Yeah, DC Is Pricey—Get Over It Already!

By Laura Moser

h, wow, your house cost five times what your childhood BFF paid for hers in exurban Dallas and it’s half the size? You pay more taxes than most residents of Mississippi earn in a year and you don’t get a vote in Congress? What’s that you say—child care is eye-poppingly expensive and the public schools hit-or-miss at best? Well, news flash: There’s a term for this tragic phenomenon. It’s called LIVING IN A CITY.

Do you know what you get for the premium you pay for living here in our nation’s capital? Access to an unparalleled array of (mostly free) cultural attractions, the company of interesting multilingual neighbors, walkable public transportation, the luxury of browsing the Bill of Rights during your lunch break, and excellent restaurants. That’s not good enough for you? Then move.

On my pathetic writer’s salary, I could live large in Paris, Texas, where my grandparents’ plantation-style house recently sold for $129,000. Oh, but wait—my income would be a fraction of what it is here and I’d have very few opportunities to increase it. (Plus I’d sooner have my teeth pulled out without anesthesia, but that’s a story for another day.) Living in a city, especially one with as many big-money job possibilities as this one, comes with a heavy surcharge—that’s just the way it goes.

And the other thing: DC just isn’t that pricey compared with other big cities like, say, New York or San Francisco. Tried to buy a condo in the “gritty” Mission lately? The median cost of a house in the District is $475,000; in Manhattan it’s $972,000, and in San Francisco it’s $1 million. And again, as in all things, you get what you pay for. There are still vast swaths of Washington where you can get a decent-size house for less than the cost of a one-bedroom in the West Village or Pacific Heights. Maybe you won’t live within walking distance of any embassies, but I assure you that’s a survivable fate.

True, I’d rather not raise my children directly next door to a deaf-mute drug addict who openly smokes crack in the back yard and throws beer cans over our fence and regularly passes me notes reading “NEED $ [sic],” but we all make choices in life. At least I’m not hauling up five flights of stairs to a railroad walkup or trudging nine blocks to the nearest laundromat. (After spending my twenties in London and then New York, I’ve enjoyed those privileges plenty.) And at least, even on my family’s unspectacular household income, I can afford to have kids in the first place! We might not have much socked away for college, but we’ll cross that bridge when we come to it. In the meantime, our lives are challenging and full and seldom boring, and I wouldn’t trade our shabby rowhouse on four major bus routes for a stately manor just outside of Tulsa—not for any price.

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