



(U) Omaha - The *Heart* of the Heartland

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(U) "Where the heck is Omaha? Who the heck cares?" My high school sweetheart gave me a t-shirt with this written on it after she and her family vacationed in Nebraska. I often teased her about being a "farm girl," saving up her pennies to go to the "movin' picture show," and riding her horse to school. I would have never thought I'd marry that girl. And it is even more surprising that I now live "in the middle of nowhere" with my first love and our two children.

(U) Why would you want to live in Omaha? I get asked that question often as I occasionally return to NSA headquarters. I simply respond by saying that the Omaha metropolitan area "still cares about the county fair." In the midst of a city of 390,000 (716,000 in the metropolitan area) that's trying hard to be considered a "real" city, there's a down-to-earth simplicity you would typically find in a small farming town.

(U) You'll find gentlemen farmers working in fields very close to the growing contractor community building new facilities near the base. You'll find dust-covered pickup trucks taking a trip to town being passed by a Lexus on its way to the next important business meeting. On the radio, the agricultural digest follows the morning financial report where you can find out how much pork bellies are going for. No matter how hard it tries, Omaha will always be at war with itself - trying hard to transform itself into a big city, but never able to separate itself from its agricultural roots.

(U) To put it bluntly, Omaha is a nice place to live. There is something for everyone. The most popular activity is football. Nebraskans are known as football nuts. Most everyone follows the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Cornhuskers. You will certainly notice the "Husker Nation" on football Saturdays. Almost everyone will be wearing a red shirt. Flags and banners will be displayed on houses. And you'll see cars with pennants or magnetic placards from the Old Market in Omaha to 9th Street in Lincoln.

(U) The Omaha area has "tons" of recreational activities from little league baseball and peewee football, to girl's soccer, softball, and volleyball, to parks and bike trails that wind throughout the city. If culture and sophistication is more to your liking, Omaha has a symphony, several community playhouses, the Joslyn Art Museum, the Durham Western Heritage Museum, a botanical garden, and the world class Henry Doorly Zoo. This year is special since we are celebrating the bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark expedition: activities and displays commemorating this accomplishment are planned throughout the summer up and down the "Mighty Mo."

(U) Omaha has a variety of restaurants. Although it has most of the national and regional chains, I find it more interesting to go to the

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many family restaurants you'll find through the area. One, for example, is Johnny's Caf  . Many, many years ago, as people were migrating west, a young polish immigrant crossed the Missouri and stopped for the evening. Someone was looking for someone who knew how to cook. "Johnny" volunteered to cook vittles for supper, and the rest is history. He stayed in town and opened a restaurant that his family has been operating ever since. His restaurant has now gone Hollywood as it was in a scene in the movie "About Schmidt" starring Jack Nicholson.

(U) In my three years at STRATCOM, my family has really enjoyed our time here. My kids are beginning to ask me how long we can stay. From the moment we arrived, my wife and kids easily transitioned - the move was a perfect fit for everyone. I've found the work at the command to be very diverse. No single day is the same. As frustrating as it may be working with the command to incorporate four new missions into day-to-day operations, it's much more satisfying when you finally accomplish the task at hand. And the next task is already right there for you dig into.

(U) "Where the heck is Omaha?" It's right in the middle of the heartland of America where you'll get a smile and hello from the cashier at the grocery store. "Who the heck cares?" You'll find that a lot down-to-earth people in your neighborhood that care about you and your family. When you PCS to NSA STRATCOM, you'll probably drive into town on I-80 from Iowa. You'll see a sign on the bridge over the Missouri River that succinctly sums up what it's like living in Omaha; "Welcome to Nebraska - The good life." Hurry up and buy your Husker shirt and I'll see you soon around town.

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