

# A quiet day in the city?

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It was the invitation which got me to thinking: it read "Come to our house on Sunday and spend a quiet day in the city." A quiet day in the city?

One of the real delights of city living, I have found, is to stay at home on a good weather weekend in the summer while others are frantically rushing off to the beaches, car rallies, flea markets, museums and other crowd generating activities. At home, one can enjoy the peaceful setting of the trees, grass, birds and quiet of one's own small backyard. This is the brief respite from the harried life of urban living, which can be so refreshing and uplifting. It is this variety of a quiet summer's weekend in contrast to the vitality and activity normal to urban living that is one of the city's strengths.

But if peace and quiet are so important, why not move to the suburbs as many Americans have done and where most Americans now live? Even better, why not a place in the country, set on five to ten acres, and experience this tranquility all of the time?

It was the solitude of rural life which most impressed me when visiting friends in New Hampshire with their 240-year-old farm house on 100 acres of scenic meadowland and forests. We delighted in the walks in the woods, the night-time stillness punctuated only by the croaking of frogs and the hooting of owls rather than the sirens which are so much a part of the city environment. It was difficult to leave when the weekend was over. But looking back on it, I can say that "it was a great place to visit but I wouldn't want to live there."

Raised in a small town, I thought of it as the only place to live. It was the experience of city living in Europe which made me aware of the joys of these cultural centers. The recent summer spent in New York, that wonder of great cities, strengthened this consciousness. There is no question about where I stand: after years of studying it and living in it, I love the city and am hopelessly addicted to it, and I ask myself why.

Most Americans are anti-city, an attitude well articulated by Thomas Jefferson and many others since his time, including a

Frank Lloyd Wright who claimed that "cities are for prostitution and banking and little else." The negative image of the city still prevails. Witness the continuation of people from our urban centers. But this city image differs from most part of the world where cities continue to grow, with people flocking to them to work, to live and to experience these centers of civilization.

If there is one word which best characterizes urban living, I think that it would have to be "variety." It is the variety of a hectic rush of people to get the bus to that of a quiet, backyard weekend picnic. It is the variety of architecture that one can observe and absorb in the quiet of a Sunday morning walk in the downtown while the rest of the city sleeps. It is the variety of people that one sees on the streets or encounters in the downtown and that gives a distinctive flavor to many of our neighborhoods.

Perhaps the greatest variety involves the activities available in the city — shopping from haut couture to discount basement, with entertainment from street musicians to semi-topless, with restaurants from pizza to plush, with socializing from happy

hours to disco, with contiguous neighborhood ranging from high income to boarded-up houses in incipient slums, with intellectual challenge from university to skid row, and with diverse work places more concentrated than anywhere else. And contrary to what many believe, each neighborhood within the city has its own sense of community.

The disadvantages of city living will not be enumerated here because *everybody* knows the problems of cities, many of which are stereotypes and erroneous perceptions rather than point of fact or truth.

Will the American city come back? James Rouse, developer of Columbia new town and the Faneuil Hall Marketplace, believes that the city and peripheral planned communities will provide the major opportunities for development before the next century. The sterility, loneliness, isolation, and lack of variety and community in the suburbs will make them less desirable as places for future generations to live. Time will prove Rouse's perspicacity.

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