

NORTHERN ROAD TRIP DIARY (September 2012)

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Amy and I are celebrating our 25-year anniversary (and my 50th birthday) with a nearly two-week road trip through Maine and Quebec that will take us back to some places we've enjoyed over the years with some new destinations in between.

Sunday, September 16, 2012 (Ephrata, PA to Rockport, MA)

Late in the morning, embarking on the 7-hour drive to Rockport, Massachusetts, a small town on Cape Ann, the smaller cape to the north of Boston that is the bookend to Cape Cod in the south.

Gary (nice guy), new owner of the [Eagle House Beachside](#) (the former Motel Peg Leg), shows us to our recently-remodeled second-floor room overlooking the beach. We'll have the sound of the surf as our lullaby.



And some quiet neighbors.

A short stroll on Beach Street takes us into town to **The Fish Shack** restaurant. Roy Moore is the man . . . he owns the restaurant and the **Roy Moore Lobster Company** of Rockport, so the lobster is fresh and delicious.

Bearskin Neck is a strip of land jutting out into the small harbor. Most of the shops are closed on Sunday night, but the air is crisp and we watch the rolling waves in the moonlight.



Monday, September 17, 2012 (Rockport, MA to Freeport, ME)

Perfect late summer morning. Just right for . . .

breakfast on the deck at [Helmut's Strudel](#) on Bearskin Neck.



Flaky pastry and powdery-sugar goodness.

A stroll on the town pier.

Take some snaps of the most photographed (so I've read) building in the U.S.



A simple storage shed behind Roy Moore's in the Rockport harbor, it is known as Motif #1.

Several scenes from the 2009 Sandra Bullock film, *The Proposal*, were filmed here.

A short hike out to the rocky point at [Halibut Point State Park](#).



Back out on the road, heading north for Maine.

The parking lot at [Ogunquit Beach](#) is no longer a bargain, and the off-season lunch options there are limited, but there is a good chowder house, [Jake's Seafood](#), in Wells, ME, that serves both haddock and clam chowders with Bud Light Lime to wash them down.

[Cindy's](#) in Freeport, ME has the best fried clams in the world according to [weloveclams.com](#), but it is closed on Mondays (bummer). So for dinner we opt for the [Harraseeket Lunch and Lobster](#) dining room overlooking the harbor at the mouth of the Harraseeket River just outside of town.

We're fueled for hunting up some last minute items at the [L.L. Bean](#) outlet and its main store in downtown Freeport.

Time to kindle a fire at our cabin at the [Maine Idyll Motor Court](#).



This place has never failed to feel like home.

Tuesday, September 18, 2012 (Freeport, ME to Bar Harbor, ME)

Delicious homemade maple coffee cake with juice and coffee served at the Idyll's office.

Weather forecast calls for increasing clouds with rain as the day wears on, so we decide to forego a leisurely drive up the coast so we can enjoy [Acadia National Park](#) while the sunshine lasts.

Because the rain and wind is coming, instead of attempting to camp for the next two nights, we book a cozy cottage at [Bar Harbor Cottages and Suites](#).



We're set with a bath and two bedrooms, a kitchen, and a living room, set on a high bank looking out over Salisbury Cove on the north side of Mount Desert Island.

Then it's straight to an outdoor seat overlooking the water and mountains at [Jordan Pond House](#) in the park



More chowder with popovers and jam on the side.

While in the park, one *has* to take the loop road to see Sand Beach, Thunder Hole, Old Soaker, Monument Cove, and the Otter Cliffs. You can get a nice brisk shvitz just by standing around absorbing ocean spray.



Rosalie's Pizza in Bar Harbor makes a good pie. Order a large so you can have leftovers the next day.

OK, here comes the wind and rain. Time to hunker down with the book I picked up at a bookstore in Bar Harbor, *Two Coots in a Canoe*.

