

Real Estate/Vermont

Travelers Find That 251 Is More Than A Summer's Worth

DAY 15: My writing style consists of unnecessary, often sweepingly generalized, metaphors. After months' worth of articles, here's a recap of some of the metaphors that have graced my summer travels: mowing the lawn, dumpster diving, horizontal vs. vertical integration, and the license plate game among others. I guess the only fitting way to end a summer's (and now autumn's) worth of articles would be to 'metaphorize the metaphor'. It seems there is nothing that can't go without metaphorical content attached to it...including 'the metaphor' itself. A certain paradox it seems, but, in this case, it fits perfectly. At its heart, a metaphor is a literary element that takes the place

of something else, by spicing up the material from telling it like it is to telling it with a little more flare, confusing the reader

in a good way, a way that makes him think. In a way, we could call my 251 explorations their own metaphor; they've taken the place of other, more fruitless activities this summer, substituting something productive instead of clicking the remote control through channels of static all day long. So, here's my final metaphor...251 itself, ever amorphous and entirely dynamic.

Our northernmost town remaining was Tunbridge. I have forever known Tunbridge as the place where, every fall at the fair, I am certain to leave with at least one new goldfish. Those fair games never disappoint and, where Tunbridge's local counterpart Rutland falters, they seem to be a little easier to win than most. To my parents' chagrin, annually I have counted on a new pet. Sadly, this year I will have to miss the festivities (at the time of printing, the

fair's ruckus has long subsided) but our summer visit saw us staring into a vacant, anticipatory field. Waiting for the brief celebrations to begin, the deserted fairground carries with it an eerie sort of beauty. Like the abandoned ski hills we've so often seen this summer, I wonder as to that landscape's potential. Recharging itself in the off-season, I have no doubt Tunbridge will be ready for the hordes of Vermonters on game day, loose change in pocket, waiting for the chance to throw the ball in a dish, and win a prize fish.

It was the delicate town of Baltimore that saved us. Prior to this, our final 251 voyage, we had technically already visited 250 towns, leaving

in your own home, but I suppose it's important to know what you're living around. Whether I stop in to taste the new flavor at the Ben and Jerry's factory or pause on Fifth Avenue to gaze at the Empire State Building in my other home, sightseeing is important whether you're a tourist or not. I suppose, it's a reminder of your sense of place.

Checking off the familiar, we were imbued with a sense of hesitance. Bethel, Royalton, Springfield, Weathersfield...all colored in. Pomfret, Barnard, Bridgewater, Hartford...all done. After a summer of exploration, all that remained was one single uncolored block on our town map...our fair Woodstock.

And we realized, that though it was exciting (and unexpected) that we would so feverously accomplish our summer goal, we didn't want it to end. These travels

