

## Vermont invasion yields chills and thrills

By Esther Baird

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My friend pulled into our driveway in the largest non-commercial vehicle I'd ever seen — some sort of Suburban/Expedition/Destroyer.

"What is this?" I gawked.

"Yeah," my friend sighed. "I wanted a sturdy rental . . . but I didn't mean this."

We were taking a quick girls' weekend to Woodstock, Vermont. Since I was eight months pregnant, it was now or never or at least a long way away from now. .

I eyed the monstrosity in my driveway. "I hope the town doesn't think we're invading!"

Once packed, we barreled up through New Hampshire and then swung west on Vermont's Route 4. Just a few miles down the road we entered the charming and artsy town of Woodstock. Our first order of business was locating the Kedron Valley Inn.

"It's the Inn they use as the backdrop in the Anheuser-Busch holiday commercials — the one with the Clydesdales," my friend had said excitedly when we were trip planning.

And, in the absence of any real criteria, we had booked it.

It was charming and cozy and all the things that a quaint New England Inn should be. Well, except maybe warm. There was no heat in our room to speak of. But the manager quickly sent up two space heaters that brought our room up to a toasty temp and we all laughed about old New England buildings.

We headed back into town for a movie at the town hall. That's right, the single theater in Woodstock was in the Town Hall. We were charmed by the concept. It started at 7:30 p.m. so we scouted out a dinner spot first. We landed at Bentley's: A perfect pub, with perfect pub food and the perfect hustle and bustle pub background. So perfect that we told our waitress we had decided to go to our movie and then come back afterwards for dessert. She laughed. "You two going to the Town Hall?" We nodded — unaware of any other option.

"Well I'd love to see you back here, but make sure you get some of their maple butter popcorn. It's the best thing you'll ever put in your mouth." Armed with this tip, we took off. We walked down the snow-covered street, past one of the many famous Woodstock covered bridges, past the town green and into the Town Hall. Not to register a deed, or pull a permit, or pay a tax . . . nope we were there to see a movie.

My friend ordered the maple butter popcorn and, as promised, it was fabulous. Still, we managed to save room for one more round at Bentley's in the form of chocolate lava cake.

When we finally returned to our inn, we were greeted by an arctic blast. Again our room had no heat. After a brief investigation we discovered that the power on one side of our room was completely out. Specifically the power that ran the heaters, the TV, and the lights in the bathroom had selectively vanished.

My friend called the manager to our room. Again. But despite switching fuses, crawling around in the attic and tramping down to the basement, nothing worked. The manager gave up and it seemed we were out of luck, or more accurately, power. Suddenly, near midnight, everything came on at once. We didn't ask questions — or laugh about old New England buildings. We just turned on the heaters and fell asleep.

The next day we browsed in each of the Woodstock shops and galleries. I discovered that artist Stephen Huneck, creator of the children's books about Sally the dog, had his primary gallery on main street. We learned about flannel underwear in The Vermont Flannel Company, determining that it looked, umm, warm. My friend bought a miniature pewter pig wearing a stars-and-stripes vest — the very sort of thing you simply don't need, but tend to buy in a cute New England town — at the funky gift shop, Unicorn. And I insisted we

visit a store just out of town called Scotland By The Yard. I browsed through the family tartans comparing my married Scottish name, Baird, to my family's historical Scottish name, Galbraith. I have to say that the Baird tartan is simply easier on the eye than the Galbraith pattern. On the other hand, the Baird family shot glass isn't terribly unique.

In the end we bought some Scottish, and immediately edible, shortbread cookies. We pointed our gas guzzling behemoth south and headed home. Our invasion, I mean girls' weekend, in Vermont was at an end.

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