

The Star-Ledger

I spent 12 hours in traffic during ‘Snowmageddon’ a year ago and didn’t flee Jersey. Here’s why.

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Dear New Jersey,

A year ago today, you stuck me in traffic for 12 hours during a snowstorm.

Around the same time, a train I was on caught fire. That was after you flooded my basement apartment with rainwater, when the place still lacked furniture. But it was before you flooded my apartment again, when there was definitely furniture.

It’s almost like you want me to leave.

But you know what? I like you.

I moved here after six years in the Midwest. I’m sure you’re aware, New Jersey, that you’ve got a weird reputation around the country.

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When I arrived, I thought people would yell at me all the time.

And did a large man once scream in my face that I was a “f---ing idiot?” Yes. Was it because I was riding my bike into oncoming bike traffic? Perhaps.

I thought all the wildlife had been wiped out by factories.

It turns out that there are so many deer that I know a guy who kills them with a crossbow. Then he bakes them into meatballs!

I thought New Jersey drivers would be baffled by right-of-way laws. That one’s actually spot on.

Yet the moment our moving truck pulled in, a neighbor appeared to welcome us. My landlords spent hours helping me vacuum out flood water. My colleagues are funny and the pizza is good and the trees right now are real knockouts.

The stereotype that the Garden State is hostile to outsiders is like the myth that everybody hates journalists.

When I arrive at community meetings in Newark or hearings in Trenton, people just seem happy that somebody's paying attention to what they care about.

Do I get the occasional grumpy email, including one that accused me of being arrogant? Of course. (Did I resist the temptation to tell that reader she had misspelled the word "arrogant?" So far.)

I've covered tension and tragedy across the state. It can't be fun to have strangers with notepads knock on your door after something bad has happened nearby. But in Westfield and Woodbridge and Voorhees and Maplewood I keep meeting kind people who only want to be quoted accurately.

You're stuck with me for now, New Jersey.

But when I drive home tonight, I will have enough supplies to survive nuclear war.

Sincerely, Blake