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Introduction: The dog days of summer are a time when some residents of ski-resort towns start to think about trading in their skis for a more serious, career-minded lifestyle. Former Telluride resident Eric Krell encourages ski bums to look before they leap.

“Mountain-Town Retirement”

Several years ago, my wife awoke to a strange sound outside her tent in the Uncompahgre National Forest. Unfamiliar voices and the skidding thumps of unsure footsteps tainted the usual chorus of bird chirps and wind-bit leaves. My wife pressed her face to her mesh window as a trio of early-morning hikers wandered by her and her friend’s group of tents. One of the tourists, a woman in her late 50s, stopped and turned to her friends. “I’ll bet these kids live here all summer,” she said with a hint of admiration in her not-so-quiet whisper. “It’s as if they retired before they even got started.”

My wife smiled. The visitor was right on both counts, and her comment echoes through my mind whenever we return to Telluride. After four years of active, mountain-town retirement in our early to mid-20s, my wife and I plunged into un-retirement five years ago, trading her tent and my pickup truck, the one I lived out of in the summer months, for a real house and a less “Northern Exposure”-esque existence.

A recent visit to our old home gave me an opportunity to gauge how well un-retirement is treating me. Most of the time, it doesn’t measure up. If you’re living in Steamboat, Winter Park or one of the Summit County resorts and growing tired of scribbling in “dishwasher/snowboarder” on your college alumni questionnaires, I urge you not to act on your canyon fever. For the road that winds out of the mountains is extremely bumpy, and it cannot be navigated by a mountain bike alone.

As difficult as it is to settle into ski-bumming – a term that conceals the steep challenge of securing jobs and housing (or tenting, as it were) – it’s far more difficult adjusting to life in flatter locales. No matter how menial their jobs are, resort-town residents remain way ahead of tourists, who seem to delight in asking silly questions, like

Does the altitude change in the summer? And, do you actually live here? To which you occasionally answer, “No, I actually commute from St. Louis.” In addition to that lighthearted sense of superiority, resort residents generally feel a deeper connection to their environment than people who live in other places. They’re there because of the mountains, snowfall and rivers. In un-retirement, I’ve found that jobs rather than natural splendor often dictate one’s choice of place.

I’ve had some trouble adjusting to a different seasonal shift as well. In ski towns, two main seasons, winter and festival, are sandwiched by off-seasons – those four weeks in spring and fall when the town shuts down and you’re expected to take a vacation from all the skiing, boarding, biking, hiking, wine-tasting, bluegrass-listening and film-watching you’ve endured. Now that I’m no longer retired, my vacations have shrunk from two months to two weeks.

I also feel less connected to local forces these days. I live in a city of close to 100,000 people and we have our share of controversial issues, but none seem to galvanize the population the way so many questions do in resort towns: Should the ski area be allowed to expand? Are second homeowners the root of all evil? What, exactly, is affordable housing? These days, the most controversy I encounter is the heated exchange with video clerks over late fees.

To be fair, there is a positive side to un-retirement. My wife appreciates the upgrade from bedroll to bed. And I now have a checking account, a savings account and a home that wasn’t built by Toyota. Still, as the value of each of these benefits inches upward, I contemplate a return to our former lifestyle. The next time I retire, I know there’s no coming back.