I remember the first time we realized that we could borrow up to a hundred items on our SCCLD library card. We were like kids on Christmas morning, entirely at the library's mercy, our hearts hammering against our chests as we raced past the shelves, grabbing at any book that looked inviting. We went overboard on our first time there and ended up reading only a quarter of the books we finally did check out. Even so, I doubt I would ever forget the pure, unbridled joy I felt upon running my hands over the spines of my favorite books, knowing that I could take them home with me.

Winters in California were a whole other story. I remember sitting on the open school grounds one day, with my jacket tightly wrapped around my body as I worked through my lunch.

My friend, a true Californian, complained about the weather. "It's so cold. I can't believe it's fifty degrees, I'm freezing."

I look back on that interaction with a mix of amusement as well as envy. I now huddle underneath my two blankets and shiver against the merciless cold that Massachusetts brings forth. Winters here are a feat of strength; the northeast throws everything it has at you. From learning how to shovel snow, to my eyelashes freezing shut, I constantly feel like I'm on the latest season of *Survivor*, and every bone in my body is telling me to turn tail and run back to California.

I've met people who often ask me if California is full of influencers who shove cameras into your face and pretend to prank you for hundreds of viewers. I always respond by telling them that I am yet to meet anyone with a vlog camera, and in my eyes, they

lurk in the more stereotypical waters of the state, prowling behind the Hollywood sign while filling themselves up on LaCroix. The realistic scene that one would witness on a regular day out in California would simply be regular people on their daily routines, slowly pushing through their day while they made the most out of the weather.

Somehow, one of my biggest gripes about life in California as compared to Massachusetts is their public transport system. Where I live now, we have buses that would ferry us to and from our school. The high school, middle school, and elementary school would have their own separate bus system and even granted us a late bus if we missed the first one. In California, your arrival at school was entirely based on what you could do about it. I lived slightly far from my high school and had days where I would walk a couple miles to school simply because my working parents did not have the time to drive me.

As a freshman, I could not drive myself either, so more often than not I found myself taking the long route home, humming to myself as the other cars raced past me. I think about the lack of public transport a lot now I wonder why they did not have such a thing in Cupertino, which was full of working families and their children. Did they just expect the mothers of the family to make themselves available on school days? Were they expected to carve out time to drop and pick up their kids from school, while their husbands worked their strenuous I.T. jobs? Or were the fathers expected to drive us home, and get words of praise from other parents for doing a *mother's* job? For a place that prides itself on being 'liberal', why did my mother need to feel as though she was doing something wrong for not being able to excuse herself from her job at the hospital to pick up her two kids?

In retrospect, I feel as though we never fully felt like a part of California. The feeling stems from the certain presence that engulfs the state, dividing everyone who lives there into different groups. We are forced to interact with each other, as well as put on an air of nicety. We have a gifted set of people who have honed their craft at every imaginable hobby, as well as those who strive to be the next Steve Jobs. On the opposite side of the spectrum, we have people who drift through their lives, content with what they have. Although neither of these sides are wrong in any way, they clash with each other while living in the same place, unable to leave, and are always at a loss when they compare themselves to each other.

I remember my mother once telling me that she went to a clothing store and was casually browsing through some of the summer pieces when another woman approached her. This woman was younger than her, and she had decked herself out in the latest fashion and was sporting beautiful jewelry that she wore proudly. She gave my mother a brilliant smile and asked her where she could find the new spring dresses from the latest Aria couture line. When my mother politely informed her that she did not work there, the woman looked her up and down, her eyebrows raised in poorly disguised confusion.

“Oh, could have sworn you did!” she said, leaving quickly.

Although this interaction was a long time ago, it still stuck with my mother for a while. She brushes it off now, saying that she did not entirely care too much, but it still stays in the back of both of our minds. That was the first instance where my mother felt as though life in the shiny West Coast was not for her. Although she had danced with California and been the most enchanting date, she could not help but notice the subtle disdain she felt from the state.

My mother with her modest clothes and tame hairstyle did not fit in the sea of shinier pebbles. She was allowed to stay, of course, but this was not the right place for her. She knew it, the shopper knew it, and now I know it.

She said her goodbyes to California then.

My falling out with California continued for a few months, where our relationship slowly faded—it was nothing dramatic, nor did it leave either of us with a bad taste in our mouths. I will always regard my home state with a special kind of love. I find it hard to forget its broad roads, beautiful grassy fields which always smelled of lavender, and the tall trees that swayed in the sun. I can still remember the drive to my aunt's house which followed a route near a stable: the smell of dirt and manure would always follow our car as we drove, and we'd have to hold our breath for a couple of blocks, or until my brother's face would turn a peculiar shade of purple.

Life in Massachusetts has grown on my family, and we take pleasure in the little things. My dad often takes the train to Boston for his work, and he tells me about the journey there. He told me that once he found a seat and had settled down for the forty-minute ride from where we live to the heart of Boston, he would always look around and find that at least one other person aside from him was reading a book. My dad found this very charming and he admitted that he rarely saw this occur in California. His observation was definitely biased, but I still find it very interesting. Everyone in my family is an avid reader, and we often take books with us wherever we go. Now when I travel to Boston, like my dad, I started to look around for other readers while I use the commuter rail, and smile warmly at them when we do see each other.

So, goodbye to California, I suppose, and hello to a whole new side of the country. Would I miss the West Coast? Would I yearn for its freedom, the memories, and the weather? Or would I form a newfound love for the East Coast, with its roots firm in American history? There are quite a number of differences between living in California and living in Massachusetts. I find it hard to form an opinion when someone asks me which state I prefer. I always change the subject or place my foot staunchly in the middle of both sides. Although, I will mention that until In-N-Out manages to launch a couple of its restaurants in Massachusetts, California might have a slight advantage in earning my love.

When people come to visit us in Massachusetts, we usually take them around Boston and show them the different sites around there. We would walk the freedom trail, stopping by the oldest bar in Boston, or take them on the Duck Boat tour if they so desired. Visiting Massachusetts meant taking them around different sorts of architecture, where they could explore the extremely old buildings around the city, or even wander Westborough, the small town that I live in, which is full of colonial-style houses and churches that have stood tall for countless years.

While living in California, I was so irrevocably in love with it, that I was convinced that I would never leave. Therefore, when we finally did leave the state behind and move to Massachusetts, I was at a loss for a couple of months. I kept waiting for my parents to change their minds overnight and decide that Massachusetts wasn't for us after all. When my mom would complain about the work she had to do in her new hospital, I would laugh and say, "Well, should we head back to California then?"

Now, having lived in Massachusetts for around five years, I would not go back. It is my home now and I cannot see it as anything else. I would miss it too much. Leaving it would mean I

would have to say goodbye to the local USPS driver who always tips his hat in hello, or the sweet old ladies who own the sushi restaurant right on the outskirts of the town rotary. I would miss the town playground, which hosts a drive-in movie night every so often, leaving everyone who came to it with bug bites peppered all over their body. I would miss the people of Westborough, with their avid enthusiasm for town events, and their love for the high school football team. I would miss my friends, with their cleverly disguised Boston accents, and their acceptance of the terrified-to-be-here Californian girl.

There were years when I called California my home, but they seem quite a long time ago.