

## Opening words are from Sam Watkins of the 1st Tennessee Regiment

*America has no north, no south, no east, no west. The sun rises over the hills and sets over the mountains, the compass just points up and down, and we can laugh now at the absurd notion of there being a north and a south. We are one and undivided.*

How does a liberal end up living in South Carolina? Let's start with a little background on how this liberal ended up here. I'm not officially Southern by Southern standards. My parents were grad students at the University of Connecticut when I was born. When I was two, we ended up at Clemson after a year in Ohio. My parents figured they would end up in the south for several years, then move somewhere more respectable. Most of you know that they live around the corner in the same house they bought when they moved here in 1966. (For those furiously doing the math, that makes me 47.) Between finding jobs for two Ph.D.s at another institution and making friends here, it just got increasingly difficult for them to leave.

I suppose I could have left a long time ago. I had planned to do just that. I was going to go to school far away, but in the end I got a degree from Clemson. Then I was going to move far away, to New York City, and design *Rolling Stone*. That proved to be too much work and I got as far as Charlotte.

So, besides inertia, why do I choose to stay here? I don't really fit any demographic for the area. Sure, I might eat grits and I love a good apple crisp, but I loathe sweet tea, fried chicken and pork rinds. I don't water ski or shoot or fish. Hell, I don't even go to football games. What am I doing here?

### Ten reasons:

*Coach Tom Landry: "I like the South because it is so much warmer on the sidelines than it is up North."*

This may seem insane to say when it's been so hot, but I hate cold weather a lot more than hot. That's why we have air conditioning, folks. Four days in Minneapolis one December and I honestly thought I would die. I need the sun. I need the warmth. I enjoy a good sweat. It feeds my soul.

*Lee Hazlewood: There's nothing worse, I guess, than being black in an all-white church or being southern and being a liberal.*

I grew up being in the minority, so I'm actually a little uncomfortable being in the majority. I'm a David Sedaris kind of person, just not fitting in anywhere. When I'm up north, I don't belong there. When I'm down here, I know I'm not a typical southern gal. I might as well not fit in where I already am.

*Maya Angelou: The quality of strength lined with tenderness is an unbeatable combination, as are intelligence and necessity formal education.*

I've concluded my reason for living in SC is not to change people's minds on the issues. I'm here to show conservatives that liberals are not evil, sushi-eating, tea-sipping freaks. I'm here to show them that I'm their neighbor who happens to eat sushi and sip tea. A story: we became close with the neighbors when our kids began to play together. And yes, they were conservative

Baptists. I overlooked their rants about the health care bill on FB and she never said a word about the Planned Parenthood or Sierra Club mailings she picked up while we were on vacation. We did share a sense of humor and we found that we really wanted the same sort of thing for our country and our kids. I've concluded that being here is a way to remind conservatives (as well as myself) that we're not the evil other team.

*Biltmore's director of horticulture Parker Andes: Sugar Maples, Sweet Gums and Sourwoods around Asheville are center stage, showing all the fall colors imaginable — yellow, orange and every shade of red.*

It can be stunning down here. Within 30 minutes, I can be in the mountains. And even where I live is really pretty, an old neighborhood, with lots of trees and wildlife. On a warm summer morning, there just is nothing better than running down a country road, surrounded by the pines and the birds singing. I don't have to drive to get to this route. It's part of my running route from my house.

As for raising a daughter, it's a terrific place to be. I know, since I was raised here myself. Clemson is a bit of an oasis. It's a great little small college town, with fun little restaurants and good green spaces. The families may not be liberal, but they are fairly educated, usually. If I really want a city experience, Atlanta, Charlotte and the always funky Asheville are all nearby.

*John C. Calhoun: Learn from your mistakes and build on your successes.*

Living here keeps me grounded reminding me that my opinion isn't so obvious to everyone else. I become a better person for having my ideas and beliefs challenged. I'm not the status quo. This is good. Want to be a good UU? Live in the South. If you come out with your seven principles still intact, still believing that your Fox News-watching neighbor has the right to an opinion as much as you, the NPR-informed person, then you are a good UU.

