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# The Guide to Worcester Introduction

By Walter Crockett

My favorite Clark University memory, not including Spree Day 1977 when I first met the woman to whom I am married (my successful come-on line: “Are you tripping?”), is the day in 1967 when Jerry Garcia rolled up to Atwood Hall behind the wheel of a rented truck with all the Grateful Dead’s equipment. It was the Dead’s first Eastern tour, and first of three visits to Clark. They blew out the circuits three times during their third song, “Alligator,” and had to stop the concert early. When Pigpen walked into Tom’s Liquor Store, which is now a parking lot next door to Moynihan’s, the guy stocking the shelves almost fell off his ladder. Not because it was Pigpen—nobody in Worcester and few people at Clark even knew who the Dead were back then—but because he looked like a scary biker dude.

I mention all this not because it has any relevance to this introduction, but just to seem cool.

When you come to Clark, the important thing to know about Worcester is that everyone is an outsider. As an affluent Clarkie from some cookie-cutter town in New Jersey or Long Island, you are not any more different from any particular denizen of Main South than said denizen is different from his neighbor downstairs. That means that we’re all safe in our—I shudder to use the word—diversity. Nobody’s much weirder than anybody else—including you, hard as that may be to believe.



*Worcester is just 250 miles away from New York city.*

Yes, Worcester is full of Catholics, but they’re all kinds of Catholics: French Canadian, Irish, Italian, Irish, Lebanese, Polish, Irish, Lithuanian, Hispanic and a whole bunch of other kinds who would write nasty letters to the editor if they saw that they’d been left off this list, which they won’t. Oh yes, and lots of Irish.

Then there are the Orthodox: Greek, Romanian, Albanian and assorted. And there are the Jews, lots of them: Conservative, Orthodox, Reform, Schneersonites, and the ones over at Temple Sinai who are so rich they hold their bar mitzvahs on the space shuttle. On top of all that, most of Worcester is atheistic, but since no one will admit to it, it’s hard to keep statistics.

Worcester has a big middle class, most of which lives to the west of Park Avenue, but it’s really a working class town—blue collar they used to call it back when people wore collars—black T-shirt might be more appropriate today. If you can identify with the country hit, “I Like Women Just A

Little On The Trashy Side,” which you probably can’t since only three people in the history of Clark University have ever really loved country music, you’ll be right at home here.

Worcester is unique in that nobody from any of the colleges gets involved in the city. Everybody stays on campus—nobody helps out in the community, nobody really tries to explore it. Everybody leaves town immediately after graduation. That means you’re all a bunch of turkeys.

The best thing you can do for us and for yourself is to get out and revel in the overwhelming ugliness of our city streets and general tastiness of our many restaurants. Drive out to pastoral Marshall Street to Spencer or tree-lined Reservoir Road to Holden and make sure to leave the windows down if you’re getting stoned, in case you get pulled over by the cops. Write nasty letters to the editor of our fine *Worcester Magazine* and the two other shoddy excuses for journalism.

Worcester is a great place to confirm your prejudices, but it’s an even better place to get beyond them. Clarkies tend to believe that townies are lurking behind every dead tree, waiting to relieve them of their Camrys, Pentiums, gold cards and whatever vestiges of virginity remain. Nothing could be closer to the truth. But don’t let that stop you.

Confront us.  
We’ll be waiting.  
We need you.  
Suckers.