



RICHARD'S RAMBLINGS

By Richard Huss

How one staffer came to call this area "home"

This issue of *Pulse* deals mostly with the people who live in our tri-towns: how they got here; why they stay; and what, if anything, they would like to change.

I encounter a problem whenever I try to write about or talk with someone about Mount Dora. On a day-to-day basis, I am somewhat caustic, and at times I've been accused of being a curmudgeon. But when it comes to Mount Dora - I have to warn you - I can become almost rhapsodic.

My trek to Mount Dora started when my wife woke up one morning four years ago and announced, "We need to get out of here." Here being Connecticut, about an hour outside of New York City. I didn't panic. Yet. But I did reply, "Well, where do you want to go?"

It was one of those brain flashes as opposed to a well-thought-out idea. We had no clue about where to go. And since we had a house, two cats and a dog, I suggested we might want to consider a few options.

Now, the fact is I've always wanted to tour around the country in a motor home - an RV (recreational vehicle). It was a romantic fantasy of mine. But since I'm not mechanical, methodical, or systematic, it has always remained a remote - a very remote - fantasy.

So I was definitely surprised, immediately panicked and totally ecstatic when she suggested, "Why don't we get a motor home - an RV? Then we can head south and check things out. Take the cats, and Hope, the Wonder Dog, with us."

Two months later, after a six-hour lecture and training session, I'm driving a 36-foot Pace Arrow Motor Home, pulling a tow dolly with a big Ford Explorer loaded on it. I'm now solely in charge of a vehicle about 60 feet in length, loaded with all my city services that I usually pay someone else to maintain. We're on the New York State Thruway at 5:30pm where I'm white knuckled to the steering wheel of this behemoth, with cars and trucks whipping by me. I look over at my wife, who is glued to her seat, staring, eyes fixed straight out the window.

Through gritted teeth I hiss, "Are we having fun yet?"

We get it onto our garage apron in Connecticut. But not until we've almost lost the Explorer off the dolly, ripped an awning off the RV by grazing a 100-year-old oak tree at the edge of the apron entrance, and smacked the front bumper on one of the stone walls marking our quaint Connecticut driveway. We're home. We're still alive. Still speaking to each other. But we're not headed south. Yet.

Two months later, we've mapped a trip from Connecticut to Summerfield, Florida, just south of Ocala. It takes us that long to "outfit" the RV since we're going to spend the winter, or what's left of it, in Florida. It's November when we leave, and we pray that there's no snow, ice or sleet between us and North Carolina, which is at least two days away. The trip seems simple enough, at least on paper. We've discovered MapQuest and have our entire route mapped out. Or so we thought.

By the grace of God, the support of a squadron of angels, and some

good defensive highway drivers, we make it to our destination. We're still alive. And we're still speaking to each other.

It's now late March and it's been raining for several days. The RV feels a little cramped with the animals and the adults sharing a little over 300 square feet. My wife indicates that this is not a good situation, and takes out our Florida small towns book.

She opens it randomly and reads out loud to me, "A quaint New England village..." This sounds like a fun place. It's only 45 minutes away. Lots of shops and restaurants and not destroyed by Highway 441.

Forty-five minutes and three days later we've had lunch at Cecile's and met Bruce and Jo-Jo. Walked through the town several times. Met Terry and Stephanie at Maggie's Attic. Looted the Chamber for brochures. Had drinks on the deck of Pisces Rising. Had dinner at 5th Avenue Café where we met Lucas and Leigh. And fell in love with Mount Dora.

Good thing, because we had also bought a house that was located within walking distance to town - our primary requisite. We had no idea how this happened, but the contract said it did.

It took us about five months to actually relocate, sell the house in Connecticut, shut down our life there, and transfer everything to start a new life here. In that time period, we made about five trips between Florida and Connecticut, giving us lots of time to consider what we had done, and why we had done it.

And, every time we went back up north, we could not wait to get back down here - to Mount Dora.

It's not magic. It's not even "something in the water." It boils down to the people - you and me. Our willingness to be supportive, exchange ideas, try new things. A desire to make things happen

and to create a positive experience here.

Now, lest you think I'm completely naïve and a total "Pollyanna" about life, I realize we have problems in the tri-towns. The economy isn't what it was two years ago. Gas isn't what it was yesterday. People are more fearful for their family's welfare, and maybe even their own jobs.

But I urge you to take a look around. Tavares is moving forward with its Wootton Park expansion. Eustis is still working hard to keep its Magnolia Street alive and well. New businesses and ideas for celebrations/events are coming to Mount Dora.

Yes, at times we still have our problems with accepting each other. Our differences, life paths, viewpoints and outlooks can get in the way of our living in harmony. But we have a choice about how we respond, and mostly we do take the high road, are optimistic and remember to smile. We do try to make it easier, more positive - try to make it work.

And that's the secret I found here - not everywhere with everyone - but enough to make me want to be here. Enough to make the tri-towns a good place to be.

Thank you Mount Dora, and thanks for indulging my rhapsody.

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