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### Oh my gosh! I'm from Earth, too!

By Julia Smillie Carey  
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Two days into our honeymoon, my husband and I are in the rainforest. More specifically, we are at Casa Cubuy Ecolodge, which sits directly on the South edge of El Yunque rainforest in Puerto Rico. We are approximately 2,000 miles from St. Louis. We are, for all intents and purposes, lost and anonymous in a tropical paradise.

Until breakfast.

The guests gather at a communal table for a breakfast comprised largely of luscious fruit plucked from the trees outside. It is our second year here, and we're old pros at the protocol. Everyone sits down, shares names, judges appearances and eventually gets down to the one question that ultimately defines us: "So, where are you from?"

We go first, experienced as we are, and learn one couple are Bostonians. Pretty impressive. That's a long haul. "And you?" Boston Guy asks. "We're from St. Louis," I say. "We have an arch."

Boston Guy knows this. He's been to St. Louis and he *loves* it. The whole introductory protocol is suspended as he waxes nostalgic about St. Louis. "The people!" he exclaims. "I just love the people. They're so *nice*."

Soon enough, he turns to the couple to his right and asks where they're from. The wife looks up from her breakfast and announces, "St. Louis, actually." There is no change in her facial expression, but Boston Guy and I are practically jumping out of our seats, amazed by this coincidence. St. Louis!

Yet, the woman remains unmoved. Her husband hasn't moved the entire meal. "Where in St. Louis do you live?" I beseech, giddy as a school lass. She says: "Olive and 270."

"Olive and 270," I say. "I used to work out there." My husband looks at me. "No, you didn't. You worked at Olive and 170." Oh, right.

Our fellow St. Louisans simply work at their breakfasts. It doesn't seem to phase them that we

have met in a little-known ecolodge in Puerto Rico. I WANT US TO CONNECT!

It reminds me of when I spent a semester "studying" in London. I took a job slapping together sandwiches at a shop just inside the Gloucester tube station. One day, the door opens and in steps an American Woman – hair highlighted and sprayed to a crisp, a slather of makeup, heels and a full-length sable coat.

I take her order and she gasps, "You're American!" I decline to respond, trying to appear consumed by her egg salad. "Where are you from?" I barely say "Missouri" before she raises a gloved hand to her cheek and screeches, "OH MY GOD! *I'm* from Texas!"

So maybe here, I'm the woman from Texas. Maybe I'm trying to push some sort of connection that doesn't exist, create some kind of common identity simply because we hail from the same geographic region.

As I ponder it all, the Boston Man is rhapsodizing about Ted Drewes and the West County woman wrinkles up her nose. "I think it's over-rated," she says.

I feel a sadness.

My husband and I retreat to our room, taking our coffee out onto the balcony where we bask in our surroundings. Here we are, in El Yunque, thousands of miles from St. Louis.

**Julia Smillie** *Carey is a freelance writer and regular contributor to STLvoices. Look for her "Ask Julia" advice column beginning Sunday, June 17.*

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