

Cape Crazy, Cape Calm

“If we can get to the outhouse by twelve,” says Johnnie, stepping on the gas, “we should be able to visit the Big Boned Barbies by six!” Johnnie is my best friend, and has accompanied me on a now-ritualized trip to Cape Cod every Memorial Day Weekend for the past five years. By “Outhouse,” he means Jack’s Outback, our favorite lunch place that he always calls by any other name for my amusement, and by “Big Boned Barbies”, he means the transvestites dressed in pink patent leather who advertise the drag shows in Provincetown at night. Petula Clark belts out Technicolor lyrics about sleeping in subways as we speed up I-95, trading big city concrete and steel for New England sand and sea.

Five hours later, near the entrance to the Sagamore Bridge, the flowers and shrubs have been pruned to form the words “Welcome to Cape Cod.” We look at each other and grin: “We’re here!” Like the many other vacationers in the region, we rent our house from Hopper Realty (508-255-3560). The rates vary according to the size of the house and length of stay. We opt for a two-bedroom, one-bath with a great room and kitchen, and pay \$1000 for the week. Depending on location and owner, some homes are rented years in advance.

Johnnie was right and it is just about noon when we stop for lunch at Jack’s Outback, 161 Hallet Street (508) 362-6690. An ex-local who knows how much we enjoy the artwork of their local celebrity, Edward Gorey, recommended the spot to us. Gorey, who passed away in Hyannis on April 15<sup>th</sup> 2000, was a cartoonist famous for his macabre yet razor-sharp funny line drawings of small children and odd people. We can see all around us proof that Edward Gorey was also one of these hip locals. The walls are decorated with original artwork, posters, and even a calendar of his guest checks written

in his characteristic lettering. “I love Jack’s Outback,” said Gorey in an interview years back. “I’ve been eating breakfast and lunch there every day for the past eight years.”

Another must-see is Parnassus Book Service (508-362-6420), the used bookstore that specializes in rare and old books. We drive up to the 1840’s general store, with a wall of paperbacks on the outside wall and books spilling out from the front door. As we walk inside to inspect what dusty, curled edges and yellowed paper might strike us as fascinating, we smell the delicious, antique smell of aged books. Aisles are crammed with boxes and the shelves contain old and new volumes on every subject. Although we are not interested in their extensive collection of maritime history books, we do find a few Italian design annuals from 1966 and 1967 for Johnnie and a much-needed Cape Cod guidebook that will inspire me to visit new places I have yet to discover.

Finally, we arrive in Eastham, a town established in 1644 by Pilgrims. Many people think of Cape Cod as one tourist area, but it actually comprises 17 distinct towns, from Provincetown at the tip, to Falmouth at the bottom. The Cape’s three hundred miles of sparkling beaches, the cranberry bogs, lighthouses, museums, bike trails, whale watching and antique shopping might lure any tourist, but friendly shopkeepers, clean air and beautiful weather encourage Cape Cod’s visitors to keep coming back.

The first night we arrive, we head for the Town Hall parking lot where we find Hatches Fish and Produce, (508-349-2810), 310 Main Street. As they are closing, we rush out of the car and beg them to let us buy some scallops. Not being the hardened city-types we expect them to be, they offer us our choice of the biggest scallops we have ever seen.

After making dinner, we smack our satiated lips and drive to Provincetown, where Thirsty Burlington and Pearlene Dubois perform the 9:00 show at Steve’s Alibi,

Commercial Street, Provincetown. They are some of the best-loved drag queens on the local Provincetown scene. Between hilarious impersonations of Gloria Estefan, Cher, Marilyn, and Liza, they show no mercy to the straight couple in the front row and I only escape their radar by virtue of my second row hiding spot.

When the Thirsty and Pearlene have given their last curtain call, we go down the street and buy Almond Joy ice cream cones at Van Dereck's (310 Commercial Street, 508-487-4640) and walk to the 225-foot tower called Pilgrim's Monument (off Route 6, High Pole Hill, 508-487-1310), which commemorates the Pilgrims first landing place in the New World. Around the corner at the town hall, we watch couples walk hand in hand, smiling at each other, comfortable in ways their hometowns may never accept. I am in awe of the twin 6-foot transvestite Barbies and the leather men.

The next morning, we make the most crucial visit: the annual trip to The Christmas Tree Shop on Route 6A in Orleans. This store has just about everything. Food, frames, cosmetics, toiletries, toys, lamps, mirrors, furniture, seasonal decorations, placemats, silverware, plates, cards, gift-wrap...it is hard to be calm while I am in the store because everything is of excellent quality and at the same time, severely discounted.

In the afternoon, we go to Marconi Beach in South Wellfleet, off Route 6A, where the first transatlantic telegraph was transmitted from the Marconi Telegraph Station. In the parking lot, we find the trail through the jungle-like foliage of White Cedar Swamp.

That evening, we hurry to make it to First Encounter Beach right in time for the sunset. Sitting on the dunes, we watch the dazzling red disk disappear into the bay. Next, we hop back in the car to go to our favorite coffee spot. We drive down to The (Hot) Chocolate Sparrow on Route 6A in Orleans (508-240-2230). They have well-lit

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cases of hand-made gooey chocolate candies and along one wall, bins full of M&Ms separated by individual color. Johnnie orders a rich desert that I am not allowed to look at and I get my favorite flavored coffee. Back at the house, we sit on the deck exhausted and watch the stars twinkle brightly in the crisp evening sky. I turn to Johnnie, smiling: “Aren’t you glad we were able to get away from our hectic lives and just relax?”