Wednesday, September 19, 2012 (Mount Desert Island, ME)

Still raining in the morning. The cottage's screen porch is a perfect place for more reading about the two coots while watching the fog over the cove.

Clearing to a beautiful sky by late morning. Time to get out and poke around.



Nice selection of junctiques at [Super's Junkin' Company](#).

Fairly good crowd at the [Bass Harbor Lighthouse](#), including a slim, tanned couple in their mid-fifties who look like they just stepped off their yacht (let's call them Mr. and Mrs. Thurston Howell). Thurston has a big camera tripod and he's imploring Mrs. Howell to pose on the rocks ("just one more step back . . ."). She gets completely soaked by the crash of a big wave and looks like a wet poodle.



Nice shops in Southwest Harbor, including a good bakery, and just to see what we missed, we drive through [Mount Desert Campground](#). It is spectacular, perched on the pine-edged Sommes Sound. Maybe next time we'll bring the kayaks and stay here.

The view from atop Cadillac Mountain needs no description.



We can see Katahdin more than 100 miles away.

Along Route 3, Hank has fresh lobster for sale in his garage. \$3.99 a pound. Just find the biggest pot in your cupboard, take it down to the water's edge and dip some seawater, put it on the stove to boil, add the lobsters, and cover for about 10 minutes. Perfect (no butter required).



Thursday, September 20, 2012 (Bar Harbor, ME to Millinocket, ME)

Hittin' I-95, headin' for the North Woods of Maine.

Stocking up on supper supplies at a grocery store in Old Town. **Baxter State Park** has no electricity or running water. In fact, pond and crick water are your only water sources, so unless you want to treat it for drinking, you'd best take some bottled water (and a six-pack of Long Trail Harvest) to drink.

Since being here seven years ago, I've forgotten how delightfully out-of-the way Baxter is. But be forewarned: the park gate is 20 miles from town by way of the hard road, and the speed limit on the park's winding, rutted dirt roads is 20 MPH, so it feels like it takes (and it does) a long time to get anywhere . . . but when you get there, it's worth it.

A short hike to Sandy Stream pond for great views of Katahdin, the highest mountain in Maine and terminus of the Appalachian Trail.



This is the place of the most-recent moose sightings in the park, but the ranger at the gate says this is the worst time of year to see them because they are up in the higher elevations. Apparently when I was last here (and saw lots of moose), during black fly season, it was prime moose-viewing time. So what do you want: cool crisp air with no bugs (and no moose) or black flies, mosquitoes, and moose knee-deep in every roadside bog?

Had been thinking we might hike down to Big and Little Niagara Falls when we get settled in at **Daicey Pond Campground**, but the place is so beautifully perfect, we can't tear ourselves away. The cabins are clustered around a pond that God created just for your viewing pleasure, with Katahdin as a perfectly-framed backdrop.



Launch a canoe or kayak from the wooden dock behind the library, which is stocked with old books, games, a big woodstove, and plenty of chairs.

Our park ranger's name is Charity (her name, like mine, suits her to a tee). She couldn't be more friendly and welcoming. She makes sure we know how to get to her house in the park in case we have any after-hours emergencies.

Our cabin (the aptly-named Loon Lodge) has a propane lantern, two single beds (sleeping bags required), a chest of drawers, two rustic chairs, a table, and a small woodstove with plenty of kindling and firewood.



Our neighbors are from Miami. Turns out they are ballpark junkies, so we share tales of PNC Park and baseball in general as well as the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh.

It gets dark quick here, but there is time for a camp-fire supper, a kayak trip around the pond, and some sunset snaps.

I have to agree with Thoreau as regards the sound of the Maine woods at night: the “general stillness is more impressive than any sound.”



When the stars come out, be sure to gaze upon their silent, glorious beauty (makes a midnight outhouse trip an event).

Time for some reading under the hissing propane lantern.



The Bangor newspaper's top story is about Mrs. Farley, a mother of 13 home-schooled kids who has been arrested for taking out a murder-for-hire contract on her quite-possibly-deserving idiot husband. I also read a bit more of the two coots book.

