

Reflections on Oakland

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NBA XPLOR Residents in Golden Gate, CA



“Claire, how do tides work?”

On our second week in California, the members of Golden Gate House went hiking along the ocean in San Francisco, and we realized that Claire, a native New Mexican, has lived closer to an ocean than any of the other, deeply Midwestern, housemates. Living in the middle of a desert, we all assumed she would know more about oceans than us. The Bay Area and this part of the country is new to all of us. In living here, we

have each formed a deep connection to Oakland. Yet when we talk to natives of the area, especially from the suburbs of Alameda County, they generally react with shock when we talk about how much we love our new home. For our blog post, we each decided to write about our reactions to Oakland and why we are happy to be here.

Oakland is the biggest city I’ve ever lived in. Well, worked in. One of the main reasons I love Oakland is because of its size. I may have grown up in the rural Midwest but I thrive in big cities. With that mentality, any big city would dazzle, but Oakland is unique because of its location. Being in the East Bay, it’s a cultural hub for so many. Most every time I’m on public transit there are no less than 3 languages, other than English, being spoken and many more ethnicities, races, genders, and orientations. Diversity is a given here. I often find locals take this for granted. When I walk from the Downtown Bart station to my regular bus stop on my commute home I walk past not only diverse people but beautiful pieces of art. Many of the adult locals I’ve encountered have a distaste for much of the street art around the city. Illegal vandalism or commissioned graffiti it’s beautiful to me. It may seem to the locals that I am just experiencing a bit of naiveté but I call it a healthy sense of wonder and love for my surroundings. Every city has its downfalls but the difference for me, here, is there are opportunities to make change and work through our problems. To plug in without reinventing the wheel, as it were. Naiveté or wonder Oakland is quickly becoming a home I love. -Tj

One thing that has become obvious through both my work as well as living in and exploring Oakland is that the Bay area is incredibly expensive to live in. With my work at St. Mary's, I focus on helping clients find affordable housing in Alameda County and other counties surrounding the Bay. Through that research I have learned that the average median income for Alameda County is around \$80,000 a year. Because rent is often set based on AMI, that means that to be able to afford living in the area one must make at least \$80,000 a year. The housing crisis in the Bay area is forcing people who have lived here their entire lives into homelessness. At St. Mary's we work every day with low-income and homeless seniors to help find them housing and create a sense of community that they might have lost along the way. Knowing the difficulties placed before those who are homeless and seeing tent encampments across Oakland makes me appreciate the great privilege of getting to live here without the worry of paying rent. I'm so grateful that I can explore the city on weekends and fight against the housing crisis on weekdays. - Claire

On my second week in the Bay Area, I saw a man transporting his fig tree on the train. A week later, I was walking downtown and someone came up to me, handed me a business card that had their name and phone number hand-written on it, told me I had a "beautiful aura", and walked away. There is a spontaneity and bizarreness that comes from living in a city of half a million people (well over a million, if you include San Francisco and Berkeley). When you know that, statistically speaking, you will never see the people riding the bus with you again, you let go and become more messily human. Oakland is a great city with a lot to love, but my favorite part is just walking around and seeing people singing or crying to themselves. I know that I may never know their stories, I could never meet everyone in the Bay Area, but their stories are real and felt differently. Oakland is home to half a million humans living their human lives, and they aren't afraid to show it, which is absolutely beautiful to me. - Sandy

Oakland - what can I really say about this place, other than it's beautifully and annoyingly different and basically my new home? The place my roommates and I currently reside is in Alameda. The tiny island definitely doesn't have that same home-ish feeling that Oakland does, but I plan on writing about that experience in another blog post. I gave myself exactly one day to get accustomed to life here, even though everyone I came in contact with assumed I have lived here all my life. I took the "you're not a newbie" compliment with pride, and it really helped subdue my need to freak out over how different it was. For that one day, my brain screamed with questions like: "how can you race to work on a bike with a 3-piece suit on? I know you're a hot guy..." and "how is everyone so calm when walking past literal human poop on their daily commute? Do they not care?" I thought

maybe people here are just desensitized, since the homeless population is so large. I really didn't know what to do with my thoughts.

During that one day I allowed myself to freak out, my brain also delighted in the fact that the city was so diverse and has its thumb on the pulse of social justice. The culture of social justice in the city was, and still is, intoxicating for me. I appreciate the feeling of “urban realness” that oozes out the city’s pores. By urban realness I mean the city knows its roots, its struggles, and its future. Oakland thrives from knowing all facets of itself in order to progress and change. I also love the strong sense of community that has been cultivated here, as well as the city’s ability to beam beautifully, even though outside perspectives would say otherwise. I am so grateful to call Oakland my home and my new community. Oakland’s spirit of resilience, beauty, and justice has already rubbed off on me; and truly what a blessing that it has. - Tia-Lynn

NBA XPLOR is a 10-month service residency opportunity for young adults ages 21-30, with the purpose of empowering young adults to discern and develop a “heart for care” as they live together in simple community, engage in direct service and justice work, engage in leadership development, and discern their vocational calls to honor the various communities they are called to serve. **Learn more and apply at nbacares.org/xplor.**