

# Having best of both worlds

The taxi ride from LaGuardia Airport to Manhattan still thrilled me; my spirit soared at the first glimpse of the New York skyline.

Although it was a hazy Friday afternoon, sunlight was peeking through the clouds, bathing the skyscrapers in silver. "Skyscraper." What a perfect word. I was looking forward to my first book signing in my hometown, New York City. The Mississippi Central Park Picnic was going to take place the next day, and I was full of anticipation.

We exited the Expressway. The driver sped furiously through the Midtown Tunnel. And there I was again — right in the heart of the city. My city. And as the car horns blared and the people ran and the lights blinked and the hotel doormen whistled for taxis, I felt that deep love for Gotham that I've felt my whole life.

The next morning, I entered Central Park on its Fifth Avenue side and smiled. I was walking into the best

outdoor party of the year, and the fun hadn't even started yet.

By early afternoon, Central Park was hot. I was signing my book, "From Manhattan to



Read

Mississippi: A New Yorker Falls in Love with the South," at the Mississippi Gift Company table. Mercifully, the tent protected us from the sun's glare.

"You shared our blanket last year," said the genial South-

ern gentleman I had met during the previous year's picnic. Mike Boyd hugged me as if I were his long, lost cousin. Locke Barkley, the lady with him, smiled shyly and I instantly remembered her face from the 2007 picnic. I'll never tire of the friendliness of Mississippians.

Before I moved to Mississippi, an embrace by a person I had only met once would have shocked me. But after 10 years of living here, I've grown to love the spontaneous, heartfelt warmth that is so natural to Mississippians.

It was a glorious picnic and Sunday morning arrived too quickly. There's only about

one hour during the week that you have the city to yourself, when its sidewalks aren't overflowing with people, and you get an unobstructed view of the city.

That hour is always on a Sunday morning. In this brief snippet of time you see Manhattan's beautiful bone structure. With its clean, vertical lines and its hard-edged granite and asphalt, it's beautiful; not the gentle, verdant, flower-filled beauty of Mississippi, but beautiful nonetheless.

The car arrived to take me to the airport. As we quietly sped away, I sighed and sat back in my seat. Then I turned and took one last look as the sky-high buildings receded from my view. I thought about the question Mississippians often ask me: "Do you consider yourself a New Yorker or a Mississippian now?"

I'm a New Yorker. And I'm a Mississippian. How lucky can one woman get?

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