Friday, September 21, 2012 (Millinocket, ME to Rockwood, ME)

Misty morning. Hard to leave this place, but a hot shower beckons.



There is a magnificent red fox in the road as we leave the park.

Was planning to take the Golden and Greenville Roads to the [Kokadjo Trading Post](#) for breakfast (looks very do-able on the map), but I read an article in the newspaper the night before about the pavement ending at Kokadjo. So with the advice of the ranger at the gate (he tells of 30 miles of dirt logging roads, complete with fully-loaded logging trucks) and despite the lure of Kokadjo having the highest concentrations of moose in Maine (Lazy Tom Bog outside of town is apparently Moose Central), we head into Millinocket for breakfast at the [Appalachian Trail Cafe](#). I notice that the facial and body-language affect of most of the women in town indicates that the Maine Woods is not the ideal place for most women to live. Makes Mrs. Farley's story that much more plausible.

A few hours of very rural driving. But the roads are paved and very straight. Through pines and hardwoods, past lakes, over streams. A coyote crosses the road and disappears, ghostlike, into the forest. Several groups of wild turkeys hang out right beside the road . . . don't they know a certain holiday is right around the corner?

We reach Greenville on Moosehead Lake. It's fairly sleepy this time of year. As we near Rockwood, **Mt. Kineo** looms, an odd sight this rugged rock cliff that rises 700 feet out of the lake.

We're staying at **Maynards in Maine**, an old-time (est. 1919) fishing lodge on the Moose River near its outflow into the lake. The main lodge is classic, with a huge stone fireplace, trophy fish mounts, a canoe hanging from the ceiling, and an antler-adorned front porch overlooking the river.



Of it, Arthur Frommer accurately states, “In the main lodge, it seems like nothing has even *moved*, never mind been replaced, in a half-century.”

Our clean cabin is an antique itself, filled with antique furnishings, providing a comfortable place to rest up for the next leg of our journey. A 1990 Wayne Curtis article in the New York Times categorizes Maynard's cabin furnishings as "American Flea Market style". I see nothing here has changed in the last 20 years.



The cool cloudy weather is perfect for a nap, and Gail lets us use her washer and dryer to do some laundry.

We are lodging on the American plan, which includes meals (American-sized) served in the main lodge dining room. Friday's dinner menu includes a choice of prime rib or baked stuffed haddock. We go for the prime rib (huge). We should have spent the day in more active pursuits so as to have a suitable appetite given the quantity of food served (still, we don't turn down dessert).

An after-dinner snooze in front of the TV in our cabin, with a little fire going in the woodstove, gets me ready for bed.

Saturday September 22, 2012 (Rockwood, ME to Baie-Saint-Paul, Quebec, Canada)

Big breakfast in the dining room, calorie overload, but this place is great. It has been a good place to rest up.

We hit US-201 in Jackman, ME. Looks like Cicely, Alaska, the fictional town from *Northern Exposure*.

US-201 heads north to the Canadian border through some rugged mountains decked in fall foliage. We're basically following the route of Benedict Arnold's ill-fated invasion of Canada in 1775.

At the border, we are questioned by an extraordinarily handsome French-Canadian official. He purses his perfect French lips in response to all of our answers as though he doesn't believe us for one minute. Despite feeling nervous and intimidated, Amy thoroughly enjoys the foreign beefcake.

Haven't seen any moose on this trip except ones strapped to vehicles . . .

with their ears a-flappin' in the wind.



I guess it is moose season in Quebec.

In little time at all, we are crossing the St. Lawrence, zipping around Quebec City, and heading up the north shore drive, past Montmorency Falls to the [Shrine of Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré](#).



Huge cathedral . . . pilgrimage destination . . . site of a papal visit (John Paul) in 1984 . . . good place to stretch one's legs and snap some architecture shots.

