WHOA, I DIDN'T KNOW YOU HAD RUNNING WATER!

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[Assignment: Describe a place you know very well. Imagine that your audience has never been there. What details will you want to include? Which will you omit? You may need to dispel any inaccurate, preconceived ideas the reader has about the place. The essay may be humorous or serious in nature.]

Many people in the good ol' United States of America are culturally stupid. Not only about other nations and cultures, but also (and usually even more so) about their own homeland. Take, for instance, people's views on the state of Nebraska. If I went around asking people what they thought of Nebraska, probably most of them would say something to the effect of, "Isn't that like a bunch of farms or something?" Most people don't know more than two sentences worth of information about a state besides their own.

One time I heard the results of a survey done in New York which asked people about different parts of the country. One of the states asked about was Nebraska. The typical question asked about Nebraska was, "Do you know what Nebraska is?" The typical response was, "Isn't that the football team?" When asked further if they knew it was also a state, many people expressed genuine shock at the concept.

Another time, a friend of mine was at a summer camp, and many of his fellow campers found out he was from Nebraska. All of a sudden, he was bombarded with questions about what Nebraska is like. Here is a sample:

"Do you know what Saturday Night Live is?"
"Do you have cars there?"
"Do you have running water?"
(Personally, I'm surprised they didn't ask if we had planes and airports.) Most of the time, though, Jason would get smart-alecky and reply, "Do you?" But every now and then, he'd put on a fake hillbilly accent and fool the campers, saying, "What's that? What are you talking about?"

On the other hand, those of us from the Cornhusker state know the truth, and we're not afraid to share it.

One interesting fact about Nebraska is that it is home to Boys Town. I'm sure just about every person has heard about Boys Town—it would be hard not to, especially considering Mickey Rooney and Spencer Tracy made an Oscar-winning movie about it. Boys Town is a place where delinquent children (under the age of 18) are sent; usually they are referred there through the court systems, but occasionally the kids find their own way there. It is the place where "there are no bad boys." Of course, now they include girls—it's not a sexist place. Boys Town is only a few blocks from my house, and it's great to take our out-of-town
visitors to see it, because you're right there on the site of a legend. (And it's in Nebraska!)

Another really great fact about Nebraska is that we have the world's largest indoor rainforest. I don't think a whole lot of people know that, but it's true! The Henry Doorly Zoo in Omaha, Nebraska is home to the largest man-made indoor rainforest in the world, called the Lied Jungle. It's really cool to be walking through and have a boa constrictor hanging down next to you in one section, and to walk a few feet more and be standing between pools of piranhas, with all kinds of exotic animals from South America, Africa and Asia right there, in Nebraska!

One of my favorite aspects of living in Omaha, Nebraska is the cultural diversity which is always present. No, I don't mean going from a pig farm to a horse farm, but I mean going to culturally enriching experiences, like the ballet, the opera, the symphony, and other examples of "pop culture." For example, there is a beautiful old theater in downtown Omaha called the Orpheum Theater. Back in the 1900's and up to even the 1950's, it was an elaborate, gilded, chandeliered old movie theater. At the turn of the century, the films shown were old silent movies, and the famous Wurlitzer organ provided the background music. As it got closer to the middle of the century, it played more modern movies. My dad likes to tell me stories about how he would catch the bus with his friends and go downtown, pay a quarter, and watch John Wayne films with cartoons beforehand. Now the Orpheum, as it is known, is home to Opera Omaha, Ballet Omaha, and the Omaha Symphony Orchestra, as well as visiting shows, like the touring company of Les Miserables. People still pay their money to sit in the still-elaborate theater, to watch and listen.

Also on the listening side, Omaha has been the starting place for many popular recording artists. Mannheim Steamroller is perhaps the most well-known. They are a group of musicians who have written New Age music, recorded it and sold it to a large worldwide market. They have also put out a couple of Christmas albums, and have annual Christmas concerts at, where else, the Orpheum. Another up-and-coming band is an alternative rock band named 311. In fact, I just heard Q101, a Chicago radio station, play one of their songs last week. Unfortunately, not many people know all these little tidbits of information about my home state. Most people still seem to be stuck back in the Dark Ages in their thinking about Nebraska, and think "cowboys 'n 'injuns" whenever they hear the word "Nebraska." It's too bad they haven't taken the time to try and get to know any place besides their own, because, gasp, they just might like it!

[Editor's Note: Whoever we are, we all come from somewhere, and that gives us authority to inform others about things they don't know. Note how in the first three paragraphs, Becky provides her paper with its reason for existing. Often the difference between "school" writing and "real" writing is that the writer is truly motivated to set the record straight. The paper that follows this one, Emily Grana's on the "Misconceptions of Lifeguarding," also seems motivated by a desire to correct commonly held misconceptions--an excellent and useful purpose for writing.]