



This month from
journalist Ginger
Henry-Künzel in
New York State

Seated on a plane somewhere between Frankfurt and New York, I was asked by the passenger next to me, "Where do you live?" I was speechless. It suddenly struck me that I really didn't live anywhere. Having settled in Germany 20 years ago, I was now finally returning to America, the country I had never stopped considering home. But at that moment in the

plane, it wasn't yet my home.

My first big decision coming back to the U.S. was where to settle — east coast, west coast, heartland, city, suburb, small town? I had done the city life in Germany and decided that life in the fast lane was no longer my style. Time to try the slow lane. As it turned out, the village I now call home — Hague — is so far off the beaten track that the slow lane here is a dirt road. It's the town where I grew up, in northeastern New York state, near the Vermont border. It's where the nice lady at the general store still remembers me as a child with a fistful of pennies to spend on penny candy stored in the jars behind the counter.

The jars are still there. The only difference is that today's children need a fistful of dimes. Well, actually, there are a few other differences as well. The videotapes beside the cash register are new, as are the signs telling customers that their Visa, Master Charge and American Express cards

are all accepted. Ada, the cashier, owner, friend and confidante to all, has also changed a bit over the years. But then I, too, am no longer asked to show some form of ID to prove that I really am old enough to buy beer.

The store is in the center of town. Next door is the post office, and beyond that are three churches and the town hall. That's the entire town. There used to be a gas station and a coffee shop, where we hung out as teenagers. But the coffee shop has been torn down, and the gas station's pumps were removed several years ago.

My house is a log cabin in the woods about two miles out of town, on the shores of a large mountain lake. The nearest neighbor is a quarter mile away.

"Back in the village where I grew up, I am no longer asked to prove I am old enough to buy beer"

Because it stays cold in these parts well into June, and because my main source of heat is a wood stove, I quickly became good at splitting wood, laying a fire and keeping it going throughout the night. In my jeans and lumberjack shirt, standing outside my log cabin, ax in hand, I could almost pass for a pioneer woman, recently arrived from Europe, beginning a new life in the New World.

But this is 1995, and, fortunately, times are not quite as tough as they were 200 years ago. The toughest thing nowadays is that jobs are scarce and the commutes are long.

The job I found, as a reporter for local newspaper, requires a 40-mi drive to the nearest large town. It's part of the price I pay for living in a place where most people can only vacation. So, after a quick mornin swim and a cup of coffee on the deck, I put on my city slicker cloth and head for the "city" of Glens Falls, population 25,000. Everything is relative. When you live in a town of 800, believe me, 25,000 is a big city.

Glens Falls has a lot that Hague does not have like — a movie theater, a library, museums, concerts and plays, a bus station, supermarkets and drugstores, and even a mall. I'm glad all these things are accessible, but I don't regret that they are a 45-minute drive away. The remoteness of Hague has enabled it to remain the town I remember from my childhood, where people still have time to spend with their neighbors, time to savor the wilderness beauty around them.

Most of those who have stayed here or who have returned, as I did after years of life in the fast lane, have made a conscious choice to give up the city lights, the high-powered jobs and the high salaries for the solitude and peace of life on the dirt road. A forest ranger I know here says that he takes a good part of his pay in sunsets.

So if you still picture America as New York City, Miami and Los Angeles on the one hand, and the national parks on the other, with nothing in between, I suggest that you leave the beaten track on your next visit, and try the back roads. No matter what part of the country you're in, you'll find a town like Hague. It won't be in the guidebooks, it might not even be on your map. And it might take you a while to get there, but then getting there is most of the fun. And if you see some pioneer splitting wood outside a log cabin, give a wave. It could be the start of a wonderful experience.

US usage
suburb [ˈsʌbɜːb] — Vorort
fast lane — Überholspur
off the beaten track —
abgelegen, weit ab vom
Schuß
dirt road — nicht asphaltierte
Straße
fistful — Handvoll
penny candy — Bonbons für
einen Penny
jar — Glas, Topf
dime — (US) Zehncentstück
cash register — Kasse
cashier [kæʃɪr] — Kassierer(in)
confidante — Vertraute
ID (card) — Ausweis

gas station — (US) Tankstelle
to hang out — (ugs.)
herumhängen
log cabin — Blockhaus
mile — 1,609 Kilometer
wood stove — Holzofen
lumberjack — Holzfaller
ax — (US Orth.) Axt
commute — Arbeitsweg,
Pendlerstrecke
to vacation — (US) Urlaub
machen
deck — Terrasse
city slicker — Großstadt-
bewohner, Stadtmensch
movie theater — (US) Kino
mall — Einkaufszentrum

accessible — leicht erreichbar
remoteness — Abgeschlossenheit
to savor — (US Orth.)
auskosten
wilderness — Wildnis
conscious — bewußt,
überlegt
solitude — Einsamkeit,
Abgeschlossenheit
forest ranger — Förster,
Waldwächter
sunset — Sonnenuntergang
back road — kleine
Landstraße
guidebook — Reiseführer

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