We keep heading north through increasingly impressive mountains until the vast expanse of La Mer (the sea) appears sparkling far below. It is the huge tidal river that is now the St. Lawrence below Quebec City.

Sitting at the mouth of a small tributary at the bottom of a circular valley created by the impact of a meteorite millions of years ago is the lovely artist's-colony town of **Baie-Saint-Paul**, gateway to one of those rare places where mountain meets the sea, the **Charlevoix** region of Quebec.



It is said to be the cultural center of the Frenchiest part of French Canada.

Gîte TerreCiel, on Rue Sainte-Anne just west of the center of town, is our B&B. Run by a fellow Pennsylvania native, David, who moved here five years ago without knowing any French (he's fluent now, an amazing guy), this place is B&B done right. Laid back. Simple. We're offered soup and fresh bread upon arrival.



Lots of people on the streets, in the shops, galleries, and restaurants. We find an ATM to get some Canadian cash and then start spending it, starting with gelato. Word to the wise: your change returned to you after a small purchase may include \$1 and \$2 coins. Keep this in mind when tipping the gelato girl, who will probably be so devastatingly beautiful that you will not realize you are putting \$3 in change into her tip jar.

I ask David if there is any music to be heard in town tonight. He tells us about a free show in **Le Cabaret** below **Le Café des Artistes** featuring Patrick Gosselin, the local miller who grinds the flour in David's bread (not a euphemism) by day and who sings his homemade songs by night.

We decide we must hear this miller/musician, so we find the last two seats at the bar of the café for a pre-concert beer. There is no English to be heard except for one tourist who almost accidentally tips his waitress \$80 on his credit card. Fortunately the bartender is bilingual and he quickly sorts out the mess before getting our beers (amber seems to be the local favorite).

Nicole, enjoying her pizza in the seat next to Amy, is kind enough to practice her English on us. She is from Malbaie, an hour north. She is the first of many to encourage us to go see the whales in the **Parc marin du Saguenay—Saint-Laurent** near the village of Tadoussac at the confluence of the Saint Lawrence and Saguenay rivers. She says Charlevoix is beautiful and she loves living there, but when we ask her how the winters are, she replies, "Horrible!"

Waiting for the concert down in the cabaret, we are surrounded by a rowdy crowd. Amy comes out of the ladies room to find me yukking it up with three ladies led by Danielle, the only one of the three who speaks English, having been raised in Montreal. As near as we can interpret, she is a retired kindergarten teacher and is a hoot to boot.

Finally Patrick comes out on stage and launches into a 20-minute speech (no cue cards or pauses) before his band jumps up on stage and begins to play traditional Quebecois music with guitar, piano/accordion, bones (played like spoons), and cajon.



Good raucous tunes.

Sunday, September 23, 2012 (Baie-Saint-Paul, Quebec)

David knows how to keep breakfast simple yet delicious. He lays out a spread to start and then prepares a hot dish.



Fresh bread, quail eggs, cheeses, fruit, sausage, and ground cherries.

I've driven this far, and I feel that going to see the whales would put me over the edge car-wise, but I can't resist a 20-minute drive up the coast to the town of Les Eboulements. This is translated "the landslides", as here in 1663, a strong earthquake caused chunks of the mountains to slide down into the river.

I don't think car engines last long here because the roads do not serpentine gently up and down the mountains: they go straight up and down.



At the bottom of one particularly-steep drop is the free ferry to L'Isle-aux-Coudres, a river island thought to have been formed by land flung up by the meteorite's impact.

Back in Baie-Saint-Paul, at David's suggestion we lunch at **Le Rustique** (best fish and chips I've ever had) just across the street from the massive church in the center of town. Then we stroll down Rue St-Joseph for the **Rêves d'automne, Festival de Peinture** (festival of painting).



Painters have their easels set up, busily creating works that will be auctioned off at 3 PM.

We run into one of our friends from the night before who implores us to put brush and paint to her son's blank canvas.



