

A Charming welcome on the Eastern Shore

Kent County:

Carrousel Horse B&B in the quaint town of Galena is convenient to many spots in Maryland and Delaware.

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Though we have a commodious guest room in our old farmhouse in Galena, my mother-in-law declined to stay with us when she came for Thanksgiving last year. It wasn't a rift in family relations. It was the commotion. We have dogs and kids, something Jane finds nice in the abstract, but a little overwhelming at the end of a long day. So, when she accepted our invitation for a huge family-and-friends turkey day feast, it was conditional:

"I'd love to come if you can make me a reservation at the hotel."

To save my husband, Gary, a 30-mile round trip to deliver Jane to her usual retreat in Chestertown, I phoned Jan and Bill Graham, neighbors who have converted their dignified old manor house at the north end of town into a bed and breakfast called the Carrousel Horse. Jan was gracious. Although they were having some of their grown children visit for Thanksgiving, which meant that the Victorian Suite and the rooms in the third floor garret were occupied, they would be happy to accommodate Jan, too. Jan wanted to know if Jane had a room preference. We didn't have a clue, so we walked down to inspect the two rooms available.

Galena, a Kent County town of about 400 souls, is lovely on autumn evenings. The crimson leafed dogwoods that line Main Street whisper in the breeze. Lights glow in the windows of the mostly 19th-century houses. And the air is

permeated with the scents of rich earth and drying cornstalks and soybeans in the fields that surround the town.

Another era

The Grahams opened the door as we came up the boxwood-lined front walk. Gary and I hadn't been inside the house in years. Built in 1880, it's a tribute to 19th-century design and craftsmanship with honey-colored pine floors and airy, high-ceilinged rooms. Now filled with Victorian antiques, it must look much as it did when the Dempseys lived there more than a hundred years ago, an era when the days moved slower and there was time to savor the simple pleasures of life.

To perpetuate that sense of timelessness, guests may take their breakfast on the shady screened-in side porch in summer. In winter, they are ensconced before a roaring fire in the dining room. In addition, the two beautifully appointed front sitting rooms are open to guests, including use of a large TV and a baby grand piano.

The two guest rooms available that Thanksgiving night - the Peach Room and the Lavender Room - are at the top of an expansive front staircase and share a bathroom of a broad hall. When their children aren't visiting, the Grahams also rent the Victorian Suite, which consists of two rooms and a private bath of the long back hallway. One room is perfect for children, the the large west-facing bedroom is fit for a queen, with a vast Victorian bed whose enormous medallion bed frame looks like something out of C.S. Lewis' "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe."

Most innkeepers are people who like people, and the Grahams are no exception.

"I had a B&B in North Carolina and thoroughly enjoyed it,"

says Jan, a bright, energetic woman who also skis, rides horses and swims. When Bill changed jobs to Delaware, they knew they wanted a B&B, but weren't sure where.

"We wanted a rural setting," she explains. "But choosing Galena was an accident. Bill's job was in Newark, so we drew a circle on the map so he wouldn't have too long a commute and we landed here. We loved the house. The funny thing is, we learned later that it had been lived in by a distant cousin of Bill's."

One of the reasons for having a B&B is the company you keep. Though village-sized, Galena draws a smorgasbord of people. The sassafras River, only a mile away, plays host to summertime bass tournaments and is crammed with full service marinas, one of which rents kayaks for touring. Kent County's broad-shouldered roads draw cycling clubs year-round, and nearby Hopkins Game Farm has a woodland course for sporting clays that's a popular weekend destination for shooting enthusiasts. In addition to cyclists and the spillover from the marinas, local parties and weddings, the Grahams accommodate tourists and race enthusiasts who go to Dover Downs 25 minutes away.

"You could have somebody from anywhere to eat breakfast with," notes Jan, who adds that friendships have been formed at their table. "we once had two men who came to shoot skeet at Hopkins. Their wives first met each other over breakfast. Instead of waiting around here for the men to get back, they went to the antique places here in town together and toured all over and had a wonderful time."

In addition to outlying attractions, Galena itself offers pleasures for the urban-weary. The town has become a haven for antiquers thanks to several good shops.

After inspecting both available rooms, Gary and I chose the Peach room for Jane; she's small and the bed in that room was closer to the floor.

All the comforts of home

After a long and raucous Thanksgiving feast whose company ranged from toddlers to retirees, including a couple of Scottish friends who had never before experienced the Great American Pig-Out, Gary took Jane down the street for the night. The next morning, Bill Graham delivered her back here after breakfast - not part of the service, but a generous, neighborly gesture.

The light continental breakfast at Carrousel was perfect for Jane. But for those who crave something heartier, a short walk to Twinny's (which also serves some of the best subs on the shore) will net you a massive spread - eggs, toast, sausage, bacon, pancakes, French toast and coffee. And it's one of the hubs of the community where people catch up on all the local news. Another is Dixie Jo's diner at the other end of town beside Don's Tavern, the local liquor store that has a handy supply of wines, in addition to the usual offerings. For a delicious dinner, a short ride (or 1-to 1.5-mile walk) to Georgetown will bring you to the Kitty Knight House or the Granary, where you can eat seafood and watch the sun set over the river. But food and sunsets weren't my mother-in-law's concerns that night.

"The bed was comfortable, the breakfast was nice and the Grahams are very warm," Jane said as she sipped another cup of tea in our kitchen. "I'd happily stay there again."