

# It's sweet as!

## THE VIEW FROM HERE

with  
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Friends and family in America often ask me, how big is Rotorua?

I've seen estimates ranging from 55,000 to 70,000. Whatever the number, if it's in that range, it's a pretty decent size for this country. Yet compared to my own frame of reference, I realised that it's small after meeting a few new people recently. One of them asked me if I'm renting a certain person's house (I am) and another asked if I ate at a particular restaurant last week (I did).

How startling! I felt a little exposed — but I certainly do realise that small towns have their benefits.

For example, consider this column, and how I got involved with *The Daily Post*. It happened when I saw an ad inviting the public to join the staff at their daily meeting to discuss the next day's newspaper. I think this is a wonderful idea, and it certainly wouldn't happen in a bigger city — heck, in America, I don't know that it would happen at all. But here, the community is welcome to take part in shaping its media. I love that sense of openness and involvement.

Someone recently asked me if New Zealanders are as friendly as they think they are. I answered, yes, absolutely. I've asked for directions and ended up having conversations.

I've been thanked for asking about work opportunities where there are none. I've even been told "I love your accent." (I've never heard that one before, and probably won't again anytime soon!) I wonder, is everyone here this kind to each other? Does it have to do with the novelty of my being an American resident? I

have no idea, but the niceties definitely brighten my day.

Of course nothing is perfect and unfortunately, the face-to-face friendliness doesn't always seem to translate as well to the road.

Driving has become easier — I find it interesting that no one ever honks — but as a pedestrian, I feel I need to be particularly careful. I wonder if I have an invisible target on my back, because as I cross streets, I sometimes hear people revving their engines as they come toward me.

I once actually held my hand out in a "stop" motion to a driver who kept inching forward as I crossed in front of him. I wonder if this is a backlash against how stringent driving laws are here in regards to speeding, random license and breathalyser checks, and the like.

As a writer and lover of grammar, I've gotten a big kick from all the slang I've heard, and attempted to learn, since coming to New Zealand. When John Key was on the *Late Show with David Letterman*, my favourite of his top 10 reasons to visit New Zealand was number 5: "Get the whanau together, stay in a bach, crack open the chilly bin and slap on your jandals."

You can bet I went to look up what all those words meant!

There are other phrases and slang that I love as well. I still giggle when I see "chunky fries" on a menu; I like that my morning cereal is referred to as "grunty" on the back of the box.

My favourite, though, is the ubiquitous "sweet as".

As I often tell folks back home, I'm having a sweet as time in this magical place.