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Becoming Montanan

Andrew Grossmann

I wanted to become a Montanan. I wanted in-state tuition. I turned in my paperwork, filed my Montana taxes, and got a new driver’s license. I was on the road a lot and grew out my mustache and donned a Montana Highway Patrolman hat from The Fifty-Thousand Silver Dollar Bar. A nervous man in Helena told me to leave the bar. I was pulled over in Missoula; I didn’t have my headlights on outside The Wilma. I rolled down the window of my ’82 Mercedes diesel station wagon. It was like the officer was looking into a mirror. He said, “I like your hat. Where are you going?” “To a party,” I told him. “Okay, have a good time,” he said, and I went to the party.

I overheard a story at The Break in Missoula. A young man from Chicago came to Montana, wearing shiny white cowboy boots. “How do I weather-prep these?” he asked. The Montanan told him, “Pour two cans of bacon grease in each boot and let them sit overnight.” “Okay,” said the boy. He did like the man told him.

In Spokane, Uncle Reid told me I had a Carlos Santana mustache. It was real thin. Reid told me he used to drive a hundred miles an hour through Montana. The highway patrolmen would pass him at one-hundred-twenty miles per hour, and they drove with a glass of bourbon in their lap. Sometimes they would pull Reid over and tell him to slow down.

I worked at the Mansfield Library, Delta Gamma, and for the Intramural Program. I volunteered at Lewis and Clark Elementary and taught third-grade math. I had to pay close attention when the teacher taught the kids. I mainly tutored two kids. I worked with a female student teacher who I later saw completely naked at Goldbug Hot Springs. But to get in-state tuition I had to work for a year straight and file my Montana taxes, among other inconveniences.

I went in to see the lady in Lommasson who was supposed to help me get in-state. I dropped a class late one semester and was
down to seven credits. The rule is students are supposed to take only six credits per semester for two consecutive semesters before they can apply for in-state residency. The lady in Lommasson said, “It’s okay, a lot of students become in-state after taking seven credits. It’s all part of the process. How many credits you take is only one part of the application, there are other factors.” Six months later, when I applied, the school told me I would not receive in-state because I had taken seven credits one semester. “Sometimes that happens,” the lady said. I wrote the dean an appeal letter and Dad called the dean and said the lady misled me from the beginning. She told me to pour bacon grease in my boots, and I listened to her. Fortunately the school over-turned the decision and gave me in-state tuition, and I shaved off my mustache and threw away my highway patrolman hat.