

Home on the range

“I moved to be near the mountains.” If you’ve lived in Colorado any length of time and asked any non-native why they came here, I’ll bet you’ve heard that phrase.

To many non-natives, Colorado equals mountains. That’s the draw. Well, I would like to make a case for the flat part of the state. That is where I grew up, and that is the part that I still find beautiful. I live on the Front Range now, and I find myself longingly looking toward the east – toward the plains – while everyone else seems to be gazing toward the west.

I grew up in Fort Morgan, a lovely small town where the land is flat and the streets are wide. Although the town has grown some since I was a kid, it still doesn’t take long to walk or bicycle from one side of town to the other.

That’s the part I appreciated when I was young. It only took a few minutes to walk from my house to the north side of town, where the land stretched out for miles, dipping down to meet the South Platte River and then rising again and rolling out to the sky.

Then, as now, I love to let my gaze rest on that expanse. It seems to me the prairie landscape calls a person to step out, explore, adventure into the world. It gives a person room to reach up, reach out, dance and grow, as opposed to a mountain landscape which makes we want to sit on a rock and stare into a campfire.

My freshman year in college at the University of Colorado-Boulder, I was assigned a roommate



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That evening, after Thanksgiving dinner, we went outside and gazed at the stars. This time, instead of fear, she felt awe. “I’ve never seen so many stars in my life!” she gasped. The sky is at its most magnificent when it’s not crowded out by pine trees and mountain peaks.

When I do go to the mountains, I am drawn to the tundra. My husband, who doesn’t share my appreciation for treeless spaces, scoffs, “That’s the ugliest part of the mountains!” But I like it, because that’s where the sky is. That’s where I can see the farthest.

I think if I had my choice, I might have settled in one of the less-populated towns on the plains.

from New Jersey. She couldn’t afford to go home for Thanksgiving, so I invited her to my house.

I will never forget her reaction as we drove out of the mountains and toward the flat land of my hometown. She grew up walled in by trees and cities. She had never found herself in the middle of so much space before, and it actually frightened her.

I’ve visited Yuma and Wray a number of times, once going before sunrise to watch the prairie chicken’s mating dance.

I like the rolling flatness, the sagebrush, and the tall yucca spires.

But since I married a man whose definition of a town suitable for raising a family includes proximity to Taco Bell and a first-run movie theater, I now live in Greeley. We’re in a new development, on a 100-x-60-foot lot. When I look out my window I see the neighbor’s roof instead of the sky. It makes me claustrophobic.

Sometimes I just have to put the kids in their car seats and drive east, until the buildings and trees give way to the expanse of the prairie, with endless miles of sepia-toned grasses and an occasional cottonwood along the river. It’s where, most of the time, the tallest thing I see is a cow.

Many folks these days express concern about the growth in Colorado. “Too much development is spoiling the reason we moved here,” people say, gazing toward the mountains. I can sympathize. And then I look east, where the part of Colorado that I treasure lies. And I am secretly, smugly happy that as people are flocking to the mountains, they are leaving alone the truly beautiful part of Colorado – the flat part.

Tracy Hume of Greeley is a happily married working mother of two sons. Applications for Colorado Voices are accepted in February.