VERMONT: One Town At A Time

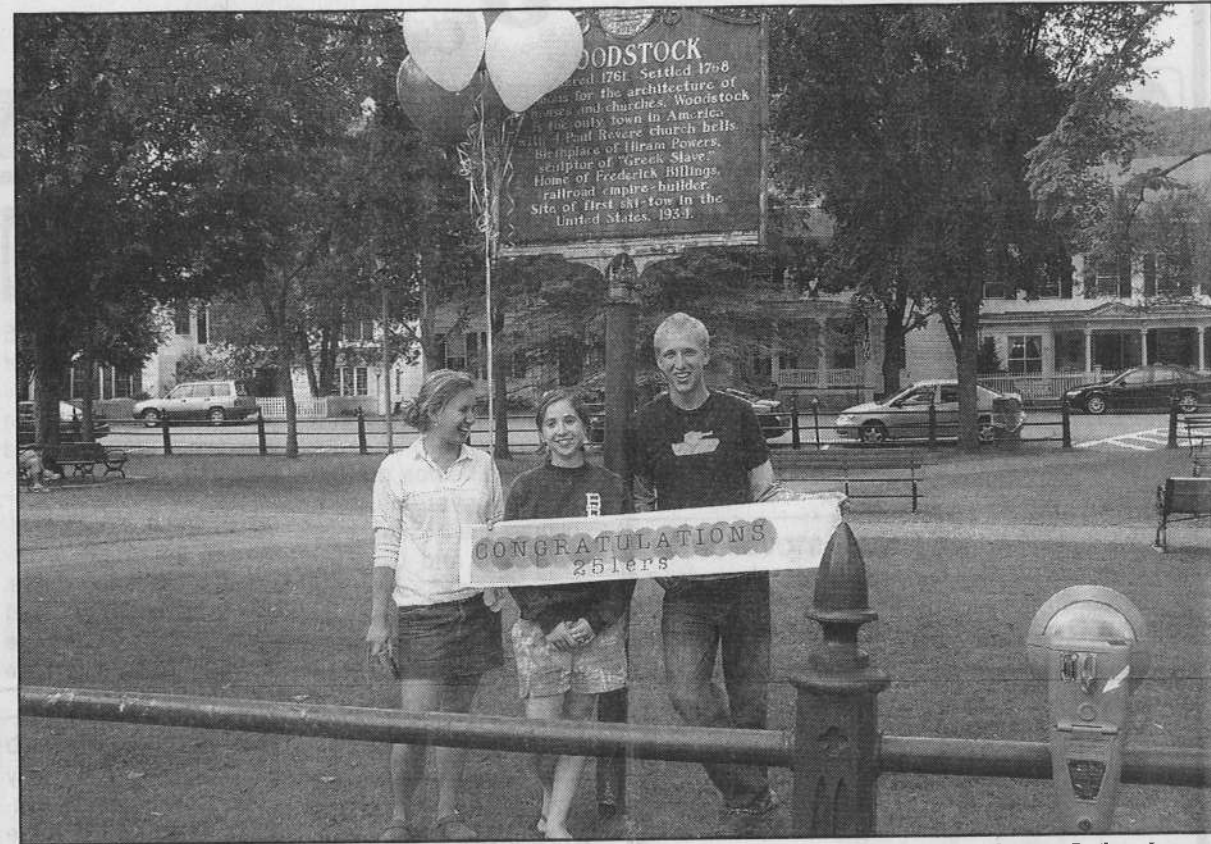
By MIKE LEONARD



Baltimore as the only uncharted territory remaining. And, the meager town nestled in Cavendish's southeast corner didn't make it easy for us to finish. The backroads were rough and the proof of our visit by way of a manifestation of a sign was nearly impossible. Luckily, we found the town clerk's office, not so far from home, but in a town we never knew existed.

I've probably driven over the Quechee Gorge 700 times in my life (and that could be a low estimate...I have no idea). 251 was the first reason for me to get out of the car and explore the area that has grown into a tourism mecca over the course of my life. Thankful that, finally, I resisted in bypassing the area I've always referred to as 'Is it summer?... Yes...Ok, then slow down to 30', I owe it all to the 251 club. As I've said before, it's humbling to be a tourist

have been a long-awaited filling of a void, teaching us about a Vermont we always knew existed but had never witnessed from our own perspectives. Coasting into Woodstock as if Chariots of Fire were resonating through the airwaves, we found a fan club of sorts waiting for us at the finish line. My mother, grandmother, and aunt were all smiles as we took that final picture. And I realized that, though I may have slight delusions of grandeur, 251 is a lot larger than a metaphorical summer. However insignificantly, we have inspired people along the way, through knowledge of such a unique club or through my grandmother's proud photography at that 'finalest' of legs.



(Photo Courtesy Barbara Leonard)

251 TRAVELERS Julia Norcross, Samantha Avant and Mike Leonard at journey's end.

Everyone seems to understand the allure of 251. A certain rumination about an area still modest, where one can count the number of McDonalds without becoming disgusted, seems in order for such dark days of terrorism. Call it conservatism, but in this day in age I embrace the tranquility of Vermont's landscape, from the farm islands of Grand Isle to the remoteness of a town like Lewis (Northeast Kingdom) to the purple majesties when the flattened sunlight hits our Green Mountains at the right angle. Vermont is unlike any other place in the world, and as I've found, each town is just as unique as the next.

So we conclude. With the completion of a journey thought impossible amidst our many other summer escapades, the only lingering emotion is one of bittersweet nostalgia. It's done...and it's done well...but we don't want it to be. As we wonder how our state can seem so small and large at the same time, we close our atlas with a flourish of finality, the three of us with our sights set on new lands of exploration, already missing our fine Vermont and everything she had to offer us. So my latest metaphor is one of conclusion, like

the fallen leaves of a summer well traveled or the birds flying south for their winter solace. Our travels may be over, but with lingering images of Vermont's varied landscape, I realize the importance of seeing it firsthand. Sometimes we all need a metaphor, this isn't one of them.

Towns Visited (16): Bridgewater, Barnard, Bethel, Royalton, Tunbridge, Pomfret, Hartford, Hartland, Windsor, West Windsor, Weathersfield, Springfield, Baltimore, Cavendish, Reading, Woodstock

Totals: 251 visited, 0 remain.