But growth doesn't happen without a little nurturing and care. If you've ever talked to me, I'm sure you've heard me talk about the importance of religious education for our youth. I've talked about giving them a haven, a community, a safe place to talk about who they are, why it's OK to not be Christian (and OK to be one too) and how that makes them feel. The same goes for adults. UUFC is a safe spot for us.

*Gore Vidal: Southerners make such good novelists; they have so many good stories because they have so much family.*

After being in Dallas for a year, we realized we had this adorable child you all know as Bella that could be loved by four people who she should get to know. So why were we living 1,000 miles away? We moved so that our child could have grandparents. And we moved so we could be closer to our family.

*From the hyperdictionary: rebel: 1. noun (informal) `johnny rebel,' a nickname for Confederate soldiers 2. noun, someone who exhibits great independence in thought and action.*

Let's face it: anywhere else and I might be your run of the mill soccer mom. But down here I'm a crazy liberal, with crazy ideas! Letting my kid learn about Hinduism and Buddhism on Sundays! Eating quinoa and acorn squash! CRAZY! It's a lazy gal's way of being a rebel.

Now rebel is a word with powerful meaning down here in the south. The original confederate rebel was brave enough to stand up for his way of life. Although totally wrong about owning slaves, don't get me wrong, he did believe their liberties were suppressed enough to die for it. From Sarah Dawson, a southern girl during the civil war, "When so many outrages were committed by the fanatical leaders of the North, though father regretted the Union, said, "Fight to the death for our liberty."

Am I a rebel in the tradition of the confederate rebels? Not so much in the states rights tradition, but I do believe in my way of life. Would I die for it? I've never had to face this. Instead, all I can do is live what I believe and give back where I can.

*Joe Hollingsworth: If Donald Trump was from the South, he would say, 'You're fired, but, bless your heart, you've tried.'*

I have a great job. I have a manager that listens to me kvetch all day and helps me channel that into solutions. I have a director that begs his employees to grow and learn. Both are incredibly supportive. They give me freedom to get the job done as I see fit. My manager is very southern, at least a third generation Six Mile boy. A southern Baptist, likes a good meat and three, talks very slowly, he surprises by being very forward thinking and sharp, very smart. He pushes us to think in different ways. The fact he talks slow is a lesson for me to stop and listen, because there are important things to be heard, both from the words and from the silences.

*Reynolds Price: I think we Southerners have talked a fair amount of malarkey about the mystique of being Southern.*

Many of my stories begin with "ok, you know I love irony." I have a young friend from Massachusetts who had problems handling some of the attitudes around her. (Yes, I tried to convince her to attend this church.) Me, I find humor in them. I'm so deep into irony that I really get a charge out of people's differences. This makes SC the perfect spot for me to live.

*Margaret Walker: I want my careless song to strike no minor key; no fiend to stand between my body's Southern song — the fusion of the South, my body's song and me.*

Beyond the weather and the lazy rebel and the setting, this is indeed my home. I love my home, warts and all. I'm very comfortable here and I love the people who live around me, despite the differences we might have. It would be easy to leave it and head somewhere else, but I stay here to fight for it. I stay so that I can indeed say "leave the arts alone, why destroy that rich tradition we have here?" or "do not cut education, it is worth investing in our children" or "let's work on building a first class institution here so that we can attract industry" or even "uh, taking down the Confederate flag off the capitol and flying it down front isn't exactly what we meant?" I love SC enough that I'm willing to fight for her.

And so, 45 years later, I'm still here. There are times when it might be easier to live in a place where everyone agreed with me. But how boring would that be? I'll leave you with a little Walt Whitman: "O magnet-South! O glistening perfumed South! my South! O quick mettle, rich blood, impulse and love! Good and evil! O all dear to me!"