

Gray Matters on Preserving the New Hampshire Way

The year was 1980. Captain and Tennille was topping the billboard charts. Daisy Duke posters plastered the bedroom walls of teenage boys everywhere. Peace efforts of the 70's were still alive and well. Life moved a little slower. But not slow enough for my parents. They described life in Massachusetts as a 'rat race,' and they were tired of running. So, they packed up their four young children and set the compass due North, landing in Gilmanton Iron Works, New Hampshire. Only a few hours by car, yet lightyears from Scituate, Massachusetts. It was as if life had come to a screeching halt.

We got a goat (and took him back). We rototilled the backyard for a garden (successfully growing a wide variety of weeds). We explored the haunted nooks and crannies of our 200-year-old house until tears streamed down our terrified faces. That first Christmas, strangers showed up at our door singing songs. Legit Christmas carolers. Life would never be the same.

Fast forward a few years, my father's work brought us back to Scituate. We kept our home in GIW and became those 'summer tourists' we locals love to hate. But the rat-race caught up with my hippie-hearted parents once again and we returned permanently to GIW in '86. Today's Gilmanton is still reminiscent of those times, recently opting to turn the Four Corners intersection into a four-way-stop instead of installing traffic lights. Our local government has done a spectacular job at resolving the congestion on our hiking trails by limiting the number of vehicles that can park in the lots. (Our lakes are in need of similar solutions.)

But what about other parts of this beautiful state? How are cities and towns doing at preserving the New Hampshire way? And what, exactly, is that?

There was a time when billboards lined the roadways preaching, "Drive with Courtesy... *That's* the New Hampshire Way." And people did. Matter of fact, we were known for letting people into traffic, following speed limits, and being all-around courteous drivers. Accidents were rare. Road rage was non-existent. Tailgating was something you did at the local stock car race. People were friendly, happy, and helpful to one another. It was a place where everyone knew your name... and you knew theirs. (Maybe that helped hold people accountable for their own behavior...)

In GIW, my parents had a van for their furniture restoration business. When the school bus wouldn't start because of the cold temperatures (which was often), my dad would pick up all the neighborhood kids taking them to school himself. Parents applauded and the school Principal would thank him profusely paying no mind to the dozen or so kids piling out of the back of his wide-open van.

We came here for the slower pace. My parents weren't trying to keep up with anyone, let alone the Jones's. Many people who travel here really enjoy that pace and want more of it. For a long time, NH was off-the-beaten-path: a well-kept secret for grateful natives. But that's changing. The lakes and mountains have been discovered. Our quiet little towns are becoming congested. An afternoon of boating feels like a battle in Boston traffic. Accidents are on the rise. We are becoming over-populated and are losing a grip on our humankind-ness.

I am stunned at the way people drive today. I'll admit, I look at the plate expecting to see it's from out-of-state. But the truth is, it's equally often as not a NH plate. Are these transplants who have made this their permanent home, bringing their rat-race ways with them? Or are these locals who have become calloused? 'If you can't beat 'em, join 'em'.

The true meaning of living in NH is changing. The scenery may be what brings people here, but beauty is only skin deep and there is so much more to NH than meets the eye. There is an appreciation of life here that many people still possess. I'm talking about *quality of life*. Parents dip in the river with their children on hot summer days after work. Families eat dinner together, sharing stories about their day. Yards look lived-in *because they are*. Children can (and do) play outside. Neighbors are neighborly. Antique cars are still a thing. Bikers are commonplace, riding these beautiful wide-open spaces. Mom and Pop shops still exist, thriving on local economy. NH is also rich with history, local artisans, and architecture. Many towns continue with traditions that encourage community and togetherness with family-friendly activities, charitable events, and local culture.

Instead of perpetuating the rat-race, let's show the newbies how we do life here. It's up to us to preserve what makes it so desirable by working together to keep it that way: The New Hampshire Way.