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Tooele, Utah and Ketchikan, Alaska are approximately 1,900 miles away from each other via car and about 1,300 miles apart as the crow flies. The borders of Alaska join with that of Canada and it is the closest State to our eastern neighbors of Asia (technically to the west of Alaska). The influences of the outside world (outside meaning not the U.S) are much vaster than that in little Tooele County Utah. Although they are both within the realm of United States and the culture of the two is without a doubt an American culture, the sub-cultures of the two could not be more different.

I have called Tooele, Utah my home for around 9 years and before that West Jordan, Utah was where my family resided. The furthest I have been away from Utah was Florida and that was only for a week, all in all, I’m pretty familiar with the “Utah” way of life. There is a certain way to do things in Utah (much like other places), a way of making yourself fit in with the rest of the crowd or be looked down upon. This way of life tends to have a “Sun” that everything is revolving around. That “Sun” would be the Church in the State of Utah. Even if a person is not a Church goer, they are still influenced by the Church in certain ways, the way they dress or talk, for example: the LDS Church owns a mall called the City Creek mall. In this mall there is a dress code, no swearing or being too eccentric (running around, horse playing). Every person is allowed to come to the mall, religious or not but they have to abide by the mall’s rules-Church’s rules, so whether religious or not people are influenced by it. The sway of the Church is also felt in places like schools and business buildings. Business buildings, like a hotel, in the sense that there is no smoking in almost every building in Utah, this is not a Church said decree, nor is it a bad thing medically speaking, but it is looked down upon by the Church to smoke at all. In almost all schools in the State there is a dress code, no short shorts, spaghetti strap tank tops, belly shirts, etc. the dress codes seem to be “Sunday” proper. The dress codes are much stricter in comparison with other places, for example, Ketchikan, Alaska.

The realization that the Utah culture is driven by the Church did not come to me until I decided to interview my girlfriend, Julia West was born and raised, until the age of 18 in Ketchikan. I interviewed her about the differences or “culture shock” she experienced when she moved to Tooele. Her first answer came, at first, as a shock to me, “The fact that everyone is affected by the Church was a surprise to me. In Alaska Church was something people went to, to pray and feel good about themselves, whereas here, it affects how people act in their everyday lives.” “Alaska (in her eyes) was much more laid back than Utah. There was no dress code at school, as long as you were not naked or in a bathing suit you were fine and the teachers swore all the time, as long as the F-bomb wasn’t dropped everything was good.” As she was telling me these things I began to realize how much the Church does affect, even my life (I say “even” because I am not a church goer). “School dances were actually fun to go to.” She told me, “there were maybe one or two teachers there and the high school turned into more of a club.” Club was definitely not a word to describe the dances I attended in high school. We were there to get our picture taken as a group, slow dance awkwardly for about ten minutes and then leave, any longer than that and you were considered “not cool”, whereas Julia’s dances were considered the cool thing to do.

The languages between the two cultures is not too much different, but there are some slight differences. For instance, Utahns tend to leave the “T” out of words like mountain or fountain and Alaskans emphasis the word, making sure everyone knows the word. Every sub-culture seems to have their own words that no one else understands as well, sluffing was a word Julia and never heard before she came here, they would just say skipping class. The language in Utah does seem to go along the rest of the culture with being stricter, “My biology teacher used to drop the “S” word every other word!” Julia told me compared to my 9th grade math teacher who got in trouble for saying hell in one of my classes.

The word chivalry was in the dictionary for Julia when she lived in Alaska but the word was never put into action. The cities women seemed to be much more self-dependent that the women down here (Utah). “I was actually starting to find it annoying when a guy would sprint up from behind me to open the door for me, I can do it myself thank you.” She tends to like the gesture now that she has become accustomed to it but for her it seemed unnecessary because she was raised in a self-dependent state of mind.

Yes, both Ketchikan and Tooele are in the United States of America but they are both very different from each other. From the Church driven State of Utah to the much more relaxed state of Alaska. Language and attire even differ in the two, it is amazing how diverse the U.S has become.