

IF THIS ISN'T HEAVEN, IT MUST BE THE NORTH GEORGIA MOUNTAINS

If heaven is prettier than the North Georgia mountains, I promise to change my sorry ways and to be a lot nicer in the future. Otherwise, I am going to ask God that if it is all the same with Him, would it be okay for me to just hang out somewhere in the vicinity of Dawson County for eternity, or until a white male Republican is elected mayor of Atlanta, which may be a lot longer than eternity.

After years of wheedling, whining and making a general nuisance of myself, I finally convinced The Woman Who Shares My Name to let me purchase a home in the mountains — Big Canoe, to be specific. Big Canoe sits about halfway between Jasper and Dawsonville. The view is — to understate — spectacular and reminds me why it is so difficult for Georgians to be humble, try though we might.

What other state has such a combination of beautiful mountains and silky-soft ocean beaches? North Carolina? Nice mountains, but hurricanes blow their beaches to West Virginia every year. Same thing with South Carolina. Florida has no mountains, although they have a hill in Tallahassee and too many hurricanes for me to ever want to live there. Plus, the University of Miami is in Florida, and their football team has just signed a high school player with a rap sheet longer than Bonnie and Clyde's. You would think the whole state would be embarrassed about that, but if having just one little hill in Tallahassee doesn't bother them, I doubt this will either.

Virginians will tell you they have pretty mountains and nice beaches, but the state is too near Washington, D.C. and all those self-important politicians and bureaucrats with their briefcases and cell phones. They might as well be located next to a landfill. Alabama is on the Gulf of Mexico, which isn't an ocean. Mississippi and Louisiana suffer the same fate, and I don't think they have any mountains.

People who live in the states on the eastern seaboard above Virginia have bigger mountains than we do, but they can't enjoy their beaches because it snows ten months a year. The West Coast isn't much better. If you walk on the beaches out there, you are liable to see Susan Sarandon or sourpuss Alex Baldwin, who didn't move to France like he promised when George W. Bush was elected president. Besides, everybody on the West Coast wears sandals and eats sushi and says "like" all the time, none of which I find very attractive.

Not only is Georgia prettier than any place on God's green earth except Ireland and Scotland and maybe Montana, but the people are nice, too. To get up and running at Big Canoe, we needed telephones, electricity, water and people to maneuver trucks up and down steep hills and deliver supplies. Everybody came through for us, and no one seemed to get out of sorts in the process. I'm not sure why. Maybe the mountains just have a positive effect on people's attitudes.

As I pen these words, I am looking out the window at Sandelin Mountain. Soaring high above are a couple of hawks. I have already seen deer, and from what I hear, I will see a lot more. The locals tell me that there are a lot of bears around, too. If any bears are reading this, please know I am on your side. I always thought you got a bad rap from the Goldilocks episode. I would have reacted the same way you did, if my porridge had been too hot or too cold.

The Woman Who Shares My Name has told me that at the first sign of snow, we are out of here. I tried to look pouty, but I'm so happy to have my mountain house that I would agree to almost anything, except eating broccoli. In the meantime, I plan to enjoy the cool breezes and the changing leaves, make frequent visits to the local Ace Hardware store and even play a little golf. If the North Georgia mountains aren't heaven, you can sure see it from here.