

## Small Town vs. Big City: What Kind of Childhood Stays With You?

I used to think growing up in a small town was boring. The kind of boring that makes you memorize the cracks in the sidewalk and the exact time the sun slips behind the trees in late August. Nothing ever really changed. The same families lived in the same houses. The same kid worked the register at the grocery store all through high school. You couldn't sneeze without five people asking if you were okay. At the time, I wanted more. I wanted noise. I wanted strangers.

Then I got older and met people who grew up in cities, actual cities, with subways and skylines and coffee shops that didn't serve from a drive-thru window. And I realized they had no idea what it was like to ride your bike down the middle of Main Street because you knew no cars were coming. Or to wave at every passing car because it was probably someone's uncle or someone's coach or someone who helped you tie your shoe once in kindergarten.

They talk about independence, and I get it. They had it early. They took the train alone by twelve, knew how to read a schedule, knew how to keep walking when someone tried to talk to them on the street. I didn't even know how to cross four lanes of traffic without panicking. But they didn't know what it was like to be known. Like, really known. That kind of everyday closeness you don't notice until it's gone.

In a city, you can vanish. You can have a bad day and no one knows. In a small town, everyone knows, and sometimes that's the problem. You mess up once, and it becomes part of your story forever. There's not a lot of room to reinvent yourself. There were moments I felt suffocated by that. Like my whole personality had been decided for me by the time I turned ten.

But still, there's something I miss. The slowness. The way the air feels different when everything's still. How the town gets quiet at night, not because people are afraid, but because they're asleep. Or sitting on porches. Or just... content. That's rare.

My city friends had museums and concerts, and takeout at 2 a.m. I had bonfires, gravel roads, and a sky full of stars so clear it didn't feel real. They learned to hustle. I learned to wait. They're faster. I'm quieter. We both came out okay, I think.

I don't know that one way is better than the other. Maybe it's more about what you carry with you. The city teaches you to keep moving. The small town teaches you to sit still. I think, if you're lucky, you figure out when to do which.

I used to think I'd never go back. Now I'm not so sure.