11 Things I Didn’t Know Until I Moved Here

There’s plenty of reminiscing about old South Coast hangouts, from Lincoln Park to the **Bijou Theater** to legendary jazz clubs in Onset. As a transplant, the best I can do is pretend I get it. While I can’t relive its good ‘ole days, I’d like to think I pick up on local nuances just because I’m not originally from around here.

Here is my list of 11 quintessential local traits that I was clueless about until I moved here seven years ago and counting (Putting whaling and all that jazz aside):

1.”Wicked” as an Adjective Equivalent to “Very”: Don’t roll your eyes. Yes, I had heard it in movies set in Boston and a certain *New Kids on the Block SNL* skit and *Car Talk* on NPR. But from a live human being as a regular part of conversation? Nope. I still do a double take when my kids inject that in a conversation.

2. Quahogs and the New England Clam Bake: Never knew about quahogs and the art of dredging them from the seafloor. (It was more fun than I expected when I actually got to do it). Had the sad distinction of misspelling the word “Co-Hog” in a weekly newspaper article. Yep: Most. Embarrassing. Moment. Ever. As for clam bakes? Haven’t mustered the courage to try them yet (Disclaimer: I’m from a landlocked state).

3. Enunciation, Pronouncing Local Words: People didn’t know what the hell I was talking about when I asked about rentals in “FAIR-haven” and not “fair-HAVEN”. And why do people pronounce Coggeshall with a Z sound? It took me two years to pronounce Acushnet right—not to mention Mattapoisett, which at

first I pronounced in a deranged French way. Oh, and I didn't realize they rent places without major appliances like stoves and refrigerators until I moved in—Oops!

4. Portuguese Influence: I had no clue about this Portuguese enclave. Never heard of Linguica or Chourico. Never had fresh fig until my Portuguese landlord gave me one from his backyard tree, which he insulated well enough that it survived the winter.

5. "You're Welcome" as One Word: It's oddly delightful, the sing-songy "Yo-Welcom" I hear from clerks and the like.

6. Annual Town Meeting: I honestly hardly knew who the Board of Selectmen were when I first got here, and the annual town meeting felt like a portal to the 17th century. I'll never forget the resounding "Aye!" booming from hundreds of people at the town meeting. Democracy at its best!

7. A Place Where Being Anonymous Ain't Gonna Happen: I remember freaking out when I ran into my neighbor working as a pharmacist within a week of arriving. Once when walking to an interview in Onset, TWO cars pulled up and asked who I was looking for. Apparently it was obvious I didn't belong there. When I finally told one woman, she said, "Oh, that's my nephew!"—true story. Also, it's impossible going out for an extended period of time without seeing a familiar face.

8. Cranberry Bogs: Aside from a vague memory of seeing a photo of one, I knew nothing about cranberry bogs. And before you call me ignorant, I've had several out-of-town guests who have confessed the same thing. But nothing like devouring a fresh cranberry during harvest season.

9. Massholes?: Say whatever you want about crime and gangs in New Bedford, for the most part people in the area are genuinely nice and willing to help you out. I remember a small

army of neighbors assisting me when I locked myself out of the house. There is a chivalrous nature in the men around here.

10. The Fishing Industry: When I first moved here I supplemented my income working the overnight shift at a hotel. Yes, I was on the job when Justin Timberlake and Jessica Biel descended on Fairhaven for a day. I cannot count how many drunk fisherman I met returning from weeks-long stints out at sea who talked about their broken families in the wee hours of the morning. And I also didn't know that Guatemalan immigrants, many of them previously farmers, generally work the markets at this major U.S. fishing port.

11. NonTransient, But With a Twist: I've profiled dozens of local independent businesses as a freelancer, and I can't tell you how many owners grew up here, lived somewhere else—then returned. "I always knew I wanted to come back" is a common line. And while plenty of folks here never move away (just read the obits, or notice that the road signs, cemetery headstones and phone book are filled with the same names), so many people leave for years then eventually return home, The Alchemist-style. That's special.
