

Clare –

a small region with a big heart and lots to do

by Sandra Phinney

I found the perfect card to give my friend for her 80th birthday.

I hope this year you have amazing, life-changing experiences. Little ones don't count. Sorry, those are the rules.

To mark this special occasion, I invited Jean Clulee to trip the light fantastic with me for a couple of days in Clare, a French Acadian region within 70 km of where we live in Yarmouth.

As luck would have it, just a few days before Jean's birthday, I was introduced to a new brochure titled "Art de la Baie – Baie Sainte-Marie," touting 18 stops of interest featuring artists, studios, and galleries. Knowing that my friend is an art aficionado, I thought it would be fun to meet some artists along with just following our noses.

Our home-away-from-home was Au Havre du Capitaine, in

Meteghan River, smack in the middle of the "French shore," a stretch about 46 km long on Route 1, encompassing 40 Acadian coastal and inland communities. Our innkeeper, Louise Comeau, gave us insider information on the history of her lodgings, which opened across the road as Riverside Inn in the late 1800s. After a fire in 1949 demolished the premises, owners Delile and Angele Boudreau built a new inn on the current site, featuring eight guest rooms upstairs and an impressive dining room downstairs.

In 1970, Eudists priests teaching at Université Sainte-Anne approached the owners with a request to buy the inn so they could all be under the same roof. The story goes that Angele didn't want to sell but her husband said, "We can't say no to the priests or we'll go to hell!" The priests were there for 27 years.



Louise bought the inn/restaurant in 1997, added 10 rooms, keeping with the architectural style of the old inn, and eventually added a cottage, a mobile home, and the original owner's home. Over breakfast, she shared many stories with us, closing off with a grin, "If these walls could talk..."

Our first artist rendezvous was with the indefatigable Denise Comeau in Comeauville. Her watercolours are full of stories and take me to places I've never been, even though it all seems so familiar. Not only does the artist have an impressive studio/gallery, she also sells images of her paintings as "usable art" on household items such as shower curtains and pillows.

Of course, one of the delightful aspects of meeting local people is that you learn buckets of things like where to find a secluded beach. For example, Denise told us about this one: "Drive past the university and as soon as the sidewalk ends on the left, turn down that road." Voila. Ticken Cove, aka Grandy Beach – a hidden gem!

We later met Bernie Forsey, a master woodcarver and competition judge. Bernie carves everything from humorous caricatures to exotic birds, puffins, and whales. As we wandered around the brightly lit 4-Sea Gallery overlooking the ocean in Belliveau Cove, I kept coming back to an exquisite Carolina duck, commonly known as a wood duck. Eleven months in the making, it's easy to see why it won a prestigious award. When Bernie started carving 37 years ago, he says it was all knives and chisels. "Today the carving world has changed dramatically and most of my work is done with power tools, a flex shaft, and micro grinders."

While at a competition a number of years ago a world champion duck carver chided him for going to the dark side by carving "tweety birds," referring to songbirds. Thankfully, he's still carving tweety birds along with three-foot high parrots and everything in between.

Someone who surprised me (only because I thought I was familiar with her work) was Jay LeBlanc at Studio/Galerie Écllosion in Little Brook. I have always appreciated Jay's stained glass work. Much to my delight I discovered that she has added printmaking to her repertoire. "Printmaking has allowed me to explore entirely different ways of making images including carving, engraving, and acid etching. There's satisfaction in digging into a surface and using other manipulations of surface to print off of, instead of always drawing directly."

I'm still trying to find the right words to express how I felt about a few pieces, including a coloured puzzle wood block titled "Dreaming." Jay explains: "The block was in sections and different colours were applied to the pieces separately, and then put back together to print in one go."

En route home on our second day, we dropped in to visit Katherine Dawson at K's Woolly Loft – Rug Hooking Studio, in Hectanooga. Her studio oozes with charming woolly things ranging from original hooked art to exquisitely dyed wool and linen fabrics. It was fascinating to hear the various methods of dyeing wool (her own recipes!). Katherine also sells yarn, frames, hooks, patterns, and binding, along with doing special orders for hooked rugs.



Katherine Dawson



Bernie Forsey



Denise Comeau



Jay LeBlanc

Somewhere during the course of our two-day jaunt, we managed to spend a morning at the bustling Farmers’ Market (try the Acadian Fricot!); wander around Point-a-Major (a historical chapel site with a fascinating history); and visit Cape Saint Mary’s Lighthouse. Alas, we simply didn’t have time for a side trip to “La Montagne” where, on a previous trip, I discovered some waterfalls and the perfect place to go skinny dipping. Next time!

Shortly after we returned home, I received an email from Jean that said in part, “I have been fortunate to see many parts of the world, but this coast ranks right up there with my favourites.” And, true to the advice spelled out in her birthday card, she added, “Thanks for the first life-changing experience. It rekindled my interest in the history of this fascinating shore.”



Where to eat

Jean says, “**Roadside Grill** in Belliveau Cove offered sophisticated food presentations using local produce, with super service, in a spotless environment – so important just now.” (I, feeling righteous about having only a kale salad for lunch, ordered poutine for dessert, and gave them both a thumbs up.)

École dans l’Anse Resto sur Mer, a restaurant situated in the old schoolhouse in Belliveau Cove, provided a magnificent view combined with the Friday night lobster and shellfish boil (Beau Vendredi) normally set up outdoors with live music where the Farmers’ Market is situated.

La Cuisine Robicheau in Saulnierville. It’s always a toss up between the fish cakes (best in the province) and seafood lasagna. We had the latter, and bought several frozen portions to take home. When our waitress heard we were celebrating Jean’s birthday, her coconut cream pie was served with a lit candle, “on the house.”

Go to baiesaintemarie.com for information on artists, food and drink, events, accommodations, and more.

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