

Hinsdales remain in hearts, floormat

Knutson duo head home after memorable tour of village's New England counterparts

By Ken Knutson

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Morning in Brattleboro June 15 greeted us with radiant sunshine and brought me up short with stiffness in muscles I had forgotten about.

Wyatt and I had gone canoeing on the Connecticut River the previous afternoon. I'd like to claim it took several hours of intense rowing to render me so. Nope, barely an hour, including a break to snack. But it was a little windy.

"Great day to go out," the um, canoe wrangler had said.

Mixed with my soreness was a little sorrow that our Hinsdale-hopping was over and all that was left was the long journey home.

Wyatt and I hit the hotel breakfast bar, a cable news broadcast showing at the other end of the lobby.

I had learned of the horrific massacre in an Orlando nightclub a few days prior but had managed to steer clear of the news channels. Until now, as images from the scene of terror flashed across the screen.

"What happened Dad?" Wyatt asked.

"Well, someone hurt a lot of people, and many of them died," I replied, wishfully thinking he wouldn't want details.

"How many died? How did they die?" he followed up.

I stammered through answers before prodding him to finish his cinnamon roll so we could be on our way. He would learn soon enough that America's story contains both light and darkness.

We pile into our traveling recycling bin and head in the direction of the Green Mountains, a stretch I was looking forward to en route to reaching Buffalo, N.Y. for our overnight.

In addition to the undulating terrain and early American architecture, I'd been enjoying the unique road signage of New England, such as "Moose Crossing" and "Thickly Settled."

We hadn't seen any

■ HINSDALE 03451

This is the final in a six-part series on visits to towns named Hinsdale in Massachusetts and New Hampshire

moose during the trip — just some deer and a lone porcupine that slowed our transit one day. As for the latter, it seemed that any grouping of homes following a stretch of undeveloped territory was considered "thick."

We reached the lovely Vermont foothill town of Wilmington at about the same time I had become painfully aware that I had yet to acquire a souvenir for my wife, Shari.

Like a sign from heaven, The Vermont Bowl Company suddenly appeared on the horizon. Bingo!

The large sprawling store was filled with mostly finely crafted wooden wares. Somewhat out of my element, I opted for a serving tray and ceramic dipping bowl combo. Wyatt, who had not been authorized to select anything, declared that a honey dipper would transform his world — at least as it pertained to Cheerios and biscuits.

At the counter was store manager Donna Lackey, a native of Wilmington and a young mother. She said her boyfriend was not a fan of the pastoral life,

"I'm just not a city girl," Lackey remarked, noting she'd experienced urban living. "I like the safety I feel, and I like raising my daughter here. It can be annoying because everyone knows your business, but there's nothing like living here."

Fall brings foliage-seekers and nearby Mt. Snow draws winter sports enthusiasts, Lackey said, so there's always some activity.

The car worked hard scaling the Green Mountains, and the curvy descent afforded some spectacular views.

The eastern part of New York Leatherstocking Tales country is filled with dramatic hills and stunning vistas. I toyed with the idea



Ken and Wyatt Knutson attend the Buffalo Bisons baseball game on June 15 in Buffalo, N.Y., at which the team celebrated the signing of the National Bison Legacy Act by President Obama the previous month, making the bison the country's new national mammal. Fans also had reason to cheer as the Bisons vanquished the visiting Durham Bulls 6-4. (Ken Knutson photo)

of swinging by Niagara Falls before reaching Buffalo, but decided that would have to wait, hopefully with the full family contingent along.

We sought out the hotel pool, a smallish one located on the top floor.

"Look Dad, he has your shirt," Wyatt whispered, pointing to a man seated poolside

Sure enough, he was wearing a Cubs T-shirt similar to mine. He was from Kentucky, he said, and was in town for World War II veterans' gathering in honor of his father's unit.

He advised us to ride the light rail line to the Buffalo Bisons' game.

"I like you, Dad, because you buy me stuff," Wyatt said after I shelled out for a stuffed Bison mascot.

Music to an already self-conscious parent's ears.

Our last day was our biggest day of driving. I was tempted to drive by Quicken Loans Arena, home of the soon-to-be NBA champion Cleveland Cavaliers, but route deviations were not on the itinerary.

To accompany me, Wyatt had to sacrifice a few games on his Little League schedule, including tonight's, which I figured we'd be too late for. But he was ready to rejoin his teammates, and I didn't want to disappoint.

Traffic came to a virtual standstill on I-80 around South Bend, Ind., dimming those hopes.

We pulled into our driveway 15 minutes after the first pitch, and Wyatt darted inside to change into his uniform. Shari and the twins were already at the game.

Back and intact!

Sure, I'd left my phone charger back at our first hotel in Erie, and my glasses case had vanished under the accumulated road trip trash (later unearthed). But we had learned that Hinsdale comes in different shapes and sizes, and that strangers quickly become friends when you take an interest in one another's experiences.

And this marked a noteworthy early chapter in our family's travel journal, with who knows how many more

Homebound

Total miles traveled: 2,078

Amount spent on gas: \$209.38

Best meal: Pulled pork sandwich at Top of the Hill Grill in Brattleboro, Vt.

Most treasured souvenirs: (Ken) Gifted pens from Hinsdale Trading Co. in Hinsdale, Mass., and Hinsdale, N.H. Post Office — nation's oldest in continuous operation; (Wyatt) T-shirt from Ozzie's Steak & Eggs in Hinsdale, Mass., and Pittsfield Suns (Mass.) baseball cap

entries to go.

God help us.

*"Now everywhere I go across the land
I stand so proudly in the sun
and say
I am home."
— from the song "An American Hymn"*