

Small-town living is the life for me

My kids complain about where we live. They say, "There is *nothing* to do here" or "This place is a dump." They miss its strong suit — simplicity.

Where else can you go on a pilgrimage without leaving the yard at Our Lady of the Dish (formerly a tub) while nearby, a gardening backside, surrounded by a colorful mix of annuals and weeds, provides yards of fun?

The untrained eye doesn't see that the abandoned cars in our hedgerows are monuments to our strong sense of commitment. Not only do these old cars ensure an endless supply of spare parts, but we are attached to them. We name them "Petunia" or "Sparky," and include them in family photo albums. It's all very warm and fuzzy.

We lack any Joneses. We don't know who they are, and we are not in a hurry to find them. They

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would always be welcome, as we are hospitable people, but they would have to adjust because only "upkeep" is permissible here.

We like the present at a past time. The future arrives here just a tad late, which makes being "in fashion" affordable. We save a bundle on clothing, sneakers, electronic devices, etc. We savor trends like fine wine, keeping once trendy things in storage.

We know that they will be "in" again in about 30 years, like when hip-huggers resurfaced: Off came the "Partridge Family" patches and we were good to go. Imagine, people paying for "vintage" clothing. It's almost laughable, but we are kind people and don't usually delight in others' lack of foresight.

Our strong environmentalist tradition of recycle, reuse and reclaim is especially evident during our annual community yard sale.

People come from miles around to pay homage to



Mary Fagan enjoys family life in Middleport, rated #11 by BusinessWeek Magazine as the best place in the nation to raise children.

our collective practices, and we sell them snacks at outrageous prices to pay for decorations on Main Street.

We want things looking nice for visitors because we are considering attracting more of them due to the recently rediscovered Erie Canal. Virtually ignored for years, the canal really hasn't changed one iota but suddenly, boaters, bikers and joggers are using it. (Moving fast around here is a sure sign you're a visitor.) This movement on the canal is a bone that has locals in a quandary as we contemplate the fine art of moving ahead while standing still.

Another asset is our drive-in movie theater with three screens. Kids can't experience the thrill of hiding in the trunk so they don't have to pay admission just anywhere, now can they? There's an ice cream stand there, too, because we like our sugars and fats, and parents find that a little Lipitor goes a long way.

Life here poses some dilemmas. We love the slow pace and lack of Joneses, but there aren't jobs. Kids move, leave us another old car hidden and we miss them. Our elected officials have promised jobs galore any day now. Another of our virtues is patience, but we have memories like elephants so this is a tricky business.

We love our seven restaurants, four bars, five churches, drive-in movie theater, gas station, liquor store and two Laundromats. If we wanted crime, drugs and billboards with sexy things dripping from them, we'd move to New York City. We don't need big-city slickers thinking this is Mayberry RFD and we aren't sophisticated enough to understand a put-down when we hear one.

And that's not good for Aunt Bea's bloodpressure.