

Is Florida on its last leg?

I left New York City and moved to Orlando in search of a better quality of life. I felt I could provide a better lifestyle for myself and my young son away from the Big Apple.

At the time, the general consensus was that the Big Apple was rotten to the core: dirty, unsafe, expensive. I had heard you could rent a house with a swimming pool in Orlando for less than the cost of a one-bedroom apartment in the city. I was ready for a better life!

So, we packed up and headed south to Orlando. Life would never be the same.

The first thing that struck me about Orlando was the lack of people walking on the streets. Towns seemed deserted. Where were the people? I found them fairly quickly.

They're all driving. Driving through banks, driving through fast-food restaurants, even driving through dry cleaners. At first I panicked and thought: These people have no legs! I decided it was the result of some natural evolutionary process. Combine not walking for years with living at or near sea level, and you've got a new gener-

ation of Floridians who've forgotten how to use their legs.

But why had they stopped walking?

I figured that one out pretty fast: It's too hot! I thought New York City summers were hot. The first hot summer day I ventured out in Orlando, I felt as if I had opened the door of a preheated oven and stuck my face inside. I quickly realized why everyone here uses those silly-looking windshield covers. If you don't, you can't even think about touching your steering wheel.

When I do manage to walk somewhere, which is usually indoors at my office building, I always find myself behind someone moving at a snail's pace. These must be the folks who have regained limited use of their legs, but can't really use them that well yet. And so I think I'll never get where I'm going!

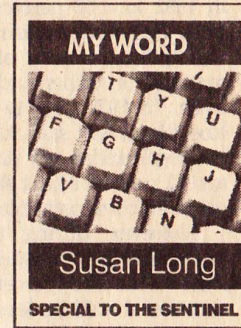
Still, I'm trying to convince myself that living in Orlando beats living in New York. In the winter, when folks up North are shoveling snow, I can be swimming, barbecuing or bicycling, right?

Well . . . the swimming thing is tricky be-

cause of encephalitis-carrying mosquitoes. We've been warned not to go out after dark, and especially not to go near water. What about a nice backyard barbecue? Fine, but watch out for the fire ants waiting to make you their barbecue. A bike ride's a possibility — if you don't mind being chased by wild packs of Rottweilers that people seem to breed like crazy down here.

Safety. It's probably the most important quality of life issue there is. And, you're thinking, Orlando must be safer than New York City. That's what I thought when I first moved here.

And then I made the mistake of turning on the local news. In New York, everyone knows someone who has been mugged and had an apartment burglarized. It unfortunately comes with the territory. But, the types of crime I've encountered here are as shocking as not being able to find a fresh



bagel and the Sunday *New York Times* in my new city.

Home invasions, cult rituals, kidnappings, car jackings . . . these are mean crimes. Even scarier is the abundance of crimes related to road rage. Drivers are out of control.

Still, I know the Sunshine State must have a lot to offer. Otherwise, why would so many people be moving here from places like New York? Why, indeed.

I had a dream the other night that I was back in New York. I could see thousands of legs moving along at a frantic pace. This sea of legs was trampling me, and I was screaming for help, but nobody heard. When I awoke, I was sweating and my heart was beating fast. My first conscious thought was: I need to move back to where people have legs. I need to go home to New York.

I just hope I haven't forgotten how to walk.

Susan Long lives in Winter Park.