

# Hello, New York. Goodbye.

A runner discovers how to love a new city—and when to leave it



**T**HE FIRST TIME I BROKE INTO exercise-induced hives was somewhere between the Williamsburg Bridge and my apartment in Park Slope, Brooklyn. I wasn't sure where, because I'd sweated through the printout detailing the 24-turn route of my first long run in my new hometown. I'd been in New York City a week. I was fresh off seven years in Boulder, Colorado, thick with hemoglobin and clutching a 20-dollar bill and four building keys.

I remember Hasids, hipsters, and a lot of itching. When I got home, my roommate Veronica took one look at me and laughed. I was covered in livid red welts. "You're allergic to New York!" she said.

To a dedicated runner, relocating from the fitness capital of the universe to the concrete heart of Brooklyn might seem like thumbing your nose at paradise. But

I, a dedicated runner, quit a good job, sold a good condo, left some really good trails, and drove 1,800 miles from that athletic Eden because Eden does not have opera, art, or real bagels. Eden was as white as vanilla GU. And when it came to running, Eden was too...perfect. Those really good trails started to feel boring. I needed a new challenge, beyond altitude and blizzards.

As a runner, I knew the perfect way to learn a city and own a city is to run a city. So I ran down Park Avenue during Summer Streets, when seven miles of road are closed to traffic. I ran over and under the Brooklyn Bridge, cursing at poky tourists as if I were a jaded local. I ran to Coney Island and ate a hot dog *before* riding the Cyclone. When someone asked me how to get into Manhattan, I knew that, too. Q train from Church to Union Square, then transfer to the 4/5. Boom.

And I never got hives again.

For more than two years, I barely missed the West—the generic stunning scenery, the sinewy athletes, the niceness. Until I did. And when I did, I missed it as a runner first. I missed long stretches without traffic lights, unobstructed views of the Rockies, and being the first person to make footprints in the snow on the Eagle Trail. I realized that any place, any route, can become ho-hum, and that thriving as a runner is about finding the best ho-hum for *you*. Running is as much about settling into a lifelong groove as it is about constantly changing course.

Before I left New York, I did one last long run. Going through Central Park, I thought about my first autumn walk there and the time I paid a dime to get into the Metropolitan Opera. I crossed Times Square, and recalled seeing *The Seagull* on election night and walking straight into a spontaneous street party. I headed toward the slate-gray Hudson where I used to lie on Pier 45 and look for the Empire State Building through the lesser towers.

Thirteen miles later, I came to a stop somewhere along the West Side Highway. It didn't really matter; I knew exactly where I was. And exactly where I was going. [▶](#)

**Evelyn Spence** has finally settled on living and running in Seattle.