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**The Mountain State
by
Tom Holbrook**

Most of you who read this column regularly know that Judy and I are from West Virginia. You also know that I am wont to make as many jokes about “us’ns” who did and do live there. Hopefully, for those who have written me from time to time I haven’t insulted you or yours, but I think it’s okay to poke a little fun at those you love.

For those of you who have never been to West Virginia (WV) and aren’t aware of all it encompasses or offers America I would like to share with you some actual facts about our great state. My daughter-in-law sent most of them to me, but I included more and juxtaposed them a little differently than how I got them. I trust you will find this informative and know WV is more than a bunch of mountains and people with one leg shorter than the other from walking around them.

We are the Mountain State and, because we have mountains, we have rivers. The oldest river in the state is the New River which flows north from several states south of WV and ends where it merges with the Gauley River, producing magnificent falls and forming the Kanawha River which flows through the center of the state, through our Capital City of Charleston, and ultimately into the Ohio River. Charleston is the also the largest city in WV, but the tallest building doesn’t reach 30 stories.

The population of the Kanawha Valley, which is where Judy and I grew up, is no more than 200,000 and you can drive from one end of town to the other, even in heaviest traffic in less than 10 minutes. The crime rate in Charleston is the lowest in the state, whose rate is the lowest in America.

There are three major interstate systems going through Charleston which makes it the smallest city in America that can make such a claim. There are six different interstate systems running through the entire state which puts a WV resident within a 4 hour distance of such major cities as Cleveland, Columbus, Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, Louisville, Richmond, Charlotte and Washington, DC.

Riding on the Interstate through the state is a beautiful ride but the fun and adventure, however, begins when you get off the interstate and ride one of the many two lane roads which twist, turn and wind their way over the mountains and up the hollows offering amazing views of historic places and small town America... poor in wealth but rich in history.

West Virginia is the birthplace of Mother’s Day in Grafton and Father’s Day in Fairmont. We have the oldest covered bridge still in use in the United States and enjoy fairs and festivals of every kind. We have Walnut festivals, Strawberry festivals, Apple festivals, Pumpkin festivals, Buckwheat festivals, Arts and Crafts fairs, Stern Wheel Regattas and Wild Bear and Ramp dinners.

We have been represented by great college sports teams and participants for many years many of whom have gone on to play in the NFL and NBA and represent the United States in the Olympics. In the basketball arena four of the most outstanding of my generation were Jerry West, Hot Rod Hundley and Rod

Thorn who graduated from WV University and Hal Greer from Marshall University. In football three of the NFL's best recently came out of WV...Randy Moss and Chad Pennington from Marshall and Marc Bulger from WVU.

We have minor league hockey and baseball, hiking, skiing, caving, camping all over the state and a fantastic State Park system that allows you to get back to the wilderness or enjoy the luxuries of the present, both in food and lodging. If you want to take a leisurely drive on a Sunday afternoon plan on 6 – 8 hours and covering over 100 miles, there's that much to see.

We have Bed and Breakfasts, golf courses, museums and the Greenbrier Hotel Resort that occupies over 6,000 acres of beautiful woodlands and streams with every amenity you could ever ask for and more natural beauty than you can imagine.

Even though our state is one of the most beautiful in the Union it is our people that truly make us unique. West Virginians are good people... we care about each other. We talk over the back yard fences... we wave as we drive by and we grow tomatoes for the entire neighborhood. We turn around in each other's driveways and yell "howdy" when we do.

One of our greatest pastimes is sitting on the porch on warm summer evenings, listening to crickets or bull frogs in the pond and watching the kids catch lightning bugs...(fireflies to you city folk.) We loan our tools, or a cup of sugar or flour, and we rarely get in a hurry.

We share recipes and have relatives just down the road. We're not too bashful to go down the lane to borrow a socket wrench from a neighbor, nor to accept the offer of that neighbor to come help fix the car. Most everyone has a garden and at harvest time there's a whole lot of trading produce with each other. When you bake a pie it's not unusual to bake an extra for the widow lady across the road or someone who's hurting over the loss of a loved one. We house sit each other's dogs while we're on vacation and we loan our cars if someone needs to go to the drugstore. We're happy at and celebrate each other's accomplishment and share in any turmoil or tragedy that comes into a neighbor's life.

We are a friendly folk. We are sons and daughters of West Virginia and our motto is Mountaineers Are Always Free! Free to be who we are and enjoy the life God gave us and to experience each and every moment to its fullest. We believe in the God that created the beautiful West Virginia Mountains and us in the process. We thank Him for blessing us with our heritage and we hope you'll visit our homeland sometime and make your lives even brighter. You'll be glad you did.

Ya'll come now!

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