Yes, I'm the jackass who painted a sloppy red guitar (I later discover that some people thought it was a violin) smack dab in the middle.

Fortunately, her son then takes our crude pictures and embellishes them . . .



to create something beautiful.

While we watch some street performers, a lady starts talking to Amy in French. She sees the blank expression and quickly switches to English. Collette, from Montreal engages us in a chin wag for quite some time.



Lovely person and she sure can talk!

Still wish I would have bought one, but the going rate was between \$500 and \$1,000, a bit steep for my budget.



Back at Le Café des Artistes for dinner: wood-fired oven pizza with amber beer and chocolate cake with coffee. Ooh la la.

Most of the painters from the festival are there at the bar and around a big table, spending their day's earnings, getting oiled up, and laughing their French heads off.

Monday, September 24, 2012 (Baie-Saint-Paul, Quebec to L'Île-d'Orléans, Quebec)

After another great breakfast, we're heading back upriver to the bridge that crosses over to L'Île-d'Orléans, a large island just downriver from Quebec City. This bridge was built in 1935, bringing truck deliveries to the island and thereby ending commercial riverboat traffic.

There are six villages on the island loop road (Chemin Royal), each presided over by a lovely stone church and each named for a saint or saintess: Sainte-Pétronille, Saint-Pierre, Sainte-Famille, Saint-François, Saint-Jean, and Saint-Laurent.



We spend the afternoon driving the Chemin Royal, visiting boutiques and snacking on Joe Pacquet's smoked fish, fresh apple and strawberry tarts, local beer (amber of course), and ice cream cones dipped in thick milk chocolate.

The island's north side reminds me of the Hudson River's east bank: a high bluff dotted by orchards and small farms with a view of the mountains across the water.



The sunnier, less windy south side is reminiscent of coastal Maine with its rocky shoreline (if Maine had Quebecois houses with curved rooflines).

Our B&B in Saint-Laurent is the [Auberge L'Île Flottante](#), the home of a former riverboat captain who had eight children. Our hosts are Tony and Genevieve, two of the friendliest, hardest-working, most delightful people I've ever run across. Their deck (terrace) on the river is a lovely place to observe the comings and goings of the tides while sipping a libation.



We really don't need dinner at this point, but this is vacation after all, so (with a nod to Jim Gaffigan) let's find something to eat. Genevieve recommends [Café Bistro de la Plage](#), in Saint-Jean overlooking the river. It is nice but a bit pricey for what you get. We're sure that Tony (the ex-banker) senses this because he asks a few times in the next few days if this place was good for us.

Tuesday, September 25, 2012 (Saint-Laurent, Quebec to Quebec City, Quebec)

Breakfast is an artistic event. Genevieve is a wonder. All of the guests besides us are tourists from France, so we get very few words in. There are so many people talking at once, I wonder what "listening" means in French.

We do discover one thing though: unlike in the U.S. and Canada, shopkeepers in Paris expect you to buy something if you go into their store to look around.

Great view of **Montmorency Falls** as we cross the bridge to the mainland. We're spending today in **Vieux-Québec**, the walled old town of Québec City. Easy-peazy to get there: I-440, left at the second light, into the underground parking garage, walk up the stairs, and wham-bam you're there.

Walking and walking. Upper town. Lower town. Be sure to go in all the churches (can't forget that great old wood smell).



Take the **Funicular** (cable railway) to save some steps on the way back up.

The **Château Frontenac** has a new copper roof since last I've seen it. Has not yet acquired a patina. Artists used the old green copper to create objects of art displayed in the lobby.

And speaking of the lobby, it has very comfortable seating and restrooms when you decide to take a break from walking and walking.



A flock of Aussies on the streets of lower town. Love to hear those people talk.

At this point in our trip, we could fast for a few days, so we decide to eat “light”. What does light mean? Why crepes of course, with ice cream, strawberries, and maple cream. We get a seat next to the crepe lady at [Au Petit Coin Breton](#). When my crepe gets stuck to the griddle, she scraps it and starts over again. Nothing short of perfection is allowed.



