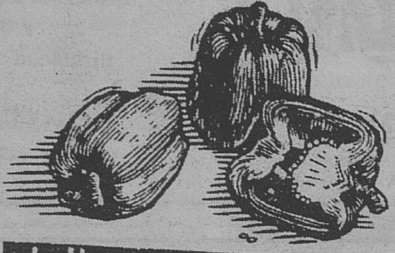


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A City Boy With Few Regrets

BY STEVEN KOPSTEIN

S hhhh.... Wait a minute.... Don't say a word.... just listen... The sound of silence surrounds me in my mountain retreat. It has replaced the rattle of the Number 97 bus that used to shake my windows as it hauled another load of commuters past the front door.

I've made the change- the change that can seem frightening and soothing at the same time. As a self-identified Urban Gay Male (UGM) who has transitioned to country life I have drawn both consternation and praise from my urban brethren. The experience has been enriching, to say the least.

I left inner-city Washington DC for outer mountains, Vermont with hopes of spiritual fulfillment, cleansing and a fresh perspective. For the most part, my wishes have been granted. Like being born again, the change from Sunday brunches at the latest gay hot-spot to barn warmings at the local organic farm has not been without some pain. The incredible natural beauty bestowed upon the Green Mountain State cannot be underestimated as a tonic for urban longings. But I'm still not into folk music. Memories of plexiglass encased shopkeepers, carjackings, and the discovery of shards of glass where my car window used to be do help to remind me of some of the reasons why I left the city where my neighborhood straddled a line between crack houses and cappuccino infested cafes.

So, when I miss being able to walk a few blocks and see many friends on the way to my gay coffee house, video store or selection of watering holes, I get out my cross country skis or, when the weather is warmer, take a hike and drink in a bit of the landscape and relish the quiet. My sister told me for the first several months I was here that I was still living on DC time. I'm not sure if she'd say that now - almost 2 years later. The country changes you in subtle ways, like aging. You can't see the changes from day to day - but over

time you notice them - especially when your old friends begin to make comments. I think many of them had expected me to adopt a sudden fondness for country music or start sleeping with my cousins, but then again, their view of the country is West Virginia, where curly fries are haute cuisine - especially when drenched in fluorescent orange cheese - and Woodstock and Wheeling are two very different places.

Vermont is a very special place to be able to experience country life as a gay man - we have an active radical faerie contingent, a generally open and accepting people, more gay rights laws than any other state - and Montreal - when the woods just aren't enough! But living in the wilderness has given me the opportunity to live closer to the land than ever before -to get to know the family that provides the wood that heats me each winter - to watch the vegetables that I'll make for dinner grow in the valley - to really see the sky for the first time in my life. One doesn't have to seek out nature - living in the forest teaches us how we are a small part of a very powerful and beautiful world.

It's not all festivals and berry picking though. Like the time I was driving home from Albany in mid-April, when a blinding snowstorm made me crash into a tree that had fallen across the road. The fact that I'd blissfully had my snow tires removed two days earlier made me feel like the flattest flatlander that ever lived. When I finally got home about six hours later - I was forced to walk up my long driveway through more than a foot of snow - my two dogs in tow. But I think Vermonters like stories like this - it shows our tenacity - a bunch of snow isn't going to get in our way!

Then there is the distance to think about. Living in an isolated place means I rely on my car much more. Driving 60 miles roundtrip to run errands is common. Basically, if you are thinking about a move to the country, you can double your car wear and tear and mileage. Vermont eats cars

And there is a deeper loss that must be considered. The loss

voices from the mountains

of community. As a gay urban male, I had oodles of friends who would call to go out to movies, dinner, bowling, drinking or just hanging out. There are tons of groups one can get involved in - gay singing, gay bowling, gay wrestling, volunteering at many organizations etc... That doesn't happen in rural Vermont. So, one makes adjustments - we create community within our communities, we network through *Out In The Mountains* - we go to Pearls, we go on-line, we volunteer for smaller groups here - basically, we adapt. Which is something that UGMs are not necessarily famous for. Adapt or die is how the saying goes... So I guess it's not so much a loss of community as it is a redefinition of community.

The move from the city to a rural life is not one that should be taken lightly. It involves a fair amount of personal sacrifice and a willingness to be quiet and still - something we don't get much practice at in cities. But the rewards are great if you can make the leap. There is no way to measure the elation of seeing how full of stars the sky really is, the wonder in your first sighting of the northern lights, the inner warmth that comes from a stove lit by your neighbors hand - or the secret thrill of a hunky guy appearing through the maple mist at sugaring time. It is simply the joy of living - and the knowledge that living without the distractions of the city can help you appreciate life more fully. And Vermont is probably the best place this side of West Virginia to be a RGM (Rural Gay Male), after all, we've got Sugar on Snow!

PS - Any mention of Mud Season has been purposely omitted from this article.

THE MOSTLY UNFABULOUS Social Life OF ETHAN GREEN.

ETHAN SLEEPS WITH LEO FOR THE FIRST TIME.

THANK YOU, GOD FOR MAKING ME UNABLE TO SLEEP WHENEVER I SPEND THE NIGHT WITH SOMEONE FOR THE 1ST TIME.. I REALLY REALLY APPRECIATE IT.. REMEMBER THAT QUARTER I GAVE TO SALVATION ARMY LAST X-MAS? IT WAS A VIDEO GAME TOKEN...



3AM: FAKE SLEEP.

WAS I GOOD ENOUGH? WAS I EXCITING ENOUGH? WAS I EROTIC ENOUGH? WAS I KINKY ENOUGH?

You'd THINK HAVING WATCHED AT LEAST A BILLION PORN FLICKS, THIS WOULD BE ONE PARTICULAR OBSSIVE WORRY THAT I'D BE SPARED.. BUT NNN0000000...



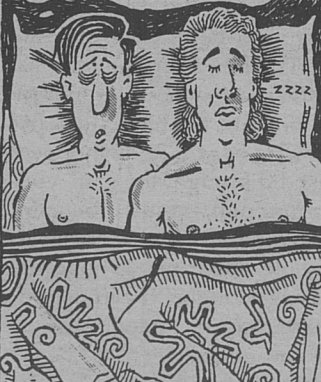
4AM SEXUAL INSECURITY.

IF I MOVE- I'LL WAKE HIM UP.. IF I DON'T MOVE, I'LL SPEND THE REST OF MY DAYS AS AN AMPUTEE...



5AM: YOUR ARM'S ASLEEP.

SHOULD I OFFER TO MAKE HIM BREAKFAST? OR WOULD THAT BE TOO CLINGY? I COULD LEAVE AS SOON AS WE GET UP.. BUT THEN HE MIGHT THINK I DON'T LIKE HIM.....



6AM: NEXT MOVE WORRIES

HIS HAIR IS BEAUTIFUL HIS EYES ARE BEAUTIFUL HIS FEET ARE BEAUTIFUL HIS BEDROOM IS BEAUTIFUL HIS UNDERWEAR ON HIS LAMP IS BEAUTIFUL..



7AM CHINA PATTERNS