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— Justice Louis Brandeis



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## Pastoral pleasures

A country calm has displaced  
this columnist's craving for urban uproar

**M**y mother used to read me a story about a city mouse and a country mouse. I thought the city mouse was much cooler. Those country mice wore gingham and overalls. No contest.

Thirty-odd years later I moved to the country. I lived with mice. They did not wear gingham or overalls. They ate my lesbian pulp paperbacks, then nested in the leftover shreds.

Everything seemed shabby compared to the city and the suburbs. There was nothing interesting to look at, like

down on strings—had I ever really thought that was a good idea?

Country isn't neat little squares with life hidden behind screens of brick. I kind of got used to spilling over onto the land I was sharing with critters. Cities sprawl too, but that sprawl was looking shabby. The teeming streets of summer with every stoop filled, lawn chairs on sidewalks, kids hopscotching: It felt crowded instead of neighborly; they sounded loud, not exultant.

I was changing. Every year I had looked for-



BY  
LEE LYNCH

cornices on an old warehouse or neon lights flashing reflections onto wet midnight sidewalks. After a while even majestic mountains can get a little humdrum. I was hungry for the excitement, for romancing the concrete villages.

I pined for the city. Any city. During those years I visited New York, Galveston, Chicago, Reno, Tucson, San Francisco, Seattle, Houston, Greensboro, Boston, Las Vegas, Portland, Norfolk, D.C., Corpus Christi, New Haven, Dallas, Concord, Los Angeles and on and on.

All I wanted was to walk the streets, ride the buses, look at the architecture. To visit the shops and museums and galleries and restaurants. I wrote about cities. I photographed cities. I dreamed about cities. I wondered if I could survive in mousy towns the rest of my life.

Little by little, something changed. I guess that something was me. I'd drag myself back from the bright lights and crowds and collapse. Goddess, it was good to get home. I'd say I never wanted to leave again.

Meanwhile, I found I had some friends in Mousetown. I got involved in the Audubon Society. I volunteered my time. The shopkeepers knew me by name. I could leave messages and packages for people at the natural food store.

I began to appreciate the quiet that five acres could bring. Or the cacophony that often greeted me when I got home: chickadees, nuthatches, doves, grosbeaks, wild turkeys, juncos, towhees. Bird song, not taxi horns. Our land sounded like an aviary, but the creatures were free. I was free.

The idea of living in an apartment building became anathema to me. Layer on layer of boxes stacked toward the sky? Those things could collapse, for heaven's sake. And to get in an elevator, a mouse trap that runs up and

ward to going to New York. Then I realized all I wanted was to see the skyline. Then I didn't even want that.

The sights I once loved became overwhelming. The sounds I barely noticed grew confusing. The dangerous ifs were too numerous to defend against: those snapping elevator strings and collapsing buildings, muggers and pedestrian-hating cabbies, gangs and terrorists and neighbors going postal.

Looking back, the city was a wonderful place to grow up. Museums were my playgrounds, parks my Sherwood Forests. It was a lot easier to come out with Greenwich Village a subway ride away and Valerie Taylor's novels in the bookstores.

But I know it's not age that's doing in my love of cities. There are plenty of 50-somethings thriving in metropolises.

The fact is, I've been seduced. Lover was surprised today when she watched me pick up a lizard in our canning closet and reassure it that the move outside would be beneficial. I've come to be quite fond of lizards. They don't eat lesbian books.

Yesterday I hiked with publisher Renée LaChance and poet Ila Suzanne, two transitioning ex-urbanites. I was chilly in the clear morning air, excited by the sea lion Renée spotted in the surf. We all had binoculars at the ready for glimpses of every bird we could find. It's taken a while, but I learned there's something interesting to look at in the country. My friends weren't wearing gingham, but I was in my blue and white striped overalls.

Later, at home, I read an old *New York Times* I'd been hoarding, finished up the latest *New Yorker* and came across a great Lower East Side photo from *New York* magazine. I cut out the photo. It's on my desk, plucking at my heartstrings.

The country mouse, that's me.

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