Taking a load off with a couple of blondes (pilsners) at an outdoor bistro along Côte de la Montagne. Jan and Colin, a friendly couple on a package tour from Australia, sit down beside us for a lovely conversation about our travels, our kids, and finally, of all things, 9/11. It was poignant to discover how shocking an event it was for them as they observed it from the far side of the world.

Had crepes for lunch? Why not have them for dinner too? We try another creperie, **Casse-Crepe Breton**. Good, but the lesser of the two.

Back at the B&B before bed, doing some reading (Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* from the 6th century, a surprisingly snappy good read) in the TV room when couples from England and Ontario arrive. Looks like we'll have some English conversation at breakfast.

Wednesday, September 26, 2012 (Saint-Laurent, Quebec to Killington, VT)

Last day in Canada. We have a great time at another fantastic breakfast with Paul and Linda from the U.K. and Jerry and Diane from Toronto. I relate that I'm a regular listener of BBC radio's great selection of music. Linda asks if I listen to the newscasts. I tell her that yes I do, at the hourly newsbreaks, and that I appreciate hearing their perspective on American politics.

Paul says the British are fascinated by American politics, but he can't figure why some Americans are opposed to universal health care. I tell him that, near as I can tell, the plutocrats have successfully brainwashed a good number of Americans into thinking that universal health care is creeping socialism, and therefore evil.

I could have gone on to say that at least half of all Americans prefer to let someone else do their thinking for them, but why be a whiner?

Tony tells us how he makes a \$4 Wal-Mart barbecued chicken last for a few days when he's on his winter holiday in Florida. I knew that guy was a bargain hunter!

Hugs and kisses from our hosts when we leave.



The U.S. customs agent at the border is sort of a doofus. I have a four-piece fly rod in an aluminum tube in the back of the car. He sees it and asks, “What’s in the canister?” Canister?

The fall foliage in Vermont’s Northeast Kingdom is so spectacular for miles and miles as we travel down I-91 that it becomes a bit ho-hum after awhile.

We stop in Montpelier to take its pulse, check its favorability rating. Still has a good vibe, but we can’t seem to get the timing right for the New England Culinary Institute’s restaurant, **NECI on Main**. Last year we tried to have lunch there on a Monday (closed); this year we get there around 4 o’clock (very few lunch items left and dinner is not served until 5:30). Fortunately, I know that **McGillicuddy’s Irish Pub** is right around the corner. Great burgers and Long Trail Ale on tap. Good to be back in the good ole’ USA!

We take VT-12A south . . .



and cut across Warren Road (NOTE: dirt road at the top of the mountain) to VT-100, the classic Vermont road trip route.

Moss Glen Falls is still falling. The **Granville Bowl Company** is still standing despite the efforts of last year's flood to wash it away.



We make it to Killington by dark and find room at the inn at the **Best Western**. Always reliable with a good breakfast.

Thursday, September 27, 2012 (Killington, VT to Ephrata, PA)

Is it finally time to go home? Fortunately, VT-100 has never failed to satisfy. Great scenery, quaint (the dreaded Q word) towns, maple creemees (didn't really need that but couldn't resist). It is sobering to see the flood damage, creek beds completely washed out, lots of temporary bridges still in use. Glad we got to see it last year before the deluge.

Hike a few miles of the West River trail in [Jamaica State Park](#) just to stretch our legs.



We meet more Aussies. They tell us that their dollar is currently quite high compared to that in the US and Canada, so many tourists are taking advantage.

A brief snack at **D&K's Jamaica Grocery Store** prepares us for the final leg.



More red maples in the middle of the state as we cross US-9 back toward home. By the time we get to Bennington, the foliage is green again.

When we get back to Pennsylvania, it is still summer, and we can rest (if only briefly) awhile before the schedule of normal life resumes.